



**YWCA**  
C A N A D A

A TURNING POINT  
FOR WOMEN

UN POINT TOURNANT  
POUR LES FEMMES

# YWCA Canada Report on The Status of Women and Girls in Canada

September 28th marks the anniversary of the 1970 release of the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada*. Thirty-eight years later, we release the *YWCA Canada Report on the Status of Women and Girls*, revealing that while women have come a long way, we still have a long way to go.

In the 21st century, Canadian women win Olympic medals in hockey, wrestling and weight lifting; Canadian women are surgeons and pilots, astronauts, CEOs, Supreme Court justices, and for a brief moment in our history, even prime minister. But over 50% of Canadian women are likely to experience violence at some point in their lives, women still earn only 73 cents for every dollar earned by men, and single mothers are still forced to choose between paying

the rent and feeding the kids.

Key indicators show that in the almost four decades since Canada as a nation first thought to review how women fare in this country, women have not achieved full equality with men. The enormous strides made by some women, in some fields, have not been enough to right Canada's historical gender imbalance, nor to raise the status of all women.

*The Report of the Royal Commission* declared that the stage had been set "for a new society equally enjoyed and maintained by both sexes." How do we get there from here? The answers are not a mystery. Along with the broad Canadian social justice movement, YWCA Canada recommends the following strategies:

- Adopt a national child care program.

- Implement a coordinated national action plan on violence against women and girls.
- Develop a comprehensive national poverty reduction strategy.
- Implement pay equity across the workforce.
- Establish a national program to end women's street homelessness.
- Substantially increase national transfers to low-income mothers.
- Create targeted intergovernmental strategies on Aboriginal women's poverty and on violence against Aboriginal women.
- Ensure a minimum of 50% women candidates in every municipal, provincial and federal riding.
- Restore the Court Challenges Program.
- Restore the strength and capacity of Status of Women Canada to pursue full equality for women.

## Women are working more - but earning less

Increased participation of women in the paid work force is one of the most significant social trends in Canada in the past quarter century. Women play stronger roles in the workplace and in many professional fields. Yet substantial gaps continue to exist between genders:

- Women make up a disproportionate share of the population with low incomes.
- Women make up two-thirds of those working for minimum wage.
- Women account for about 70% of part-time employees, which has not changed appreciably since the mid-1970s.

Raising the minimum wage continues to be one of the most effective ways to raise wages for the lowest-paid women workers, many of whom are also racialized women.

SOURCE: WOMEN IN CANADA: A GENDER-BASED STATISTICAL REPORT, 2006.

## Crawling toward equal pay

Women's average earnings are still considerably lower than those of men, a gap that hasn't changed substantially in the past decade. Studies indicate this gap is largely due to discrimination – female-dominated jobs are paid less than male-dominated jobs of equal or lesser value. Ranking 25th in the world, Canada is not a leader in representation of women in professional and technical occupations.

- In 2006, women working on a full-time, full-year basis had average earnings of \$36,500, 73% of men's earnings.
- Aboriginal women earn 46% of men in comparable jobs; women from racialized communities earn 64%.
- Retired women on CPP/QPP receive 58% of the benefits compared to men.
- Two-thirds of employed women worked in teaching, nursing and related health occupations, clerical and administrative positions or sales and service in 2004.

Pay equity is a strong step toward correcting this imbalance. But pay equity is not the reality for most women. The struggle has been long and slow, requiring repeated redress to the courts for success. Pay equity legislation needs to be implemented across the workforce as recommended by the government's Standing Committee.

SOURCES: WOMEN IN CANADA: A GENDER-BASED STATISTICAL REPORT, 2006; STATISTICS FROM THE FEDERAL PAY EQUITY TASK FORCE REPORT ISSUED IN 2004; [www.equalpaycoalition.org](http://www.equalpaycoalition.org); UNITED NATIONS, "THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX - GOING BEYOND INCOME," COUNTRY FACT SHEET: CANADA.

## Life on the street is brutal

Almost one in three single (unattached) women in Canada live in poverty. Despite decades of women's organizing, protection under the *Charter of Rights*, and major advances in the professions, the number of homeless women in Canada continues to rise. A recent study reveals that:

- One in five homeless women have been sexually assaulted in the past year.
- 84% suffer from at least one serious physical health condition.
- 42% live on less than \$2,500 per year.

Life on the streets exacts a brutal toll on women's health and safety, and the status of women who are homeless is far from equal. The condition of street homelessness is a clear violation of women's *Charter* right to security of the person.

Much of women's homelessness is often hidden, rendering the problem largely invisible. Canada needs to establish a national program to end women's street homelessness, including immediate access to housing with supports; programming for concurrent disorders; and an increase in women-focused, trauma-informed counseling and addiction treatment programs.

SOURCES: STATISTICS CANADA. "INCOME OF CANADIANS" MAY 2008; SISTERING & STREET HEALTH, "WOMEN AND HOMELESSNESS BULLETIN," JUNE 2008.

## Struggling below the Poverty Line - with kids!

With the dramatic rise of women in the workforce over the past three decades, we now have the highest number of working mothers in Canadian history. Women-led families continue to struggle to make ends meet.

- In 2004, more than two-thirds of single mothers were employed, compared to less than half in 1976.
- 36% of families led by single mothers have incomes below the poverty line (after-tax LICO) compared to only 15% of male lone-parent families and less than 9% of two-parent families with children.
- In 2006, 43% of all children in a low-income family were living with a single female parent.

Recent studies show rising poverty rates among racialized families and the persistence of poverty for Aboriginal women.

Women living in poverty need a comprehensive national poverty reduction strategy, including substantial direct support from the federal government for raising their children.

SOURCE: WOMEN IN CANADA: A GENDER-BASED STATISTICAL REPORT, 2006.

## Child care is central to the life of Canadians

In the words of Madam Justice Rosalie Abella of the Supreme Court of Canada, “child care is the ramp to equality.” With 70% of Canadian mothers of children aged 3 to 5 in the paid labour force – more than double 1976 – child care isn’t a women’s issue, it’s an issue for all Canadians. While men’s role is increasing, women continue to do the bulk of child care, and when child care isn’t available or affordable, it’s largely women’s choices that are circumscribed.

- Canada is an international laggard on child care. Our expenditures on child care as a percentage of GDP are the lowest among OECD countries.

## Youth is no exception – violence against girls

While youth violence is a priority issue for service at the federal, provincial and territorial levels, discussions about violence tend to be a discourse of guns and gangs in public spaces, and neutralized as a male-centered problem. Yet young women’s experience of violence is distinct from that of young men and is rarely differentiated in the spectrum of violence. Girls and young women ages 8 to 19 are most concerned about physical and sexual assault, discrimination and harassment, drug activity, sexuality and gender issues.

- Young women – under the age of 25 – experience the highest rates of violence.
- Assaults against girls account for 79% of the total cases of sexual

- Regulated child care spaces meet the needs of less than 16% percent of Canadian children.

**Canada requires an early childhood education and care program to make high quality early childhood education and care a reality over the next decade for all who want it: increase federal funds; implement federal legislation (recognizing Quebec’s distinctiveness) to establish the conditions, criteria and principles for the accountable use of federal funds in the provinces and territories; and improve maternity/parental leave policies to complement the new program.**

**SOURCES:** THE 1984 ROYAL COMMISSION ON EQUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT; OH CANADA! TOO MANY CHILDREN IN POVERTY FOR TOO LONG, NATIONAL REPORT CARD ON CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY, CAMPAIGN 2000.

assaults against children and youth, though less than 8% of sexual assaults are reported to the police.

- Young women are the least likely to report sexual assault incidents to the police.

Research reveals that one in four adult women will experience violence from an intimate partner at some point during their lives. Understanding the interconnections between various forms of violence provides insights into the ways that it is a learned form of behaviour.

**Recognizing the connections between violence experienced at a young age and violence experienced later in life must become part of the coordinated effort toward a national action plan to end violence against women and girls.**

**SOURCES:** STATISTICS CANADA’S FAMILY VIOLENCE IN CANADA: A STATISTICAL PROFILE, 2004; STATISTICS CANADA: MEASURING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: STATISTICAL TRENDS, 2006.

## No safe place – violence against women

Violence against women is the world’s largest and most persistent human rights violation, and Canada is no exception. The federal government estimates the economic costs of violence against women at \$1.1 billion per year in direct medical costs, rising to \$4 billion a year with costs of criminal justice, social services, and lost productivity factored in.

- Women are more likely than men to be the victims of the most severe forms of intimate partner abuse, including spousal homicide, sexual assault and criminal harassment (stalking).
- Almost 40% of women in Canada who reported assault by an intimate partner said their children witnessed the violence and in many cases the violence was severe.
- In half of the cases of intimate partner violence against women that were witnessed by children, the woman feared for her life.
- Rates of intimate partner abuse and spousal homicide are higher for Aboriginal women than for non-Aboriginal women or Aboriginal men.

Ending violence against women requires a major societal shift. Access to affordable, high-quality child care increases women’s ability to establish an independent, violence-free household by allowing them to earn a steady income.

**A coordinated national action plan to end violence against women and girls needs to be implemented and enforced seriously and consistently.**

**SOURCES:** BRIAN VALLE, THE WAR ON WOMEN, KEY PORTER BOOKS, 2007; MEASURING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: STATISTICAL TRENDS 2006; BUILDING A COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD, YWCA CANADA, 2006.

## The status of Aboriginal women

Despite the growth of vibrant Aboriginal women's organizations and the advancement of Aboriginal women across the professions – in communications, law, politics, education, social services and the arts – Aboriginal women remain the most marginalized in Canadian society. The devastating count of missing and murdered Aboriginal women points to a deep-seated gendered and racialized violence in our culture.

- Aboriginal women earn an average of \$16,600 a year, less than half that of non-Aboriginal men.
- Rates of spousal violence for Aboriginal women are much higher than for non-Aboriginal women.

Barriers of racism need to be dismantled and jurisdictional disputes and stalled land claims resolved to attain cross-the-board improvements for Aboriginal women. **Canada needs targeted intergovernmental strategies on Aboriginal women's poverty and on violence against Aboriginal women which are developed with Aboriginal women and accountable to Aboriginal women for results.**

SOURCES: WOMEN IN CANADA : A GENDER-BASED STATISTICAL REPORT, 2006; NWAC.

## Equality before the law

To fully establish their rights under law, women have often had to resort to the courts. With the elimination of the Court Challenges Program in 2006, which provided Canadian women with their only access to the use of their constitutional equality rights, a door to justice closed.

- The program offered court access to marginalized, disadvantaged and minority communities.
- Without the funding to bring legal challenges to the fore, Charter protections are not enforceable.
- With little legal aid available for family law cases, women don't have equal access to legal representation or a fair chance in court when challenging an abusive ex-partner.

**Equality requires equal access to the justice system. Restore the Court Challenges Program.**

SOURCES: FAFIA; LEAF.

## Improving the status of women requires maintaining a strong Status of Women Canada

In 2006, Status of Women Canada (SWC) saw a major budget cut and changes in its mandate, causing the elimination of virtually all funding for research for women's organizations involved in advocating or lobbying governments. Research and advocacy are at the core of service provision to women on the frontline. Women's organizations which receive funding from the SWC need to educate

## Not enough women in charge – equal voice and representation

Over the past decade, Canada's international rankings based on the number of women in our national legislature have steadily dropped.

- Today, we stand 48th in the world, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Despite relative economic prosperity and political stability, Canada has fewer women in parliament than most of Europe and many so-called less developed countries including Uganda, Rwanda, Afghanistan and Iraq.

- At dissolution there were just 64 women in our House of Commons, or 20.8%.
- The United Nations concludes that 30% representation by women is the tipping point after which government policies begin to reflect women's priorities.

**Political parties need to ensure 50% of electoral candidates are women, so Canada can achieve a minimum of 30% elected women.**

SOURCES: EQUAL VOICE: WOMEN IN CANADIAN POLITICS BACKGROUNDER, 2008; VANCOUVER SUN APRIL 5, 2008.

government officials and policymakers on their findings to continue to improve the status of women.

*The principles of equality, action and advocacy need to be strengthened and the cuts to SWC and its regional offices across the country must be reversed in order to pursue full equality for women.*