



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO



NUMBER 023



1st SESSION



41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, March 12, 2012



Chair

Ms. Irene Mathysen

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Monday, March 12, 2012

•(1530)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP)): I would like to begin. I would ask everyone to be seated.

I welcome our visitors. We have with us Saman Ahsan, executive director, and Juniper Glass, director of development, with the Girls Action Foundation. We also have Paulette Senior and Farrah Todosichuk, with YWCA Canada.

I don't think I've forgotten anyone.

Welcome. We are so very glad you're here. We'll begin with 10 minutes for each panel. Then we'll continue with questions.

Ms. Ahsan, would you please begin? You have 10 minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Saman Ahsan (Executive Director, Girls Action Foundation): We are very pleased to be here and to share our experience with you.

I would like to invite my colleague Juniper to speak to you first.

Ms. Juniper Glass (Director of Development, Girls Action Foundation): Good afternoon. Thank you so much for this opportunity to discuss this important subject, the future for girls in Canada.

[English]

I think it's very forward-thinking of the committee to have asked this important question on how to improve the economic prospects of girls in Canada.

Girls Action Foundation was founded in 1995. We have our main office in Montreal.

We have about 270 member organizations across Canada. Our member organizations have presence in all provinces and territories, and we really like to work towards uniting organizations to collaborate for the betterment of girls in Canada.

We do programs with girls. We have a young women's leadership program, and we also reach out to women to mentor, interact with, and exchange with girls. Mentorship and role modelling are some of the important issues we will bring up in our recommendations regarding the economic prospects of girls.

Why should we focus on girls? We believe that Canada will be better off if all citizens are able to achieve their potential. As we've seen on the international scale, investing in girls means investing in the social and economic well-being of the whole country, and we

believe this to be true in Canada as well. As prosperous as we are, there is still a lot of work to be done.

Last year, Girls Action Foundation conducted a public opinion poll, which found that, at the top of the list regarding issues around equity of men and women and girls and boys, 96% said they felt strongly that equity between boys and girls was an important Canadian value. However, it's clear that many girls are still not reaching their potential in career and financial security as they grow up. So what can we do?

For example two-thirds of those who work for minimum wage in Canada are female. Male wage earners earn 20% more than do female wage earners in Canada, resulting in one of the highest gender wage gaps among the OECD countries.

It seems as though girls are doing well. For example, in education, it appears that fewer girls drop out than do boys, but when we look beneath the surface of girls' daily lives, there is a lot going on. There are daily experiences of harassment. Violence is still quite widespread. Girls have very low self-esteem, and these things seem to be getting worse. So schools are not super safe places for a lot of girls.

We also know that girls are more vulnerable to economic insecurity since they face additional barriers and limited opportunities related to their ethnicity, their income, their class, their ability, their immigrant status, and whether or not they have aboriginal heritage, and so on. These are all important things going on in girls' lives.

I think it's very interesting that there's more and more attention being paid by the federal government and so on to the need for greater representation of women in governance. There are some very important initiatives addressing women, for example, even on corporate boards. Companies are more profitable when there are more women in decision-making roles.

So we need to start young, and that's why we're here today—to help girls cultivate confidence, skills, and experience so they can reach their potential, and also to improve the social and educational environments in which girls are growing up. I think it's on both sides. It's not just an individual problem, such that if girls are confident everything will be fine. It's also about creating environments in which girls can be successful as they grow into women. We also know there is an intergenerational effect. The more girls and women can achieve economic stability and prosperity, the more they will contribute that to their children and to the community.

This week in Quebec a study that looked at dropout rates was also released. Obviously more boys than girls are dropping out of high school—we know that—but the impacts on girls are greater. Girls who do drop out tend to stay in poverty, whereas men are able to find other kinds of jobs.

This shows us again that we do need to start young. I will now pass the mike to Saman Ahsan, who will speak about our recommendations.

• (1535)

Ms. Saman Ahsan: Thank you, Juniper.

Based on our experience with girls and young women over the past 15 years, we feel that an important recommendation is to create and sustain all girls' programs that develop self-esteem, critical thinking, and leadership skills. At first glance it may seem that these are not very closely linked to economic prosperity, but in fact they're part of a vicious cycle that hampers girls' development and makes it difficult for them to reach their full potential.

There's still a low perceived value of young girls in Canada, where they are perceived as if they can't do much. That, in turn, leads to low self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence. This causes depression, distress, and frustrations while growing up. Forty-four per cent of adolescent girls report feeling constantly stressed, and girls are twice as likely as boys to be treated for depression. Sixteen per cent of adolescent girls think of themselves as worthless.

There's a quotation that says, "The most common way for people to give up their power is by thinking they don't have any", and that's exactly what's happening with girls. They feel powerless, worthless, and they don't have self-esteem to break out of that vicious cycle. We at Girls Action Foundation don't see girls as victims or passive recipients of development. We feel they need to take charge of their own lives. They're agents of change. They just need to be equipped with the skills to allow them to break out of that vicious cycle, to take charge of their lives, to take actions in their own lives that would improve not only their lives, but the lives of the people around them, their families and communities. And that would be the most important step in improving their economic prospects in the long term.

Our second recommendation is providing mentorship and diverse role models for girls growing up. Young Canadian girls don't have that many successful female role models to look up to, especially if they come from minority, indigenous, low-income, northern, rural, or marginalized backgrounds. Studies have proven that if girls are given positive female role models of successful women, their sense of self-worth and self-esteem is higher than girls who don't. We feel this would be an important step in helping girls realize that they can

do anything to achieve their full potential, especially for their economic prosperity.

Our third recommendation is educating boys and young men to think critically about gender expectations and to promote equality between the sexes. Now, I think it's quite clear that you can't just reach out to one part of society and expect to have a transformation throughout society. So we don't just reach out to girls and women; we need to reach out to society as a whole, which includes boys and men, who are socialized in the same way as girls. As they grow up, they learn the messages about gender roles, norms, stereotypes, behaviours. They get these messages from a very young age from their families, communities, peers, the media, and from their schools and educational institutions. We need to make sure that our boys and men are educated in a way that they become active protagonists towards gender equality.

Our next recommendation is to review and address gaps in the school curriculum to ensure that gender equality is incorporated at every level of education. This is not just in the content of education, but also in the methodology and the way schools function. Schools need to be welcoming environments for girls, by encouraging them, promoting them, and to be a place where they can thrive and learn and grow to their full potential in all fields, especially in the fields that are currently male-dominated.

Our fifth recommendation is implementing and expanding programs that reduce gender harassment, especially in educational institutions. As Juniper just said, harassment is still very prevalent. Forty-four per cent of high school girls report having faced sexual harassment. This has long-term impacts. It causes depression; it causes low self-worth. It can lead to substance abuse, violent delinquency, thoughts of suicide. So it can create a lot of problems. A girl who is faced with this kind of harassment is obviously not going to do her best in her studies and in her professional career, and this is going to limit her economic prospects in the long term. Not only does it cause depression, but it also perpetuates the idea of gender inequality, that women are of a lower status than men, hence they are able to face this discrimination and harassment.

•(1540)

Our final recommendation is providing gender-specific financial literacy education for girls and women. It has been proven in many developing countries that women are better at managing money than men. That's why a lot of social development initiatives—micro-credit initiatives, micro-enterprises, women's empowerment initiatives—all focus on women, and they teach women financial literacy skills, and that helps them take charge of their lives. When a woman is financially empowered, the effect goes on to her family and to the entire community. We feel that girls need to have financial literacy skills so they can plan for their future and improve their economic prospects in the long term.

The Chair: I'm sorry to cut you off. We appreciate very much hearing from the Girls Action Foundation and we thank Ms. Ahsan and Ms. Glass for the information you've provided.

We need to move on now to the YWCA. We're very fortunate to have Paulette Senior, the chief executive officer, with us.

We also have a video conference from Victoria, British Columbia, with Farrah Todosichuk.

Welcome, Farrah, and welcome, Paulette.

Ms. Paulette Senior (Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canada): Thank you.

The Chair: You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Paulette Senior: We'll do our best.

Thanks for inviting us to make this presentation today. I also appreciate Farrah being along with us.

You may or may not know that the YW in our name stands for "Young Women", and girls and young women are a strong focus for us at the YWCA of Canada. Across Canada, 30 of our member associations offer girls' programming to over 25,000 girls and young women each year. Advancing the leadership of girls is a priority for our work, and 25% of our boards and staff are young women, in accordance with a policy adopted by our global YWCA movement some years ago.

From our experience interacting daily with young women and girls, issues that we see impacting the future economic prosperity of girls in Canada as they become young women are: overcoming systemic barriers, affording the education they need to prosper as adults, bridging to the first career job in a time of high youth unemployment, getting back on track after violence and abuse, and access to child care for young mothers who are in the workforce.

YWCA Canada is proud of the positive impact of our programs, but ensuring the economic prosperity of the next generation of young women cannot be accomplished by programs alone. Girls' economic prosperity is tied to women's equality and to family prosperity. In 2012, women continue to earn a fraction of men's salaries, and 80% of single parents are still women, with 30% of those families living in poverty. Low-income families need appropriate income supports that level the playing field for girls in those families. Service organizations can work to ensure girls out in the community are getting the support they need around education, life skills, and leadership, but the home situations of girls directly impact their

future. Continuing growth of the income gap will not enhance the economic prosperity of today's girls as adults.

Overcoming systemic barriers is also important. It is broadly recognized that specific communities face barriers to prosperity in Canada. Girls from first nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, girls from racialized communities, girls with physical and mental health disabilities, and immigrant and refugee girls—who need to adapt culturally and/or linguistically and may have lived through large-scale conflicts—all face barriers to economic prosperity. Without systemic change, these girls are less likely than other girls to achieve economic prosperity as adults. Effective programs and policies intended to enhance the prosperity of the next generation of young women need to address systemic barriers. Our remarks here today recognize that reality and apply even more strongly to girls who face systemic barriers than those who do not.

Our programs recognize the reality of girls' lives and encourage them to explore their imagination and creativity while developing confidence and leadership skills. The YWCA programs for girls and young women meet the need for gender-specific, extra-curricular community activities offering girls and young women the opportunity to build on their positive self-esteem, self-reliance, independence, and leadership skills in a non-judgmental and safe environment. Instilling a sense of leadership and empowerment in program participants develops skills to help them navigate their teen years and transition successfully into adulthood.

We have programs such as YWCA GirlSpace, which offers quality programming that addresses key social issues facing girls today and responds to their very diverse needs. We also offer the Power of Being a Girl, which is a violence prevention conference that is hosted in over 25 communities and reaches over 4,000 girls each year. It focuses on issues such as healthy relationships, body image, sexual health, bullying, and Internet safety. We also have a new program in development called Y Act Up. It focuses on the leadership and decision-making skills of girls and encourages life-long civic engagement in their communities. We know that when girls are educated and empowered they become leaders at home, in the community, and beyond, improving their economic prosperity, as well as those around them.

In terms of education, since the seventies, to quote Statistics Canada, “a dramatic reversal has taken place on Canadian university campuses.” We know that in 1971, 32% of university grads aged 25 to 29 were female; by 1991, 51% were female; and by 2006, 60% were young women. Education has immense power to improve the economic prospects of girls and young women. For example, in 2006 the median income of aboriginal people was 30% lower than that of other Canadians, but the median income of aboriginal women who held a BA or more was higher than that of non-aboriginal women with equivalent education. With 70% of new jobs requiring a university or college degree, the future prosperity of girls is tied to higher education.

● (1545)

Higher education needs to be accessible and affordable, and yet nationally undergrads complete school with an average loan of \$19,000. Almost 400,000 students borrowed to finance their education last year.

As young women have increased their participation in post-secondary education, tuition fees have risen and grant support has dwindled. Young women leave school, degree in hand, but emerge to find limited job prospects and substantial personal debt. Young women from lower-income families trying to improve their economic prospects are certainly among those who are borrowing.

I'd like to now introduce Farrah, who will tell you of her own experience.

Go ahead, Farrah.

Ms. Farrah Todosichuk (Representative, YWCA Canada): Hello. My name is Farrah Todosichuk, and I have been asked to speak to you today of my personal experience and perception of the economic prospects of young women in Canada.

This past June, I graduated from the University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus on the dean's list, with a bachelor's degree in psychology and a specialization in gender women studies.

Like many young women across the country, I endeavoured to pay for my university education on my own. I worked hard, received scholarships, and received financing in the way of student loans in order to pay for my education. I am proud to have finished my degree, to have done really well, and to have really enjoyed my studies.

Right now, as I appear before you, I am also sitting with a tremendous amount of debt, however, and to be honest, I feel at a loss on how to proceed. The issue for me is that I don't have any professional experience, and without that, I find myself unable to access the potential careers that my degree can offer.

For the time being, I am working two minimum-wage jobs; however, my earnings are not yet enough, unfortunately, for me to pay for daily life and for me to make my student loan repayments. What is more, I find that working these two jobs disables my ability to access volunteer opportunities where I could build my resumé and build my networks in order to find and secure a job in my field. In this way, I find myself in a position of stagnation, unable to find and fill a position that pertains to my degree without the experience I need to attain it.

On top of this, the reality is that I have \$35,000 worth of loans that are accumulating interest. Through this process, I've become like many women in Canada who are working minimum-wage jobs: I find myself now living below Canada's poverty line.

From my experience and from my conversations with friends across the board, I see that youth in Canada need more support in terms of career and financial guidance. Young women need help to build their skills, to broaden their resumé and to get the experience they need in order to make the transition from school to employment more successful.

I feel that if investments are made to work with individuals in a proactive manner, providing support, training, and services during school or before the majority of these individuals are burdened with the full responsibility of financial independence, this gap can be overcome. What is more, this guidance does not have to be specific to students or people who want to attend university. It could also be made relevant to younger and older women who are entering into or returning to the working world. This supportive financial guidance could also be made beneficial to the men of our society who are also making similar transitions.

When I was asked to speak to you today, I was overjoyed by the opportunity. This journey has been yet another positive and eye-opening experience for me. Through this, I realize that my economic position is similar to that of a vast variety of women across Canada.

Furthermore, I understand that my position is still a positive one. There are many women who face barriers and hold responsibilities that go way beyond mine. When you consider women with children, with disabilities, or with other obstacles of self-esteem or social standing, it is absolutely remarkable how broad the continuum really can be between those with financial stability and those without.

Although this has been short, I hope that what I have shared with you today helps to stress the importance of support service organizations such as the YWCA, and that in the future we continue to focus on the ways in which we can better enable the economic prospects of women in Canada.

Thanks.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Todosichuk.

Ms. Paulette Senior: I have some recommendations, but I don't know if I have any more time.

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds.

Ms. Paulette Senior: Okay. I'll go for it.

We've had some experience with delivering programs to girls. In particular, with our Youth Eco Internship Program, or YEIP, we've had incredible success focusing on girls and young women. We also think it's important to ensure that single-gender programs continue, because the success of young women in these programs becomes very important. We recommend reviving YEIP with a focus on young women facing systemic barriers.

We also recommend that appropriate services include affordable and supportive housing for girls and women, which can ensure that teenage girls who leave home to escape abuse can build a life that is economically safe and stable. We know, from our experience on the ground, that this is an important thing.

We know that achieving accessible, affordable child care services —

The Chair: I'm terribly sorry to interrupt, but perhaps you could send those recommendations to the clerk—do we have them? Okay. I think that's good.

Ms. Paulette Senior: Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair: It's certainly our pleasure.

Now we'll begin our seven-minute round with Ms. Truppe.

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Thank you very much.

I want to thank Girls Action Foundation and YWCA for coming and video conferencing to give us all this information. We really appreciate that, and it will hopefully help with our study.

I'd like to ask Girls Action Foundation—I know you had a list of recommendations—what top two or three recommendations would you offer this committee on how Status of Women Canada could improve the economic participation, prosperity, and leadership of girls in Canada?

Ms. Saman Ahsan: I think the first recommendation was a very important one, which is all-girls programming. That improves their self-esteem, critical thinking, and leadership skills. Girls are at the crux of this matter, and as we said, we don't see them as active recipients. We feel that they can be empowered to feel that they can make a change, and once that happens, it's a crucial step in overturning the vicious cycle. Once they start acting, they change their lives and the lives of people around him. Then their perceived value improves; they're seen as more valuable, as contributing to society.

That changes the whole vicious cycle of discriminating against girls and not letting them realize their full potential. So that is one major recommendation.

I think educating boys and men would be another very important one, because of course we can't expect girls to do it all on their own. We need to have the whole society aware of the importance of gender equality, at all levels. Everyone, not just men and boys, but the government, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, schools, the media—everyone needs to make a concerted effort, and it will only happen if boys and men also realize that they need to play their role in improving gender equality.

What would you say?

Ms. Juniper Glass: Yes, having boys and young men thinking critically about gender discrimination and inequality would go a long way to reducing the discrimination and relationship violence that is extremely prevalent in Canada today among adolescents.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

Could you also provide some insight—it's sort of a two-part question—into what unique challenges girls face concerning economic participation, prosperity, and leadership? Would these challenges differ among girls living in urban versus rural areas? Would the challenges be different for them, or what is the same?

• (1555)

Ms. Juniper Glass: You're asking about the main challenges facing girls regarding—

Mrs. Susan Truppe: What are the main challenges for girls in general? And would there be a set of different challenges for, say, urban and rural girls?

Ms. Juniper Glass: Yes.

I think it's very important to not think of girls as all the same, as one group that has exactly the same issues.

We also work with girls across the country—we're talking more about girls and less about young women, so a younger age group. What we see is that it's not so much about employment but more about the building blocks of self-esteem, confidence, seeing people they admire, setting higher goals for themselves, and also taking those steps towards their goals.

That's why confidence and freedom from harassment and violence, as well as role modelling, are very important for that adolescent and pre-adolescent age group.

We're currently leading a project right now, Girls Action Foundation, in partnership with girl-serving organizations and rural communities across Canada. We're very pleased; we'll have our results soon. Because girls in those areas face the unique challenges of more difficult economic circumstances, fewer choices of career and education, and the need to go out of their community often for post-secondary education—it's harder to access support if they are experiencing violence.

There are often more traditional gender expectations of women to fulfill the mother role only, and so on.

There definitely are unique challenges. We're also working with some first nations as well. While they face many of the same challenges as rural communities do, being isolated and dependent on resource economies, they also have the additional challenges of the history of colonialism as it has impacted their families and caused a lot of difficulties—barriers to get over in terms of success—financial, parenting, and so on.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

There have been a number of reports that one of the most pressing issues facing executives across the country would seem to be a shortage of skilled labour. According to *The Globe and Mail*:

Two-thirds of executives say they are having difficulty finding qualified employees, and one-third say the labour shortage is so severe it is preventing their company from growing as quickly as it could.

Have you been able to identify in any area of your work if today's girls are less or more likely to be interested in skilled trades? Are they pursuing these opportunities or are they looking at other venues?

Ms. Juniper Glass: There have definitely been increases in girls entering non-traditional and technological fields. There's a wonderful organization called Actua. They have a girls program focused entirely on science and technology. They're part of the Girls Action Network and they do very good work, especially around math, science, and technologies.

It's part of the role modelling thing. We have Roberta Bondar, but there aren't very many more we can think of, women who have succeeded in technological fields. Maybe we need to shine more light on who is there, as well as create girl-specific spaces within schools, within community centres, where they can discover their interests. If girls are seen as being interested in that, they don't get a lot of support.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'm sorry, this first round is finished.

Unfortunately, our committee is being interrupted by a vote.

I would propose that questions be submitted to the clerk by all members of the committee who wish to do so. She will forward those questions to our witnesses and we'll get a written response back.

In terms of panel two, I would ask everyone to return to the committee room as soon as possible after the vote, and we'll start the committee as soon as we have quorum.

Is that agreeable?

• (1600)

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Madam Chair, what are the parameters for submitting these questions in writing? What is the deadline? What is the timeframe? What are the rules?

The Chair: I would assume that since you're here, you have questions that you would like to ask.

Madam Clerk, would tomorrow be acceptable, or perhaps Wednesday?

Is end of day tomorrow acceptable?

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Yes.

That's fine as far as the question goes. I think you're wondering if everybody has a certain allotted time, so if whichever party asks one simple question and then you get this big long answer back, it would never fit into, say, three minutes or five minutes or whatever it happens to be.

Otherwise, I'm okay with that.

The Chair: Very quickly, yes, Madam Freeman.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Respectfully, if the answers include more information, I don't think that's a terrible thing.

That being said, we have our prepared questions, and it concerns the number of questions we would normally prepare for the kind of testimony we're hearing, about three or four per round, and we usually get around two rounds per panel. We're not going to submit 500 questions or something like that.

The Chair: Is that agreeable, that the opposition will submit about the same number of questions as they would in a usual committee hearing? I would expect the government members would do the same.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: We're okay with the questions. But normally on these panels there's time for one question from each of them, and then we go on to the next panel. I would suspect, if you look at our last panel, there would be one question from each.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: No, we usually get about three questions, two rounds, if not four.

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Madam Chair, a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: The bells have rung, and I believe that committees are supposed to stop debating.

The Chair: Yes, I do understand that.

Have we agreement with regard to questions in writing to the clerk, so that's how we'll go about it?

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Yes. If we have any other question on it, we can discuss it when we come back, because you're not going to have it until tomorrow anyway.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1600)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1650)

The Chair: We're ready to continue, and I would like to thank our witnesses for their indulgence in regard to the interruption.

I would like to begin with the witnesses so that we can hear from them and have as many questions as possible. We'll return to the issue of questions for the previous panel.

But at this point it's my privilege to welcome Ms. Byers, Ms. Smallman, and Professor Lahey. Welcome.

You have 10 minutes for the CLC and 10 minutes for Professor Lahey.

Ms. Byers, would you please begin.

Ms. Barbara Byers (Executive Vice-President, Canadian Labour Congress): Thank you on behalf of the 3.2 million members of the Canadian Labour Congress. As you know, our organization represents Canada's national and international unions, along with provincial and territorial federations of labour and 130 district labour councils. Our members work in virtually all sectors of the Canadian economy, in all occupations, in all parts of Canada.

If we want to improve the economic prospects for Canadian girls, then we need to take a close look at the economic reality for Canadian women. Women make up almost half of Canada's workforce. Women work in every sector of the economy, yet women still experience inequality and discrimination in society and in workplaces. The gap between women's and men's wages has been stuck between 70% to 72% for the last three decades. The gap is wider for older women, aboriginal women, disabled women, and racialized women.

Much of our employment remains concentrated in so-called female jobs, the service sector or the caring and helping professions. Women are still poorly represented in the skilled trades and in senior management positions. Women are much more likely than men to work part-time, to hold down more than one job, and to work in precarious jobs. This means there are more women working with fewer benefits and little or no workplace pensions.

Only 33% of unemployed women qualify for employment insurance benefits. If you don't qualify for EI, you don't have access to maternity, parental, compassionate, or sick leaves.

Women are under tremendous pressure to balance work and family life, whether it's caring for children, looking after aging, disabled, or sick relatives, or contributing to their community. Without strong public services, many women pay the price by interrupting their careers or settling for part-time or precarious work to make ends meet while caring for their family.

Now we are facing a climate of austerity, which threatens public sector jobs, a source of good jobs for women. The loss of these jobs will be devastating not only for the families that rely on them, but for the services that women across Canada depend on. That's the economic reality for women today, and it's going to become the reality for Canadian girls if we don't take concerted action.

Young women in Canada face an economic deck that seems to be stacked against them. You may hear from other witnesses about Canada's success in educating young women. What you might not hear is that gender equality in education does not necessarily lead to better opportunities for young women entering the workforce, nor does it seem to lead to improved economic prospects over their working lives. The reasons for this include high student debt, precarious work, lack of child care, and wage inequality.

We're recommending seven key areas where the government could act to improve economic prospects for Canadian girls.

First, address under-employment and precarious work. Canadian youth were and are among those most affected by the economic

downturn and remain overwhelmingly better educated, badly paid, and under-employed. Women in Canada are much more likely than men to work part-time, hold down more than one job, and work in precarious jobs. And young women are among the most likely to work in part-time or temporary work.

While some may hold those jobs because they want to, still more are working more than full-time by combining more than one precarious job, or they would like to work more but cannot find affordable child care.

Girls and women need access to decent work—work that is productive and delivers a fair income—security in the workplace, and social protection for families, and they need better prospects for personal development and social integration. There needs to be freedom for people to express their concerns, to organize, and to participate in the decisions that affect their lives, and we need equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

Our second recommendation is to close the wage gap. The government must implement the recommendations of the pay equity task force. We don't need to say any more than that.

Third, get serious about child care. Research has shown that investments in child care increase labour market participation, improve gross domestic product, and support vibrant local communities. Only one in five Canadian children has access to licensed regulated child care, yet 70% of Canadian mothers are in the paid workforce.

● (1655)

Something is wrong with this picture, and it can only be addressed if the federal government works with the provinces to establish a pan-Canadian early childhood education and care system that is non-profit, public, high-quality, accessible, inclusive, affordable, and provides adequate compensation to Quebec for the system it is already providing.

It's not just the right thing to do; it's the smart and fiscally responsible thing to do.

Fourth is to invest in public services. Privatization and contracting out of public sector jobs pose a threat to good stable jobs for women, and it is not fiscally responsible. The loss of public services in communities means young women end up taking on more and more unpaid work. It means less money in local economies. Now is not the time to be cutting back if we want to improve economic prospects for Canadian girls.

Five is to prioritize retirement security. Current debates over changes to public pensions and old age security are particularly troubling. While retirement security may appear to be of concern only to Canada's older population, it is the current generation of young and future workers who will be the most impacted by any changes. It is ironic that youth are being told it is in their interest to cut back on OAS when they are earning less for longer, are more in debt than ever before, and when it's clear that private savings schemes are not enough. It's not gold-plated to be able to retire in dignity, and it is unfair to take this very basic right away from young workers in the interest of short-term economic gain.

Six is to ensure access to education and training and reduce student debt. It's unacceptable that Canadian students need to take on a lifetime of debt to get an education, especially when those credentials don't mean better jobs after they graduate. Tuition fees in Canada have far exceeded the rate of inflation over the past two decades. Today average student debt now stands at \$27,000. Because there is no coherent national policy for post-secondary education, policies dealing with access and funding differ dramatically from province to province. Canada-wide, almost 430,000 students were forced to borrow in order to finance their education. By 2013, Canadian student debt will hit \$13 billion.

We must also consider increasing opportunities for young women to access skills training and embark on careers in trades and technology. The government can promote women in these career paths by supporting youth apprenticeship and school-to-work transition programs; funding employability training programs and bridging programs, which encourage women to retrain for work in trades and technology; and by supporting women's needs while they're in training or apprenticeship. Once they start their careers, we need to develop a workplace culture that supports women, accommodates work-life balance, and ensures that we include a gender focus in workforce development programs.

Seven is to address the disproportionate levels of poverty, unemployment, and violence among aboriginal women and women with disabilities. The challenges facing both of these vulnerable populations are well documented. Aboriginal girls and girls with disabilities would both benefit from better employment, equity policies and practices, specific programs for access to education, training, and employment, and a national action plan to end violence against women.

Finally, the text of this motion creating this study asks what changes can be made by Status of Women Canada to its approach. The most fundamental change that needs to be made is the approach to funding women's organizations. With no core funding and no funding for research, policy development, or advocacy, the ability for women's organizations to propose innovative solutions to improving economic realities for women and girls is seriously

diminished. Funding for research and advocacy must be restored, and a lack of core funding needs to be addressed.

To improve economic prospects for Canadian girls, Canada needs to make a real commitment to women's equality. Our future depends on it.

Thank you. My apologies to the interpreters if I tore along.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Byers. You indeed have come under time, and we appreciate that. It leaves more time for questions.

Now, Professor Lahey, for 10 minutes, please.

Professor Kathleen A. Lahey (Faculty of Law, Queen's University, As an Individual): Thank you very much for the invitation to speak to you today.

I consider this to be an auspicious beginning to a very important study by this committee, and I feel honoured to have an opportunity to share my own insights in this area with you.

I want to speak, first of all, to the point that there is a strong relationship between women's equality and girls' economic prospects. Just to emphasize how beyond question this connection is, I'd like to refer you to UNICEF's most recent report, which it published in 2010, on its policies relating to women's economic equality and the position and the prospects of both boys and girls. The report states that:

...gender equality among adults, expressed in equal enjoyment of rights and mutually respectful relationships in both the public and private spheres, provides an essential context in which girls and boys can learn the gender-equal attitudes and behaviours that will sustain human development and development goals.

This is a point that has been repeated by every major international organization and by countless studies and governments, and it is beyond question. I emphasize it here because it was articulated in the UNICEF report in the form of a commentary on the application of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as in related international documents in the context of dealing with women's domestic equality.

I also wanted to start with this point because this committee is asking what steps can be taken to secure a prosperous future for girls in Canada. I would like to remind this committee that in fact Canada is the country perhaps best suited to answer that question, because Canada was the very first country to actually achieve high standing on the question of gender equality. Between 1975 and 1995, Canada took all the steps necessary to be ranked, for the second half of the 1990s, number one on the UN's gender-related development index.

Canada has walked this path before, and Canada has in the past catapulted women in Canada to positions of accelerated equality not seen in any country before or since. I also want to emphasize the position or the connection between women's equality and girls' economic prospects, because, unfortunately, since 2000, Canada has lost its world-renowned capacity to deliver women's equality.

Table 1, which is included in the brief I circulated for this hearing, demonstrates that since 2005 the status of women in Canada has fallen rapidly on all global indices and thus no longer provides the policy context, the social and economic context, that is necessary to raise gender-equal girls who can confidently look forward to safe and prosperous futures.

I have provided in table 1 the details of these rankings, because this is a very serious matter, which has been confirmed not only by the United Nations but also by Social Watch, a respected social-equality organization, and by the World Economic Forum, which is essentially concerned with matters economic. It documents that within a short 10-year period, Canada has fallen from number one, at the beginning of the 2000s, to number 18 on the UN index.

Women's equality responds quickly to changes in policies. I've included parallel data for Spain, a country that started out ranked number 21 when Canada was number one. If you follow down the column in table 1, you will see in fact that as Canada has fallen, Spain, simply by using the same policies Canada used between 1976 and 1995-2000, has managed to get itself close to the same position that Canada had achieved after its efforts.

• (1705)

So policies matter, and women's equality is incredibly fragile as well as being incredibly responsive to equality-promoting policies.

I would like to go on to my second point, which is to give you a bit of information about what has so damaged the status of women in Canada in such a short time. With respect to the economic position of women in Canada today, women perform approximately 45% of all paid work that goes on in Canada. This figure has not changed in 30 years, since this calculation has been made. At the same time, women continue to perform 64% of all unpaid work. Do the math. That has women doing more than all the work in the country, year in, year out. These two figures have not changed.

This is in exchange for 36% of total national market incomes. Women work more and get far less than men do. This is a position that has been virtually unchanged for the last 15 to 20 years and accounts for the deteriorating position of women. This has shown up in every facet of the fiscal, educational, social, and other systems in Canada.

I'd like to draw your attention to the data on women's full-time incomes as a percentage of men's, by educational level. It is true that it has been by dint of higher and further education that women in Canada have managed to make the great gains they did. But based on data produced by Statistics Canada in its publication "Women in Canada", you can see that the gender gap for women with a university degree in Canada in 2000 was bigger than the gender gap for that same level of educational attainment in 1990.

My main recommendation is that this committee charge Status of Women Canada with responsibility for continuing the detailed work

needed to track the gender impact of every single policy produced by the federal government.

Thank you.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll begin the first round with the Conservative caucus.

Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate the witnesses coming in today and having their presentations ready for us. It's great to see you can be participants in this study of ours.

Professor Lahey, in regard to your statistics outlining the involvement of women in various industries, I see that 7% of construction workers are women, 7% of those in trades and transportation are women, 22% of engineers are women, 21% of those in primary industries are women, and 31% of manufacturing workers are women. I was just wondering where you got your reference material.

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: I can give the primary site, which is the paper I published in the *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, volume 22, year 2010, issue 1. These are all Statistic Canada's studies, every one of them.

Mr. Dan Albas: Great. Do you know from which year this would have...?

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: They're from various years. They were all done at different times. But they're the most recent data for every topic.

Mr. Dan Albas: It's a wide area and there's a lot to know. I appreciate your raising some of this today, because I didn't have previous knowledge of women's participation in those industries.

Moving on to the Canadian Labour Congress, thank you for being here and making your presentation. Just for the record, it says in our briefing notes from the library that the Canadian Labour Congress is the "umbrella organization for dozens of affiliated Canadian and international unions, as well as provincial federations of labour and regional labour councils" and "represents the interests of more than three million affiliated workers".

Do you have any stats that say how many of the workers you represent at the CLC are women?

Ms. Barbara Byers: It's more than half.

Ms. Vicky Smallman (National Director, Women's and Human Rights Department, Canadian Labour Congress): Yes, it's more than half. I think it actually might be closer to around 60% to 64%.

Mr. Dan Albas: In my particular area, before we had the financial crisis a few years ago, there was a lot of talk in British Columbia—that's where I'm from—as far as a skills and labour shortage was concerned. Recently a lot of press has been saying this is becoming a pressing issue. There have been a number of reports...that one of the most pressing issues facing executives across the country would seem to be a shortage of skilled labour.

According to a *Globe and Mail* C-Suite survey, two-thirds of executives say they are having difficulty finding qualified employees, and one-third are saying that labour shortage is getting so severe that it is preventing their company from growing as quickly as it could.

Have you been able to identify, in any of your work or your conversations with those you represent, that today's girls are less or more likely to be interested in a skilled trade?

• (1715)

Ms. Barbara Byers: Actually, a lot of work has been done by our affiliates, particularly in the construction trades, that do a lot of the training. In terms of outreach to young girls and women, generally, who are going into retraining, that kind of work is being done as well.

There's certainly the need; people want to get into the trades. Some of it is about not having, again, the financial access to be able to do it. Some of it is issues around child care. It's all those sorts of things. A couple of years ago, the CLC, along with the Canadian manufacturers and employers, developed a website around women and the trades specifically. So there are issues being taken on, on the question of women in trades and technology.

Mr. Dan Albas: I really appreciate your bringing that up.

You said there are different affiliates that have done research, and I understand—

Ms. Barbara Byers: They've done actual work of bringing women in.

Mr. Dan Albas: Okay, they have actually done outreach work specifically.

Can you state for the record which ones those would be? Are they federal bodies or are they more provincial? Or are they just within a sector?

Ms. Barbara Byers: I think the ones that have done some significant work in particular in the area of the skilled trades would be the construction trade unions, because, again, they're the ones that are most heavily engaged in apprenticeship programs in terms of the work that's done.

The Ontario Federation of Labour, three or four years ago now, had a very good conference on women and the trades, where they brought in women from across Ontario who have worked in the trades, to try to figure out how to do the promotion. Some of the unions have specific conferences around women and trades specifically.

A few years ago I spoke at a conference called Sisters in the Brotherhood. It was from the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America and Canada. There is certainly work that's being done, but there is more work that needs to be done, as we say.

Mr. Dan Albas: Now, just so we don't forget, for the record, Madam Chair, you also mentioned there was a website, specifically, I think you said by an Ontario body that had created an outreach tool.

Ms. Barbara Byers: No. The Canadian Labour Congress, along with the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, did a...what the benefits are of employing women in the trades for employers, for unions, and also for women specifically.

Mr. Dan Albas: Again, I don't mean to put words in your mouth, but you say there is quite a lot of outreach that is being done. However, there's more that needs to be done.

Specifically, let's go to the construction trades. What more can be done in that specific...to outreach? I know there are many mentorship programs that are available. What other suggestions would you have to help support those sectors to be able to draw more girls into the trades if they choose to do that?

Ms. Barbara Byers: I wouldn't say in terms of apprenticeship programs it's only about the construction industry, because certainly there are apprentices who move back and forth between the industrial sector, the public sector, and the construction industry.

As we pointed out, there are programs that need to be taken up in terms of supporting the work of the organizations that are bringing women in, whether they're young women or women going back for retraining. We need to support apprenticeship more in this country generally.

Again, I'm going to go back to some of the things that all women need in the workplace or as they're trying to enter the workplace. They need support for their education. They need support if they have children. They have to know that when they get out after investing in this education there's going to be a job that can support them and their families.

Mr. Dan Albas: I don't want to lose this thought.

The Chair: Sorry. That's it.

We go now to Madame Boutin-Sweet for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Thank you to both of you. I greatly appreciated your presentations as well as your recommendations.

We are talking here about promoting, especially, the participation of girls in our society's economy. All the groups who spoke mentioned the need for financial equality between girls and boys. You may not have heard them all speaking earlier, but both groups of witnesses that we heard from before you mentioned it: there is no possible economic equality without equal pay.

Ms. Byers, you specifically mentioned that pay equity is a project that comes up often, but always ends up being set aside. In Quebec, pay equity is a done deal. I personally participated in it and I saw the results. It's not perfect, but it was brought in. It means that for equivalent work, men and women receive the same or similar wages.

You did not say very much about this because it seemed so obvious to you. However, I would like to hear your thoughts on this, please.

• (1720)

[*English*]

Ms. Barbara Byers: Well, the first thing we would say is adopt the pay equity task force recommendations from 2004. They are good recommendations. They will benefit women from coast to coast to coast.

When some of us in the room were younger activists—that would be me—things were going to be different after 10 years. But 30 years later we're sitting here and the gender pay gap is about where we were when some of us were much younger.

The reality is that it's not only about equal pay for equal work; it's about equal pay for work of equal value. That means we need to start to pay women for the value of their work rather than downgrading the pay because it is a female-dominated occupation. It makes a huge difference.

I remember years ago meeting a woman who had won a similar pay argument at a hospital in Saskatchewan, and she talked about what the difference was for her. She could buy a small home for her and her two kids. It made a big difference, between what she was being paid before and what she was being paid in the new regime.

We didn't go into details, because quite frankly let's go back to 2004. Let's dust off that report. Let's make sure we implement it and then we lead the way.

We have to remember as well that women in the federal public sector have lost their rights on pay equity by the equitable compensation act, which is not going to be equitable and is not going to compensate people for what they need.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: People say that young women need to be more confident. If they were to earn the same wages as men do, that would be a good start.

You also said that women, since they often have precarious employment or part-time employment, are less well-paid, and that often, they do not have access to employment insurance and therefore cannot benefit from maternity leave, sick leave, etc. In your opinion, what could the federal government do to avoid leaving women behind once again, and to help them improve their situation?

[*English*]

Ms. Barbara Byers: We've been promoting for a long time.... As anybody who has been around Parliament will know, we've been promoting that the unemployment insurance system should be changed so there is a common access for the number of hours, which would be 360 hours for people to access it. That would mean that a lot of women and a lot of young people would be able to access unemployment insurance for short or longer periods of their unemployment.

That's a critical issue. When the system was changed from a weeks accumulation to an hours accumulation, I don't think anybody anticipated that the access hours were going to be set so high that people weren't going to be able to get into the system anymore. And that's quite clearly what it is.

Again, a number of years ago I had a woman tell me that between her first child and her second child, when the system got changed, she no longer qualified as she would have if the system had stayed the way it was.

If we're going to do something, we would say decrease the number of hours that are needed to access EI, and then women will have better access to parental benefits.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you.

I am going to share the rest of my time with Ms. Freeman.

[*English*]

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Thank you all so much for being here, and for all the great work you're doing, really. That goes to our witnesses from Girls Action Foundation and for the YWCA as well, since I didn't get a chance to tell you that earlier.

Professor Lahey, the World Bank has shown us that Canada is not doing as well as the other OECD countries when it comes to equality. I hope this question is as loaded as I intend it to be.

Can you explain why this is so, what it means to this committee's study, and what recommendations you can offer the federal government with regard to the economic prospects of women and girls?

• (1725)

Prof. Kathleen A. Lahey: Yes, easily.

Various factors have contributed to the increasing economic gap between women and men. In my brief, in section IX, "Denial of Support for Women's Economic Equality", there is a summary statement that I think sheds a lot of light on what's been going on in Canada. It is a bit of a bean-counting answer, but this is where the answer lies. In this brief I have discussed a number of tax, benefit, and budgetary measures, all of which had a pronounced negative impact on women's economic equality in Canada. These items—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Professor. We'll have to allow the committee to look at that. The time is up, but I thank you.

I want to come back to the question regarding the submission of questions. First, the meeting of March 14 will be in room 160, 1 Wellington. Each member of the committee has received the excerpt from the Journals of the House of Commons regarding the main estimates that were referred to the committee. You received that March 1.

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Roxanne James: I'm sorry that you rolled your eyes, but can we not carry this on after the witnesses have gone? There are only three minutes left and I'd really like to hear more questions while we still have the time.

The Chair: The problem is, Madam James, at 5:30 we have to leave the room. We can only stay until 5:30. If you want this information, then it has to be now.

Madam Bateman.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: I have a point of order.

Is this not being disrespectful to our committee? We've already interrupted them and now we're doing housekeeping work. These people have come a great distance. It was so uplifting to hear of the work being done by the Girls Action Foundation and the YWCA. People like Barbara Byers and Kathleen Lahey will have students who are better equipped because of the work being done by Girls Action Foundation and the wonderful work of the YWCA. To me, it's important that we take advantage of the expertise we have in front of us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Freeman.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: I find that's pretty rich. The reason we have to leave this committee, which is doing an important study with excellent witnesses who we are glad are here, is that your government moved a time allocation motion on debate. So maybe you should get your story straight on the way you act in Parliament before you try to lecture the chair about whether—

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. James, you may continue, and then we will be adjourned.

Ms. Roxanne James: I would just like to say, on behalf of this side of the committee, that I think it is important that we all act like adults. I don't think what I'm hearing from across the floor is very parliamentary, and I apologize to the witnesses for the outburst.

Thank you.

The Chair: The clerk will send an e-mail about the information I wasn't able to mention.

With regard to questions, submit written questions to the clerk and she will forward them to the witnesses. Inside the committee there are restrictions on the number of questions. We're governed by the time and the Standing Orders. But outside, there are no restrictions. The committee may request witnesses to answer questions as they see fit, so please direct your written questions to the clerk for all witnesses who appeared today.

The meeting is adjourned.

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and
Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les
Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>