

OECTA Submission to the
Standing Committee on the
Status of Women

*Economic Security of
Women in Canada*

ONTARIO ENGLISH
Catholic
Teachers
ASSOCIATION

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) represents the 45,000 passionate and qualified teachers in Ontario's publicly funded English Catholic schools, from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

Ann Hawkins
President

Marshall Jarvis
General Secretary

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association
65 St. Clair Avenue East, Suite 400
Toronto, ON M4T 2Y8
416-925-2493 or 1-800-268-7230
Fax: 416-925-7764
www.catholicteachers.ca

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.01 The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) welcomes the opportunity to submit this brief to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO).

1.02 Representing 45,000 Catholic teachers in Ontario, more than two-thirds of whom are women, OECTA acknowledges the critical importance of women's economic security. We are acutely aware that women's economic security is central to ensuring the equal participation of women in the Canadian economy and society. As educators, one of the key lenses through which we experience this relationship between economic security and participation is child care.

1.03 The literature, both from Canada and abroad, is clear: the benefits of investing in quality, affordable, and accessible child care are manifest. Educators, academics, and business leaders agree that investments in early childhood education and care (ECEC) are one of the most effective uses of taxpayer dollars. These investments yield both short- and long-term returns for children and society as a whole. Early childhood development programs have been linked to a number of economic benefits, such as reducing labour and skills shortages and increasing productivity and innovation, and research from TD Economics credits investment in ECEC with lifelong reductions in social welfare and healthcare costs (Alexander and Ignjatovic, 2012).

1.04 From the child’s perspective, the benefits are obvious. The social, emotional, and cognitive abilities developed in early childhood lay the groundwork for skill-building in later life, and play a determining role in the health, education, and economic prospects of an individual (Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, 2014).

1.05 This brief focuses on a slightly different, though equally important aspect of the benefits of investment in child care: the ways by which investment in child care contributes to women’s economic security, and by so doing improves women’s participation in the modern economy.

2. CONTEXT

2.01 For years, Canada has trailed our international counterparts when it comes to early childhood education and care. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives estimates that child care expenditures fall in the range of 0.2 per cent - 0.34 per cent of GDP, well below the OECD standard of one per cent of GDP (Macdonald and Friendly, 2014). In the absence of a national child care framework, several obstacles to effective and affordable child care have emerged. Currently, there are licensed ECEC spaces for just 20 per cent of Ontario children under age 4; for infants under 18 months old, capacity currently stands at less than 5 per cent (Macdonald and Klinger, 2015). As such, the Ontario government’s recent announcement that it plans to create 100,000 child care spaces over the next five years is welcome. In addition, the announcement to create a new provincial cabinet portfolio for the early years and child care is a positive signal of the government's commitment to our children.

2.02 However, caution must be exercised on several fronts. Research from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives finds that the median monthly cost of full-day care for an infant can be as high as \$1,375 (Macdonald and Friendly, 2016). For many Ontarians, this is tantamount to a second mortgage, and financial strain is particularly acute for single mothers. Furthermore, 26 per cent of licensed ECEC spaces are run by for-profit enterprises (Macdonald and Klinger, 2015). This is cause for concern, because Canadian and international research shows that for-profit child care models are consistently associated with a lower quality of early childhood education and care, due to lower staff-to-child ratios, lower wages for staff, and lower levels of specialized training for caregivers (Prentice, 2000; Rigby, Ryan, and Brooks-Gunn, 2007; Cleveland, 2008). It is clear that a national program for affordable, accessible, high quality, publicly funded early childhood education and care is necessary to ensure that our society reaps the full social, economic, and educational benefits.

3. Child Care Investment and Women's Economic Security

3.01 Just as the benefits of ECEC for children are clear, so too is the correlation between access to affordable and adequate child care and the economic security and independence of women. Women who face financial obstacles in accessing child care are too often forced to forgo participation in the labour market (Ferraro, 2010). This conclusion is not new; more than 30 years ago, the *Royal Commission on Equality in Employment* argued, "Unless [child care] is provided in adequate quality and quantity, the debate about the right to equal employment opportunity is academic for most women." The costs of

child care hampers women's ability to participate in the labour market and threatens their economic security.

3.02 Women who are forced to forgo labour market participation due to high child care costs or inadequate spaces must disproportionately rely on income assistance for basic financial support (Statistics Canada, 2011). Even when women find ways to enter the labour force, they often do so in forms of precarious work. As one recent study notes, "the average amount of unpaid child care performed by most employed women each week amounts to an additional full-time job" (Milne, 2016). As a consequence, women are often forced to sacrifice job security or career advancement in order to meet their needs as caregivers. In Ontario, nearly 40 per cent of female workers are in precarious jobs, compared to 28 per cent of men. And single parents, who we know are most often women, are more likely than people in other family configurations to be in precarious work (Noack, 2011).

3.03 The inability for parents, especially single female parents, to access affordable and adequate child care fosters a cycle of poverty and precarity. Further public investments in high quality child care would reduce barriers to affordable and accessible options faced by many families, creating pathways to increased economic stability by allowing individuals to return to work or further their education. And a publicly funded model would ensure children and parents from all cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds have equal access to the opportunities afforded by ECEC.

3.04 In recognizing the benefits that investing in child care has for women, it is important to also consider the role of ECECs. Almost 99 per cent of ECECs are women (Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, 2013). Thus, there is a direct correlation between fairly compensating ECECs and improving women's economic security. We must ensure that ECECs are fairly compensated for the important work they do. The median hourly wage for child care workers in Ontario is just \$17 per hour, which fails to recognize the tremendous responsibilities these people undertake, and prevents many qualified, committed people from entering the field at all (Warren, 2016). We hope that public subsidies for child care will enable ECECs to receive pay that is commensurate with their skills and value.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 The lack of funding or policy framework for quality, affordable, and accessible child care continues to have immediate and important consequences for women in Canada. This reality forces many women to make an impossible choice between fulfilling their duties as a caregiver and their desire to participate fully in the labour market.

4.02 This does not have to be the case. By investing in universal, accessible, regulated, and publicly funded child care and early learning, including fair compensation for ECECs, we can ensure that children receive outstanding care, while allowing women to pursue their career goals. Ultimately, this approach will allow women to achieve economic security, and will ensure their equal participation in the Canadian economy.

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