

WOMEN'S POVERTY

Women and child care

→ Many Canadian women are limited in their choice of paid employment because child care is unavailable or unaffordable. In 2006, for example, the number of regulated child care spaces could accommodate only 17.2% of children aged 0–12 years. Coverage in full- or part-time centre-based space was available for only one in five children aged 0–5 years.

→ The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has described Canada's child care system as a chronically underfunded patchwork of programs with no overarching goals. The OECD ranked Canada last among developed nations in terms of access to early learning and child care spaces—and last in terms of public investment.

→ During the 2004 federal election, the Liberals promised \$5 billion to create 250,000 additional child care spaces by 2009. But when the Harper-led Conservatives won the election, they immediately scrapped the Liberal plan. Instead they implemented a \$100-a-month allowance for all children under age 6. The payment is taxable and is only enough to pay for one child care space for about three days—assuming one could be found.

*Based on the report **Women's Poverty and the Recession** by Monica Townson, September 2009. Visit www.policyalternatives.ca to read the entire report.*

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Women and poverty

- Even after taking into account government transfers and tax credits, almost one-quarter (24%) of Canadian women raising children on their own and 14% of single older women are poor, compared to 9% of children.
- Women raising children on their own are almost five times more likely to be poor than two-parent families.
- The low income rate of older women on their own is 13 times higher than that of seniors living in families.
- Women who work full-time, year-round earn only 71 cents for every man's dollar.
- Only 39% of unemployed women compared with 45% of unemployed men are receiving EI benefits.
- Women account for 60% of minimum wage workers, but minimum wages in all provinces are less than \$10 an hour.

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Women underpaid

- Over four times as many women as men in part-time permanent jobs and almost three times as many women in part-time temporary jobs in Canada are paid less than \$10 an hour. This is below the poverty line as measured by Statistics Canada's after-tax LICO (Low-Income Cut-Off).
- The average earnings of women who were working full time for a full year in 2007 were only 71.4% of the average earnings of men working full-time for a full year. Similar earnings gaps are seen between women and men when hourly wage rates are compared. For example, in 2007, men had a median wage of \$20 an hour, \$3.63 more than women.
- The Harper government has now prohibited women employed in the federal public service from exercising the right to demand equal pay for work of equal value. The government announced in the fall of 2008 that these women would no longer be allowed to take pay equity claims to the federal Human Rights Commission.
- Statistics Canada reports that women accounted for 60% of all minimum-wage workers in 2008, but just under half of all employees. This translates into a higher proportion of women working for the minimum wage: nearly 1 in 16 compared with 1 in 25 for men. The minimum wage is set at different levels across Canada, ranging from \$8.00 an hour in New Brunswick to \$9.50 an hour in Ontario.

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Women and the Harper government

- Many Canadian women are limited in their choice of paid em
- Women's poverty is clearly not high on the policy agenda of the current Conservative federal government. On the contrary, since 2006, initiatives taken by the Harper government have substantially undermined progress towards achieving equality for women and reducing women's poverty.
- Status of Women Canada's mandate to promote women's equality was cancelled – implying that these activities were no longer necessary. Funding for research activities designed to document women's inequality was also withdrawn.
- The research activities of Status of Women Canada were terminated.
- The Law Commission of Canada and the Canadian Labour and Business Centre were shut down.
- The Court Challenges Program that financed women's efforts to obtain equality rights was abolished.
- Funding cuts forced the closing of the National Association of Women and the Law that helped women with these problems.
- The Harper Conservatives also reneged on a signed agreement between the federal government and the provinces to establish a national system of early learning and child care.



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Women and welfare

- Women who are single-parent heads of families have one of the highest poverty rates of any group within Canada's population. Many of these women must rely on social assistance as their main source of income. But social assistance rates set by the provinces are not increased regularly, and the National Council of Welfare, in its most recent report, noted that welfare rates were at their lowest level since 1986 in nine scenarios it looked at.
- The Council calculated that the total annual welfare income for a lone parent with one child was lowest in Nova Scotia, at \$14,041, and highest in Newfoundland and Labrador, at \$17,850. The Council also reported that welfare incomes in 2006 were less than two-thirds of the poverty rate in almost half the households examined.
- The majority of welfare incomes, when adjusted for inflation, peaked in 1994 and have been falling ever since. Some of the losses were staggering. In Ontario, for example, a lone parent's income has dropped by over \$5,900, and a couple with two children have lost more than \$8,400.
- In contrast, the United Kingdom's New Deal for Lone Parents program, implemented in 1998, offers help for lone parents on social assistance in finding a job that suits lifestyles and overcomes barriers to work, such as helping with child care or upgrading out-of-date skills. Under this program, lone parents meet with a personal advisor who provides specific advice and assistance in finding a job, child care, and training.

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