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Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I will be calling the meeting to order, so I'll give everybody an opportunity to come and sit.

Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Madam Chair, I wonder if we could take a moment. Three of us have students from McGill, from the Women in House program.

I'd like to introduce my student today, Laura Jones, who's with me for the day.

I believe there are others.

The Chair: Good morning, Laura.

I have two students who could stand up.

Where are they sitting?

Hi, guys. They're from McGill as well.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): I have Megan Webb, who is shadowing me for the day.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): There's another student with me. Her name is Jade, and she's from McGill.

The Chair: Good morning.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: We're ready to begin.

I want to welcome the witnesses, pursuant to Standing Order 108 (2), to a study of the cancellation of the mandatory long-form census and its impact on women's equality in Canada, which is being undertaken by this committee.

This morning we have five witnesses. We have Kathleen Lahey, professor, Faculty of Law, Queen's University; Martha MacDonald, professor and chair, Economics Department, Saint Mary's University; Sheila Regehr; Beverley Smith, editor of "Recent Research on Caregiving"; and the Canadian Women's Foundation's Mary Mowbray, co-chair of the board of directors. Good morning.

Here are the rules. You each have five minutes to present. Because there are so many of you, we have to fit this into the timelines of the committee. When you finish your presentation, there will be a question and answer session. I'll give you a one-minute warning. So it's a five-minute presentation this time.

Thank you.

We're going to begin with Kathleen Lahey.

Professor Lahey.

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey (Professor, Faculty of Law, Queen's University, As an Individual): Thank you very much for this opportunity to address these extremely important issues.

I would like to go directly to my main point, which is that the changes that are being made to the census are a failure on a massive scale and at a fundamental level of Canada's commitment to carry out gender-based analysis of every policy, practice, law, and program in the country.

In a written brief I will be providing the committee with the specific legal references to the international charter, constitutional human rights, and other obligations that form the human rights framework within which these violations are taking place, but I'd like to go to my second point, which is that these violations of human rights that flow from the failure to carry out a gender impact analysis of the changes being proposed to the census are all the more egregious because this is the second most disastrous economic period of crisis that Canada has faced in a century.

One of the things that made it very difficult and challenging to cope with the current situation was the dearth of usable social science information as to how the Great Depression affected various vulnerable groups in Canada. So if we change the census at this point to remove both the scope and the validity of data that is otherwise available to us, as a country we impair our ability to understand what is happening right now, to translate it for future generations, and to learn and grow from the experience.

The gender impact is severe and goes beyond the prospective damage that would flow from the current economic crisis. First of all, the right of Canadians to have access to the best statistical tools and policy analysis techniques just when they are most needed is a concrete human rights guarantee. And if the government fails to continue providing the best data possible, that itself is a violation of rights, because important sources of data that would otherwise have been available will be gone permanently and cannot be recovered, as other witnesses have already testified. But the core of the government's justification seems to be not the human rights justification, which is that women are already totally enduringly equal; the government's justification is that this is all right, they can use the data for unpaid work from the general social survey.

I'd like to use the remaining minute of my time to make a couple of points as to the inadequacies of the general social survey unpaid work data.

First of all, question 33 on unpaid work in the 2006 census, which is being cancelled regardless of which form of national instrument goes forward, is the tool that was designed to find the gendered unpaid work in Canada. The general social survey does not do that. In the question period, I can give examples of such differences in the sampling methodologies and some of the other techniques used in the GSS that make it a far less useful instrument for evaluating who does unpaid work in Canada and what type of work that is.

There are huge omissions from the general social survey. For example, it does not even attempt to cover elder care issues, which are covered in the census, and there are a number of technical problems with it.

• (0850)

The last very quick point that I would like to make is that I and other witnesses here today can give personal testimony to the fact that Statistics Canada was not being very accurate when it took the position two days ago that when it looked around to see if anybody was using the data from question 33, it found that, "no one was using that data". It took the position that there was "no academic work" using that data. I'm here to testify to the contrary.

Those are my submissions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Lahey.

We now move on to Martha MacDonald, professor and chair of the economics department at Saint Mary's University.

Professor MacDonald.

Dr. Martha MacDonald (Professor and Chair, Economics Department, Saint Mary's University, As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm very pleased to speak to you today on this crucial issue.

I'm an economist who specializes in research related to understanding gender and equality. I have experience using Statistics Canada data.

I'd like to speak first of its importance for economic analysis.

The census is the single most comprehensive source of data for analyzing the socio-economic situation of women and the issue of equality. Economists and other social scientists use the census to examine inequality in education, earnings, incomes, and other considerations. Work done on the feminization of poverty and the ongoing labour market inequality has relied on the census.

To analyze these kinds of issues, three kinds of data are essential in addition to individual income and earnings characteristics. The three kinds of data that are essential and that the census is particularly good for are as follows.

First, unpaid work, which has already been mentioned. It is essential to understanding women's economic inequality. Women's organizations worked very hard to get questions on unpaid work into the census. Canada is a leader and a model in so doing, and the results have been invaluable for research on women's equality.

The large sample and wealth of related variables in the census make it an important alternative to the time diary method from the general social survey. The quality of the summary data collected by the census has also been shown to be good in comparison with the time diary method. They're both good, but they're useful for different kinds of questions and they aren't replacements for each other.

The second kind of data that the census is good for in terms of analysis of gender inequality is the data at the household and family levels. You can't just look at the individual to understand the situation of women. Economic outcomes depend on household decision-making. Many other surveys only have data on the individual, which makes it harder to understand the processes that give rise to labour market and other outcomes.

The third kind of data in the census that is essential is data on ethnic origin, immigration status, language, geographic location, disability, etc., and other markers of social location. Women are not all the same, and the census allows one to analyze multiple dimensions of inequality.

In my own case, I've relied a lot on the level of geographic detail that's available in the census. For example, you can look at small communities, rural-urban differences, and you need that kind of reliable sample and detail to get at that level.

A voluntary survey will have a high likelihood of under-representing marginalized and vulnerable groups in the population. As the non-response rates have been shown not to be random, we're going to have a skewed sample from a voluntary survey.

I'd also like to speak about policy analysis and the importance of the long-form census.

Policies related to women's equality require the availability of data to analyze the problem in the first place and demonstrate the need for policy intervention. Without that data, the case can't be made that the inequalities exist, nor can one design effective policy without understanding the underlying causal relationships. We can't plan for the future in policy areas such as health, education, and pensions without accurate demographic information.

Without data one cannot evaluate the impact of various policies on women. This includes policies aimed at addressing inequality and also policies that are aimed at other issues but that impact on women. So virtually every policy that we have does impact on women. For example, an analysis of budgets from a gender perspective is not possible, nor is an evaluation of the gender impacts of programs like EI or pensions, if we don't have this kind of good data.

Of course, advocacy on women's equality relies on the data from the census. Without it, groups will have difficulty making their points and women's ongoing inequality will become invisible.

Finally, I will comment on the impact of dropping the mandatory census on other Statistics Canada data.

● (0855)

It has been pointed out by Statistics Canada officials and other economists that the loss of the long-form census impacts the other surveys that the government is saying they can use. In terms of their sampling frames and the weights they use for analysis, the other surveys rely on the underlying population measures that are generated by the census. Those weights allow them to take account of a possible non-response bias in the voluntary surveys. Without reliable population measures, the whole thing becomes less adequate. Without the mandatory long-form census, Canada's position as an international leader in quality of data and research on women's equality will be lost.

Finally, to make one last point, about privacy concerns, and speaking as a user of the data, Statistics Canada is also a world leader in terms of how hard it is to use their data in any non-confidential way. They are extremely demanding when it comes to protecting privacy, and researchers know this.

In conclusion, along with everybody else I feel strongly that it is very important, regardless of political persuasion, that we understand that good social science in every kind of policy decision requires reliable data.

● (0900)

The Chair: Thank you, Professor MacDonald.

I'll move now to Sheila Regehr.

Ms. Sheila Regehr (As an Individual): Thank you very much for inviting me to this session.

I believe I've been invited on the basis of some history I've had over the years in working with gender statistics in collaboration with StatsCan and with women's organizations. In particular, I have done a lot of work on unpaid work.

I'm not a statistician; I am one of those users. My interest in data, like others', is in how it can support policy in the public interest.

I want to focus on the historical perspective. It will be a bit different from but complementary to the approach of others. I think it's important to the present discussion to situate this in a longer-term, bigger picture.

Significant societal change, like greater equality for women, does not happen overnight. There was mention at your Tuesday session of UN agreements, for example. These are developed over many years as new knowledge is gathered and experience is gained in different parts of the world.

Unpaid work was not on the radar screen when the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women was created in the late 1940s. The work of many people inside and outside governments put it there, and the impetus came primarily from the women's movement.

Why does this matter? I'd like to highlight four main reasons.

First, it matters because what counts as unpaid work for public policy purposes and the reason it is important is still not very well

understood publicly, and the tasks that characterize most of women's work are still too often either sentimentalized or derogated in male-dominated society. So asking questions about something like this requires great care. I know that great care went into designing the general social survey on time use and the census questions on unpaid work. I was part of the consultation when those questions were being designed. When issues are as important as this, you have to keep at them for the longer term, and expecting high use of such data in the short term is probably unrealistic.

We talked about the fact that people are using this data. That's true, but I think it's important to look at this issue of users.

The second reason it matters is that, as is too often the case, the users or potential users who have the most need of data and analysis often have the most difficulty using it. In the case of unpaid work in particular, the overworked women who are struggling most to get to their undervalued paid jobs, raise their children, care for an aging parent, and so on, need the policy support. They're not the ones who are going to be able to do the research, and yet without the research and data, it's hard for them to get policy-makers to pay attention to their issues. This is a real challenge.

In my current job I'm using census data on unpaid work for a new report related to poverty, but I discovered, even in my own world, that to get the full detail I wanted was beyond my resources. I'm sure I'm not alone.

My third point is this. I read in the transcripts from Tuesday something in the discussion in French that really struck me, which I don't think comes across the same way in English, and that's the use of the term *travail invisible*. It's this issue of invisibility that I think relates strongly to the census. One can see the value of having census questions about unpaid work that make many people think about it—far more than you would get in the limited sample size.

So you make people think about it. You make people stop and recognize how much work they do. Maybe they talk to other people, who didn't get the long-form census, and the conversation expands. This has tremendous value in making this work visible—legitimate, if you will—and thus valuable.

The final reason I think the longer-term view matters is that within the past few years, especially following the world financial crisis and ongoing difficulties in restoring some stability and sustainability, new voices are being heard on unpaid work. This is similar to Kathleen's point.

Joseph Stiglitz, for example, is former head of the World Bank. He's one of a growing number of very influential, mostly male, traditional, market-oriented economists who are changing their view. They're now developing a strong appreciation for the importance of non-market work, what we refer to as unpaid work, and as unpaid work becomes a more important topic of wider public debate, it's even more important for Canada to have good information to be in a good position on this issue.

In closing, I was going to say a few more things that I don't need to say about the value of the census in terms of all the different factors that you can relate, the almost infinite possibilities for analysis. I want to talk just a tiny bit, though, about the work that I was involved in.

• (0905)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Sheila.

Ms. Sheila Regehr: Okay. I think I can do it.

I was struck in the census data by how much work some senior women were doing, such as almost full-time, or more, child care. I really wanted to know what these grandmothers were doing. Knowing what I know about family structure and differences across immigrant and visible minority communities, I really wanted to dig into this to find out what was going on. The only way I could do that or see whether there were different geographic patterns—whether immigrant neighbourhoods in Toronto were different from other places—was through the census, and that's the work that I couldn't afford to get done.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Regehr.

Now we go to Beverley Smith.

Ms. Beverley Smith (Editor, Recent Research on Caregiving, As an Individual): Thank you.

I am unhappy with the elimination of the long-form census. It's an important starting point in making fair laws. We had opened a window on women's rights, the sun shone in, and now we're closing it.

[Translation]

In prehistoric societies, men and women were sharing responsibilities: she was taking care of children and he was hunting. They were interdependent.

[English]

However, when men set up commerce with money, they stopped counting the role at home. The person cooking, cleaning, and tending the young became invisible. Tax policy said she didn't even work.

Carol Lees, Saskatoon homemaker, was handed a form by Stats Canada in the 1990s. It advised her that if she had been a housewife all her life, she should indicate that she had never worked. To her this showed the level to which we had sunk.

The state required her to deny her own worth. Her complaints, the conference she organized, united women's groups across the country. She was our Rosa Parks. Her insistence that women's work in the home be counted had resonance. It also showed that Stats Canada

and the Government of Canada are works in progress and that they can see the light.

At Beijing in 1997, Canada signed the UN Platform for Action, to value unpaid work. For the first time, it would count in the long-form census.

Now that window is closing.

When I heard of the voluntary survey, I was dismayed that the unpaid labour question would no longer be compulsory. Imagine my surprise to learn that the question wouldn't be asked at all.

[Translation]

I am a teacher. What we are teaching in school is what we believe to be important.

[English]

We teach math and reading in school because we think they matter. What is not in the curriculum, we might conclude, does not matter. And that is what is wrong with the census plan.

To take off the unpaid work sends the message that women's unpaid work does not matter. Monday I taught grade 11 students about the Rwandan genocide. The first step: "just the facts ma'am". I gave them the background, and we watched a movie. They will have lots of opinions and be passionate about the issues, but the school's job is to give them the factual basis on which to build their views. The first step is the facts.

Statistics Canada is all about the facts. We need them as the pillar to build our bridge on, the bridge to equality.

I arrived yesterday in Ottawa by plane.

[Translation]

I did not ask the pilot whether he was competent. The public is already protected by the legislation. If I am the victim of a car accident, I am confident that emergency services will be deployed.

[English]

So it's not a question of whether you should ever trust anybody; it's whom you trust, what standards you have.

Our laws protect children from predators. We require security checks for those who handle our kids or our money. We trust the codes of ethics of real doctors and engineers. And it's the same with government.

I don't tell my neighbour how much money I make, but I'll tell Revenue Canada so they can charge me an arm instead of an arm and a leg. I don't tell my prospective employer how many children I have. It's none of his business. But I tell Stats Canada so that my district will have schools and parks. I wouldn't tell the stranger at the corner how I commute to work, but I tell Stats Canada so that roads won't be congested.

Government gets a bad reputation as big brother. We're worried that if they know too much they'll harm us. But if they know too little, they might also do us harm. I am in favour of small government. It should let us live our lives. But enabling people to take care of themselves starts with recognizing how much they do of that. We need the data to empower free choice.

In a democracy, those who make the laws have to know what we want. We have to tell them. If they guess, they may guess wrong.

I believe Stats Canada can be trusted. Since 1881, workers there take an oath of secrecy. The information we give them is coded and machine scanned. They are not motivated to deal with us personally. They are only looking at us as groups, for trends. They have no agenda; they are not trying to sell us anything. They are neutral.

We may worry that information could give government too much power. But for women, information is what will empower us. The facts will show with clarity the difficulties we face.

• (0910)

[Translation]

Are women earning as much as men? If not, why not?

[English]

I think it's because of our caregiving role. Do women earn longer than men? Are they delaying retirement because they can't afford it? Are senior women in poverty because they outlive men? We need the facts.

Do women suffer more depression than men do? Do they consult doctors more? Do they have more stress from career-family dilemmas? How much is this costing the economy? Give us the facts.

Are children dropping out of school more? Is unpaid care time related to how well children turn out? How does this factor affect their health, their education? We need the facts.

Women save the state billions tending the sick and elderly outside of hospital. To maintain our homes, we are the greatest spending machines in North America. We keep the economy running. Is what we do counted? We need the facts.

For me this is not about being fair. It is not about being nice to women, giving them a little pat on the head: Oh, how cute. This is about a debt we owe women. The unpaid labour question alerted legislators that what women do unpaid is one third of the GDP. Should we sweep that information back under the rug? No. We need the question to stay. It's a promise we made internationally. It's a debt we owe.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Smith.

Now we go to Mary Mowbray of the Canadian Women's Foundation.

Ms. Mary Mowbray (Co-Chair of the Board of Directors, Canadian Women's Foundation): Good morning. Thank you for inviting the Canadian Women's Foundation to address this committee on how the loss of the mandatory long-form census will affect women's economic security in Canada.

I'm the co-chair of the Canadian Women's Foundation. I've been on the board for eight years. In my professional life, I'm a vice-president with Colliers International, a full-service commercial real estate brokerage firm. The issues that affect women and girls are a passion of mine. I have personally experienced and I have seen clearly in my work the impact that a woman's ability to achieve economic independence has on her family and on her community.

The Canadian Women's Foundation's mission is to invest in the power of women and the dreams of girls. We work to move low-income women out of poverty, to end violence against women and to build strong, resilient girls. We are Canada's only national public foundation focused on transforming the lives of women and girls to better the world for everyone. We are one of the 10 largest women's foundations in the world.

All of our funding is donated by private individuals and corporations who believe in our mandate to improve the economic security of women and girls in Canada. Since 1991, we have raised over \$47 million and funded over 1,000 community organizations across Canada. The work we do has a positive effect across Canada. Eighty-four percent of the women who were on welfare when they joined our economic development program have reduced their dependency on welfare.

I'm going to make three points this morning. One, the loss of reliable, accurate data from the mandatory long-form census will hamper our efforts to advance women's economic independence in Canada. Two, a move to a voluntary survey will mean that Canada's most economically disadvantaged women and girls will no longer be properly counted. Three, data from the mandatory long-form census supports our fundraising work and informs our community investment strategy.

We believe that women's equality is inextricably linked to their economic security. In addressing the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Hillary Clinton said:

If women have a chance to work and earn as full and equal partners in society, their families will flourish. And when families flourish, communities and nations [flourish].

When women are economically secure, they pay more taxes, they have more purchasing power, and they help to keep the economy strong. They also rely less on government services. They are healthier and their children are healthier.

We know because of long-form census data that despite women's social advancement, certain groups of women remain economically vulnerable. We know there are significant income gaps for visible minority groups even when members of them are born in Canada, gaps that cannot be readily explained away by differences in age, education, or any other factors. We know that women who immigrate to Canada today are not advancing economically as immigrants have done in the past, despite higher education levels.

We know that aboriginal women, especially those living on reserves, are among Canada's poorest women. These are the women we work with—low-income women—and they tend to be immigrant women, visible minority women, women with disabilities, single mothers, socially marginalized women, women who have lived with abuse, and aboriginal women. These are the very women we fear will not be fully represented in a voluntary survey of any kind.

The Statistics Canada website gives examples of how voluntary surveys under-count economically vulnerable groups. Here's a quote about the general social survey: "Non-coverage of households...is concentrated in population groups with low educational attainment or income."

Currently, Statistics Canada uses data from the mandatory long-form census to help correct these biases in voluntary surveys and ensure that voluntary survey samples are properly weighted. However, without a mandatory long-form census as a baseline, how can we be sure that data from voluntary services captures the vulnerable groups? Without reliable data, how can we measure economic progress or lack thereof? How can we demonstrate that all women count when all women are no longer counted?

I'm going to give one specific example. We used information from the mandatory long-form census when we did an economic review of our economic development work. We'd done the work for 20 years. We knew the areas. We knew the issues that were involved. We had a volunteer committee of 22 people, each with their own biases. We had a report conducted on women in trades and technology.

● (0915)

The conclusion that came out of that was that it was very clear that women were clustered in the lowest-paid occupations. Out of this work that was based on data, we ended up funding a new trades and technology stream. We're investing over \$1 million a year in it, and we picked up a major corporate partner who was engaged because of the research that supported our investment strategy.

To be an effective and responsible foundation, we have to base our investment strategy and decisions on reliable and consistent data. All evidence supports the view that groups that are economically vulnerable are likely to be under-counted in voluntary surveys. These are the women we serve. Without reliable, consistent data, how do we know how they are progressing? Without the ability to compare the past to the present, we won't know if women have achieved economic independence or not, or how their progress is going. We don't know what we can't accurately measure. Helping women achieve economic security is our mission. We know that if women remain economically insecure, Canada cannot reach its full potential. The corporations and the individuals who support our work know this too.

Our work is based on reliable and consistent data—data that capture the reality of all women and data that change over time, data that can only come from a mandatory long-form census.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mowbray.

Now we move to the question and answer segment. We begin with seven minutes.

I'd like to let the witnesses know—for those of you who have been here before, you do know—that the seven minutes includes questions and answers. So if everyone could please be as succinct as possible, we can get as many questions and answers as we would need in this session.

I'd like to begin with Ms. Neville for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

And a very sincere thank you to each of you who were here this morning. Your presentations were different, but the power of your presentations and the impact on women is quite astounding, and I very much appreciate your being here.

As you know, we heard from Statistics Canada on Tuesday, and they said to us that "...it appeared that little policy, analytic or academic work has been produced from the unpaid work questions on the census".

Why would they say that? What's been your experience?

Ms. Lahey, do you want to comment?

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: I will share a personal, direct experience that might shed some light on that. First of all, as Dr. MacDonald mentioned, it takes time for peer-reviewed, data-based research, which is usually funded from grants, etc., to get up, running, be executed, and published. So there is always a time lag, and sometimes that time lag can run to a total of three or four years. As soon as the 1996 unpaid work data became available, I rushed to my nearest Status of Women Canada office to look for funding. But along the way, I managed to get funding even more quickly from the Law Commission of Canada to carry out a research project in the tax policy area that was very near and dear to my heart, on the destructive impact of joint taxation on women particularly.

That paper was published fairly quickly because it was published by the law commission itself and was available and circulating for a total of five or six years. It's no longer available, however, unless someone makes a personal appointment to come to my office and take a copy out of the boxes in my office, because when the Law Commission of Canada was defunded in 2006, its offices were closed. It was told to dispose of all its assets for the best price, and the dump truck would be along on a specific date. The web page was torn down and is only available through an obscure, mirrored version based at Dalhousie University. And the research is, for all practical purposes, invisible. So I don't have any problem believing that when the Statistics Canada gender experts went looking for evidence of use of these data, they may have had a hard time finding a great deal of it.

Status of Women Canada did fund a huge amount of research on this. That research has all been taken off the web page, hidden in government archives, not available on the Internet, and is not available for sale.

• (0920)

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Ms. Mowbray.

The Chair: Yes, I was going to say Ms. Mowbray and Ms. Smith both had their hands up.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you. I have lots more questions.

Ms. Mary Mowbray: Was your question that Stats Can is saying there's no research being done using this data?

Hon. Anita Neville: They said that very little research is being done, yes.

Were any of you consulted on the decision?

Ms. Mary Mowbray: To scrap the long-form census?

Hon. Anita Neville: And question 33.

Ms. Mary Mowbray: No, the Canadian Women's Foundation was not.

But I want to go back to your question for a second. As the co-chair of the Canadian Women's Foundation, or as a taxpayer, I don't see that the data is being collected so that research can be done. I never saw that as the fundamental purpose of a census and that the validation of a census is that a lot of other bodies, whether they are educational bodies or private corporations or whatever, are using the data for research.

I don't see the relevance of the question at all. It's about accurately understanding the population of the country so that the government and organizations, non-profit foundations like the Canadian Women's Foundation, can use that data to drive strategy and make change and make the country a better place. It's not about whether somebody does research with the data or not. To me, it's irrelevant.

Hon. Anita Neville: Well, it strikes me that it's research you're speaking about.

Ms. Smith.

Ms. Beverley Smith: I was just going to say that I am a big critic of the way they ask the question. I have always been a big critic of the way Statistics Canada asks the question on paid labour because

it's so broad. It's ridiculous. How much time did you spend doing a zillion tasks? If you want to know, and if you want to analyze it, at least ask it as a question that is analyzable. How much time did you spend cooking? How much time did you spend reading to the child? Make it specific enough that we have something to deal with.

The other thing is that people don't know what you're talking about. They say, "Okay, yesterday I went for groceries. I got diapers for the baby and I got some steak for my dinner." Which part of that was for the kid? Dividing up your day to see which part was for the kid and which part wasn't is very hard.

It's a new category, as my colleagues were mentioning. We have to have a better question. In fact, we need more questions, not no questions.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do I have time?

The Chair: Yes, you have two minutes.

Dr. MacDonald.

Dr. Martha MacDonald: I have a couple of comments. I agree that the purpose of the data is not just for research, although Statistics Canada does make money from people using their data for research.

In terms of the unpaid work question, in my own experience there certainly is academic research on it. It's also extremely useful for teaching and for general public education, that sort of lower level of research. At the high level of academic research, I'd have to do my own literature review to answer that question. But of course I was not asked about that when they decided to axe it.

It's quite annoying, in that there are so many other questions on the census. How many rooms are in your house? Has anybody checked on how much research is being done using that question? Is there a reason to ask that question?

In terms of the level of generality in the question, there are similar problems with the unpaid work questions being quite general. There are similar problems of recall, and so on, with regard to the paid work questions on the census. There are a lot of questions on that. People have to make their best guess on what kinds of work they do and how they spend their time, how long they commute to work. All of those things require judgment.

On the strengths of the unpaid work question, I and others have worked with it in conjunction with the more detailed general social survey breakdown of tasks, and they are quite complementary—

• (0925)

Hon. Anita Neville: Could I ask one quick question to Ms. Lahey?

The Chair: We have gone over the seven minutes.

I would like to ask everyone to please be succinct in your answers, because we're using up the time. Ms. Neville wished to answer another question, but we've gone over—

Hon. Anita Neville: I have several.

The Chair: We've gone over the seven minutes, so I'm sorry.

We'll now move to the Bloc Québécois, Monsieur Desnoyers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will start my intervention the same way I did at the last meeting. In the House of Commons, we passed a motion which reads:

That this House highlights the importance of the so-called "invisible" unpaid work done by parents and caregivers on behalf of their children and aging family members by creating the "Invisible Work Day"...

Mr. Fellegi, who was previously the chief statistician of Statistics Canada, told us yesterday about the importance of the long form census, as compared with the survey that the government in power would implement. He mentioned that in fact, the debate would not deal with statistics any longer, but rather with the reliability of data.

How will we be able to analyze data obtained from a questionnaire that some 20,000 or 25,000 persons will have filled, given the fact that at the last census, the data were obtained through a long form questionnaire that was filled by more than 2.9 million people?

I would like to know what is your opinion, as researchers, on the reliability of the future data concerning the so-called invisible unpaid work. And you are right when you say that through the data that we used to have, we could make this work visible.

[*English*]

The Chair: Which one of you would like to tackle that first?

Ms. Smith.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Beverley Smith: I can start.

From what I understand, in order to do what they are now proposing to do, we will need to make a survey on a greater number of families. And there will be many people who will not answer. So it will take much more paper work, efforts, advertisements, publicity expenditures, and we will not have the same sample, as you indicated. So there is no benefit. Only the official census will have any reliability.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Anyone else wants to answer that question? No.

As researchers who have worked with the previous data, how will you be able to work from now on with a new form and new data? Will it be possible to make comparisons between the two sets of data?

[*English*]

The Chair: Professor Lahey.

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: Just a quick comment. I've already been talking to Statistics Canada officers who are responsible for different programs I rely very heavily on and they're basically saying

they don't have a clue. They truly don't know. There's no plan in place.

Statistics Canada's budget has been cut so severely that the extra money for funding the extra 10% of the national household survey that's been promised may have to come out of StatsCan's existing budget. Another five surveys were cancelled just a month ago, with their accompanying analysis. This is going to put a lot of financial pressure on the whole StatsCan set-up as well.

The Chair: Is there anyone else?

Dr. MacDonald.

Dr. Martha MacDonald: I think the point about the inability to do that historical analysis and the continuity is extremely important. And we have also all made points about the problems of reliability in terms of underrepresentation of certain groups in a voluntary survey.

• (0930)

The Chair: Monsieur Desnoyers, you have another three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I understand.

So your future research could be seriously jeopardized because the data will not be as reliable.

So what they are really doing is making invisible all the data that we had on women that could allow the government to finally consider putting in place programs that could address the needs of women in our society. We know that their contribution, in the form of invisible work, represents one third of the GDP, as Ms. Smith was saying, if I am not mistaken. So it is a major change.

I would like to hear your comments on the economic contribution of women.

[*English*]

Ms. Beverley Smith: I'm so used to being put down. This is just another blow. It surprises you and you're sick of it, but enough already. We're half of the population of this country and we're the caregivers of this country. And it's just amazing that they would take away that one little thing we had.

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: Could I just add that there's a lot of detail that goes with this, but this is the only question that has ever been removed from the census since Confederation after it has only been used for a couple of cycles. No other question has ever been so attacked in each consultation period and so vulnerable to being removed. And the way that Statistics Canada handled it I think betrays a certain lack of gender balance.

Ms. Beverley Smith: Could I just say that in my research, Statistics Canada has, over time, changed head of household, changed the marital status categories to five, and removed some things. I still have hope. We keep knocking on that door.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Anyone else wants to add something?

[*English*]

The Chair: One minute.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I will make one last comment. You talked about the economic crisis. It is quite obvious that women, at the present time, are the most vulnerable. In all businesses, they were the first to be let go because it so happens that the vast majority of them were the youngest. So they find themselves in a situation where they have been seriously put at risk and, unfortunately, we will no longer have these statistics.

So how will we be able to make progress to improve the situation of women? I believe, Ms. Smith, that you have somewhat answered that question earlier.

I find unfortunate that after having waged such important fights for a number of years on issues relating to women, we are not able anymore to continue to make progress on women issues in Canada. It is unfortunate. The government should reconsider its position, as far as I am concerned, on this whole set of issues.

I don't know what your views are about this. In any case, we obviously have very little time left.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we move on to the next group. That would be Ms. Cadman for the Conservatives.

Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): Ms. Lahey, do I call you Doctor or Professor?

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: Professor, not Doctor.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Okay. Do you teach now, or are you a lawyer?

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: Both.

Ms. Dona Cadman: How do you, as a lawyer, use this data, or would you use this data?

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: I tried to list all of the ways and I really ran out of space.

The most important application that lawyers and law students need to know about is how to adequately prepare, identify, and deal with expert testimony in a whole range of cases. Socio-economic data is one of the key areas, so in my charter litigation involving groups such as Métis women, same-sex couples, and so on, I have had to continually confront the data limitations that the Canadian statistics scene offers.

Also in my own personal research, which is fairly wide ranging and has been funded by everyone from SSHRC to Status of Women Canada and private foundations, I have carried out in-depth research that is usually demographically diversity oriented and requires me to make very heavy use of all of Statistics Canada's products. As well, I've done sort of international, transnational comparative statistical work, so I'm familiar with statistical practices from a large number of developed and underdeveloped countries also.

• (0935)

Ms. Dona Cadman: Okay.

Madam Chair, I'll be sharing my time with Ms. Brown and she'll take over now.

The Chair: All right. Ms. Brown, you have five minutes.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all of our witnesses. I appreciate hearing from you.

Ms. Smith, I do have a confession to make, I think. In all the years I have been filling out census forms.... I've always worked. As an adult, I've always worked. I took on my first full-time job when I was 18, but when my children were little I was home for a very brief time and then went back to paid employment. But I never, ever considered reading to my children as unpaid work, so I guess I've skewed all of the data that the rest of you have been using. To me, reading to my children was an absolute privilege, and it was time that I looked on, as a mother, as quality time with them. So I'm afraid that I may have skewed the data that you've been using all these years, and you may need to go back and reflect on how others have seen that, because I think it's a very subjective kind of assessment.

I would never have considered shopping for my family as unpaid work. Again, I say that skews data, because again, it's very, very subjective in how people approach these questions. I don't know how you get around that, unless you start to take every question and break it down into multiple components. In the same way, my husband would never consider cutting the grass part of unpaid work. It's simply a household thing that we do because we own the home and we want to maintain our home to its very best advantage. It would never have occurred to him to include that in unpaid work. So again, I say the data you've been using all these years has been skewed, because my responses have not been appropriately delineated in the way you would have said.

That's only a comment to you, not really a question. But I do have a question for Ms. Mowbray, if you don't mind.

Ms. Beverley Smith: Can I comment on your comment?

Ms. Lois Brown: Yes, you may.

Ms. Beverley Smith: Thank you for bringing that up. That is a key issue, and you're not the first or the only one to do so. A lot of people say, "It is a privilege. I love my kids. I want to feed them. I want to take care of them. I want to rock the baby to sleep. Why would you call that work? How insulting that is." I see what you're saying. The problem is, what's the alternative? Is it play? Is it leisure? Is it a hobby? To me, it's a responsibility. You legally are supposed to feed your child. If you didn't feed your child, you would be prosecuted. So what category does it fall in? The category I think it falls in is unpaid work, because it's selfless effort that takes energy and time, and often money, and it's benefiting society, it's benefiting the GDP. For example, I had four children. My four children are all adults now—two lawyers, a doctor and a magazine editor. They are big taxpayers, I hope. I gave that to Canada. That's my unpaid work. That's my contribution to the economy.

Ms. Lois Brown: But in the same way, it's very subjective.

I'm currently the accompanist for the York region police chorus, and I donate hours and hours of time in performing concerts. The time I spend in preparation for those concerts is my personal time at the piano. I am preparing for something that is for the public good, but I don't consider that work.

So I think we're looking at some very subjective delineation.

The Chair: I have to suggest that this is not a debate. You were going to ask a question, Ms. Brown, of Ms. Mowbray. You only have a minute left.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you.

Ms. Mowbray, I just want to ask you a question, if I may. And thank you for the work you're doing.

I wonder if you could tell us whether you have been a participant. We understand from Statistics Canada that there have been consultations ongoing since 2008. As a net user, have you been a participant in those consultations?

Ms. Mary Mowbray: Not that I'm aware of.

Ms. Lois Brown: It was available, but users are not undertaking to be participants, because they expect to get this information in the long run.

Could I ask what it would cost you if you had to access this information? What would it cost your organization if you had to pay for it?

● (0940)

Ms. Mary Mowbray: I don't know the answer to that question right now. I think that sort of relates to whether it is our data collection and why the government should pay for our data collection. My response to that is that it's not our data collection in terms of the Canadian Women's Foundation; it's our data collection in terms of the country of Canada, and the government represents the people. It is not for us; it's for us to do work, the same work, frankly, that I think the government should be doing. Part of what a government does is look after the most economically vulnerable people in society and move them to becoming economically independent and contributing to the economy.

Ms. Lois Brown: How long have you been using this...?

The Chair: I'm sorry, we have gone to seven and a half minutes now.

Thank you very much.

Now I will go to Ms. Ashton for the New Democratic Party.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Thank you very much.

First I'd like to apologize for stepping out for a few moments. My community is going through mass layoffs, and there was a big community meeting at home to try to deal with the situation.

I am particularly interested in the way question 33 connects with advocacy work. In my last two years, since having been elected—and prior to that as well—I have been shocked to see the attack on women's advocacy organizations.

I'm particularly interested in how, perhaps, the facts about women, and certainly, in a way, the numbers that represent the voices of

women, may relate to advocacy around issues like child care or elder care or pay equity or employment insurance or whatever it might be.

I'd also like to note that sitting in the House of Commons, where only 21% of us are women, it seems to me more urgent than ever to make sure that women are counted somewhere.

I'd like to perhaps begin by asking Kathleen Lahey, and others who may have thoughts on it, about the connection between question 33 and advocacy.

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: Well, I think the most obvious answer is that there has been advocacy, I believe, going on within Statistics Canada to try to get rid of question 33. I think that's a very direct link. After having heard the testimony that was given two days ago in this committee, I went back and reread the "2011 Census Content Consultation Report", in which they report on their consultation process. Footnote 10, which says, "During most in-person consultations, participants were asked about the use and importance of unpaid work data", took on an entirely new meaning for me.

This was not done in any of the discussions pertaining to any of the other questions that were on the "to be reviewed" list. Unpaid work was never on the list to be reviewed, according to the consultation guide.

The other peculiar thing that happened is that Statistics Canada itself became a major contributor to the comments that were collected and were then relied upon by Statistics Canada in concluding that the unpaid work question should come out, although it did not fully say that in its consultation report. In fact, the combination of the federal government responses and the Statistics Canada responses to the question that was asked by Statistics Canada people interviewing their consultants about unpaid work were enough to clearly constitute the 30% who said to take it out.

So there's advocacy on both sides. Women have been trusting Statistics Canada to not particularly single out the unpaid work question, but I think there's evidence in the consultation report that, unfortunately, Statistics Canada has perhaps not been quite so above board.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Moving on to Martha MacDonald, do you have any thoughts about question 33 and how it connects to advocacy work by women?

Dr. Martha MacDonald: The unpaid work activities are an important part of what women's advocacy has tried to make clear. It's not just in terms of providing those services; it's in terms of how that work relates to paid work and the inequalities in the labour market.

Definitely, it has an important role to play. But I don't want it to be just a focus on that unpaid work. In terms of advocacy, I think there are a lot of other issues about the value of the long-form census data that are going to equally pose a challenge.

● (0945)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Maybe we could move to Mary Mowbray, given her experience.

Ms. Mary Mowbray: The information we get with question 33 helps us to explain why women are at an economic disadvantage. They make choices, and whether you want to call it unpaid work or selfless work, or whatever it is, if I wasn't buying groceries for my child, somebody would have to buy the groceries. If I'm not doing it, I have to pay someone to do it.

We can get caught up in semantics for years and have fun little conversations, but at the end of the day, child care is child care, elder care is elder care, and if I don't look after my 84-year-old mother, I have to pay someone to look after her.

I just want to make a point here. I hear the passion and I hear the real commitment and the interest from the members of the committee, but I don't hear a lot of discussion about what I think is the fundamental issue as to why people are outraged—and I think outraged is the word—about the cancellation of the mandatory long-form census. It's really simple. There are lots of data and there is lots of research. It is not all driven by our organization or special interest groups. There are examples from other countries, like our neighbour to the south. These data show that voluntary surveys, by virtue of being voluntary, underrepresent vulnerable groups. Full stop.

It's very simple. Up to now, Stats Canada has used the mandatory long-form census to correct for that skewing. It's a very simple proposition. If you don't have a mandatory long-form census, you don't have the ability to correct for that.

The stats are there. When they did it in the U.S., 43% of white households responded, compared with 20% of black households and 23% of Hispanic households. When you phoned them afterwards, as soon as you said it was voluntary, responses dropped off by 17%.

This is not driven by special interests. This is fact. You can play it any way you want, but that is the fundamental problem. We will not have factual, accurate data about the Canadian population. It will be the people who need the most help that will not be counted.

The longer we go on not having a mandatory long-form census, the more difficult it will become to correct for the bias and the bigger the skewing will get. It's simple.

Can we collect the information some other way? Sure, we can. We can become like Finland. We can have an identity card that combines our health records, school records, income records, employment records, traffic violations, credit checks, and crime records. Everything could be in one place.

Do you want to talk about being intrusive? Do you want to talk about aligning local, provincial, and federal governments? Do you want to talk about costs? Let's start doing that. That is the alternative, unless you want to accept that we're not going to know the makeup of our population.

I'm here on behalf of the Canadian Women's Foundation and the one in seven women in Canada who lives in poverty. But really the issue is far greater than the people in the groups that the five of us are speaking about.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think we have time for a second round. We will begin with Ms. Simson for the Liberals.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): I'd like to thank everyone for coming out. Your testimony has been very compelling and powerful.

Perhaps I'll start with Ms. Regehr.

You said something that's quite interesting. Having read the clerk's notes, and I hope I have this correct, you mentioned that you were in some way consulted back in the 1990s on question 33. I agree, and was hoping, that it would be a lot more finite and a lot more detailed rather than eliminated.

That said, looking back in history, and to your point, Ms. Lahey, what's the problem with Statistics Canada in this particular question?

The clerk's notes indicate that historians reported that the federal government announced its intention to include the question on unpaid work in the census at the Beijing conference. That decision was the result of a cabinet decision that overruled Statistics Canada's advice. Right from the get go, Statistics Canada was a little adverse to even having it.

Ms. Lahey, you indicated that there are advocates to remove this question, which is quite bizarre. Statistics Canada appeared to have given us what was rather misleading testimony in terms of users of that particular data that was obtained by that question.

You were there at the beginning, Ms. Regehr. Do you have any sense of why there was an objection on the part of Statistics Canada to even include this question?

• (0950)

Ms. Sheila Regehr: I wondered if somebody might ask that. When I read the transcripts, I thought, "Oh, is my memory any better than Dr. Fellegi's?"

I can't definitively say that I know the answer. Based on my recollections of what was going on at the time...and it goes to Dr. Fellegi's statement too, though, that there is a role for government in deciding what we ask questions about. It's not about how we ask the questions and those technical things—

Mrs. Michelle Simson: In fact, he testified that if the government thought a question was far too intrusive, they had the option of eliminating that question.

Ms. Sheila Regehr: From my recollection, this was one of those issues.

There was a lot of testing that went on in the design of the questions. To the point that was made earlier about people understanding the question, they focus tested it a lot. They tried to get the questions as good as they could, so that people who were not used to considering these things as work would understand what they were. Take the emotion and motivation out of it, but understand what the work is, so that it could be documented.

For Statistics Canada, I think there were some people who were worried a little bit about the reliability of it. Once we got the results and once they were compared to GSS, those fears proved to be unsubstantiated. I think those were some of the concerns.

However, going into Beijing, and given the importance to gender equality of having this kind of information, that societal need to start somewhere and understand what we're dealing with and get good data on it—I'm speculating—was probably the paramount issue.

I don't know what happens in cabinet, but those were some of the discussions and some of the issues that were being debated at the time.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Does anyone else have a comment?

The Chair: You have just under a minute.

Dr. Martha MacDonald: I'm not sure if this is a direct answer to your question, but I think one of the strengths of the census data is the mix, the range of information. It might not be the most perfect unpaid work question, it may not be the most perfect job-related question, but the elements are all there. The various range of things we've talked about in terms of immigration, paid and unpaid work, incomes and family incomes, and children and education—it's that mix that's really important.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Ms. Grewal for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, ladies, for your time and your presentations. Certainly we enjoyed them.

Talking about question 33, I want to suggest that it was inadequate and offered very little value to our researchers and policy makers, but the results may be interesting. A serious analysis of unpaid work requires much more information than the census question provides, and it's not just the number of hours of unpaid work that matters; it's when and how those hours are spent.

Would you agree with me that it's not the number of hours worked that's important?

The Chair: Sheila Regehr.

Ms. Sheila Regehr: Thank you.

It's an interesting question, and the response was mentioned earlier. You need more than one source of information to really get a handle on these things. I'm a very visual person, and something springs to mind that Australia did when it was looking at unpaid work and time-use surveys the first time. One of the really neat things about the general social survey is that it really allows you to see very specific patterns in women's and men's time that are different.

This visual chart for Australia showed that men's time is in big blocks. You spend a long weekend doing home repairs, and that's done. Then you spend the next five days at work. Women's patterns are like this coloured mosaic all over the place. You do a few minutes of this and a few minutes of that; you do things in combination. That's fascinating to know, but the amount really matters too. The kind of thing you get in the census is

complementary to that, so you get a sense of the volume and who's doing what.

In the study I'm looking at and working on, I found it fascinating that there are some women who should be retired but look like they are doing full-time, long hours of child care. I also know from the census that family structure among immigrants to Canada is very different, especially among immigrants who are living in poverty. It's very different from the Canadian average. So combining those things you get a sense of that population.

Maybe they are elderly women who have come to Canada recently who don't qualify for old age pensions and therefore need to do this child care work. Maybe they're supporting their children, who are very stressed from lack of child care and trying to meet all the demands, so the grandparents are assuming that. There is such a richness there if you combine these different sources.

● (0955)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Ms. MacDonald, you have done some serious work on unpaid labour. Was your work dependent on the results from question 33, and did you gather more vital information from other sources as well? Could you please elaborate on those sources?

Dr. Martha MacDonald: My main published work on unpaid work used the general social survey, but in doing so I discovered both the strengths and weaknesses of that. It's very rich in detail. You can decide, concerning what Ms. Brown said, whether you're going to count shopping as work or not in how you do the analysis. You can have lots of debate on that. There are also things you can't do with that, and certainly in that work we cross-referenced with the census.

In other international comparison work I'm involved in, and particularly in my teaching work, the unpaid work is very central, using the unpaid work as a factor in an analysis of paid labour market inequality that you can do with the census—so the gender wage gap, or penalties in terms of having children, or whatever. In the analysis of paid wage work you can also use summary unpaid work as a variable. You are not necessarily focusing on the unpaid work, but you are taking it into account in analyzing other aspects of inequality. It's very useful in that way. I have used that.

The Chair: Ms. Smith, you had your hand up.

Ms. Beverley Smith: It's more than hours. I would also count income sacrifice. Did you have to take time away from your paid work commitment to do the care work? There are other questions we could ask within this.

Ms. Mary Mowbray: Sorry, and full-time to part-time.... Seventy percent of Canada's part-time workforce is female. They make choices that they don't take full-time jobs because of core housework related to food and shelter. So this is meal preparation, cleanup, indoor cleaning, and laundry—not lawn cutting and not reading to my daughter at night. It's still mostly done by women. The hours do matter; they really do. They affect their choices in jobs, and that affects their economic independence.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll now go to Madam Guay for the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am happy to be here today. Ladies, thank you for being here.

You talked about question number 33. As I only have five minutes, I will try to be as brief as possible.

There are other very important questions about women in the long form census. Am I wrong about this? I understand that these questions could also be eliminated.

•(1000)

Ms. Beverley Smith: At the level of definitions, I always had a problem with Statistics Canada because their definition of work is different from mine. In each question where a person is asked whether he or she has worked, there is nothing to take into account the women who work but who are not paid for their work. So the whole questionnaire is biased.

Ms. Monique Guay: Exactly, and that should not be the case since in Quebec, for example, women represent 52% of the population.

You talked about unpaid work, but there is also the whole issue of women who are single parents and the issue of women who do not get equal pay for work of equal value. A great number of questions deal with this issue. If we withdraw question number 33, I believe that it will do a lot of harm.

I have two questions that, for me, are very important. Did you approach the government, apart from your appearance in front of this committee, to insist that question 33, among others, stays in the long form census?

Did you intervene in other fora, through your respective groups or associations or whatever?

[*English*]

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: I took it directly to the national newspapers, the political parties, the major blogs, and so on, and a huge reaction unfolded.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Perfect.

[*English*]

Dr. Martha MacDonald: I signed a petition.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Okay. It is important that it be known.

[*English*]

Ms. Sheila Regehr: As an individual, not as a representative of my organization.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Okay.

What about you, Ms. Mowbray?

[*English*]

Ms. Mary Mowbray: Sorry, my French is not....

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: You can answer in English.

[*English*]

Ms. Mary Mowbray: With my work through the Canadian Women's Foundation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Did you receive any answer? No, none. Nothing happened.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Brown, you had something to say?

Ms. Lois Brown: Does Ms. Mowbray have her translation?

The Chair: I think that's up to Ms. Mowbray whether she wishes to listen to the translation or not.

Can we move on to Ms. Guay, please?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: I would like to know whether the previous form really allowed you to obtain all the information that you are talking about this morning. Did you really obtain, through the previous form, all the information that you needed to compile your statistics? I would like to hear you about this.

[*English*]

The Chair: Let me just clarify. Are you asking if there is another way we could get it?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Did the previous form, that included question 33, really enable you to do all your research?

Ms. Beverley Smith: No.

[*English*]

The Chair: Kathleen?

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: Question 33 was never designed to cover every aspect of unpaid work. Unpaid work probably accounts for about one-half of all human work hours in Canada. But unlike paid work, which is covered in 12 questions over many, many pages in every census, unpaid work has been segregated into one single question. So it has been framed as what is referred to as a symbolic question, which gets at the three most important unpaid activities people engage in.

It's a very wide-ranging framing of the question, and I'd just like to emphasize that it does not ask about unpaid work; it asks about unpaid activities. That's why the census data really are the place to start, because they reach every part of Canada, every community, every income category, and every cultural and linguistic group. No one is left out.

In a quick comparison of just how the two samples, the GSS versus question 33, compare, I discovered that in the last round of census data collection, 40.9% of all the women who responded to the census—and there were 25.5 million responses to the census—indicated they did some unpaid activities relating to children.

The GSS for the year just before that, for 2005, which only sampled 19,500 people in the whole country, or 2,000 per province, was only able to find 20% of all female participants in its sample reporting any child care work. So there are significant data limitations with the GSS.

The census is absolutely crucial with respect to question 33, even though we could make it a lot better than it is.

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll move to Ms. Ashton for the New Democratic Party.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Great. I have two questions.

I would direct my first question to Ms. Regehr. My mom, who spent many hours of unpaid work raising my brother and I, was part of the national action committee in the fight for consideration of this point in the census.

It seems to me that so many years later, the question I ask is, by removing not just this question but also the mandatory form census, are we in fact moving backwards?

Also, how do we compare with other countries' data collection and the work they're able to do as a result of their data collection?

Perhaps I'll state those questions, and then after you have a chance to comment, Ms. Regehr, I'd like to direct a further question to Ms. Mowbray and ask her to further expand on what I think are some pretty shocking figures of the level of responses by different groups when the census is no longer mandatory.

I'm wondering if we could perhaps consider that model in Canada. I represent an area that has a very large number of first nations and Métis people, and certainly people from diverse groups. If in fact we can project that level of response in our country, what would that mean for the representation of these groups, and certainly of the women in these groups?

Ms. Sheila Regehr: It's hard to respond to that question other than to say that things are going backwards if there's a huge range of data we're not going to be able to use anymore. I know that in my own professional life there are pieces of work that we would have done but will not now be able to do if we do not have the long-form census this time. That's fact; it's just straight fact. So I don't know how to respond otherwise.

The focus of my work has been different in recent years, so I haven't kept up with things, and I apologize for not being able to answer the question about international comparisons. But I do know

that most of the Nordic countries do a really, really good job at collecting this sort of information, and they use it better than we do in public policy.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Perhaps, Ms. Lahey, you have a comment.

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: Yes.

With respect to other countries, I have worked extensively with Eurostat, which is a European Union-wide database. I've worked extensively with the individual country databases for countries such as Sweden, Norway, Spain, the U.K., and so on. And not only do they have unbelievably detailed sex-disaggregated data available to anybody—even to me in Canada—for no payment whatsoever, but it's produced much more quickly, it's more comprehensive, it has more depth to it, and it is something that no one would consider dropping. Canada has lost its statistical edge in comparison with those countries.

Canada does have a lot of micro-simulation in the development and application stage, which does compare fairly well with some of the European material. But still, if the census goes, the platform for all of the new micro-simulation programs is also going to vaporize.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Ms. Mary Mowbray: I just wanted to clarify one point, because I think I had my numbers mixed up, and I know it's going on record.

It was the U.S. in 2002. They did a test to see what would happen if they went to a voluntary American community survey, and they found that 43% of white households responded, as did 20% of Hispanic households and 22% of black households. There's other data out there that shows that exactly that happens.

It would be great to know why. I don't profess to know why, but we know it happens. Statistics Canada have said sampling was unlikely to produce accurate data for small populations, so the smaller the population within the big population, the less likely it's going to be accurate.

And when Statistics Canada did a test and looked at what Canada would look like, they found the same thing. They did a simulation, and they found that in the Toronto population, blacks were underrepresented by 13.2%, Chinese were overrepresented by 17.6%, and reported Indians were underrepresented by 11.7%. This is in the last year or so. This isn't 10- or 20-year-old data. And strangely enough—I have no idea why—construction workers were overrepresented by 9.4%, and bureaucrats in most of the major cities were massively overrepresented. So we see completely skewed results, not just by ethnic origin or by economic class, but by job. We know that's happening. That will happen with a voluntary survey.

So to me, the fundamental issue is voluntary versus mandatory. You can tweak questions. That's a separate issue. The issue is whether it's voluntary or mandatory. Right now the mandatory census is used to correct this sort of thing. So when you get results back and you see that blacks are underrepresented by 13%, you can adjust for that and weight it. You can't if you don't have that.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Ms. McLeod for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think I'd like to head down a little bit of a different track in terms of our conversation today, to something we haven't chatted about it.

When the decision was made to go from mandatory to voluntary, I certainly had phone calls to my office, and not an insignificant number of phone calls. I certainly heard things on both sides of the issue, no question, but some of these phone calls were to say thank you. And the stories they had, whether they were single moms or elderly gentlemen.... In a number of cases, they were quite frightened. They had been picked for the long-form census. They were getting knocks on their doors at eight o'clock at night or when they were getting ready for their children to go to school, and they were feeling very frightened by the process.

I've always thought that a carrot is better than a stick, certainly in the profile of the conversation around the census and the importance of the general household survey. But would we not be better to spend our energy and effort...? We have the people who are hired to collect the data, who are knocking on doors saying there is a \$500 fine. And no, we never have fined anyone. We have never sent them to jail, but those possibilities have certainly been made very apparent to the people. A carrot rather than a stick.... This not going to be supporting people if we move this forward, because there is manpower that is focused on bringing these results in. I don't think we can completely discount these people who feel that way, and the very frightening experience that they've had.

So we need a carrot rather than a stick.

The Chair: Ms. Smith.

Ms. Beverley Smith: I would say to the comment that I agree. I mean, I'm kind of a pig-headed person. I didn't start wearing a seat belt until the law made me, and then I was mad at the law. I prefer the carrot, but what kind of carrot could we give them? A tax break? I don't know.

I think that's exactly the problem with the people you're hearing from who are afraid: they're vulnerable. They're already afraid. They feel excluded and they're afraid. So—

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: So they're afraid and they have someone at their door as they're getting kids ready to go to school, as they're going to bed at night: "You have to fill in this form."

Ms. Beverley Smith: These are the particular people who are going to be the most at risk if we don't let government make this survey. Because the data will still be there, and someone else will start collecting it. We put ourselves at risk for a commercial

organization collecting the data, and they can ask really biased questions because they don't have the standard of ethics.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: We're not saying that the data shouldn't be collected. Absolutely, data is incredibly important for everything that you've talked about. What we're talking about is carrot rather than stick.

• (1015)

Ms. Beverley Smith: Yes, but what about this question about the unpaid labour? You are stopping that question.

Dr. Martha MacDonald: I was just going to say that the example you used, the single parent who is trying to get her kids out the door and may be reluctant to take on the time for the mandatory...that's exactly the kind of situation we're talking about. If it's voluntary, we will not hear from that group and we will not have that broad representation. It's the more vulnerable groups that will be under-represented.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Do you not believe that the time spent in terms of knocking on the door should be "Hey, this is important; can we help you or support you in doing this?"

Ms. Mary Mowbray: The problem is that the data shows it doesn't work. The data shows that in making it voluntary, you can knock at the door, you can be really nice, but the vulnerable people will not respond for lots of different reasons, which probably are not understood yet. Whether they're trying to put their child to bed, working two jobs, feeling socially isolated, or whether they don't like the government, the data shows, and other voluntary surveys indicate, that it doesn't work.

I would love it if taxes were voluntary, but they're not. It's just considered a simple responsibility. You report your income and pay taxes on it.

What I read showed that Statistics Canada got 25 to 30 complaints a year. I don't think that's significant in a population of 33 million people, and I, frankly, as a taxpayer and a citizen, would be very disturbed to see a government driving policy based on 25 to 30 people out of 33 million. I don't think that's good strategy.

So I love carrots, but I don't think it has to be heavy stick—but it's a stick.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Lahey, quickly, because we're coming towards the end of the time here.

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: The justice department attempted to get Statistics Canada to do exactly that. The general social survey does not do any polling in any of the territories for precisely the reasons we're talking about. People are too isolated, too vulnerable, and they simply have too low of a response rate on anything that is voluntary.

So special pilot projects were carried out by Statistics Canada not once but several times, attempting to find a way, some way, to get people in the territories to respond in large enough numbers so that the GSS data could be valid. It could not be done.

The Department of Justice, because they were intent on showing an increase in crime rates in those areas, decided they would go ahead and publish the data on their own with big warnings saying it was not valid data but it was the only data available.

You can go on the Justice Canada web page and read about all of the efforts they went to in trying to do exactly the kind of thing you're describing.

Statistically it does not work, and unless we want to go back to sort of pre-governance days, we unfortunately need a mandatory census in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have finished this round.

I am going to ask a question of this committee.

We have 10 minutes left. We could do one round at two minutes each because there are five people in the round. But if we go over—and we have been going over time here. Some of the people answering the questions take a lot of time and some of the people asking the questions take a lot of time. The bottom line is that we will take more than two minutes. If we take more than two minutes each, we will not be able to get to the work that we have to do in the last 15 minutes of this committee.

If people want this round, let me know. If we do this round, I'm going to cut you off in mid-sentence, and I don't want people complaining when I do so because my job is to keep us on time.

All right. Let's start the two-minute round.

Ms. Neville, for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: It's not really a two-minute question, but I'll try it nonetheless.

We do not have a mandatory long-form census, or it's proposed that we do not. I want to know what the implications are of not having it mandatory with this particular census round, and then one hopes in the future it will be mandatory. What is the impact on research by having a gap where it's not mandatory?

Who wants to answer?

Ms. Beverley Smith: It's a mess.

Ms. Sheila Regehr: Even if you can catch up later in the particular circumstance, when we're going through this economic upheaval that we're facing now, the gap probably comes at a pretty bad time.

Hon. Anita Neville: Anybody else?

Ms. Mary Mowbray: It's used internationally right now, but they won't accept it if it's a voluntary survey. There are all kinds of implications. You can't go back and make that up afterwards.

We'll lose a five-year snapshot of Canada, of Canadians. That is what we'll lose.

•(1020)

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: People draw trend lines, but there won't be any data. People will be guessing.

Ms. Mary Mowbray: It'll be like a dotted trend line for 2011.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you. That's fine.

The Chair: Thank you. That's good. That's under two minutes, Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: I did my best.

The Chair: That's fine.

For the Conservatives, Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you very much.

Ms. Mowbray, you've been using the data for quite some time. Can you tell us whether or not you feel the data you've been using so far has been reliable?

Ms. Mary Mowbray: Yes, despite the inaccuracies we'll have to take out for your unpaid work while you're reading.

Voices: Oh!

Ms. Mary Mowbray: At the same time, we're not saying that it's perfect. I mean, we work in an imperfect world. We collect data. We have research reports written. We analyze our own results over time.

Every time we do a granting round...we grant millions of dollars every year. We go back and assess how we granted it. Every time, we look for learning opportunities. So we look at our own processes. We look at the data our work produces.

It's never perfect, but—

Ms. Lois Brown: I'm going to interrupt there, simply because I know my time is limited. I want to put something in here.

When I was doing my own research, simply looking at reliability of statistics, I came across a quote from Britain. I'm not saying this has anything to do with Canada, but I am saying that in 2001, the ONS has admitted that it had to impute information for 6.1% of households who failed to fill in the forms—more than 1.5 million families. One in three forms was not filled in completely, leaving large blanks that are filled in by ONS staff who use average answers, using responses from neighbours.

As much as we want to say that we all have reliable data, other jurisdictions are saying that there are still problems. My point is that we're moving to a voluntary form. I'm not sure that the data we're going to get will be any less reliable since it has been voluntary. No one has been prosecuted. No one has gone to jail in the 40 years that we've been using this data. Effectively, the corollary is that it has already always been a voluntary form.

If that is reliable data—

The Chair: Ms. Brown, I'm sorry, we can't have an answer to that question. You've gone over two minutes.

Now we'll go to Monsieur Desnoyers for the Bloc.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question deals with the World Conference on Women that was held in Beijing. An agreement was reached under which Canada decided to propose an action plan to quantify and put a value on unpaid work. Ms. Smith, I am quoting from your brief.

Does this mean that Canada will no longer be a party to this agreement?

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Lahey.

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: It does not mean that. It means that Canada is in violation of very serious international obligations. As a signatory to the optional protocol to CEDAW, one can file a complaint with the committee on the status of women in addition to going to domestic courts. It's a very serious violation.

[Translation]

Ms. Beverley Smith: Are there documents that are binding and others that are not? I don't know what is the status of that document.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other questions, Monsieur Desnoyers? You have a little under a minute.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: No.

[English]

The Chair: A little under a minute.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Oh, I see.

Someone said earlier that Canada has just lost a significant statistical advantage. How would you assess this loss? Has Canada just fallen in the bottom third of countries that had significant statistics?

Ms. Beverley Smith: This is not a competition, but the difference is that other countries are taking more action in favour of women. In Australia and in Singapore, for example, some money is given to mothers. Recently, Sweden has increased the financial assistance for fathers. These countries are basing their action on statistics that they have at their disposal. We do not have such statistics.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: In Italy, women receive a pension. Is that true?

Ms. Beverley Smith: Yes, it is true.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Ms. Ashton for the New Democratic Party.

Ms. Niki Ashton: In a recent interview, former New Zealand Conservative MP Marilyn Waring commented on the elimination of the census by stating, "I see this mirrored in so many conservative governments in the post-recession period. They want to rule according to ideology not according to evidence. So one of the

most important things they can do is to obliterate evidence so they can operate on the basis of propaganda".

I'd like to open the floor for you to respond to Ms. Waring's assertions.

• (1025)

Dr. Martha MacDonald: I want to say that professional economists across the country are united in the opinion that doing away with the mandatory census is a bad move. Limiting statistical analysis compromises political debate and undermines evidence-based policy-making. I just wanted to contribute that.

The Chair: Ms. Mowbray.

Ms. Mary Mowbray: I've been told not to talk about ideology. And I don't see this as a right or left split. The Canadian Women's Foundation is joined by business groups such as the Toronto Board of Trade, the CD Howe Institute, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Conference Board of Canada, and Bank of Canada Governor Mark Carney. These are not groups that people would normally consider non-Conservative.

I think this is about evidence and facts.

The Chair: Anyone else?

Madame Boucher, you have two minutes only.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Only?

The Chair: Yes, and I will cut you off if you go over.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have a little question.

[Translation]

I will ask my question in French, in my own language.

I have in hand the questionnaire from 2006. I am among those who have reservations with regard to some questions, including question 33, which reads:

Last week, how many hours did this person spend doing the following activities: (a) doing unpaid housework, yard work or home maintenance for members of this household or others? Some examples include: preparing meals, washing the car, doing laundry, cutting the grass, shopping, household planning, etc.

Is that a mandatory question? Am I required, as a woman, to say how much time I have spent weeding my garden? In my view, there is a difference between unpaid work and a hobby. For me, working in the garden is a hobby. I do not have to be paid because it is a pleasure for me to work in my garden.

If some questions are optional, I will happily answer them, but if they are mandatory, that is another story. Weeding the garden, that's personal, it is a personal hobby.

Could you answer this question, please?

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Regehr.

Ms. Sheila Regehr: This is hard to do quickly.

The Chair: Well, you're going to have to.

Ms. Sheila Regehr: I don't like using the words "unpaid work". I like to talk about "non-market work". I think the problem for our society in the past several decades, the problem that many traditional economists are now starting to understand, is that our lives have been focused on the market. Everything is driven by the market.

But that's not where we live our lives. Our well-being as individuals, as communities, as a country, our social and economic well-being, depends on the whole economy, what we do in the market that pays us and what we do outside the market.

Some of this involves things that we have to do. You must look after your children or you're going to be penalized, or your children are going to be taken away. There are other things that we may or may not like to do, and we might consider them hobbies. I love my job, but I'm not about to tell anybody that I don't deserve to be paid

for it. In the same way, I love my children, but I still have to go to the grocery store and pay money to feed them.

It's the whole economy and quality of life that makes all this important to know about.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank the witnesses for participating. This was a very interesting session. I'm going to ask everyone to leave as quickly as they can, because we're moving in camera right now. I need everyone out of the room who does not belong here.

Thank you very much.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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