

INCOME INEQUALITY IN CANADA
Report to the Standing Committee on Finance
April 5, 2013

Across Canada and around the world, women are increasingly forced to take jobs that are unstable, unprotected and unable to support themselves or their families. On top of their family and community responsibilities, women are scrambling to make ends meet with short-term, part-time, casual and seasonal employment. (Oxfam, 2005). Women are disproportionately affected by precarious employment due in large part because of the “triple burden” they face as mothers, workers and community advocates.

YWCA Hamilton is committed to a community that strengthens women’s and girl’s voices, broadens their choices, builds dynamic leadership and provides essential and meaningful services that promote safe, inclusive and equitable lifestyles. We recognize that this study is meant to provide recommendations on how to best improve the equality of opportunity and prosperity for all Canadians, and we aim to do so through a gender-based lens. Canadians experience income inequality in very different ways, and as such it is important to recognize and address the inefficiencies of the system that may inhibit particular demographic groups from achieving complete equality.

In November 2012, the YWCA partnered with McMaster University to write a report on women in poverty that outlined some of the institutional barriers that women face in seeking equality. It was presented to the All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus during a community forum in Hamilton, Ontario. Organized by the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, the panel included MP Chris Charlton, MP Michael Chong, Senator Art Eggleton, and Senator Don Meredith. Our report focused on realistic alternatives that the government could implement addressing the correlation between employment, education, health and their effects on women living in poverty.

“Among full-time, full-year workers, the gap between men and women’s pay was \$24,400 in 2010 and was larger than in 1976.”

– Social Planning Research Council of Hamilton.



Passive gender segregation of the labour market coupled with employers continuing to devalue what we traditionally see as “women’s skills” continue to perpetuate the culture around women in the workforce, and contribute to the systemic pressures that contribute to income inequality. While exhaustive, the report made some realistic recommendations that are outlined here.

Creation of Feminist Community-Based Health Promotion.

All policies and programs geared toward improving the health of women living in poverty must include these women directly. It is important to recognize these women as active agents, not passive recipients in the process. One group, Women Organizing Activities for Women (WOAW) creates an inclusive environment providing choice to the women, engaging in shared leadership and decision-making, and using participatory research to gain insight regarding women’s health and poverty, and their relation to finding stable and successful employment.



Fully-Funded Child Care



Sweden & Denmark spend most of their GNP on social expenditures such as childcare and other forms of citizen care. These nations invest in developing their citizens’ human capacities through universal social policies, including childcare, which result in economic success, low poverty rates, low crime rates and a good standard of living for everyone. Denmark funds universal child care with high quality and capped parental costs and fee-relief for low-income families. Parents are provided childcare when the child turns one until they start school (Baker, 2002).

Investing in early childhood education decreases the “double burden” for many traditional families and allows women to join the workforce and contribute to the economy without resorting to precarious forms of employment. The waitlist for a childcare fee subsidy in Hamilton has doubled in the past two years and now stands at more than 1,700 families (SPRC, 2013).

The YWCA Hamilton looks forward to the findings of the study on income inequality, but more importantly the actions that result from it. We are advocates for a comprehensive national poverty strategy, a national housing strategy with a gender component, and legislation implementing pay equity as a human right, and believe that this study is a positive step in that direction.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Denise Doyle".

Denise Doyle,
CEO, YWCA Hamilton.