

# take action

“No cherries grow on our trees”

Take Action



*A Social Policy Research Paper for the Take Action Project,  
a public policy initiative to address  
women's poverty and violence against women*



October 2008

# **“No Cherries Grow On Our Trees”**

## **A Social Policy Research Paper for the Take Action Project to Address Women’s Poverty and Violence Against Women**

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
A Guide to the Reader.....	5
The Background.....	6
Research Findings.....	6
Our Analytical Framework.....	8
Poverty and Women.....	9
Violence against Women.....	9
The Intersections of Poverty and Violence.....	9
Guiding Principles.....	10
Recommendations.....	12
Policy Research Report.....	14
Background to the Project.....	14
1. Methodology.....	14
2. Gender and Poverty Reduction Strategies.....	15
3. Poverty – and Its Roots in the Lives of Women.....	17
a) The Distribution of Poverty.....	18
b) Roots of Women’s Poverty.....	19
4. Violence Against Women.....	24
5. The Intersections of Poverty and Violence.....	28
a) Poverty’s Trap.....	29
b) Health.....	38
c) Employment.....	41
d) Social Stigma.....	42
6. Implications for the Poverty Reduction Strategy.....	44
7. Guiding Principles.....	45
Recommendations and Action Steps.....	47
Appendix A.....	57
Take Action Project Advisory Group Membership (September 18, 2008).....	57

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*The views expressed herein are solely those of METRAC and WACT and do not necessarily represent the views of United Way Toronto.*

## Executive Summary

### A Guide to the Reader

This is a project about women, not as a homogeneous and objectified category, but about women as agents whose lives are shaped by the multiple dimensions of their identities, including their Aboriginal status, age, class, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and status (be it family, immigration, or health). It is a project that speaks to the realities of women's lives, in particular the harsh realities of poverty and violence. It is also a project about you. Given the high rates of both poverty and violence, many of you will share these experiences. Many of you may be one job, one accident, one separation, one lucky day, away from poverty and/or violence. In the current context of consumer-based citizenship, heightened individual (and diminished state) responsibility and the cultivation of fear of the "other," it is all too common to blame individuals for their poverty, to widen social distancing through stigmatization and criminalization, and to utterly fail to acknowledge and respect our common humanity. That is, it is all too common for many of us to think that this is not a story about us, but a story about someone else, someone "other," far removed and easily blamed and ignored. We ask that you read this report with a spirit committed to understanding, and to action.

*"It's hard to hear people say that money doesn't make you happy because I truly do believe that if we had some money, 99% of our issues would not occur."<sup>1</sup>*

The title of this Policy Research Report, "No Cherries Grow on Our Trees," comes from an interview for the project with a young woman. She spoke of living in a low-income community bordering a very affluent neighbourhood. She described her community as a supportive one that facilitated strong connections between its members. She knew the neighbours in her community well. In her yard were trees, trees that never bore fruit. In front of her house was a fence that divided her community from the affluent neighbourhood. In her many years of living in the community she had never met anyone who lived beyond this fence, although the persons living there were as physically close as those living in her low-income community. Each year the flowers blossomed on the trees on the other side of the fence and cherries grew. She told us that she often thought about the cherries growing on the other side of the fence as a metaphor for,

*"what's going on in our lives; they get to grow and prosper and be successful and live nice and we don't. And even though there is only a fence dividing us, there is such a disconnect."*

This disconnect is not simply a gulf in income, but reflects enormous social distancing between those who are socially regarded as worthy, and those who are not; those who we embrace as "us" and those who we dismiss as "them" (the other); between those who have access to the resources necessary to shape their lives and those who do not. Her metaphor of the cherry tree captures so vividly the challenges facing Ontario (or Canada, or the world for that matter); how do we tear down the fences that distance us from each other and how do we ensure that cherries grow in everyone's yard?

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<sup>1</sup> Note that all quotes from interviews for the project with women who have experienced poverty and violence appear in italics, framed by quotation marks.

## The Background

*No Cherries Grow on Our Trees*, a project conducted by the Take Action Project, is a public policy initiative designed to provide a province-wide reading of the links between women's poverty and the many forms of violence in women's lives. Attention to these links will be critical to the success of the anti-poverty strategy currently being developed by the government of Ontario. Although the document does not purport to be a panacea to end all forms of poverty, it offers a sound basis upon which to build a sustainable and equitable strategy for the reduction of women's poverty in Ontario.

The Take Action Project is managed and led by the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) and the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WACT). Two consultations were conducted with more than fifty (50) partner organizations that generously contributed their time and expertise. These partner organizations reflect the diversity, demographics, and geography of Ontario, as well as the multiplicity of issues affecting women's lives. The first consultation served to identify the key issues, assets and gaps related to women's experiences of poverty and violence and the second to provide feedback on the draft research findings and recommendations. The research for the project included three components: interviews by inclusion researchers with partner organizations (34 in total); in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted by the project coordinator and project researcher with 14 women who had personally experienced poverty and violence; and a review of the secondary literature. The interviews focused upon women's experiences of poverty and violence, their needs, assets/resiliencies, and the recommendations they would make to government based upon their knowledge and experiences of "what works" and of which strategies are most promising. The findings and recommendations in this brief reflect their stories, knowledge and analysis.

## Research Findings

There are seven (7) major findings of the research:

1. Poverty is having a specific and disproportionate impact on women as a group (for a full discussion see *infra* 17-24).
2. Poverty in Ontario is not randomly distributed. Rather poverty closely tracks and reinforces social inequalities such as those grounded in gender, race, class, age, health and disability status, Aboriginal identity and family status (see *infra* 18-24).
3. Women living in poverty are experiencing pervasive stigma and discrimination, including in Ontario's social services and public institutions. Stigma and discrimination limit women's opportunities and undermine their capabilities (see *infra* 21-22; 42-44).

*"It's like we are a pile of dirt. It's awful."*

*"It is so demeaning. It really is demeaning. If I hadn't found a different way of looking at life; I'd go nuts given my situation.... I just wish women didn't have to be dehumanized to get what they needed. You can't live on \$24/week... they don't even allow you to have a telephone in your coverage...but I need it for crisis calls, it is a lifeline. And it terrifies me... because you know if you have done one thing wrong they can take it away from you and you are out in the street, and that is absolutely horrifying, terrifying. I can't think about my future as a woman, a senior citizen with a mental disability... We need to get some type of politician in there who has a heart."*

*"With poverty you're a victim, a target, looked down on, ain't nothing. You're a piece of shit that someone can take advantage of. No one cares."*

4. Women's poverty often traps women in abusive intimate relationships, employment relationships, care-giving relationships, and other relationships of dependency (see *infra* 29-44).

*"Having a low income was a factor that prevented me from leaving a violent relationship. I felt how in the hell am I going to do this? How am I going to pay for daycare and transportation and all that goes with being a single parent and a homemaker? How am I going to do this without this person in my life whose only good quality is that he is a good provider?"*

*"You feel stuck. You need him in order to pay off rent and your bills. For one person it isn't enough. For two you get by. It (poverty) keeps you in the relationship."*

*"People use you. If all of your money is going to rent landlords will kindly offer to give you food off their table, they'll kindly offer you to go into their wardrobe and pick out whatever you want and they'll be really, really nice and then will have you sit down with a long time friend of theirs and then they just casually, all smiles, will ask you to do stuff. God. If you've taken all that stuff, you have no way out. You feel bought. You know that if you don't do it not only are you out on the street, they'll take all your stuff too."*

5. Violence and poverty are seriously impacting women's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health (see *infra* 38-41).

*"Not knowing how to cope [with violence and poverty] can lead to bad coping including drug use, including self-destructive behaviour that can contribute to mental health issues. Less income means less ability to provide nutrition and the basics of a comfortable home."*

*"The more you get isolated the more you are afraid to go out. You seem to be paranoid, don't know how to behave yourself with people, so shy. You don't even want to go out after a while. You just hide from people."*

6. Women are facing multiple barriers to accessing basic services and socio-economic supports necessary to their well-being.

*"we are lonely at home, we want to meet with others, we can't even get to the doctor's because we can't afford the TTC."*

*“Where do we go for help? To the Premier? What are the names and numbers of those we should call?”*

7. Women want to play an active role in developing strategies to reduce poverty and to participate fully in society.

## **Our Analytical Framework**

Project participants utilized “gender” as an analytical framework to aid their understanding of women’s unique experiences of poverty. We defined “poverty” broadly, and moved beyond the common conceptualization of poverty as “low income”, to capture “poor living.”<sup>2</sup> In this broader definition, four inter-related dimensions of poverty are integral and must be understood in addition to having a low income:

1. **opportunities** (lack of access to labour markets, employment opportunities, and productive resources; constraints on mobility; and the lack of time given the burdens of poverty);
2. **capabilities** (lack of access to public services such as education, training, and health);
3. **security** (vulnerability to economic risks and to civil, physical and sexual violence); and
4. **empowerment** (being without voice or power at the level of the household, the community, or state).<sup>3</sup>

This conceptualization of poverty draws our attention to the social, economic and environmental contexts that shape the realities of women’s lives. It enables a framework that recognizes that discrimination and inequalities of gender, Aboriginal status, race, age, disability and family status strongly influence whether and how one experiences poverty. Importantly, it also recognizes the link between women’s poverty and the multiple forms of violence in women’s lives. This conceptualization of poverty, while recognizing the importance of adequate income, simultaneously signals the need to pay attention to human rights and equity, to the central importance of participation in civil society, and to the obligation to enable women to develop their full capabilities by providing the supports and opportunities that they require.

This analysis is consistent with recent international, national and provincial policies and promising practices, including those of the World Bank, *Poverty Reduction Strategies Sourcebook*<sup>4</sup>, United Nations Development Program, *Human Development to Eradicate Poverty*,<sup>5</sup> Status of Women Canada, *Poverty*

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme, “Poverty in the Human Development Perspective: Concept and Measurement” in *Human Development to Eradicate Poverty*, Human Development Report, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), online: UNDP <<http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1997/chapters/>> (last accessed 9 October 2008). See also Amartya Sen, *Social Exclusions: Concept, Application and Scrutiny* (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2000) [Sen].

<sup>3</sup> Michael Bamberger, Mark Blackden, Lucia Fort *et al.*, Chapter 10 “Gender” in *Poverty Reduction Strategies Sourcebook Volume 1* (World Bank, 2002) at 333, online: World Bank <[http://povlibrary.worldbank.org/files/4221\\_chap10.pdf](http://povlibrary.worldbank.org/files/4221_chap10.pdf)> (last accessed: 30 September 2008) [Bamberger *et al.*].

<sup>4</sup> World Bank, *supra*, note 3.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, *supra*, note 2.



*Issues for Canadian Women Background Paper*,<sup>6</sup> Human Resources Development Canada, *Profiles and Transitions of Groups at Risk of Social Exclusion: Lone Parents*, 2002,<sup>7</sup> Health and Welfare Canada, *Achieving Health for All, A Framework for Health Promotion*,<sup>8</sup> the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, *Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*, 2006,<sup>9</sup> and Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres and Ontario Native Women's Association, *A Strategic Framework to End Violence against Aboriginal Women*.<sup>10</sup>

## **Poverty and Women**

Poverty is complex and multidimensional. It mirrors and reinforces inequalities of gender, Aboriginal status, race, immigration status, age, disability and family status. Women in Ontario experience higher rates of poverty than men, but their risk of poverty increases substantially with membership in more than one historically disadvantaged group. Rates of poverty are higher for Aboriginal women, racialized women, women with disabilities, immigrant women, mother led single parent families and older women. Among the many roots of women's poverty are discrimination, the lack of access to childcare, a sex segregated labour market in which women are heavily concentrated in low-waged, precarious work and for Aboriginal women, the legacies of colonization (see *infra* 17-24).

## **Violence against Women**

As with the unequal distribution of poverty, the higher rates of violence experienced by some women is yet another manifestation of the discrimination they experience. Violence is rooted in social inequality between men and women. Violence occurs in the home, on the street, in school, on the job, in religious organizations, in prisons, in welfare offices – nearly everywhere.

## **The Intersections of Poverty and Violence**

Violence against women plays a significant role in women's poverty. Violence limits women's opportunities; it undermines and erodes women's capabilities, jeopardizes their physical, psychological and economic security, and undermines their power. Yet the intersections between violence and poverty are all too often ignored in poverty reduction planning. It is imperative that the province understand and address the links between poverty and violence in the development of a poverty reduction strategy if the plan is to speak meaningfully to the lives of women and children.<sup>11</sup>

Poverty and violence against women are intertwined in many ways:

1. Poverty traps women in relationships of various kinds, be they intimate relationships, employment relationships, care-giving relationships, or other relationships of dependency

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<sup>6</sup> Monica Townson, "Poverty issues for Canadian women Background Paper" (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, August 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Costa Kapsalis and Pierre Tourigny, "Profiles and Transitions of Groups at Risk of Social Exclusion: Lone Parents" (Ottawa: HRDC, 2002)

<sup>8</sup> Health and Welfare Canada, *Achieving Health for All, A Framework for Health Promotion* (Ottawa: 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, *Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's: Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2006), online: HRLE <<http://www.hrle.gov.nl.ca/hrle/poverty/poverty-reduction-strategy.pdf>> (last accessed: 2 October 2008)

<sup>10</sup> Ontario Native Women's Association & Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, "A Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women" (September, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Note that the province of Newfoundland acknowledges these links in its poverty reduction strategy, *supra* note 9 at 8 and 13.

(see *infra* 29-38). **Without access to adequate income, housing (emergency and long-term), childcare and decent employment – that is, without other options – many women are literally trapped within abusive relationships.**

2. The deeply negative health impacts of both violence against women and poverty limit women's ability to sustain themselves (see *infra* 38-41). **Access to counseling, medical care, and other forms of support that are embedded in models developed by, for, and with women is essential.**
3. While employment is often an important route out of violent relationships, taking on employment can also be dangerous for women. For women in abusive relationships, the control of their abusive partners is often directed towards preventing access to employment or education. For other women, particularly those who are most socially vulnerable, employers all too frequently exploit that vulnerability (see *infra* 41-42). **The development of training and educational programs responsive to the needs of women who are experiencing, or have experienced violence; the enactment of specific workplace protections for women who experience violence; and the enforcement of labour standards are key components of a successful poverty reduction strategy for women.**
4. More than anything else we heard during our interviews, women reported the pervasive and destructive effects of social stigma. They experience stigma and discrimination because of their poverty, because they have experienced violence, because they are raising their children as single mothers; the list goes on and on. And they experience this from virtually every government office or program they encounter, from landlords, teachers, shop owners, from family and sometimes from people they had assumed to be friends. The dehumanization and disrespect they experience extracts a tremendous toll upon their well-being (see pages 42-44). **The proactive enforcement of protections against discrimination, and pervasive restructuring of social systems with a focus on anti-racism, anti-oppression and human rights education are essential features of a poverty reduction strategy.**

## Guiding Principles

Based on the major findings from the research, there are five (5) core principles contained within our project. These five principles offer a useful framework upon which the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction can build its Strategy.

1. **Gender Equality:** The planning process and plans that derive from that process must recognize the links between poverty, gender and violence against women. The plan must include a gender analysis, with a specific gender-budget, goals, targets and outcomes for addressing women's poverty. Gender-based policy solutions must take into account the specific barriers that women face when trying to escape poverty, such as intimate partner violence, low wage occupations, discrimination, lack of access to affordable child care, lack of access to emergency and affordable housing, lack of transportation for women in rural and remote areas, social isolation, and language barriers for immigrant women. A gender analysis aids in understanding the differing roles, needs, potential, capital, and incentives of women and men. This is critical to addressing the multidimensional problem of poverty in

an efficient and more equitable way, while strengthening social relationships in society. A gender framework also considers the positive impact generated by investing in women. This includes the role of women's education in reducing the intergenerational transmission of poverty, increasing the level of family welfare, and propelling economic growth.

2. **Integrated Solutions:** Poverty is multi-faceted and to be effective a poverty reduction strategy must be comprehensive and take into account inequalities of gender, Aboriginal status, race, immigration status, age, disability, gender identity, and family status. It requires attention to the multiple roots of poverty, and the multiple levels of intervention required to address it. The strategy requires an integrated plan with emphasis placed on the complexity, diversity, and inter-related elements of poverty. This necessitates working from a deep understanding of the roots of poverty, from analysis and not mere description, and bringing together a range of strategies at different levels and around different issues.<sup>12</sup> It requires moving away from existing silos to integrated solutions, working across government ministries, levels of governments, and sectors and with First Nations and non-profits.<sup>13</sup> It requires attending to the differences among low-income people and designing strategies responsive to their particular needs. It requires elements of prevention, intervention and support. It must address the poverty of people and the poverty of place. And it must attend to the four dimensions of poverty: opportunities; capabilities; security; and empowerment (voice).
3. **Self-determination by Aboriginal Women:** A poverty reduction strategy must address the higher rates of poverty and violence amongst Aboriginal women compared to non-Aboriginal women. First Nations and Métis communities are in the best position to determine how to meet the needs of women in their communities.<sup>14</sup> Research consistently indicates that the key to ensuring sustainable socio-economic outcomes for Aboriginal communities is to empower community based decision-making in the design and delivery of programs and to provide adequate and sustained resources. For this reason, we endorse the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women developed by Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) and the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) and urge the Cabinet to support the Framework through resource provision, research and advocacy.
4. **Equity and Human Rights:** An effective poverty reduction strategy must be focused on achieving equity, equality, access and respect for human rights in order to eliminate discriminatory attitudes, policies, and systems and protect the rights of women living in poverty. The plan must establish the principles of equity, access, participation and equality for women and address the deeply entrenched stereotypes about low income people that pervade social institutions and systems. This requires training for professionals, frontline workers, and managers, in all sectors, including government. Training must be focused upon fostering anti-discrimination attitudes, increasing awareness and developing the skills necessary to produce equal opportunities and equitable outcomes for low-income people. It

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<sup>12</sup> ONWA & OFIFC, *supra* note 10 at 5.

<sup>13</sup> See David Harrison & Bob Watrus, "Getting Out—and Staying Out—of Poverty: The Complex Causes of and Responses to Poverty in the Northwest" (Northwest Area Foundation, 2004), online: NWAFF <<http://www.nwaf.org/Content%5CFiles%5CFinal%20Report.pdf>> 9 [Harrison & Watrus].

<sup>14</sup> A First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, *Aboriginal Children, Young People, and Families*, August 1, 2006.

will also require the development and implementation of human rights and anti-discrimination curricula in our public school system. The government should provide leadership in amending Ontario's *Human Rights Code* to include protection against discrimination on the basis of social condition while proactively enforcing existing human rights laws. Violence and poverty against women, as noted earlier, both reflect and sustain women's inequality. Not only are poverty and violence against women a violation of women's equality rights, they impair many of women's other rights, including their political, associational, economic, and social rights.

5. **Community Participation and Leadership:** It is essential that the poverty reduction strategy utilize a participatory approach with ongoing community engagement in its design, development, implementation and evaluation. Given that the denial of voice is one dimension of poverty, it would be antithetical to the aims of a poverty reduction strategy to exclude the voices of low-income women. Over and over in our interviews, the importance of putting those who experience poverty and violence in charge of defining their needs and their solutions was emphasized. In the provision of services, the most constant recommendation was for various forms of peer mentors, peer role models, and peer counselors. Because those who experience poverty and/or low income are not a homogenous group and a "one size fits all" approach is a recipe for deepening inequality, this principle implies that different groups of women must be integrally involved in the varied dimensions of the poverty reduction plan. For example, as is so clearly expressed in the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*, "to be effective, all activities required to address violence against Aboriginal women must be directed, designed, implemented, and controlled by Aboriginal women."<sup>15</sup>

## Recommendations

The following are the broad recommendations that resulted from the Take Action Project; the detailed action steps for each of the recommendations can be found later in the report (*infra* 47 ff). The recommendations reflect the consistency of concerns from women, across the province.

### It is recommended that:

**1. The Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction (CCPR) pursue an integrated Poverty Reduction Strategy, with specific attention to poverty and gender, childcare, education, housing, employment, health, social and income supports and the link between women's poverty and violence against women.**

### It is recommended that:

**2. The CCPR safeguard fiscal resources and investments targeted for poverty reduction initiatives.**

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<sup>15</sup> ONWA & OFIFC, *supra* note 10 at 5.

**It is recommended that:**

**3. The CCPR collaborate within its diverse ministries to support a continuum of accessible programs and services designed for women living in poverty to increase their options for leaving abusive relationships of all forms, and to gain financial and personal independence.**

**It is recommended that:**

**4. The CCPR urge the Ontario government to proactively enforce protections against discrimination, with a focus on promoting equity, access and human rights education within public services and social systems.**

**It is recommended that:**

**5. The CCPR collaborate with its diverse ministries to strengthen all publicly funded institutions in order to improve the accountability and responsiveness of systems to women impacted by poverty.**

**It is recommended that:**

**6. The CCPR work with women's communities and groups to maximize opportunities for participation and leadership in finding lasting solutions to reduce poverty.**

**It is recommended that:**

**7. The CCPR conduct research and evaluations to further understanding of the dynamics of women living in poverty and to inform and improve policy making.**

# Policy Research Report

## Background to the Project

On November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007 the United Way of Greater Toronto Area held a Domestic Violence Convening meeting with several women's agencies to identify the most significant issue within the sector requiring a public policy response, and to determine how best to act upon this. From the discussion, it was agreed that the issue of poverty required a comprehensive policy strategy based on anti-violence principles and equality rights of marginalized women. The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence against Women (METRAC) and the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WACT) took the lead in the development of a proposal that was submitted to, and subsequently funded by, the United Way of Greater Toronto. Through the project, our goal has been to provide a province-wide reading of the multiple connections between poverty and the many forms of violence in women's lives, and to develop concrete recommendations to the government of Ontario for inclusion in Ontario's poverty reduction strategy.

## 1. Methodology

The research for the project is grounded in a participatory action research model in which each of the partner organizations has been actively involved. The first consultation occurred in Toronto on April 8, 2008 with close to 50 partner organizations, and several guests (from the Toronto Mayor's office, United Way of Greater Toronto, the Ministry of the Attorney General, and Ontario Women's Directorate, the Canadian Women's Foundation, the Ministry of Children, Youth Services and Women's Issues) were in attendance. The partners, now more than 50, convened again on September 18, 2008 to review and provide their feedback on a draft of this report.

The partner organizations reflect the diversity, demographics, and geography of Ontario, as well as the multiplicity of issues affecting women's lives. This first consultation served to identify some of the key issues, assets and gaps to inform the framework for the research component of the project. These key issues, assets and gaps are addressed later in this report.

The research framework which evolved from the consultation included three components: a review and synopsis of existing literature; interviews undertaken by inclusion researchers with the partner organizations; and interviews with women about their personal experiences of poverty and violence. Both the interviews with partner organizations and with women focused upon women's experiences of poverty and violence, their needs, assets/resiliencies, and the recommendations they would make to government based upon their knowledge and experiences of "what works" and of which strategies are most promising. A total of 34 phone interviews were conducted by two inclusion/peer researchers, Adina Jacobson and Indu Dadwal, both of whom are affiliated with the Toronto Community Based Research Network. In-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews lasting between one and two hours were conducted by the project coordinator and project researcher with 14 women about their experiences of poverty and violence. The women interviewed about their personal experiences lived in various communities, large and small, urban and rural, northern and southern. The women ranged in age from those who were teenagers to those who were in their 60's. The women differed as well with respect to their racial identities, their disability status, their family

and immigration status, their sexual orientation and gender identity, and their histories of involvement with the criminal justice system. We were also fortunate to participate in a regular meeting of a group of fourteen senior, racialized women who shared with us their experiences of poverty and violence and their hopes for the future. We learned a tremendous amount from every woman who participated and we are both humbled by them and grateful to them for sharing their life stories, their strengths, and their wisdom with us.<sup>16</sup>

As Shyanne Reid *et al.* have noted, the randomized control trial is often considered the “gold standard” against which all other forms of evidence is evaluated.<sup>17</sup> Without doubt, the randomized control trial does contribute significantly to knowledge, particularly in the bio-medical sciences. It is, however, limited in what it is able to reveal. Reid *et al.* underscore that, “understanding human experiences requires a knowledge base that extends beyond the establishment of cause and effect relationships, the collection of quantitative data, and the conduct of intervention studies. While all of these are valued, they do not represent the sum total of desired or existing knowledge about women’s experiences of poverty. Rather, consideration must be given to the nuances and particularities of everyday lived realities. Such knowledge embraces the broader social and political contexts that shape experiences in general, and those related to poverty in particular.”<sup>18</sup> The interviews we have undertaken for the project capture in detail the nuances of women’s everyday lives, and in particular how violence, poverty and other dimensions of social inequality are intricately, pervasively, woven into those lives. Their narratives help us to move beyond poverty and violence as abstract, objectified phenomena and to understand their meaning and consequence in women’s lives.

## 2. Gender and Poverty Reduction Strategies

While poverty reduction strategies are relatively new on the scene of policy development in Canada, this is not the case in the developing world. Since 1999, major international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, have required recipient countries to develop, through participatory processes, poverty reduction strategies.<sup>19</sup> While certainly many of the conditions of developing

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<sup>16</sup> During the course of our work on the Take Action Project, the project coordinator and/or project researcher attended other community initiatives designed to assist the Ministry in identifying the many faces and sectors of poverty in Ontario. They include conferences and public meetings organized by: The Colour of Poverty Campaign; 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction; The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) Poverty Reduction Forum; and Back Talk: Women and Poverty, organized by Sistering. We also attended a Roundtable Discussion hosted by Minister Matthews at York West Collegiate in Toronto. All are critically important endeavours and have the full support of the Take Action organizers and participants. A notable observation of the various consultations is that with the exception of “Back Talk,” there was minimal, and in some cases an absence of, analysis specific to women and poverty, nor was it presented as a priority or core theme. Violence against women in all of its forms was not articulated as a contributing factor to women’s poverty except for the Sistering forum, which focused on the impact of homelessness and mental health on women’s economic security.

<sup>17</sup> Shyanne Reid *et al.*, Helene Berman & Cheryl Forchuk, “Living on the Streets in Canada: A Feminist Narrative Study of Girls and Young Women” (2005) 28(4) *Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing* 237, online: Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women and Children <<http://www.crvawc.ca/documents/Living%20on%20the%20Streets.pdf>> (last accessed 18 February 2008).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Failing women, sustaining poverty: gender in poverty reduction strategy papers* ed. by Katherine Nightingale & Jennie Richmond (London: Oxfam GB, Report for the UK Gender and Development Network with Christian Aid, 2003), online: Swiss Tropical Institute <[http://www.sti.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Pdfs/swap/swap325.pdf](http://www.sti.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Pdfs/swap/swap325.pdf)> (last accessed 1 October 2008) [Whitehead].

countries are quite unlike Canada, others are similar, and there is much we can learn from their experiences, particularly in relation to gender and poverty reduction. That is, we have much to learn about the critical importance of attending to women's poverty.

There is now a sizeable international literature providing gender critiques of the plans of various countries and offering constructive guidance on engendering poverty reduction strategies. The World Bank has developed a lengthy and detailed poverty reduction strategies sourcebook of core techniques, in which an entire chapter is devoted to gender analysis.<sup>20</sup> The experiences of poverty reduction plans in other parts of the world make clear that success in the reduction of poverty requires a gender analysis and the embracement of equality as a guiding principle.<sup>21</sup> Moreover Bamberger *et al.*, in their chapter on gender analysis for the World Bank sourcebook, note that “the evidence is growing that gender-sensitive development strategies contribute significantly to economic growth as well as to equity objectives by ensuring that all groups of the poor share in program benefits.”<sup>22</sup> Conversely, the evidence indicates that gender inequalities tend to widen if anti-poverty policies fail to address gender.<sup>23</sup>

That gender has been found to be a significant variable in the success of poverty reduction plans should really come as no surprise, given that women throughout the world experience higher rates of persistent poverty than men, and that the causes of women's poverty, and women's ability to respond to conditions of poverty, are frequently quite different than men's.<sup>24</sup>

The need to pay attention to gender in poverty reduction strategies and to the multiple ways in which gender intersects with other dimensions of women's identities – that is how gender inequality interacts with other inequalities – holds implications for both process and substance.<sup>25</sup> In terms of process, the development of poverty reduction strategies must be participatory, creating spaces and opportunities for both women and men to give voice to their experiences. Poverty must be analyzed, not merely described, and analytical frameworks must employ a gender lens. The policies that are fashioned, and the indicators of success that are established, must also be constructed using a gender frame. Bamberger *et al.* conclude, based on experience in the developing world, that “a full understanding of the gender dimensions of poverty can significantly change the definition of priority policy and program interventions supported by the PRS [poverty reduction strategy].”<sup>26</sup>

Closer to home, Newfoundland has identified attention to gender and Aboriginal status as two of its four guiding principles in its recently developed poverty reduction plan and the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women* concludes that gender based analysis that situates gender in the context of a history of colonization and systemic, institutionalized racism must underlie all work related to that strategy.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Bamberger *et al.*, *supra* note 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Whitehead, *supra* note 1 9 at 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Bamberger *et al.*, *supra* note 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*, *supra* note 9; ONWA & OFIFC, *supra* note 10 at 5..



### 3. Poverty – and Its Roots in the Lives of Women

*“Being poor forces you to use whatever little you have to make it more than it is.”*

The concept of “poverty” is much contested. Frequently the debate proceeds from a conceptualization of poverty as inadequate income and what is contested is how it should be measured, e.g. basket of goods versus low income thresholds set relative to average incomes. A more recent turn in the debates over the term “poverty” expands the focus beyond low income to include what Amartya Sen has referred to as “poor living” where the “opportunities and choices most basic to human development are denied – to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect and the respect of others.”<sup>28</sup> Others have captured a similar idea through the concept of “social exclusion” and its converse, “social inclusion.”<sup>29</sup> In this understanding of poverty, lack of (or severely curtailed) opportunity, capability, security and empowerment, are understood – together with low income – to be important dimensions of poverty. It is imperative that Ontario frames its approach to poverty reduction in a manner attentive not only to inadequate income, but also to the lack of recognition of women’s voices, the lack of opportunity to develop one’s capabilities, and the lack of security (physical, psychological and economic) in women’s lives.

The work of Bamberger *et al.* provides an approach to poverty reduction that builds on this broader conceptualization of poverty. They identify four inter-related dimensions of poverty, each of which they argue must be subjected to a gender analysis:

1. opportunities (the lack of access to labour markets, to employment opportunities and to productive resources, constraints on mobility, and the lack of time given the burdens of poverty);
2. capabilities (the lack of access to public services such as education, training and health);
3. security (the vulnerability to economic risks and to civil and domestic violence); and
4. empowerment (being without voice or power at the level of the household, the community or state).

While each of these dimensions has an instrumental connection to low income – for example, enhanced access to labour markets or to education will reduce the risk of low income – they are equally important in their own right. Certainly, women of various socio-economic backgrounds (including those with above poverty-level income) experience violence in many forms. Some women may be coerced into giving all their earned income to an abusive partner, leading to a form of forced

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<sup>28</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *supra* note 2. See also Sen, *supra* note 2.

<sup>29</sup> The social exclusion literature is extensive, and the term “social exclusion” also a contested one. For our purposes, we reject what Ruth Levitas has categorized as the MUD (moral underclass discourse) and SID (social integrationist discourse) approaches to social inclusion. The former because it buys into and perpetuates stereotypes of low-income people, attributing poverty to flawed moral character rather than institutional structures for which we are collectively responsible, and the latter because it envisions paid employment as the route to social integration and thus excludes and devalues the enormous work and the many contribution made by women which go uncompensated. Rather, we embrace the RED (redistributionist) model of social inclusion. For a discussion of these approaches see Ed Broadbent (ed.), *Democratic Equality: What Went Wrong?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

or hidden poverty. Another vivid example that emerges from our research is how women who experience violence in their intimate relationships may be impoverished even though their household incomes are not poverty-level. This impoverishment will often have many dimensions:

- income is not shared so that women are without adequate food or clothing;
- the violence deprives women of security and undermines their dignity;
- women's voices are silenced and women are disempowered;
- women are denied access to employment, to training, to language education, etc.; and
- they experience homelessness although they have shelter, in that their homes are unsafe (as one interviewee cautioned, "*You should never assume that a woman's home is a safe place regardless of socio-economic status*");

When poverty is understood in this way, and the stigmatization and discrimination that accompany poverty are acknowledged, the violence of poverty becomes clear. Put differently, as did many of those who participated in this project, poverty is violence. Poverty disrespects, demeans, devalues, and diminishes our worth and our potential.

### **a) The Distribution of Poverty**

Women experience higher rates of poverty than do men (15.5% v 13.5%),<sup>30</sup> and among women, poverty is not equally distributed. Mother led single parent families experience appalling high rates of poverty (47.1% in 2005, compared to 12.6% for father led single parent families and 6.6% for two parent families), making clear that children's poverty is tied to that of their parents, particularly their mothers. Aboriginal women experience inordinately high rates of poverty. In 2000, 36% of all Aboriginal women lived in households with low incomes, compared to 17% for non-Aboriginal females and 32% for Aboriginal males. Almost twice as many women who, in the lexicon of Statistics Canada, are "visible minorities" live in households with low incomes as compared to non-visible minority women (29% v 16%).<sup>31</sup> There has also been a dramatic racialization of poverty in the Toronto over the last two decades.<sup>32</sup> Women with disabilities experience higher rates of low income than do women without disabilities and men with disabilities. In 2000, 26% of women over 15 with a disability lived below Statistic Canada's LICOs, compared to 20% of men with disabilities and 16% of other women.

"Attached" seniors now enjoy a lower rate of poverty than those under 65, but senior women are disproportionately poor compared to senior men (9% of senior women with after-tax low income; 4% of senior men). For unattached seniors the difference between men and women persist; 19% of unattached senior women had after-tax low incomes, while 15% of unattached senior men lived in low income.

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<sup>30</sup> Census Canada (2006) as cited by the Canadian Women's Foundation; this is based on pre-tax income. In 2003 the after-tax rate for women was 12% and for men, 11% (see Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, fifth edition (Ottawa, 2006) at 144. Note that there is no agreed measure of "poverty" in Canada. We use interchangeably the terms "poverty" and "low-income." The measure used is Statistic Canada's low-income cut-offs (LICOs).

<sup>31</sup> Statistics Canada (2008), "Earnings and Incomes of Canadians Over the Past Quarter Century" (2006 Census, Minister of Industry). See also Monica Townson, *supra* note 6.

<sup>32</sup> See for example <http://www.colourofpoverty.ca> and Grace Edward Galabuzi, *Canada's Economic Apartheid: The Social Exclusion of Racialized Groups in the New Century* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2006).

One in eight children in Ontario lives in poverty when measured after taxes, one in six when measured before.<sup>33</sup> Children's poverty is understandably closely tied to that of their parents; children in mother led single parent families, in Aboriginal, racialized, and new immigrant families, and children in families where one or more family members has a disability experience rates of poverty that are at least double.<sup>34</sup> In 2003, 43% percent of all children living in low-income families lived with a single parent (the vast majority women); in 2006 some 67% of children who were beneficiaries of social assistance in Ontario live in mother led single parent families.<sup>35</sup> As Campaign 2000 observes, "for Ontario children, the risk of poverty is no more homogeneous than the population itself. Children from communities and groups that face systemic discrimination are much more likely to be growing up in poverty. To succeed in reducing poverty, a comprehensive provincial poverty reduction strategy needs specific policies and instruments that effectively address systemic barriers and promote greater equity in our communities."<sup>36</sup>

### **b) Roots of Women's Poverty**

Much has been written about the multiple and complex roots of women's poverty, of which only a portion attends to the important differences among women. In the context of this report, our ambition is not to provide a full account of the many sources of women's poverty, but rather to focus upon the role violence plays. It is important, however, to sketch in broad strokes some of the other important sources of women's poverty. As we describe more fully later in the report, these roots of women's poverty are intricately interwoven with violence against women.

*Getting Out - And Staying Out - Of Poverty*, a report on poverty and poverty reduction in the northwest region of the United States, makes the important observation that to fully understand the nature and causes of poverty we must interrogate not only the poverty of people, but the poverty of place (neighbourhoods, communities, towns and cities, regions) and the factors – economic, labour market, human capital, discrimination, social capital – that shape both. Poverty is, as the authors of *Getting Out* note, at once structural and incidental, "resulting from underlying conditions of the economy, and from changing events in peoples' lives," such as divorce, loss of a loved one, an accident, etc.<sup>37</sup>

The distribution of poverty, as the rates above reveal, is related to demographic characteristics. These demographic characteristics are, in turn, traceable to,

- discriminatory practices (in employment, education, indeed virtually everywhere),
- differential access to the means to acquire "human capital" necessary to develop one's capabilities (education and training),
- differential access to "social capital" (networks of people connected to employment and other supports that help in extricating oneself from poverty), and
- a limited voice (if any) within structures of power.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Campaign 2000, *2007 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada*, "The Road Ahead: Poverty Reduction in Canada", March 2008, at 1 and 3 online:

[http://www.campaign2000.ca/rc/rc07/2007\\_ON\\_Report\\_Card%20\\_Engl\\_Mar2008.pdf?x=115291](http://www.campaign2000.ca/rc/rc07/2007_ON_Report_Card%20_Engl_Mar2008.pdf?x=115291)

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* at 3-4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* at 4 and Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, *supra* note 30 at 143-44.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* at .3.

<sup>37</sup> Harrison & Watrus, *supra* note 13 at 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

Poverty is also impacted by,

- global economic structures,
- income distribution and redistribution,
- labour policies, and
- growing wage inequalities (declining value of real wage and the growth of precarious work).<sup>39</sup>

In the Canadian context, recent research undertaken for the Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, reporting on the 1993-98 longitudinal panel of the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, indicates the five strongest predictors for persistent low income for single women were:

- 1) no change in single motherhood status;
- 2) presence of pre-school age children;
- 3) being a student or high school drop-out;
- 4) being a recent immigrant, Aboriginal or having a disability; and
- 5) living in the Atlantic region or Quebec.<sup>40</sup>

These predictors themselves signal much about the causes of women's poverty: the importance of demographic characteristics; the disparities in the earnings of men and women; and the financial burden of caring for children, family and communities that women bear.

### ***i) Responsibility for Children***

Women continue to shoulder much more of the responsibility of caring for children than do men. Both for women in relationships and women living on their own with children, the availability of flexible, subsidized and regulated childcare is central to their ability to obtain paid employment. In 2004, 67% of women with children under three years of age who were in relationships were employed, compared to only 46% of lone mothers with children of the same age. But by the time their children reached school age (ages 6-15) the differences largely disappeared; 75% of single mothers were employed by comparison to 78% of those in two-parent families.<sup>41</sup> There is a regulated childcare space for only 17.2% of children age 0-12; 19.3% of children age 0-5.<sup>42</sup> The high rate of unemployment among mother led single parent families correspond with a higher rate of social assistance take-up, where benefits place families well below any and all measures of poverty. It also corresponds with a high rate of homelessness; single parent families (the vast majority of which are led by women) make up the majority of families in North American shelter systems. Families experiencing homelessness are also more likely to be young, of Aboriginal status, racialized and immigrant or refugee-led.<sup>43</sup> Not surprisingly, "childcare has become a staple of multi-dimensional efforts to combat poverty."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Kapsalis and Tourigny, *supra* note 7 at 49.

<sup>41</sup> Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, *supra* note 30 at 106-07.

<sup>42</sup> Childcare Resources and Research Unit, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, "Early Childhood education and care in the 2008 federal election: Updates, 1 October 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Emily Paradis, Sylvia Novac & Monica Sarty *et al.*, *Better Off in a Shelter? A Year of Homelessness & Housing among Status Immigrant, Non-Status Migrant, & Canadian-Born Families* (Research Paper 213, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, Cities Centre, University of Toronto, 2008) [Paradis, Novac, Sarty *et al.*].

<sup>44</sup> See Harrison & Watrus, *supra* note 13. See also Canada Still Needs Child Care, "A strong economy needs good child care: Canada can't work without it, Federal Election 2008 on line at: [www.buildchildcare.ca](http://www.buildchildcare.ca)

Rearing children is both a socially valuable (but not presently valued) and demanding form of work. One of the women we interviewed vividly captured the challenges of rearing children, especially as a single mother.

*“I did four years of army training. I can sleep in the woods. I can survive in minus 30 weather with 50 lbs on my back and a dogsled. And I’ve been a single mother on welfare. Single parenthood is harder.”*

Responsibility for caring for children also impacts upon women’s ability to sustain employment. The women in our study described the difficulties of taking time off work to care for a sick child; two reported losing their work when they needed time off for this purpose. As one woman explained,

*“you pay through the nose for daycare so you are never getting ahead. There is always something that keeps you there. If you make more, they want more. It’s hard for single moms, school supplies, winter clothes, nutritious meals and snacks. Then you have to go to work and then your child is sick. It’s hard on your stress level and then you can lose your job if you take the day off when your child is sick.”*

It can be exceptionally difficult to find work that meshes with children’s school schedules and which provides any job security when time off to care for a child is needed. And it can be equally difficult to find accessible, high quality childcare that is flexible and able to accommodate women’s work schedules.

## ***ii) Discrimination***

Existing research and the interviews we conducted for the project all point to the significant role that pervasive discrimination plays in sustaining women’s poverty. The discrimination women experience is grounded not only in gender stereotypes and the devaluing of women, but also in how gender intersects other dimensions of social identity, including Aboriginal status, age, class, disability, family status, immigration status, race, gender identification and sexual orientation. Women constantly encounter the negative stereotypes forged at the intersections of these social locations. So, for example, pervasive stereotyping and lack of accommodation in workplaces account for the inordinately high rates of unemployment and poverty among women with disabilities. Similarly, pervasive stereotyping against those who are transgendered, or who identify as bi-sexual or lesbian, leads to widespread discrimination. Stereotypes operate to deny women access to housing, to employment, and to services.<sup>45</sup> And they extract a toll on self-esteem, hope and dignity.

In a recent study of homeless women in Toronto, more than two-thirds reported that they were regularly treated with less respect, and more than one half said that others treat them as if they were not smart. They also reported being threatened and harassed. The majority of the respondents in that study reported that they felt excluded from, or judged negatively by, society. They reported high rates of discrimination in housing, based on income level, receipt of social assistance, family status, race and ethnicity. They also reported significant discrimination in seeking employment.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Paradis *et al.*, *supra* note 43.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid* at 58 ff.

Women interviewed for the Take Action project about their personal experiences spoke of how stereotypes and discrimination kept them in abusive relationships, out of employment, and feeling disrespected. One Aboriginal woman interviewed in Northern Ontario described how Aboriginal people are followed and watched in stores and malls, discriminated against by police, employers and school officials, and experience higher rates of violence and poverty.

*"It's like we are a pile of dirt. It's awful."*

Another woman described to us the internalized violence of hiding your poverty, of having to cover up your situation and deny who you are, in attempt to avoid the stereotyping and discrimination associated with poverty.

Young women spoke to us as well of their experiences of discrimination in education and the devastating toll this has taken in their lives; indeed discrimination in education was a persistent theme in the interviews with younger women. They described how pervasive stereotyping of racialized youths – that they lacked both intellect and motivation, that they are more interested in gangs than education – impacted their lives. One young woman, who has a passion for writing, recounted to us an appalling example of this. Students had been given a writing assignment, which she had completed and handed in on time. After grading the papers, the teacher proceeded to pass the graded papers out to students in class. She returned papers to every student but one – the young woman who spoke with us. The teacher asked her to stay behind after class. She then asked the student to write a paragraph. She reviewed the paragraph and expressed surprise that the work the student had submitted may have been her own work after all. She did not apologize or explain; she left hanging not only the insinuation that the student had cheated but that the student was incapable of good work.

*"I remember how awful I felt. I felt so sad. I couldn't figure out what exactly it was. Do you know what I mean? I just remember feeling so devalued. I dropped out of school and I finished my last six credits on my own through correspondence. I could never step back into an institution."*

Racism was encountered as an everyday occurrence in the lives of racialized women. Older racialized women spoke of the racism and ableism they routinely experience in public transportation. Others spoke of discrimination based on poverty, noting how as their income status changed, so too did the manner in which others – including “helping” professionals – treated them.

### ***iii) Precarious work and differential earnings***

Women's earnings continue to be only a fraction of those of men (76.6% in 2005). Women are also much more likely than men to be employed in precarious work – jobs characterized by uncertainty regarding continued employment (that is, little security), little control over the labour process, limited regulatory protection, low wages and few, if any, benefits.<sup>47</sup> Men are more likely to have full time, permanent wage work. The over- representation of women in part-time jobs is true of both employees and the self-employed.<sup>48</sup> The “social location of ‘race’ intersects with that of sex/gender

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<sup>47</sup> See Cynthia J. Cranford, Leah F. Vosko & Nancy Zukewich, “Precarious Employment in the Canadian Labour Market: a Statistical Portrait” (2003) 3 Just Labour 6 at 9. See also Leah F. Vosko, “Rethinking Feminization: Gendered Precariousness in the Canadian Labour Market and the Crisis in Social Reproduction,” (Robarts Canada Research Chairholders Series, York University, 11 April 2002).

<sup>48</sup> Cranford *et al.*, *supra* note 47 at 11-12.

to shape workers' position in precarious wage work."<sup>49</sup> For women who have to piece together two, three or four jobs, including night shifts, finding childcare is virtually impossible. In these circumstances responsibility for childcare may shift to older siblings, and while this can have positive impacts (including the transmission of cultural values and language), it can also have a lasting negative effect on the education and involvement in social or recreational opportunities of the older sibling.<sup>50</sup>

Annual incomes are lower for many groups of women, including for immigrant women, racialized women, Aboriginal women and women with disabilities. "Women, immigrants and workers from racialized communities are disproportionately found in jobs with the worst wages and working conditions."<sup>51</sup> The reasons: "gender and racial discrimination, failure to recognize foreign credentials and work experience; predatory employers, weak government enforcement of workers rights; and outdated laws that assume we all work full time, full year jobs."<sup>52</sup>

Low wages leave even those who work full time below the poverty line; "social assistance poverty is often replaced by labour market poverty."<sup>53</sup> As one young woman interviewed for the project powerfully explained,

*"the interesting thing is, at least in a lot of racialized, marginalized communities, we work the hardest. My mom works 12 hour shifts every single day.... Still there is a struggle with money."*

Another woman we interviewed observed,

*"You have to start looking for a job and all you can get is minimum wage and nowadays it's not enough to have a full time job, you have to grab two just to make payments for your rent and bills and groceries... and everything goes up from week to week."*

Immigrant women, most of them racialized, who participate in Canada's Live-In-Care Giver Program (LCP) are not considered to be workers under the law. They come to Canada under the LCP and receive **temporary worker status** and they must live and work in their employer's homes for 24 months in a period of three years to be eligible for permanent status. Their lack of status, positioned as they are as "non-citizens," their dependence upon their employers, and the live-in requirement render them vulnerable to isolation and economic exploitation, violations of privacy, and physical, sexual and emotional abuse.<sup>54</sup> Live-in domestic workers have also reported nonpayment or underpayment of wages and/or lack of food or proper accommodation. These women are often less likely to leave abusive work situations for fear of being deported.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid* at 14.

<sup>50</sup> Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Anti-Dote: *Multiracial Girls' and Women's Network, Racialized Immigrant Girls Providing Everyday Care for their Siblings: A Community Handbook*.

<sup>51</sup> Campaign 2000, *supra* note 33 at 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid* at 7.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid* at 6.

<sup>54</sup> National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, *Racial Discrimination in Canada*, February 2007, Toronto.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*.

#### *iv) Colonization and Aboriginal Women*

Many Aboriginal women endure social conditions much worse than any other population of women in this province. The legacy of colonization, loss of status and loss of land, confinement and abuse in residential schools, and child welfare and correctional systems shape the poverty of Aboriginal women. The history of repeated trauma has led to higher rates of poverty, unemployment and violence against women in Aboriginal Communities. Living conditions for many Aboriginal women in Northern Ontario include ill health, critical shortages of adequate housing, polluted water supplies or no running water, ineffective education and rampant unemployment.<sup>56</sup>

Aboriginal women and girls who move from reserves to urban areas seeking employment and a better life are being trafficked within Canada and many of them are at risk of experiencing horrific violence, too often leading to unsolved disappearances and deaths. The Native Women's Association of Canada estimates that over the past twenty years more than 500 Aboriginal women may have been murdered or gone missing.<sup>57</sup> The disappearance and presumed murder of many of them Aboriginal women graphically attest to the vulnerability of Aboriginal women and girls to systemic violence as a group.

#### **4. Violence Against Women**

Violence against women in its many forms has increasingly been recognized by the international community as a human rights issue, a global public health issue and a barrier to sustainable development.<sup>58</sup> The 1993 *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* defines violence against women as, “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm done towards women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” Women we interviewed defined violence to include physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual and psychological harm. Violence occurs in the home, on the street, in school, on the job, in religious organizations, in prisons, in welfare offices, everywhere. Violence occurs at the level of the household, the community and the state.<sup>59</sup> Violence against women, as noted earlier, both reflects and sustains women's inequality. “Because in a society where women have been considered inferior to men and have been expected to serve men's needs, physical, psychological or emotional abuse, rape, sexual assault and sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, trafficking and prostitution is a concrete embodiment of that relation of inequality. **It is male domination made visible** [emphasis in the original].”<sup>60</sup> As the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women makes clear, violence against women is “a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women” that is caused by “historically unequal power relations between men and women.” Not only is violence against women a violation of women's equality rights, but it impairs many of women's other rights, including their political, associational, economic and social rights.

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<sup>56</sup> Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, D'Hondt, Formsma, *Keeping the Promise: The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Lived Experience of First Nations Children and Youth* (Ottawa: First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada* (Amnesty International, October 2004).

<sup>58</sup> Geraldine Terry, “Poverty reduction and violence against women: exploring links, assessing impact” (2004) 14(4) *Development in Practice* 469 at 469 [Terry].

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Step It Up Ontario at [www.stepitupontario.ca](http://www.stepitupontario.ca)



Violence against women at the state level may be understood in a variety of ways. In some contexts, agents of the state are perpetrators of acts of violence (physical, sexual or psychological) against women. Many women experience, for example, physical violence at the hands of the police. The charging of women by police when they report the violence of their partners is another form of state violence. Violence is also enacted through state laws, policies and practices that condone violence against women. This is evident in, for example, immigration sponsorship regimes at the federal level, and aggressive welfare fraud policies at the provincial level. In both contexts women have described state policies as arming men with more control and facilitating unmediated violence.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, as described earlier, poverty itself may be understood as a form of violence. Given the active role of the state in creating and maintaining many of the structural conditions that create poverty, again we may conclude that the state is complicit in violence against women. The state also enacts violence against women through its current “law and order,” and “zero tolerance” approaches to “crime.” While the state has retreated from social provision (housing, social welfare benefits, etc.) and our social net has become more and more porous – gaping may be a better word – it has simultaneously stepped up its role in surveillance and punishment. One consequence has been the increased criminalization of women; women who are punished within the criminal justice system when they must turn to illegal activity to survive and women who as welfare recipients are caricatured as criminals in waiting and constantly demeaned, intensely surveilled and caught within a maze of insanely complex rules that are impossible to follow but for which they will be severely punished should any be broken. As one woman we interviewed explained,

*“It’s how the welfare people treat you. It’s how the housing people treat you. It’s how the police treat you. Poverty and single parenthood for women – we’re expected to do the impossible.”*

We are often inclined to think of violence against women as a discrete act; an event isolated in time with a clear beginning and end. Many of us also tend to think of violence against women as an aberration; a horrid event in lives otherwise being lived in peace, with dignity and respect. The interviews for the project make clear that violence against women is both normative (much of it accepted as just the way things are) and endemic. The women we interviewed describe lives where various forms of violence, at the level of state, community and family, are a constant and its effects, cumulative and destructive.

Violence is rooted in social inequality – in power imbalances – between men and women, but as mediated by other dimensions of social location of both the male perpetrator and the woman he abuses. So for example, the high rates of violence against Aboriginal women, are “directly related to such ongoing historical factors as colonialism, the impacts of residential schools, discriminatory provisions under the Indian Act, lack of recognition of Métis identity, the residual effects of related community trauma (i.e. mental illness, addictions, homelessness, poverty, etc.), as well as mobility and migration.”<sup>62</sup> As Terry notes, “[w]omen experience gender-based violence in different ways, depending on factors such as income and who controls it, social status, occupation, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality. It is also manifested differently according to a person’s life stage...”. These

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<sup>61</sup> Mosher et al, *Walking on Eggshells: Abused Women’s Experiences of Ontario’s Welfare System*, 2004 online: [http://www.oaith.ca/pdf/Walking\\_on\\_Eggshells.pdf](http://www.oaith.ca/pdf/Walking_on_Eggshells.pdf) and Andree Andrée Côté, Michèle Kérisit and Marie-Louise Côté, *Sponsorship... For Better or For Worse: The Impact of Sponsorship on the Equality Rights of Immigrant Women* (Status of Women Canada, 2001).

<sup>62</sup> ONWA & OFIFC, *supra* note 10 at 7.

differences are evident in the differential rates of violence among women, in whose accounts of abuse are accepted as credible, in who is acknowledged socially to be a “real victim” (of rape or of woman abuse), and in who is seen as deserving of state assistance.

### **a) Rates of Violence**

In the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey, fully one half of Canadian women reported violence by men known to them, one quarter experienced violence by a stranger and 15 % reported violence by a current partner.<sup>63</sup> More recent Canadian data on violence against women comes from Statistics Canada General Social Survey, a general crime victim survey that includes a special module of questions on spousal assault. In the most recent survey 7% of women and 6% of men reported experiencing spousal violence, with women reporting more severe forms of violence. Five times more women than men are murdered by their intimate partners, and when women do kill their spouses they usually do so in self-defence or after years of abuse.<sup>64</sup>

Of those sexual offences reported to police in 2004, in the age group 0-11 years of age, 70% were committed against females; in the 12-17 age range, 89% and for those 18 years of age and over, 83%. Men are the perpetrators in roughly 98% of cases of sexual assault. Senior women are also more likely to suffer violence at the hands of a family member than are men (47 v. 36 per 100,000).<sup>65</sup>

### **b) The Gender Specificity of Violence**

The claim has been made by some researchers and men’s activists that violence between intimate partners is symmetrical. To support this assertion they cite various studies which appear to show that men and women perpetrate violence against their partners at equal rates.<sup>66</sup> The contention that violence is perpetrated equally by men and women is problematic for several reasons. First, many of the findings of gender symmetry in violence are based on studies using quantitative measures such as the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). While this scale may be the most commonly used to measure rates of violence within intimate relationships, it has several defects limiting its effectiveness.<sup>67</sup> The CTS examines only violence arising out of conflict, and ignores violence erupting for no apparent reason, or that is used as a means of control.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the instrument measures only the number of violent acts (hits, slaps, etc) by each partner, and it fails to consider important factors such as the motivation of each partner, who initiated the violence, or the physical and/or psychological consequences of the violence.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Statistics Canada, “The Violence Against Women Survey,” *The Daily* #11-001E (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Nov. 18, 1993) and Holly Johnson, *Dangerous Domains: Violence Against Women in Canada* (Toronto: Nelson Canada, 1996).

<sup>64</sup> See Statistics Canada, “Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006” (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2006) at 16-17 re the percentages of male and female intimate violence and Step It Up, *supra* note 45, regarding homicide.

<sup>65</sup> Statistics Canada, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2007*, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

<sup>66</sup> The 2004 General Social Survey, “Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006” (*supra* note 49), for example, estimates rates of violent incidents (spousal assault) perpetrated against men and women is similar (6% and 7% respectively). See also various studies conducted by M.A. Straus, the creator of the Conflict Tactics Scale.

<sup>67</sup> Russell P. Dobash, Emerson R. Dobash, Kate Cavanagh *et al.*, “Separate and intersecting realities: A comparison of men’s and women’s accounts of violence against women” (1998) 4(4) *Violence Against Women* 382 [Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh *et al.*].

<sup>68</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, “‘Gender symmetry’ in domestic violence” (2002) 8(11) *Violence Against Women*, , 1332.

<sup>69</sup> See Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh *et al.*, *supra* note 52. See also *ibid.*

While men tend to use violence in relationships to inflict pain and as a means of domination and control, women do not.<sup>70</sup> Women's violence is typically a means of self-defense or retaliation for past violence perpetrated against them.<sup>71</sup> Acts of violence by women against men in relationships tend to be acts of resistance, and are not intended to inflict pain or exert control.<sup>72</sup>

Further, women experience the effects of violence differently than men in a number of ways. Female victims of intimate violence experience more severe (including lethal) and repeated forms of violence than do men; they are 2.5 times as likely to report being beaten, choked, threatened with a gun or knife, and sexually assaulted.<sup>73</sup> As a result, women are much more likely to suffer serious physical and psychological injuries.<sup>74</sup> Women experience much higher rates of depression and anxiety as a result of intimate violence than their male counterparts; they are three times more likely to fear for their lives.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, women's experiences of violence must be considered within the context of their social location in the family and society. A gender-neutral approach to violence assumes that men and women hold equal power within the family and society, and fails to acknowledge women's lower economic status or their unequal share of unpaid caring labour.<sup>76</sup> The presence or absence of another income earner in the household is one of the key factors in determining whether women enter or exit poverty.<sup>77</sup> Women attempting to leave violent relationships, therefore, face a much greater fear of poverty and homelessness than men. Women, unlike men, are "caught in a cycle of repeated acts of severe violence within the context of subordination, lower wages, childcare responsibility and other limited options."<sup>78</sup>

### **c) Violence and Intersecting Oppression**

While violence cuts across all social classes and categories, women and girls from marginalized communities are more likely to experience violence. As with the unequal distribution of poverty, higher rates of violence experienced by some women is yet another manifestation of the discrimination, oppression and marginalization they experience. Constructed as "others" who are not deserving of respect, not fully autonomous, and not full citizens, women marginalized by race or disability, by poverty, by immigration status, by age or Aboriginal identity experience higher rates of violence. The *Aboriginal Strategic Framework on Violence Against Women* notes that while more reliable statistics are needed, existing statistics show significantly higher rates of violence experienced by Aboriginal women, compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts.<sup>79</sup> In northern Aboriginal

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<sup>70</sup> L. Kevin Hamberger, & Clare E. Guse, "Men's and women's use of intimate partner violence in clinical samples" (2002) 8(11) *Violence Against Women* 1301 [Hamberger & Guse].

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> See Susan L. Miller and Melissa L. Meloy, "Women's use of force: Voices of women arrested for domestic violence" (2006) 12(1) *Violence Against Women* 89. See also Hamberger & Guse, *supra* note 55.

<sup>73</sup> Statistics Canada, *supra* note 64 at 19.

<sup>74</sup> Statistics Canada, *supra* note 64 at 33.

<sup>75</sup> Statistics Canada, *supra* note 64 at 32.

<sup>76</sup> D.R. Loseke & D. Kurz, "Men's violence toward women is the serious social problem" in D.R. Loseke, R.J. Gelles & M.M. Cavanaugh, eds. *Current controversies on family violence*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005) 79.

<sup>77</sup> Kapsalis and Turigny, *supra* note 7.

<sup>78</sup> Amanda Dale, *Beyond Shelter Walls Literature Review: System Change, Best Practices and Policy Initiatives to Address Violence Against Women in Canada* (YWCA Canada: 2007) at 9 ["Beyond Shelter Walls"]. YWCA Canada gratefully acknowledges Government of Canada funding for *Beyond Shelter Walls Literature Review*, cited in this report.

<sup>79</sup> ONWA & OFIFC, *supra* note 10 at 3.

communities, the rates of intimate violence may be as high as 75-90%.<sup>80</sup> The Ontario Native Women's Association study, *Breaking Free*, found that 8 out of 10 Aboriginal women in Ontario have personally experienced family violence.<sup>81</sup> The 2004 General Social Survey reported rates of spousal violence against Aboriginal women as 24% and 18% against Aboriginal men (more than 3 times that for non-Aboriginal couples). Aboriginal women experienced more severe forms of violence (including higher rates of lethal violence), greater physical injuries and higher rates of sexual assaults.<sup>82</sup>

Women with disabilities also experience higher rates of violence, although as with Aboriginal women, more research is needed. Earlier research indicates that the rates of violence perpetrated against women with disabilities is 1.5 to 10 times the rate compared to women without disabilities, depending upon whether they reside in the community or in institutions.<sup>83</sup> Other work estimates that a staggering 83% of women with disabilities will be sexually abused, and for girls with intellectual disabilities, 40-70% will be sexually abused before the age of 18.<sup>84</sup>

Homeless women and women with mental health histories experience high rates of sexual and other forms of violence. Sexual assault among young women around puberty has become "highly normalized," and made "invisible by some twisted notion of what is normal heterosexual development."<sup>85</sup>

## 5. The Intersections of Poverty and Violence

Violence and poverty are linked in multiple and complex ways.<sup>86</sup> This is true both of the narrow, income-related definitions of poverty, and of the more expansive notion of poverty advocated by Sen. Violence against women denies women "long, healthy and creative" lives, it undermines women's self respect and dignity, and it prevents women from enjoying a decent standard of living. Violence constrains women's choices, limits their productivity, and undermines their health.<sup>87</sup> We are all harmed by violence against women, as our mothers, sisters, colleagues, and members of our

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Breaking Free: A Proposal for Change to Aboriginal Family Violence* (Thunder Bay: Ontario Native Women's Association, 1989).

<sup>82</sup> Statistics Canada, *supra* note 64 at 64ff.

<sup>83</sup> DisAbled Women's Network. "Family Violence Against Women with DisAbilities," online: [http://.dawn.thot.net/violence\\_wwd.html](http://.dawn.thot.net/violence_wwd.html)

<sup>84</sup> Deborah Doherty, "Health Effects of Family Violence" (Ottawa: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 2003), online: CRVAWC

<[http://www.crvawc.ca/documents/healtheffects-eng\\_000.pdf](http://www.crvawc.ca/documents/healtheffects-eng_000.pdf)>

<sup>85</sup> "Beyond Shelter Walls," *supra* note 78.

<sup>86</sup> Terry, *supra* note 58. See also Noirín Clancy and Eilís Ward, eds. "Women, Violence and Poverty in the West of Ireland: exploring economic abuse" (O'Connor Wilson Associates, 2005), online: West Training and Development Ltd., <<http://www.westtraining.ie/resources/DV%20Report%20final.pdf>> (last accessed: 2 October 2008) [Clancey and Ward], Janet Mosher and Patricia Evans, "Welfare Policy – A Critical Site of Struggle for Women's Safety" (2006) 25 (1,2) *Canadian Woman Studies* 162-166, Colleen Purdon, *Women Abuse and Welfare in a Rural Community: Rural Women Speak About Their Experiences of Ontario Works*, sponsored by Women Today Huron, funded by Status of Women Canada, 2004, Jody Raphael, *Saving Bernice: Battered Women, Welfare and Poverty* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000) and Jill Davies, "Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence, Policy Blueprint on Domestic Violence and Poverty" online: [http://new.vawnet.org/Assoc\\_Files\\_VAWnet/BCS15\\_BP.pdf](http://new.vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/BCS15_BP.pdf)

<sup>87</sup> Terry, *supra* note 58 at 471.

communities. And violence against women entails socio-economic costs and opportunity costs for economic and social development.<sup>88</sup>

In what follows we have clustered the intersections between poverty and violence under four broad frames: poverty's trap; health; employment; and social stigma.

### **a) Poverty's Trap**

It is without question that poverty, or the threat of poverty, traps women in abusive relationships, be they intimate relationships, employment relationships, care-giving relationships, or indeed any relationship of dependency. As one woman interviewed for the study put it,

*“economic self-sufficiency is a huge step in avoiding violent situations; the more choices we have the less susceptible to violence we are.”*

Below we look at several relationships that entail some degree of dependency, and how poverty works to keep women in those relationships, even when violent.

### **i) Abusive Intimate Relationships**

Research across jurisdictions repeatedly finds that the reasons most often cited by women not to leave an abusive relationship are financial dependence and there being “no where to go.”<sup>89</sup> As Punam Khosla noted in her research with low-income and racialized women in Toronto, the reality of the familial sphere as “a place of little solace, much work and staggering loneliness,” marked by “lack of personal supports, sexist role expectations, abuse and mistreatment” is made all the more oppressive by the realization that there is “no where to go.”<sup>90</sup>

In other words poverty and lack of housing keep women locked in abusive relationships. In Ontario, research undertaken by the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) shortly after a 21.6% rate cut to Ontario Works benefits was introduced in Ontario in the mid-1990's revealed that women were remaining within, or returning to, abusive relationships as a direct result of the decrease in financial assistance. Subsequent research in Ontario confirmed that women were (and are) staying in or returning to abusive relationships because of poverty (including the impoverishment of body and spirit experienced by those in receipt of *Ontario Works*).<sup>91</sup> Several American and Canadian studies have consistently found that for those women who do leave, the risk of food insufficiency and homelessness is substantially increased.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* In the Canadian context, see Tanis Day regarding the estimated economic costs of violence against women, *Selected Estimates of the Costs of Violence Against Women and Children and Health-Related Costs of Violence Against Women: The Tip of the Iceberg* (London: Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children).

<sup>89</sup> See various authors *supra* note 86. There are a host of other important reasons as well including love for the abuser, concern that children have a father, a fear of state apprehension of children, public shame and social stigma and fear of deportation.

<sup>90</sup> Punam Khosla, *If Low Income Women of Colour Counted in Toronto*, Final Report of the Action-Research Project, Breaking Isolation, Getting Involved (Toronto, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2003) at 51.

<sup>91</sup> Mosher *et al.*, *supra* note 61; Sylvia Novac, *Family Violence and Homelessness: A Review of the Literature*, (Ottawa: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 2006) notes that of women leaving shelters 12% report returning to an abusive partner.

<sup>92</sup> Richard Tolman and Danial Rosen, “Domestic Violence in the Lives of Women Receiving Welfare: Mental Health, Substance Dependence, and Economic Well-Being,” (2001) *Violence Against Women* 141.

As so many of our interviewees observed, poverty limits women's options. Without the personal resources to provide food, shelter, and clothing for oneself and one's children and in the absence of adequate state provision to meet these basic needs, women are trapped within abusive relationships. It is abundantly clear that the horrendous "choice" confronting many women is that of continuing to endure abuse or face the inadequate provision of the means essential to bare human sustenance, let alone necessary for full citizenship. The view expressed so clearly by one woman we interviewed that, *"It's easier to deal with the violence than to live on \$500 a month,"* was widely shared.

*"Having a low income was a factor that prevented me from leaving a violent relationship. I felt how in the hell am I going to do this? How am I going to pay for daycare and transportation and all that goes with being a single parent and a homemaker? How am I going to do this without this person in my life whose only good quality is that he is a good provider?"*

*"I've never called the police. I need him to live. The police would have him arrested and he'd go to jail for a long time. I'm five months pregnant. I can't be by myself. How am I going to pay for my living?" How am I going to live without him?"*

That women are often impoverished when they leave abusive relationships is evidenced by the reality that violence against women in their intimate relationships is among the most commonly cited causes of homelessness for women and children.<sup>93</sup> In Paradis *et al.*'s recent Toronto study, women's most common reason for leaving their last stable living place was abuse: 30% had left because of abuse and of these 24% were abused by their partners, and 6% reported they or their children were abused by others (landlords, parents or roommates).<sup>94</sup> Yet leaving a stable living environment for many women is anything but a guarantee that the violence will end; homeless women are at increased risk of violence, including high levels of rape, and of psychological trauma.<sup>95</sup> A 2007 report by Street Health documents the staggering high rates of sexual assault among homeless women: one in five had been sexually assaulted in the past year.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, separation is often the trigger for an escalation in violence, and women who leave abusive relationships are frequently stalked, harassed and abused.

Reid *et al.*'s recent study of young homeless women in southwestern Ontario reveals that young women fleeing dangerous situations in their homes are confronted with a street life of chronic poverty, discrimination and violence. As they conclude, for "homeless girls and young women, violence is often an integral part of their family history and current reality."<sup>97</sup> Sexual harassment is an

<sup>93</sup> See Paradis, Novac, Sarty *et al.*, *supra* note 43 at 13 and research cited therein.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid* at p. 45. See also "Beyond Shelter Walls," *supra* note 78. The research also consistently finds high rates of childhood physical and sexual abuse among those who are homeless.

<sup>95</sup> Paradis, Novac, Sarty *et al.*, *supra* note 78 at 19.

<sup>96</sup> Street Health Report 2007, "Women & Homelessness," Research Bulletin #2 reports high rates of violence, pain, mental distress and serious physical health conditions among homeless women, yet these same women cannot access the health care, social services and supports they need; 37 % had been physically assault in the past year and 21% had been sexually assaulted or raped one or more times in the past year. Online:

<http://www.streethealth.ca/Downloads/SHResearchBulletin-2.pdf> See also Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, *On Her Own: Young Women and Homelessness in Canada*, March 2002 report that also notes that sexual violence is commonplace.

<sup>97</sup> Colleen Reid, Wendy Frisby & Pamela Ponic, "Confronting Two-Tiered Community Recreation and Poor Women's Exclusion: Promoting Inclusion, Health and Social Justice" (2002) *Canadian Woman Studies* 21(3) at 239 [Reid, Frisby & Ponic]. See also "Beyond Shelter Walls," *supra* note 78 at 15.

“ubiquitous and often insidious form of gender-based violence” commonly experienced by homeless girls, who are also more likely to experience street and gang related violence.<sup>98</sup> Most of the young women in their study spoke about “sexual abuse, including rape, as the most central and persistent fear they faced on the street and in shelters...[o]ver and over again, the girls told poignant and profound stories that illustrated how violence was, and continues to be, a central context of their lives with multiple effects on their health and well-being. Through their experiences, it is clear that varied forms of gender-based violence influence almost every aspect of their lives and are intricately interwoven into the experience of homelessness.”<sup>99</sup>

Virtually all of the women interviewed for the project, and every partner organization, identified poverty as a formidable barrier for women to safely leave abusive relationships. Violence perpetrated against women interacts with economic dependence in a vicious circle. As one woman told us of her personal experience,

*“it is a circle and it goes on and on and on.”*

The women who we interviewed spoke eloquently about the connections between poverty and violence based upon their lived experiences of both. Many were clear that they could not/would not leave the relationship despite the violence they endured, because they had no income or other financial support. One woman who fled violence in her relationship in 1991 had this to say,

*“I married young, I had no education, no ability to work except in the home for 30 years. Without him, there would have been no money.”*

Although she is long out of the relationship, the poverty that compounded it continues to define her life. Another young woman whose boyfriend is currently in jail for assaulting her explains her reasons for staying with him,

*“You feel stuck. You need him in order to pay off rent and your bills. For one person it isn’t enough. For two you get by. It (poverty) keeps you in the relationship.”*

Women in abusive relationships are trapped by economic dependence, with the depth of the entrapment varying directly with the degree of social marginalization a particular woman experiences. For example, high rates of unemployment for women with disabilities, combined with the enormous challenge of finding accessible housing, deepen the grips of poverty’s entrapment. In Ontario, women without legal status are categorically ineligible for social assistance benefits, unless an application for permanent residence or refugee status has been initiated. The denial of welfare benefits, together with the difficulties of accessing employment, leave some women with virtually no choice but to remain in the abusive relationship.<sup>100</sup> In the Francophone community, especially for the older generation, there are fewer opportunities, and their capabilities and experiences are not valued, making it harder to earn a decent wage.

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<sup>98</sup> Reid, Frisby & Ponic, *ibid* at 239.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Mosher *et al.*, *supra* note 61.

In turn, economic dependence deepens an abuser's power. In abusive intimate relationships, common tactics of control focus upon preventing women from working or engaging in education or skill-training activities. Indeed the research reveals that many abusive men are prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to sabotage women's efforts to work or train.<sup>101</sup> In effect, the abuse depletes women's human capital. Another tactic focuses on financial control, as one woman interviewed for the project observed,

*"Women who are abused – it is generally around financial abuse – a way to maintain control."*

The abuse also robs women of social capital, isolating them from friends, relatives and potential colleagues who provide support (including job networking). The abuse contributes not only to low income, but to the dimensions of poverty articulated by Sen. Women are denied the opportunity to lead a "long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect and the respect of others." The abuse impoverishes women in all four of the dimensions identified earlier: opportunities are denied, women's voices are silenced, their capabilities are truncated, and their lives are profoundly insecure, physically, socially and economically.

### ***ii) Employment relationships***

Many women – particularly those who are most severely marginalized by society – are trapped within abusive places of work; an entrapment which in many ways mirrors that of abusive relationships. Women are subjected to sexual assault, sexual harassment, racial harassment, physical and emotional violence and exploitative conditions of work because they have little opportunity to secure other work and few, if any other, options to sustain themselves.

Here too state policies and practices play a significant role in facilitating the violence and abuse within places of work. For example, women who have applied for permanent resident status on humanitarian and compassionate grounds (often because their sponsors have abused them), wait months and months – in Toronto up to two years – for work permits. But the ultimate success of their applications depends to a significant degree upon their demonstration of establishment in Canada and one of the important considerations is a history of stable employment. Indeed the immigration guidelines indicate that the "degree of establishment" may be "particularly relevant in some case types," and include cases of family violence among those identified, suggesting that the degree of establishment will be a very significant factor in assessing the applications of abused women.<sup>102</sup> Working without a permit – that is, working illegally – is in fact regarded favourably in assessing the degree of establishment on a humanitarian and compassionate application. So, in reality, securing work, illegally, is tremendously important to the ultimate ability to remain in Canada as a permanent resident. This need to secure and maintain work illegally creates situations of vulnerability to exploitation and violence in the workplace.

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<sup>101</sup> See Raphael, *supra* note 86; Jody Raphael (2000) "Domestic Violence as a Welfare-to-Work Barrier: Research and Theoretical Issues" in Sourcebook on Violence Against Women, edited by Claire Renzetti, J. Edelson, and R.K. Bergen. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.443; Jody Raphael and Richard Tolman, "A Review of Research on Welfare and Domestic Violence" (2000) Journal of Social Issues and Lisa D. Brush, "Battering, traumatic stress, and welfare-to-work transition" (2000) 6(10) Violence Against Women 6(10) 1039.

<sup>102</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada, "Inland Processing Manual 5: Immigrant Applications in Canada made on Humanitarian and Compassionate Grounds" at section 11.2, online: CIC <<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/manuals/ip/ip05e.pdf>>.



The lack of access to employment protections for sex workers also enables violence, as do the two legislative regimes – federal and municipal – that regulate their lives. For women who are sex workers, provisions of the *Criminal Code* prohibiting communicating for the purposes of prostitution, procuring, bawdy houses and living on the avails create conditions of work that endanger them.<sup>103</sup> The research is clear that street sex workers are the most impoverished and at the greatest risk of violence. But because working in other venues – for example out of one’s home – runs the risk of criminal prosecution, sex work is moved to the streets. Similarly, the provisions against living on the avails make it difficult to, for example, hire a driver or security person. As one of the women interviewed for the project said,

*“I think that because sex work is criminalized, the police and powers that be leave us more open to predators who prey on the vulnerable. It’s not individual officers; it’s the institution of the police. It’s not geared to support and lift people up.”*

*“In my sex work and other work experiences, I’ve been fortunate. I haven’t experienced any physical violence. However emotional and psychological – the fear of not having stability, security. A solid job with benefits and union reps – just not knowing if your job can be taken from you at any time. The absence of those things makes sex work unsafe.”*

The violence experienced by street working women is also fueled by hostility generally toward street-involved people, by the vilification of drug users, and by stereotypes that devalue the lives of some. The provisions of the *Criminal Code* regulating sex work reinforce pre-existing stereotypes of who is a good, moral and valued person. All of these things come together to render street working women as accessible targets, and as disposable objects.

In other contexts, employment protections may exist, but enforcement is inadequate. For example, the *Employment Standards Act* establishes many rights for workers, but the system largely depends upon individual workers coming forward with complaints about violations, rather than proactive enforcement. For those individual workers who do come forward the complaints’ system is fraught with problems, and even orders to pay issued against employers by the Ministry are often not enforced.<sup>104</sup> While the legislation envisions the potential of substantial fines being issued against employers for violations of the Act, very few prosecutions are undertaken.

### ***iii) Care-giving relationships***

The high rates of violence against women with disabilities arises in part due to the large number of persons – family, professional – upon whom they may be dependent for aspects of their care.

Mid-life and senior immigrant women who may be sponsored to come to Canada by their adult sons or daughters to care for their grandchildren are also in a vulnerable position. Pursuant to the sponsorship regime through which they enter Canada as family class members, their sponsors undertake to provide financial support for a ten year period, to ensure that the sponsored family member does not become dependent upon the state. Many sponsored immigrants do not know that

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<sup>103</sup> These provisions are currently the subject of a Constitutional challenge.

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, Janet Mosher, “The Construction of “Welfare Fraud” and the Wielding of the State’s Iron Fist”, in Elizabeth Comack (ed.) *Locating Law: Race, Class and Gender Connections* (2nd ed). (Halifax: Fernwood Press, 2006) 207-229

they are eligible for social assistance benefits should the sponsor not provide for them. But even if they have this knowledge, they may also understand the inadequacy of present levels of social assistance and/or have some appreciation of the social stigma of welfare receipt. Moreover, they may know that any social assistance benefits they receive create a debt owing by the sponsor, and there is often tremendous pressure from the extended family to avoid the creation of such a debt, particularly because the debt precludes other family class sponsorships. They also fear that sponsorship breakdown may lead to their deportation, a possibility that is real in the event that they do not yet have permanent residence status. But even for those who do have permanent residence status, the difficulties in accessing timely and accurate information about the rights and entitlements accompanying such status mean that many sponsored immigrants have limited – and often inaccurate – information. Indeed, misinformation is sometimes actively cultivated by abusive family members as a way to enhance their power.

Some of these women, sponsored by a family member (often a son or daughter) to Canada as caregivers, become trapped in abusive familial relationships where they experience physical, emotional and financial abuse. The women in the group of senior women we met with for the project expressed their reluctance to speak publicly of this abuse. Innumerable obstacles make accessing assistance extremely difficult for them: the lack of a trusted confidant; lack of sufficient money to afford TTC even for a trip to the doctor; racism; and the unavailability of information in their first languages. As one woman grimly described,

*“We manage by suffering. We stay home. We cook, clean, we look after our grandchildren. We cannot speak. And no one appreciates us.”*

Added another,

*“We are lonely at home, we want to meet with others, we can't even get to the doctor's because we can't afford the TTC.” “Where do we go for help? To the Premier? What are the names and numbers of those we should call?”*

#### ***iv) Other relationships of dependence***

Poverty interacts with other forms of dependence in ways that expose women to violence. Women dependent upon low-income housing have reported abuse by landlords, and as with other abusive relationships, poverty constrains (or totally denies) them options. Two of the women we interviewed reported landlord abuses of low-income women as a common problem in their community. One woman observed that the trading by landlords of services for sex as particularly common in the lives of young low-income women. Another described how her landlord had told a service repair person that he could “have his way” with her, in exchange for repairing the refrigerator in her apartment. She had no other housing options and risked homelessness if she did not comply. She managed to persuade the service repair person to agree that she would work for him, free of charge. At the time of the interview she had worked hours well in excess of the value of the service that he had provided. She noted,

*“People use you. If all of your money is going to rent landlords will kindly offer to give you food off their table, they’ll kindly offer you to go into their wardrobe and pick out whatever you want and they’ll be really, really nice and then will have you sit down with a long time friend of theirs and then they just casually, all smiles, will ask you to do stuff. God. If you’ve taken all that stuff, you have no way out. You feel bought. You know that if you don’t do it not only are you out on the street, they’ll take all your stuff too.”*

#### **v) Facilitating the Entrapment**

As is clear from the discussion above, women are frequently trapped within abusive relationships of dependence because they do not have access to alternative means to support themselves or children. Some women attempt to survive on social assistance benefits, they line up for housing, for food, for clothing; but getting by is very, very difficult. We heard over and over again about the inadequacy of current social assistance rates, and of the demeaning and dispiriting realities of women in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits.

*“It’s harder to live in a smaller community than it is to live in a city being broke and living off assistance. There is not much help. No food banks, no shelter, but your rent is \$600 and all the landlords know about you and they won’t rent to you. Or you end up with a slum landlord.”*

*“Dalton, do you not remember agreeing to increase welfare rates? You based it on levels of 10 years ago. It was just a lick and a promise and completely worthless. You send pictures of your family at Christmas. Send some cash.”*

*“It is so demeaning. It really is demeaning. If I hadn’t found a different way of looking at life; I’d go nuts given my situation.... I just wish women didn’t have to be dehumanized to get what they needed. You can’t live on \$24/week... they don’t even allow you to have a telephone in your coverage...but I need it for crisis calls, it is a lifeline. And it terrifies me... because you know if you have done one thing wrong they can take it away from you and you are out in the street, and that is absolutely horrifying, terrifying. I can’t think about my future as a woman, a senior citizen with a mental disability... We need to get some type of politician in there who has a heart.”*

Social assistance rates are profoundly inadequate. As Deb Matthews, MPP, noted in her report on employment assistance programs in OW and ODSP, under current rates it is impossible to provide children with the proper nutrition necessary for optimal brain development and readiness to learn.<sup>105</sup> In a survey of single parents in receipt of Ontario Works in Toronto two out of three indicated that they had run out of food, and one in two had used a food bank.<sup>106</sup> A recent report by Toronto Social Services, *Systems of Survival, Systems of Support*, documents that after paying rent, many individuals and families are left with less than \$5.00/day to meet all other basic requirements, and that “nutritious eating is simply not affordable for many people on social assistance in Toronto, making it difficult, particularly for children, to meet the energy and nutrient needs that are basic requirements of

<sup>105</sup> Deb Matthews MPP, *Review of Employment Assistance Programs in Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program* (Toronto: Ministry of Community and Social Services, December, 2004) at 17.

<sup>106</sup> Toronto Community & Neighbourhood Services, *Social Assistance & Social Exclusion: Findings from Toronto Social Services 2003 survey of single parents on Ontario Works* (Toronto: Community & Neighbourhood Services, 2004) at 17 [Toronto Community & Neighbourhood Services]. See also Kate Bezanson, “Gender and Household Insecurity in the Late 1990s” in Kate Bezanson and Meg Luxton (eds.), *Social Reproduction* (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 2006) at 188-90.

health.”<sup>107</sup> A Toronto survey of single parents on Ontario Works found that 17% felt unsafe in their homes and 7% very unsafe. Two out of three indicated that they had run out of food; one in five had been evicted or received notice of eviction; one in four had her phone disconnected. Women were unable to pay for their children to take lessons or play sports, unable to buy them clothing or shoes, unable to purchase a gift to attend a friend's birthday party, unable to provide gifts for their children on special occasions, unable to pay for their children to attend school field trips, and unable to buy needed school supplies.<sup>108</sup>

The observation by one of our respondents that, “*We could save so much money if we spent more money on welfare,*” is echoed in the report of MPP Matthews,

The need for social assistance is often a result of failures in other sectors of government and society, and conversely, the failure to address the needs of social assistance recipients has a direct impact on the demand for other government services. Thus, for example, while the lack of affordable housing, insufficient mental health services, inadequate access to child care and high drop-out rates may contribute to peoples need to access the system, inadequate social supports may result in increased demand on the healthcare system, the police and justice system, and Children’s Aid Societies.<sup>109</sup>

As Deb Matthews, MPP, has noted, the system relies far too much on sanctions and prohibitions. We agree with her observation that the overarching philosophy underlying the current system is that people will abuse social assistance if given the opportunity.<sup>110</sup> Recipients feel this acutely, especially within the reformed Ontario Works regime. They describe how they feel that they are never trusted, constantly under surveillance, and treated like criminals. As MPP Matthews has argued, we must move “from the current punitive approach, to establishing a supportive, client-centered approach to social assistance that addresses the real issues standing in the way of clients securing employment.”<sup>111</sup> We must move away from an approach that demonizes and criminalizes the “other,” to one that acknowledges our commonality and which provides meaningful supports. We endorse wholeheartedly the conclusion by MPP Matthews that there is a,

fundamental need to change internal and external attitudes about who social assistance recipients are, why they are on social assistance and what they have to offer society. For the past several years, government leaders have made deriding social assistance recipients a core component of their political strategy. Their ideology has driven the entire system – the rules, the attitudes, and the administration. Reinforcing negative stereotypes has done serious damage to people who work and live in the system. It has permeated into the employment market, so that employers are not inclined to hire social assistance recipients. We need to communicate – within and without – that the vast majority of people on social

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<sup>107</sup> Systems of Survival, Systems of Support: An Action Plan for Social Assistance in the City of Toronto (Toronto: Toronto Social Services, 2006) at 24, 28.

<sup>108</sup> Toronto Community & Neighbourhood Services, *supra* note 106.

<sup>109</sup> Matthews, *supra* note 105.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid* at 4.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid* at 4.

assistance desperately want to be self-sufficient; many have valuable abilities and skills, and are ready to get to work once the barriers are lifted.<sup>112</sup>

As with the lack of adequate income supports, the lack of affordable housing and long wait lists for what social housing that does exist are chief among the barriers women and children face when fleeing violence and poverty. Women's homelessness is often less visible than men's,<sup>113</sup> but whether visible or hidden, it is "deeply stressful, having lasting effects on people's sense of belonging in society, their well-being, their family relationships and their children's schooling and development."<sup>114</sup> Having a home "is about feeling connected, cherished and valued,"<sup>115</sup> and is a place of stability where women can begin the necessary re-building of their lives. As two Coroner's reports in Ontario have found, access to housing is a critical lifeline for women fleeing violence.<sup>116</sup>

The lack of access to adequate housing for some women leads to the apprehension of their children by child welfare authorities; that children and their mothers should be separated due to poverty and homelessness is intolerable (housing problems and homelessness are factors in one out of five cases of child apprehension in Toronto).<sup>117</sup> Not surprisingly then, many women expressed negative views about child welfare agencies, and in particular the double bind for low-income women.

*"They don't do much to help. They tell you what you **must** do. I have to do this, attend this program, do this thing – anger management. Do all these things in order to get my kid back and to top if off I must have a clean and safe environment to bring her to. But I can't have that unless I have enough money to pay for the rent and I don't?"*

*"CAS comes to court and says, "send kids to group homes" – which are little schools for criminals and sends them to jail when they run away. Then they come to court and say, "Keep them in jail, they don't have anywhere else to go." They use jail as a social service. It happens. Spend the money you would give a stranger [foster parent] to watch kids on the parent who needs parenting skills. With the proper classes they will get on their feet. There is a lot of money being wasted – spent on paying the cop who had to find the kid who ran away from the group home. You could put the woman in a nice hotel room for the money we spend that way. We could save so much money if we spent more money on welfare."*

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> As described by Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, *Common Occurrence: The Impact of Homeless on Women's Health* (Toronto: Sistering, 2002) [Sistering] at vii, hidden homelessness includes women who are "temporarily staying with friends or family or are staying with a man only in order to obtain shelter, and those living in households where they are subject to family conflict or violence. Hidden homelessness also includes situations where women are paying so much of their income for housing that they cannot afford other necessities of life such as food; those who are at risk eviction; and those living in illegal or physically unsafe buildings or overcrowded households."

<sup>114</sup> Paradis, Novac, Sarty *et al.*, *supra* note 43.

<sup>115</sup> Sistering, *supra* note 113 at xiii.

<sup>116</sup> Recommendations of the Coroner's jury examining the death of Gillian Hadley, online: <http://www.owjn.org/issues/w-abuse/hadley2.htm>; into the deaths of Arlene May and Randy Iles, online: <http://www.owjn.org/archive/arlene3.htm>

<sup>117</sup> "Housing problems and homelessness are factors in one out of five cases of child apprehension in Toronto," Chau *et al.*, 2001 as cited in Paradis, Novac, Sarty *et al.*, *supra* note 43 at 20.

As *Lost in the Shuffle* has recently documented,<sup>118</sup> children are adversely affected by homelessness. Of the children interviewed for *Lost in the Shuffle* more than 70% of children living in shelters were unable to participate in before- or after-school programs. Although all schools had policies allowing parents to opt out of fees for trips and activities, accessing those policies requires disclosure of one's situation, not a comfortable option for either children or parents. Inadequate space, lack of access to computers, noise, the disruption of transience, the impact of witnessing or experiencing violence, and the stigma of living in a shelter all function as barriers to school success.<sup>119</sup>

It is absolutely clear that inadequate social provision – inadequate rates of social assistance and a dearth of accessible and affordable housing or childcare for example – deepens men's power and thus contributes to women's entrapment. Hence, the failure to take adequate steps to ensure basic needs are fully met implicates the state in violence against women.<sup>120</sup> Addressing women's basic needs through a poverty reduction strategy, on the other hand, would be a significant step in eradicating violence against women.

## **b) Health**

Violence takes a large toll on women's health, and ill health makes it more difficult for women to get and keep work, to participate in training and education, to parent their children, and to participate in the social life of their communities. In this manner, violence creates and sustains women's poverty.

Violence in all of its forms has negative health impacts; physical and mental wellness is adversely impacted. Globally, it is estimated that violence against women causes more death and disability among women aged 15 to 44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war.<sup>121</sup> Intimate violence is the leading cause of morbidity among women in the United States. Indeed in 1997, the World Health Organization identified violence against women as a priority health issue.

Jacqueline Campbell, a leading US researcher, provides a review of published English language literature that documents the extensive health consequences of violence against women, including the long-term negative effects that persist well after the violence has ended. Among these negative effects are chronic pain, recurring central nervous system symptoms, gastrointestinal symptoms, hypertension, and chest pain. Gynaecological problems are the most consistent, longest lasting and largest health difference between battered and non-battered women.<sup>122</sup> This includes higher rates of

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<sup>118</sup> *Lost in the Shuffle, The impact of Homelessness on Children's Education in Toronto* (Toronto: Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, September 2007).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> The strong agreement among service providers MacQuarrie notes in her recent research regarding the growing needs and the more complex crises facing abused women and their children, together with a sense that this was related to poverty and cutbacks in social spending, was certainly echoed in our research, see Barb MacQuarrie *Voices from the Front Lines: A report of The Middlesex County Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse & The London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse*, February, 2005.

<sup>121</sup> Terry, *supra* note 58. See also Jacquelyn C. Campbell, "Health consequences of intimate partner violence" (2002) 359 *The Lancet* 1331, online: Scholars Portal <http://scholarsportal.info/pdflinks/08090219583717586.pdf> (last accessed 21 June 2008) [Campbell]. (As much of the research on health impacts of abuse has been conducted with low income women, the question of whether the observed domains of ill health observed in such research were related to poverty, rather than violence, has been raised. In Cheryl A. Sutherland, Cris M. Sullivan and Deborah I. Bybee, "Effects of Intimate Partner Violence Versus Poverty on Women's Health" (2001) 7(10) *Violence Against Women* [Sutherland, Sullivan & Bybee], where the research delineates these variables, it was found that across all income levels women who had experienced abuse in past 6 months had significantly higher incident of health problems than those who had not been abused in that time period).

<sup>122</sup> Campbell, *supra* note 121.

STDs and HIV due to abusive men's refusal to use condoms. As Terry notes in the international context, "[w]omen involved in violent relationships or relationships characterized by a persistent implicit threat of violence, are less able to refuse unwanted sex with a partner or negotiate safer sex, even if they suspect that their partner is infected."<sup>123</sup> The women in various organizations we interviewed echoed this conclusion.

Depression and "post-traumatic stress disorder" (a diagnosis and label that many feminists resist) are the most prevalent mental-health sequelae of woman abuse.<sup>124</sup> Campbell also notes that abuse contributes to other health risk factors such as smoking, poor nutrition, substance abuse and stress. As she aptly observes, "interventions aimed at these problems will not succeed without addressing intimate partner violence."<sup>125</sup> Healing from violence is lengthy and complex and virtually impossible to achieve without basic needs being met.<sup>126</sup> The important links between mental health, addictions and violence is also made in a recent report in Ontario, yet disturbingly the same report concludes that "none of the sectors are fully equipped to deal with women whose lives are complicated by these factors."<sup>127</sup>

Virtually all of the women we interviewed who had direct experiences of poverty and violence spoke of their struggles with depression and other challenges to their mental wellness. All articulated the direct relationship between their health issues and the violence inflicted by their male partners, and spoke to how their compromised health negatively affected their ability to maintain a decent standard of living and to seek resolution.

*"Not knowing how to cope [with violence and poverty] can lead to bad coping including drug use, including self-destructive behaviour that can contribute to mental health issues. Less income means less ability to provide nutrition and the basics of a comfortable home."*

We must also be mindful of the medical pathologizing of women who experience violence and seek counseling and the rush to categorize women's responses as psychiatric disorders or illness, versus 'normal' coping mechanisms to the violence that has affected their lives. Social work models of counseling often reinforce those of the medical profession and work again, to "other" women who have experienced violence (and poverty). They are often informed by criminology and legal perspectives that cast women in these circumstances as "victims" or even "survivors" which objectify and further distance them from "good" or "normal" women or men.<sup>128</sup>

The women we interviewed about their personal experiences spoke movingly of their difficulties in accessing the necessary counseling (particularly long-term and intensive forms), the prescriptions they required for both their physical and mental well-being, and the treatment needed for dental or vision care. They expressed both regret and a deep sense of frustration that often the services that they required were financially inaccessible.

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<sup>123</sup> Terry, *supra* note 58 at 474.

<sup>124</sup> Campbell, *supra* note 121.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Judith Herman in Clancy and Ward, *supra* note 86 at 24.

<sup>127</sup> MacQuarrie, *supra* note 120.

<sup>128</sup> Jane Doe, *The Story of Jane Doe* (Toronto: Random House, 2003).

*“I’ve attempted to access counseling and was redirected to a psychiatrist because OHIP doesn’t cover psychotherapy. There was a power imbalance. It felt off. I was diagnosed and given meds but couldn’t ask questions. I wanted to know why in their infinite wisdom, after knowing me for an hour they could make a diagnosis?”*

One woman told us of the catastrophic impact of cuts made in the 1990s that prevented her from continuing in long-term counseling; counseling that was essential to her recovery and to enabling her to fully develop her capacities to become gainfully employed. Not surprisingly, she feels a deep sense of sadness that she cannot realize her employment goals. As she noted, even on a strictly economic calculus, it is likely that providing her with long-term counseling would have been a less expensive option for the government. But more importantly, the decision to take away long-term counseling literally took away people’s lives. She spoke of the power and control that front line social assistance workers wield, and the risks of seeking additional assistance,

*“you are afraid to ask for one little thing extra; you are liable to be totally axed off it. The government doesn’t realize how terrified you are of them. They have the control of whether you get to sleep under a roof, whether you get to eat your next meal, whether you get any medical assistance.”*

Like violence, poverty adversely affects health.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, because of substandard housing conditions and the often more toxic environments where low income housing is located, those on low income are also more susceptible to various illnesses and communicable diseases.<sup>130</sup> Violence begets poverty, both impair health, poverty is deepened and the vicious cycle begins to accelerate.

The isolation and loneliness that are so often a part of women’s experiences of violence and often of poverty, exacerbate the negative health impacts of both poverty and violence. In the context of abusive relationships, isolation is a common tactic of control; it is both an effect of violence and a risk factor for violence.<sup>131</sup> For women in northern and rural parts of Ontario the isolation women experience is also tied to geography, the lack of transportation and lack of services. In Thunder Bay, for example, there is a growing migration by women from remote areas who are seeking services and access to training and education. But with no or limited cultural facilities, training, education or recreational opportunities to bring women out of their homes, women experience a new form of isolation that compounds the geographic isolation of the North and increases the loneliness of poverty. Many women are isolated by language and the unavailability of culturally relevant services.

*“Aboriginal women come from isolated communities. They go from there to the city, they try to escape [violence and poverty], but it’s like a cycle you fall back into and they lose their children, they lose everything. They pretty much end up being by themselves. It happens a lot.”*

And as noted earlier, the aged and those with disabilities are frequently isolated by the lack of services to facilitate their mobility. Many are isolated by social stigma, including the stigma of violence, of addictions and of mental health labels.

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<sup>129</sup> There is an extensive literature on this, see for example Dennis Raphael (ed.), *Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2004).

<sup>130</sup> Sutherland, Sullivan & Bybee, *supra* note 121.

<sup>131</sup> MacQuarrie, *supra* note 120.



*“The more you get isolated the more you are afraid to go out. You seem to be paranoid, don’t know how to behave yourself with people, so shy. You don’t even want to go out after awhile. You just hide from people.”*

### **c) Employment**

Women’s employment is limited – and thus their poverty deepened – not only by the adverse health effects of violence, but also by the violence that is directly associated with their participation in the labour market. For women in abusive relationships this violence takes two primary and inter-related forms: efforts by the abuser to control or preclude entirely a woman’s participation in employment (a common control tactic); and violence of the abuser that is carried out in the workplace itself (again with the intention of controlling or precluding her employment). With respect to the latter, in fact a very substantial amount of domestic violence is carried out in the workplace – women are stalked, threatened, watched, and attacked by their intimate partners while at work. Not surprisingly then, notwithstanding the importance of economic self-sufficiency in ending violence in women’s lives, participation in employment can be dangerous for women. Acknowledging this, most American jurisdictions have created a range of workplace related protections for abused women (we review these more fully later in the report).

US data indicates that a full 50% of women who experience violence will lose their employment due to the violence;<sup>132</sup> some women are terminated when their abusers threaten them in the workplace and others when they miss time from work due to the violence. Time lost from work due to intimate abuse is estimated to be 8 million days/year, reducing on average a woman’s earnings by 137 hours/year.<sup>133</sup> This is lost income that women can ill afford.

Abusive partners used a number of tactics to sabotage women’s efforts to get and maintain a job or to improve their employment prospects. These include burning books, harassing women by repeated telephone calls or visits at work, and leaving them without transportation or without childcare. Ongoing and past abuse is one of the greatest impediments to women’s transition to paid employment.

*“I owe 20 grand for student loans. Violence interfered with my ability to continue with my education and to pay them back.”*

A woman who works with one of the partners on the project spoke of the huge energy drain for women in trying to constantly placate and appease an abusive partner. This channels energy away from the work that women need to do to become economically viable. Moreover, the deleterious effects of long-term violence on self-esteem and confidence can make it difficult to set and concentrate on goals.

In addition to the impact of violence in intimate relationships on women’s employment, violence in the workplace, and the risks of violence in travelling to and from work, impact upon the employment of women. Terry notes in the international context that gender based violence, including sexual harassment in the workplace and violence on the streets, limits women’s

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<sup>132</sup> In a study of women who had been raped almost half lost or were forced to quit their jobs in the year following the rape, Elizabeth M. Ellis, Beverly M. Atkeson and Karen S. Calhoun, “An Assessment of Long-Term Reaction to Rape” (1981), 90(3) *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 263 at 264.

<sup>133</sup> Deborah A. Widiss, “Domestic Violence and the Workplace: The Explosion of State Legislation and the Need for a Comprehensive Strategy” 35 *Florida State University Law Review* [forthcoming in 2008] [Widiss].

participation in employment.<sup>134</sup> Women in our project expressed fear of travelling to and from work, especially if they were required to travel at night and/or lived in neighbourhoods that they regarded as unsafe. Not surprisingly, low income women are more likely to work at night, and more likely to live in unsafe neighbourhoods.

As noted earlier, particular forms of work, including street level sex work, is often very unsafe. One woman who we interviewed reported experiencing extreme forms of violence in street based sex work, violence that she attributed to the criminalization of prostitution-related activities and her additional involvement in the drug trade. Two women involved in escort services reported no violence in their work, but rather work lost due to the violence of their intimate male partners. In an admonition that bridges both violence in employment and the violence of social stigma, one woman implored,

*“[s]top putting us down. Help us. We’re people too. I don’t want to get out of prostitution. If I wanted to, I would have a long time ago. Why don’t you help us with the prostitution instead of trying to get us away from it. Give us safe places to do it. Make it [prostitution and substance use] legal instead of sneaking behind everybody’s back.”*

Women interviewed from our organizational partners spoke of the sweep of abuse women often experience in their workplaces; as noted earlier sexual and racial harassment and, sexual assault and exploitation of labour are common, particularly among women who are socially marginalized.

Low wage and precarious work, while obviously connected to poverty, may also play a role in violence against women in a further way. Reflecting a theme in some of the literature, a few of our respondents described how discrimination, low wages, and precarious work created stress within their families. Frustrated, exhausted and being constantly fed messages/images of masculinity as power, yet experiencing little if any power in their work or political lives, women described their partners or fathers becoming violent in the home. Two young women described this happening to their fathers; *“the more powerless he felt in his situation, the more violent he was at home.”* Both were clear that their fathers’ violence was totally unacceptable, yet at the same time were careful to draw our attention to the difficulties facing their fathers.

*“Like so much violence is caused by that financial stress, so much, so many different kinds.”*

Research has also pointed to the stress caused by over-crowded and unaffordable housing and the links to violence against women,<sup>135</sup> and the role that food insecurity may play in precipitating violence against women.<sup>136</sup>

#### **d) Social Stigma**

Violence against women operates in troubling tandem with poverty in yet a further manner. The fear of stigma and ostracization, of being cast as an “outsider” and re-defined as a victim, and of being disbelieved prevents many women from disclosing the violence against them. It is also the reason

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<sup>134</sup> Terry, *supra* note 58.

<sup>135</sup> Novac, *supra* note 91.

<sup>136</sup> Elaine M. Power, “Economic Abuse and Intra-household Inequities in Food Security” (2006), 97(3) Canadian Journal of Public Health 258.

many women fear the poverty they face if they leave their abusive partners. This silencing of women's voices often furthers their entrapment in abusive relationships and curtails their access to services and supports. This silencing is itself, as noted earlier, a form of poverty. For women experiencing violence in the context of an on-going relationship of whatever kind (familial, employment, etc.), forms of belittlement and degradation are common. For many women, this disrespect and devaluation – social and/or individual – take a toll upon self-esteem. As some of the women interviewed described to us, the impact of the violence can lead to a disrespect and loathing of oneself; a sense that one is not deserving, and a loss of hope for the future. This may be especially true for women who, because of age, race, sexual orientation, disability or other dimensions of identity experience social stigma and disrespect, quite apart from the violence in their lives. Sex working women interviewed for the project identified the criminalization and stigma they endure as sex workers as additional contributors and, in one case, the physical violence and scorn street based women can experience because they are prostitutes. Another woman specifically identified the stigma attached to women with criminal records,

*“If we are criminalized and experience the trauma and injustice of the criminal justice system – that can keep a woman in poverty. With a criminal record and its stigma and no support or very little, probably having lost her home, her children and all her personal support systems would leave her more vulnerable to more violence and more poverty.”*

Stigma is also amplified for women with substance issues. Our partners who work in this area observe that women are seen as less worthy and more culpable than men when they use substances. The terminology of “clean,” often used to describe the cessation of use, is morally loaded and very stigmatizing, particularly for women.

The stigma of poverty is also profound. The stereotyping of low-income women as lazy, promiscuous, irresponsible and as inadequate mothers is pervasive and leads to repeated experiences of discrimination.

The blows to self-esteem that tear away at one's faith in oneself will obviously impact upon women's employment, women's education and women's income status. Poverty, in turn, carries its own stigma, and the cycle is again in play.

It is crucial to note that stigma is not merely psychologically debilitating. It permeates institutional structures, government policies and practices, every nook and cranny of social life. It shapes not only how those who are stigmatized may come to view themselves, but how they are viewed – and importantly (mis)judged by others. Our systems, as one of our partners puts it, make women vulnerable; make them feel guilty, as if they are not worthy. As described earlier, stereotyping and discrimination – practices intimately connected to stigma – are pervasive and endemic.

*“With poverty you're a victim, a target, looked down on, ain't nothing. You're a piece of shit that someone can take advantage of. No one cares.”*

Women interviewed for the project were clear that social attitudes about violence and poverty were factors in creating and maintaining the depression they experienced. When women are disbelieved, blamed, infantilized and/or treated as a “*pile of dirt*” in their interactions with welfare workers, police officers, child welfare workers, lawyers, or any of us, we help to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and

violence. Our social/collective responses to violence against women and to poverty often fuel the cycle of poverty and violence, weaving together more powerfully the chains of violence and poverty.

*“I had to go to foodbanks. I had to live in housing that treated women like children. I felt punished because I’m poor.”*

*“It was really hard to talk to my lawyer. I think part of it was because he was a guy and it took a long time for me to feel comfortable with telling him anything. I got the impression that he didn’t get it and didn’t understand. One of my biggest fears was that he wouldn’t believe it and the judge wouldn’t believe the abuse existed because my ex was of course denying everything.”*

The same woman went on to describe how, until her ex-husband acted out aggressively in court causing her to recoil physically, the judge was disbelieving of her sworn testimony and evidence about her ex’s violence. After that the judge became receptive and cited the incident in his decision in her favour. She believes that she would have lost custody of her children if the incident had not occurred.

## 6. Implications for the Poverty Reduction Strategy

Before turning to concrete recommendations, it is important to address the importance, yet limitations, of a poverty reduction strategy focused only on child poverty. While there can be no dispute that child poverty is a critical and pressingly important issue, children are poor precisely because their parents are poor and the risk of poverty increases for children when the risk is increased for their parents.<sup>137</sup> While a focus on child poverty may help to increase the low income of mothers with young children, it will do nothing to ameliorate the low income of women who are not mothers, or those who have raised their children, but continue to suffer the effects of their limited labour force attachment. Senior women we interviewed for the project were particularly concerned with inadequate pensions into their old age; they felt that having provided care and nurturance as first mothers and then grandmothers, they were cast off by society as “useless.”

*“I am completely reliant on my husband and his pension. But I volunteered in this country for 20 years. I worked in my home. Where is my pension?”*

*“The government doesn’t care about seniors and disability issues particular to aging.”*

Moreover, addressing women’s poverty only as incidental to the poverty of their children yet again signals that low-income women are undeserving and unworthy of our collective support.

Additionally, a focus on child poverty will, at best, address only the low income dimension of women’s poverty; it leaves intact “poor living.” It in no manner addresses women’s “capability deprivation” (the denial of the means to develop their capabilities), their lack of voice in the halls of power, or the violence in their lives. And violence in women’s lives will often have a variety of

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<sup>137</sup> National Council of Welfare, Report 104, “Child Benefits: Kids Are Still Hungry” (Ottawa, National Council of Welfare, 1998).

negative consequences for their children, ranging from the harms that arise for some children in witnessing the abuse of their mothers, to the potentially negative impact on women's parenting, to harm to the mother-child relationship.

A poverty reduction strategy that addresses the systemic nature of women's inequality in the labour market, including the impact of providing unpaid caring labour (both child care and other forms of care giving), that pays attention to the silencing of women's voices and that addresses violence against women will, by contrast to a child poverty approach, provide substantial benefits for both women and children.

## 7. Guiding Principles

Based on the major findings from the research, there are five (5) core principles contained within our project. These five principles offer a useful framework upon which the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction can build its Strategy.

1. **Gender Equality:** The planning process and plans that derive from that process must recognize the links between poverty, gender and violence against women. The plan must include a gender analysis, with a specific gender-budget, goals, targets and outcomes for addressing women's poverty. Gender-based policy solutions must take into account the specific barriers that women face when trying to escape poverty, such as intimate partner violence, low wage occupations, discrimination, lack of access to affordable child care, lack of access to emergency and affordable housing, lack of transportation for women in rural and remote areas, social isolation, and language barriers for immigrant women. A gender analysis aids in understanding the differing roles, needs, potential, capital, and incentives of women and men. This is critical to addressing the multidimensional problem of poverty in an efficient and more equitable way, while strengthening social relationships in society. A gender framework also considers the positive impact generated by investing in women. This includes the role of women's education in reducing the intergenerational transmission of poverty, increasing the level of family welfare, and propelling economic growth.
2. **Integrated Solutions:** Poverty is multi-faceted and to be effective a poverty reduction strategy must be comprehensive and take into account inequalities of gender, Aboriginal status, race, immigration status, age, disability, gender identity, and family status. It requires attention to the multiple roots of poverty, and the multiple levels of intervention required to address it. The strategy requires an integrated plan with emphasis placed on the complexity, diversity, and inter-related elements of poverty. This necessitates working from a deep understanding of the roots of poverty, from analysis and not mere description, and bringing together a range of [socio-economic] strategies at different levels and around different issues.<sup>138</sup> It requires moving away from existing silos to integrated solutions, working across government ministries, levels of governments, and sectors and with First Nations and non-profits.<sup>139</sup> It requires attending to the differences among low-income people and designing strategies responsive to their particular needs. It requires elements of prevention, intervention and support. It must address the poverty of people and the poverty of place.

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<sup>138</sup> ONWA & OFIFC, *supra* note 10 at 5.

<sup>139</sup> Harrison & Watrus, *supra* note 13.

And it must attend to the four dimensions of poverty: opportunities; capabilities; security; and empowerment (voice).

Virtually all of the women interviewed for the project spoke to how the fragmentation of services and the gaps in services available make it extraordinarily difficult for women to successfully navigate their way through our systems. The vision of the integration that would be both the method and outcome of a poverty reduction plan is one captured by the metaphor of clear, accessible pathways out of violence and poverty; a holistic approach that provides the “layers of resources that are needed as women move up the ladder of needs.”<sup>140</sup> In addition, sustained funding is critical to the necessary integration; funding on a project or limited-term basis redirects huge amounts of energy towards writing funding proposals and reports. This often means that those working on the frontlines making referrals and women seeking assistance are faced with a constant flux in service provision that creates yet another barrier to accessing supports.

3. **Self-determination by Aboriginal Women:** A poverty reduction strategy must address the higher rates of poverty and violence amongst Aboriginal women compared to non-Aboriginal women. First Nations and Métis communities are in the best position to determine how to meet the needs of women in their communities.<sup>141</sup> Research consistently indicates that the key to ensuring sustainable socio-economic outcomes for Aboriginal communities is to empower community based decision-making in the design and delivery of programs and to provide adequate and sustained resources. For this reason, we endorse the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women* developed by Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) and the Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA) and urge the Cabinet to support the Framework through resource provision, research and advocacy.
4. **Equity and Human Rights:** An effective poverty reduction strategy must be focused on achieving equity, equality, access and respect for human rights in order to eliminate discriminatory attitudes, policies, and systems and protect the rights of women living in poverty. The plan must establish the principles of equity, access, participation and equality for women and address the deeply entrenched stereotypes about low income people that pervade social institutions and systems. This requires training for professionals, frontline workers, and managers, in all sectors, including government. Training must be focused upon fostering anti-discrimination attitudes, increasing awareness and developing the skills necessary to produce equal opportunities and equitable outcomes for low-income people. It will also require the development and implementation of human rights and anti-discrimination curricula in our public school system. The government should provide leadership in amending Ontario’s *Human Rights Code* to include protection against discrimination on the basis of social condition<sup>142</sup> while proactively enforcing existing human

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<sup>140</sup> From an interview with one of the partner organizations.

<sup>141</sup> A First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, *Aboriginal Children, Young People, and Families, August 1, 2006*

<sup>142</sup> As noted by the Canadian Human Rights Review Panel in concluding its review of the federal human rights legislation, “[o]ur research papers and the submissions we received provided us with ample evidence of widespread discrimination based on characteristics related to social condition, such as poverty, low education, homelessness, and illiteracy. We believe there is a need to protect people who are poor from discrimination.” The Panel recommended the inclusion of social condition as a protected ground in the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, a ground that would capture the

rights laws. Violence and poverty against women, as noted earlier, both reflect and sustain women's inequality. Not only are poverty and violence against women a violation of women's equality rights, they impair many of women's other rights, including their political, associational, economic, and social rights.

5. **Community Participation and Leadership:** It is essential that the poverty reduction strategy utilize a participatory approach with ongoing community engagement in its design, development, implementation and evaluation. Given that the denial of voice is one dimension of poverty, it would be antithetical to the aims of a poverty reduction strategy to exclude the voices of low-income women. Over and over in our interviews, the importance of putting those who experience poverty and violence in charge of defining their needs and their solutions was emphasized. In the provision of services, the most constant recommendation was for various forms of peer mentors, peer role models, and peer counselors. Because those who experience poverty and/or low income are not a homogenous group and a "one size fits all" approach is a recipe for deepening inequality, this principle implies that different groups of women must be integrally involved in the varied dimensions of the poverty reduction plan. For example, as is so clearly expressed in the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*, "to be effective, all activities required to address violence against Aboriginal women must be directed, designed, implemented, and controlled by Aboriginal women."<sup>143</sup>

## Recommendations and Action Steps

The following are the broad recommendations and detailed action steps that resulted from the Take Action project. The recommendations reflect the consistency of concerns from women, across the province.

### It is recommended that:

1. **The Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction (CCPR) pursue an integrated Poverty Reduction Strategy, with specific attention to poverty and gender, childcare, education, housing, employment, health, social and income supports and the link between women's poverty and violence against women.**

### Action Steps:

1. Continue using an inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral approach in the development and implementation of a poverty reduction strategy.

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discrimination experienced as a result of one's status as a social assistance recipient, homelessness, illiteracy and poverty. See *Report of the Canadian Human Rights Review Panel* (Ottawa: Minister of Justice, 2000) online: <http://www.justice.gc.ca/chra/eng/chrrp-crlc.pdf> Note that Newfoundland's poverty reduction strategy clearly recognized the need to address discrimination as an important dimension of the strategy. The Newfoundland strategy includes amendments to their Human Rights Code to include protection against discrimination based on source of income; protection on the grounds of social inclusion would provide wider protection and the government of Ontario should follow the recommendation of the Canadian Human Right Review Panel.

<sup>143</sup> ONWA & OFIFC, *supra* note 17 at 5.

2. Review the roles of various stakeholders in the relevant policy and program areas to enhance social and economic development plans to address women's poverty.
3. Review all relevant policy and program areas affecting women living in poverty, in order to enhance social and economic development plans to address women's poverty.
4. Develop community action plans that will seek to reduce and eliminate the high levels of poverty among particular groups of women, as follows: Aboriginal women; women who head female-led single parent families; immigrant women; racialized women; senior women; women with disabilities; and young women.
5. Consult with municipal governments to address the specific poverty issues of their constituencies and to establish ways to strengthen the capacity of local governments to become facilitators, integrators, developers and advocates of the provincial plan.
6. Develop a public education program in collaboration with women's groups to raise awareness about poverty and the government's role in poverty reduction.

**It is recommended that:**

**2. The CCPR safeguard fiscal resources and investments targeted for poverty reduction initiatives.**

**Action Steps:**

1. Invest an annual capital commitment of more than \$830 million and another \$260 million to rehabilitate the existing stock of social housing; provide funding for 45,000 rent supplements reflecting true rental costs, and reverse the \$600 million download of provincial responsibility for social housing operating costs to Ontario municipalities.<sup>144</sup>
2. Provide the promised \$300 million annually for non-profit, quality child care across the province.<sup>145</sup>
3. Raise Ontario Works (OW) rates by 40% immediately and increase the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates by an appropriate amount aligned with current costs of living. Adjust both OW and ODSP annually to the rate of inflation.<sup>146</sup>
4. Commit to publicly funded dental coverage for all women and their children not covered by private dental insurance, and immediately fund CHCs and AHAC's to provide publicly-funded oral health care at all centres.
5. Allocate \$5 million annualized funding for full-time legal support workers in independent women's services and agencies across Ontario for women survivors engaged with legal systems, as recommended by the jury in the May and Hadley inquests (1998 and 2002).<sup>147</sup>
6. Review funding for regions outside Toronto and provide greater support and resources to community agencies.

<sup>144</sup> 2007 *Alternative Ontario Budget* and the Step it Up! Campaign, *supra* note 60.

<sup>145</sup> Step it Up! Campaign, *supra* note 60.

<sup>146</sup> Note that both Newfoundland and Quebec raised rates and permanently indexed them to inflation as components of their poverty reduction strategies. These rates have also been recommended to mitigate the impact of poverty on health, by the Ontario Association of Community Health Centres .

<sup>147</sup> Step it Up! Campaign, *supra* note 60.



**It is recommended that:**

**3. The CCPR collaborate within its diverse ministries to support a continuum of accessible programs and services designed for women living in poverty to increase their options for leaving abusive relationships of all forms, and to gain financial and personal independence.**

#### **Action Steps:**

##### ***Childcare***

1. Guarantee access to affordable, flexible and high quality childcare spaces to facilitate women's education, training, self-improvement and employment.<sup>148</sup>
2. Provide childcare for women living with HIV or other chronic illnesses, so as to enable access to medical care and other supports, and to prevent the risk of losing custody of children when women are hospitalized or when appropriate childcare is lacking.
3. Ensure women have supportive work environments with leaves for care, social networks that provide emotional and physical support (local mother and tot programs, drop in programs, family resource centres), and supports in the community such as recreation and transportation.<sup>149</sup>

##### ***Income Supports***

1. Raise the rates for OW and ODSP as noted in recommendation 2 (3).
2. Enable recipients to keep drug and dental benefits and clothing allowances as they transition off social assistance and into employment.
3. Provide coverage for vision care, specialized diets, and chiropractic treatments.
4. As recommended by Common Occurrence, the provincial and municipal governments must work together to improve the delivery of the OW and ODSP programs so that women experiencing visible and hidden homelessness are financially supported to a level that meets their day to day nutritional, personal care and housing needs.
5. Ensure that OW and ODSP offices inform applicants/recipients about all benefits that are available to them and the means to request them; they must be informed of the specific policies that provide exemptions from the obligation to pursue child support and to participate in employment readiness activities for those who have experienced "family violence."
6. Shift from a punitive model to one that is client-centred and supportive.

##### ***Housing***

1. Ensure there is a continuum of safe, affordable, accessible and supportive housing available to women, including emergency shelters, second stage housing and permanent housing. Shelters in rural and remote areas that are under-serviced and isolated are in particular need of support.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> See Patrizia Albanese, "Small Town, Big Benefits: The Ripple Effect of \$7/Day Child Care" (2006) *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 43(2).

<sup>149</sup> Campaign 2000, "Stacking the Deck: The Relationship Between Reliable Child Care and Lone Mothers' Attachment to the Labour Force," May, 2001 at 6.

<sup>150</sup> Emergency shelters are filled beyond capacity yet reach only an estimated 10% of abused women, see Statistics Canada (2007) *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2007*, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

2. Honour Canada's international obligations including the right to housing and the obligation to take progressive steps towards its realization within the maximum of available resources.<sup>151</sup>
3. Upgrade the quality of the existing social housing stock
4. Ensure social housing is located in safe neighbourhoods, with safe routes of travel to work, enables women's social networks, does not reinforce isolation and facilitates access to community centres, to schools, to places of faith, to health and other services, to education and training.
5. Expand efforts to address discrimination in housing – as recommended by Paradis *et al.*, “improve programs to educate prospective tenants on their rights, increase the ease of reporting housing discrimination and strengthen remedies for human rights abuses” and “educate private market landlords to avoid discrimination on the basis of income, receipt of social assistance, and family size as well as race, gender, and country of origin.”<sup>152</sup>
6. Treat emergency shelters as asylums for women without status who are fleeing abusive situations.<sup>153</sup>
7. Reallocate money currently spent to care for children within our child welfare system to families.
8. In assessing women's housing needs, recognize that women who are abused in their intimate relationships experience a form of virtual homelessness in their own homes.<sup>154</sup>
9. Implement the recommendations in Common Occurrence, The Impact of Homelessness on Women's Health and in Beyond Shelter Walls<sup>155</sup>

### ***Employment***

1. Introduce legislative reforms to provide specific protections for women who experience violence.
  - a. an entitlement to paid leave (when necessary for safety, court attendance and/or counseling and other interventions);
  - b. protection against termination for women who must take time off for these same reasons;
  - c. protection against termination due to the abuser's conduct at the woman's place of work;
  - d. the granting of workplace accommodations to reduce harassing or violent conduct occurring in the workplace;
  - e. clear entitlements to Ontario Works without delay where women quit work due to violence; and
  - f. as has the United States, the creation of a clearinghouse on best practices by employers in addressing domestic violence.<sup>156</sup>
2. Implement the recommendations of the Lori Dupont Inquest and in particular the recommendation for a review of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to examine the feasibility of including domestic violence (from someone in the workplace), abuse and harassment as factors

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<sup>151</sup> While the special priority status definition for access to rent-g geared-to-income housing has recently been broadened to include all forms of violence within a person's housing, “in the absence of any increase in housing stock, this pits vulnerable groups against one another in a competition for basic needs and increased the likelihood of women returning to abuse, and quite possible to their deaths.” YWCA Toronto, “WHAG Platform Statement #1”, online: YWC <[http://www.ywcatoronto.org/advocate\\_change/whag\\_sustain.htm](http://www.ywcatoronto.org/advocate_change/whag_sustain.htm)>. New regulations amending the policy provisions in Ontario Regulations 298/01 and 339/01 under the SHRA were filed on July 4, 2007.

<sup>152</sup> Paradis *et al.*, *supra* note at 43.

<sup>153</sup> No One is Illegal Toronto, online: NOII <<http://toronto.nooneisillegal.org/>>.

<sup>154</sup> Novac, *supra* note 91.

<sup>155</sup> Sistering, *supra* note 113, Beyond Shelter Walls, *supra* note 78.

<sup>156</sup> Widiss, *supra* note 133.

warranting investigation and appropriate action by the Ministry of Labour when employee safety is at risk.<sup>157</sup>

3. Revamp Ontario Works employment readiness programs.
4. Update employment standards to protect women in part-time, casual and contract work from exploitative practices, and enforce these laws.
5. Ensure the appropriate recognition and validation of foreign credentials.
6. Work to encourage the federal government to:
  - revise the temporary workers program to reduce women’s vulnerability to coercion and violence in the workplace e.g. domestic workers and caregivers;
  - revise Employment Insurance (EI) eligibility rules and benefit levels to create specific protections for women experiencing violence; and
  - revoke the communicating, procuring, bawdy house and living on the avails provisions of the *Criminal Code* and ensure sex workers have full access to existing employment protections<sup>158</sup>
7. Increase the minimum wage to \$10.00 immediately and index the minimum wage to the annual cost of living.
8. Consider models of labour market intermediaries to connect people to jobs (most people find employment through personal connections; low income people often have few connections and fewer still to decent work)
9. Provide more generous leave provisions to enable women to care for their children without risking their jobs
10. Increase funding to women’s groups, settlement groups and others so that they can pay women for services they now volunteer, such as translation and support groups.

### ***Education and Training***

1. Offer vocational training and women-centred skills training to women that lead to decent, non-poverty level jobs for women lacking employment opportunities.<sup>159</sup>
2. Make education programs available to women that are specifically designed to address their needs, and the realities of their lives (including violence).<sup>160</sup>
3. Address the lack of safety for women in colleges, universities and high schools and in particular address the high levels of sexual assault in public school – and the broader normativity of sexual assault in the lives of young women.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> The recommendations are available at <http://www.whsc.on.ca/pdfs/Dupont.pdf>

<sup>158</sup> Promising practices are found in the decriminalization models in Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>159</sup> Microskills is an example of promising practices in women-centred skills training. It develops employment focused services responses to the specific needs of abused women, and offers those services in shelters. It emphasizes creating relationships to help mentor women. Microskills has also developed mobile/itinerant pre-employment take are taken into high poverty neighbourhoods.

<sup>160</sup> The Bridges program in London, a partnership between the University of Western Ontario and Thames Valley District School Board, is an excellent example of best practices in educational responses to the needs of women who have experienced violence. The program prioritizes women’s safety, has a come when you can policy, measures non-traditional outcomes as success, and addresses many of the barriers women face (funds are provided for transportation and women may leave books and homework at school so they are not destroyed by their abusive partners). Best practices are also put into effect for women in northern Ontario. Lakehead University offers a program, “Humanities 101,” a community-based outreach program that enables women to attend university for a semester, studying in a variety of areas to determine their interests. No tuition is charged and assistance is available to address financial barriers school supplies, class materials, meals, bus transportation, and child-care or adult-care. Lakehead partners with some 25 agencies in Thunder Bay to deliver the program.

4. Expand the Healthy Equal Relationship Program to reach youth in high schools.
5. Hire women as paid role models and peer trainers, educators, etc. in all facets of training and education.<sup>162</sup>
6. Restore the freeze on tuition; provide OSAP funding loans and grants to OW and ODSP recipients and to part-time students.<sup>163</sup>
7. Double the number of ESL programs and expand to at least double the amount of funding currently provided to support upgrading and employment programs for women leaving abusive situations.<sup>164</sup>
8. Develop more effective public information and education programs on male violence against women.
9. Fund outreach programs and services for women living in deeply isolated regions.
10. Guarantee on-site childcare in public schools for young mothers so that they are able to complete high school.

### ***Addictions and Corrections***

1. Divert women out of the criminal justice system and into the appropriate treatment programs as early as possible.

### ***Access to Services***

#### *Accommodations*

1. Ensure that social and community-based support services are universally accessible to Deaf women and women with disabilities, including attendant care, accessible transportation, assistive devices, alternate format information, funded ASL interpretation and other necessary accommodations.<sup>165</sup>
2. Ensure services and resources are fully accessible to Deaf women and women with disabilities.

#### *Language Supports*

1. Continue funding the Ontario Language Interpreter Services to ensure culturally appropriate services are available for immigrant women.
2. Ensure services are available in multiple languages.

#### *Public transportation*

1. Ensure public transportation or other alternatives are available to women in order that they may access services, especially for women in rural and remote areas.

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<sup>161</sup> See School Community Advisory Panel, *The Road to Health: A Final Report on School Safety*, Toronto, 2008 online: <http://www.schoolsafetypanel.com/finalReport.html>. See also “Beyond Shelter Walls”, *supra* note 78.

<sup>162</sup> Maggie’s in Toronto has developed an effective model. Maggie’s ensures the meaningful involvement of sex workers at all levels of the organization, including management and policy-making. Maggie’s also employs sex workers to do peer outreach in various sectors including massage, dance and street. This model ensures that “peers” are not relegated to low-paying and low-income status jobs/roles within the agency.

<sup>163</sup> Step it Up! Campaign, *supra* note 60.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

### *Information*

1. Develop more effective public information and education programs on male violence against women.
2. Develop a provincial strategy, including tools that will enable women to better access and utilize critical information about their rights and about the programs and services available for low income women.
3. Experiment with different media, including television, radio and the internet.
4. Ensure that the critical information that women need, about their rights and about services, is readily accessible and timely:
  - a. public schools might serve as community hubs where among other things women could safely access information about services and resources;
  - b. religious organizations, medical offices, and shopping malls could also serve as important points of access;
  - c. develop and provide training for those institutions in order to assist them in providing appropriate responses and referrals.

### *Health Care*

1. Develop a provincial Women's Health Promotion Strategy that will link high quality mental and physical health care with health promotion and community development programs that are shown to have positive outcomes. This strategy should utilize a social determinants of health framework.
2. Provide access to counseling (including long-term and intensive where needed), to alternative treatments and to prescription medications.
3. Ensure gender specific models for women with substance use issues are funded, and provide sufficient detox beds for women. Understand that interventions must be grounded in an understanding of the role of drugs and alcohol in relieving the trauma and pain of violence.
4. Adopt and implement harm reduction strategies, including within shelters and elsewhere to enhance care and safety for women with substance use issues.
5. Increase access to healthcare and supports for women living with HIV in rural and remote areas.

### **It is recommended that:**

**4. The CCPR urge the Ontario government to proactively enforce protections against discrimination, with a focus on promoting equity, access and human rights education within public services and social systems.**

### **Action steps:**

1. Amend Ontario's Human Rights Code to include protection against discrimination on the basis of social condition.
2. Implement a comprehensive equity and access training program within government ministries for all personnel to challenge stereotypes of women impacted by poverty, and to develop the knowledge and skills required for removing barriers of discrimination in government programs and services.

3. Provide equity and access training and education in human rights and discrimination in our public school system to foster anti-discrimination knowledge, attitudes, and skills of educators.

**It is recommended that:**

**5. The CCPR collaborate with its diverse ministries to strengthen all publicly funded institutions in order to improve the accountability and responsiveness of systems to women impacted by poverty.**

**Action Steps:**

***Child Welfare***

1. Work with Children Aid Societies to ensure that children are never removed from families because of the family's low-income or lack of housing. Instead respect that adequate housing and income are rights which must be respected.
2. Continue offering the course on woman abuse now being taught in Ontario's Children Aid Societies.
3. Reallocate money being spent to care for children within our child welfare system to families.
4. Develop models where child protection authorities assist and support women to help ensure the safety of both women and children.
5. Ensure collaboration between child protection and the violence against women sectors.

***Immigration***

1. Work actively with the federal government to ensure reforms in immigration law and practices that attend to the specificities of women's experiences with violence and poverty. More particularly to:
  - d. ensure that women submitting a humanitarian and compassionate application receive a work permit upon applying rather than only once approved in principle;
  - e. ensure that receipt of public assistance is no longer treated as a ground of inadmissibility;
  - f. ensure that a woman who discloses the intimate abuse of her partner is never liable to deportation as a result of having made that disclosure;
  - g. revise the Temporary Workers Program to reduce women's vulnerability to coercion and violence in the workplace e.g. domestic workers and caregivers.
2. Given the provisions of the *Immigration and Refugee Reform Act* regarding "serious criminality" and given the important role of a criminal record when deciding upon a woman's H&C application, police investigating cases of domestic violence must be adequately trained to differentiate aggressive and defensive uses of force and women must have access to language and cultural interpretation during such investigations.

***Police***

1. Increase and provide ongoing police training that will enable officers to better understand crimes of violence against women within a gendered, anti-racist framework, and in particular, women's use of force in order to protect themselves. This is necessary to address the current problems of

under-reporting and of dual-charging, which result in the increased criminalization of women and the mythology of false allegations<sup>166</sup>.

2. Ensure access to police services in a woman's first language.
3. Develop policies, practices and competencies so that police officers respond appropriately and effectively to women experiencing mental health issues.
4. Implement relevant recommendations arising from the inquests into the murders of Arlene Mays and Gillian Hadley.
5. Implement relevant recommendations arising from the Review of the Investigation of Sexual Assault; Toronto Police Service.
6. Work with the Ministry of the Attorney General to create standards for all police forces in Ontario to adopt a "Don't ask, don't tell" policy when dealing with situations of violence against women (presently the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force has adopted a "Don't ask" policy, which is uneven in practice)

### ***Access to Justice***

1. Expand access to state-funded legal representation in family law matters to redress the current imbalances in representation between women and men, and the negative impacts of lack of representation.<sup>167</sup>
2. Create specialized legal services provided by lawyers and others with knowledge of the dynamics of abusive relationships and sexual assault. Embed legal services within other social services and supports to provide a more holistic response.
3. Address the significant problems that exist in geographic access. Currently in many parts of the province no lawyers working in particular counties will take legal aid certificates in family law matters. There are also significant challenges in accessing French-speaking lawyers.
4. Ensure training is provided for both lawyers and judges. Women expressed the difficulties both their lawyers and the judges who heard their cases had in understanding the realities of their lives.<sup>168</sup>
5. Increase funding to Legal Aid Ontario for family law legal aid certificates and legal aid clinics in order to enhance legal supports for women experiencing poverty and violence and redress inequities between criminal law legal aid certificates issued to men and family law certificates issued to women.
6. Work with the Federal government to restore the Court Challenges Program.

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<sup>166</sup> See Shoshana Pollack *et al.*, "Women Charged with Domestic Violence in Toronto: The Unintended Consequences of Mandatory Charge Policies" (Toronto: Woman Abuse Council of Toronto, 2005) online: [www.womanabuse.ca](http://www.womanabuse.ca) many women report, including in our interviews, negative experiences with the police and/or their reluctance to involve the police based on past experience and they fear that as low income and/or racialized women, and/or women without immigration status, and/or women engaged in sex work, etc. they will not be believed and the violence will not be taken seriously, they fear counter-charging, they fear police abuses, they fear an escalation in violence, and they fear impoverishment if their intimate partners lose work

<sup>167</sup> Note that Newfoundland's poverty reduction plan includes the expansion of family law centres.

<sup>168</sup> Promising practices here include Sexual Assault Law courses at the University of Ottawa and the University of Victoria and the work of the Sexual Assault Steering Committee of Toronto at C.O. Bick College.

**It is recommended that:**

**6. The CCPR work with women's communities and groups to maximize opportunities for participation and leadership in finding lasting solutions to reduce poverty.**

**Action Steps:**

1. Promote and support community governance as a critical method to ensure effective community engagement at the local level.
2. Develop local action plans and committees in partnership with women, families and communities affected by poverty, to become active partners in determining the type and scope of support they need. Other partners should include service providers, coalitions, advocacy groups and inter-sectoral networks.
3. Develop and provide adequate resources and supports for peer networks/models.
4. Support locally organized and managed programs to foster community participation and leadership, accessibility and to better reach isolated communities.
5. Report back to the women's community within a specified time regarding the plans and actions taken to implement the poverty reduction strategy and the results achieved.

**It is recommended that:**

**7. The CCPR conduct research and evaluations to further understanding of the dynamics of women living in poverty and to inform and improve policy making.**

**Action Steps:**

1. Regularly collect and track quantitative and qualitative data on poverty as it impacts women. Data gathered should inform social policy and should include targets and indicators of housing, childcare, employment, education and training, health, and income programs. Further research and or evaluations should be undertaken to demonstrate outcomes and improvements in access to public services, housing, childcare, health and other supports for women; increased training and employment opportunities; reduced experiences of discrimination and stigma; increased security and reduced vulnerability to violence as reported by women; improved physical and mental health as reported by women and increased levels of women's participation and leadership in community activities to reduce poverty. Information gathered should attend to the differences between and among women and of their geographic location across Ontario.
2. Develop appropriate criteria to evaluate the poverty reduction strategy and demonstrate its effectiveness and impact on women and their families.
3. Educate those involved in policy-making about the needs, strengths and characteristics of women and mothers living in poverty.



## Appendix A

### Take Action Project Advisory Group Membership (September 18, 2008)

Linda Abrahams - WARC (Women's Art Resource Centre)  
Andalee Adamali – CASSA (Council of Agencies Serving South Asians)  
Margaret Alexander – Springtide Resources  
Beverly Bain - Women's Studies, Georgian College  
Debbie Ball – Faye Peterson Transition House  
Michelle Batty – Sexual Assault Support Centre Sarnia/Lambton  
Mandy Bonisteel – George Brown College  
Nancy Bradley - Jean Tweed Treatment Centre  
Sarah Bukhari – Ontario Literacy Coalition  
Kathy Campbell – New Starts For Women, Red Lake ON  
Kathryn Canfield – Canadian Hearing Society  
Sly Castaldi – Guelph Wellington Women in Crisis  
Michelle Coombs – Elizabeth Fry Society  
Cindy Cowan – Interim Place Mississauga  
Pamela Cross – Consultant  
Amanda Dale – YWCA, Toronto  
Zahra Dhanani – METRAC (Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children)  
Clare Freeman – Interval House of Hamilton  
Kara Gillies – Voices of Positive Women  
Maureen Giuliani - CUPE Ontario  
Avy Go – MTCSA (Metro Toronto Chinese South Asian) Legal Clinic  
Josephine Grey - LIFT (Low Income Families of Toronto)  
Beth Jordan – Adobe Consulting  
Sylvia Hall - OWN (Older Women's Network)  
Simone Hammond – Parkdale Community Health Centre  
Erin Harris – OWN (Older Women's Network)  
Irene Harris- OFL (Ontario Federation of Labour)  
Candace Hawke – Biminaawzogin Regional Aboriginal Women's Circle  
Val Hymen - Toronto Interfaith Social Council  
Deena Ladd – Workers' Action Centre  
Julie Maher – Ontario Women's Health Network  
Afua Marcus – OCASI (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants)  
Mary Marrone- Income Security Advocacy Centre  
Sudabeh Mashkuri - METRAC  
Robin Mason – Women's College Hospital  
Notisha Massaquoi – Women's Health in Women's Hands  
Denise Matthews – Orillia Native Women's Group  
Harmy Mendoza – WACT (Women Abuse Council of Toronto)  
Farah Miranda – No One is Illegal  
Cora McGuire – ONWA (Ontario Native Women's Association)

Barb McQuarrie – Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women and Children  
London, ON  
Sherri Mohammed – WomenNation  
Dilani Mohan – Miss G Project, Ottawa  
Eileen Morrow – OAITH (Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses)  
Christine Mounsteven – CPC (Canadian Pensioners Concerned)  
Alys Murphy – Ernestine’s Women’s Shelter  
Ayshia Musleh – Parkdale Community Health Centre  
Fran Odette – Springtide Resources  
Marilyn Oladimeji – OCRCC (Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres)  
Marianne Park. – DAWN (Disabled Women’s Network)  
Kim Pate – Elizabeth Fry Society (Ottawa)  
Cynthia Pay – Parkdale Community Legal Clinic  
Yasmeen Persad – Trans Programme 519 Church Street  
Huong Pham – Assaulted Women’s Helpline  
Gaetane Pharand – AOCVF (Action Ontarienne contre la violence fait aux femmes)  
Angela Robertson - Sistering  
Keisha Scott – Maggie’s: Sex Workers Organizing  
Kripa Sekhar – South Asian Women’s Centre  
Deborah Sinclair – Consultant  
Alesha Stevenson - For Youth Initiative  
Terry Swan – Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres  
Barbara Trudeau – Barrie Native Friendship Centre  
Anna Willats – Women against Poverty Collective  
Barbara Williams – WACT (Woman Abuse Council of Toronto)  
Jane Wilson – MicroSkills Development Centre