The Framing of Poverty as "Child Poverty" and Its Implications for Women

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ABSTRACT

This report examines the sources and implications of a focus on "child poverty" in state policy discourse in Canada over the last two decades. The author traces and documents the emergence of this emphasis and identifies a number of contributing factors and events. The report examines the interrelationship between women's poverty and that of children, and explores the implications of a governmental focus on child poverty in terms of reducing women's inequality and poverty. The dominant assumptions and norms underlying the framing of poverty as child poverty are identified and linked to policy responses to child poverty to date. The policies examined include the Federal Child Support Guidelines, the National Child Benefit and the Early Childhood Development Initiative of the National Children's Agenda. Finally, the report briefly examines a range of alternative discursive strategies in terms of their potential impact on women's experience of poverty and inequality.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CAP	Canada Assistance Plan
CCSD	Canadian Council on Social Development
CCTB	Canada Child Tax Benefit
CHST	Canada Health and Social Transfer
CICS	Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
CPAG	Child Poverty Action Group
CSPC	Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
CTB	Child Tax Benefit
ECC	Economic Council of Canada
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FLC	Federal/Provincial/Territorial Family Law Committee
FPTAC	Federal, Provincial and Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health
GDP	Gross domestic product
HRDC	Human Resources Development Canada
LICO	Low-income cut-off
LIM	Low-income measure
NAPO	National Anti-Poverty Organization
NAWL	National Association of Women and the Law
NCA	National Children's Agenda
NCB	National Child Benefit
NCW	National Council of Welfare
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NLCY	National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth
OSSN	Ontario Social Safety Network
SARCO	Social Assistance Review Committee

PREFACE

Good public policy depends on good policy research. In recognition of this, Status of Women Canada instituted the Policy Research Fund in 1996. It supports independent policy research on issues linked to the public policy agenda and in need of gender-based analysis. Our objective is to enhance public debate on gender equality issues in order to enable individuals, organizations, policy makers and policy analysts to participate more effectively in the development of policy.

The focus of the research may be on long-term, emerging policy issues or short-term, urgent policy issues that require an analysis of their gender implications. Funding is awarded through an open, competitive call for proposals. A non-governmental, external committee plays a key role in identifying policy research priorities, selecting research proposals for funding and evaluating the final reports.

This policy research paper was proposed and developed under a call for proposals in September 1999, on W*here have all the women gone? Changing shifts in policy discourses*. This report identifies contributing factors and events leading to a shift in focus on "child poverty" in state policy discourse in Canada over the last two decades. It examines the relationship between women's poverty and children's poverty and explores the implications of a governmental focus on child poverty in terms of reducing women's inequality and poverty. As a dominant approach to poverty, the focus on child poverty implies that adult poverty is not a matter of social concern, and can increase the blaming of mothers for child poverty in the absence of adequate supports for parenting.

Other research projects funded by Status of Women Canada on this theme examine issues such as discourses justifying the academic success and failure of girls and boys, policy discourses in the context of women abuse, illicit substance use and mental illness, and gender equality promotion strategies for regional planning, in the context of health reform.

A complete list of the research projects funded under this call for proposals is included at the end of this report.

We thank all the researchers for their contribution to the public policy debate.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last two decades, “child poverty” has emerged as a dominant focus for policy discourse on poverty at the federal and intergovernmental levels. This emergence of a focus on child poverty can be traced to the mid-1970s but was given momentum by an all-party resolution in the House of Commons in 1989 to eliminate poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000. In the 1990s, both Senate and House of Commons committees framed their examination of poverty in terms of child poverty, conducted hearings and issued recommendations. Since the mid-1990s, major federal or intergovernmental policy initiatives undertaken to address child poverty have included the Federal Child Support Guidelines, the National Child Benefit (NCB) and the broader National Children’s Agenda (NCA).

A state focus on child poverty is, in large part, a manifestation of restructuring as a discourse and policy orientation. Federal governments over the last two decades have adopted a policy emphasis on enhanced economic growth, as measured by the gross domestic product (GDP), and international competitiveness, reduced government spending, more targeted benefits and increased reliance on “work” incentives and individual responsibility. The framing of poverty as child poverty is consistent with this policy orientation to the extent that it narrows the definition of poverty as a social problem and thereby reduces expectations of the state. A focus on children also likely represents an attempt to allay concerns about the impact of changes in the traditional nuclear family that are related to economic restructuring. In response to increased economic insecurity, mothers with young children have dramatically increased their labour force participation. The increase in dual-earner and lone-parent households has raised concerns regarding the welfare of children in light of the lack of adequate social supports for parenting and a still widespread belief that the traditional nuclear family and full-time motherhood provide the best setting for rearing children.

Several other developments or events over the last two decades encouraged or reinforced a policy emphasis on child poverty. Attention to children’s rights has increased. Empirical research made the incidence and impact of poverty among children more visible and examined the impact of childhood poverty on adult outcomes. The women’s movement allowed for the separation of children from motherhood as the biological destiny of women. Fathers’ rights activism has promoted a gender-neutral discourse around parenting that has rendered the de facto primary caregiving of women less visible. Business groups and think-tanks kept the emphasis on economic growth and welfare reform, encouraging paid work and discouraging lone-parent households. Just as significantly, several anti-poverty groups deliberately adopted a child-centred advocacy strategy and developed an effective media campaign as a way of keeping poverty in some form on the policy agenda.

Since most children live with their mothers in two-parent or lone-parent households, a policy focus on child poverty has the potential to advance women’s equality or reduce women’s poverty. A child-centred approach to poverty, however, excludes women who are not and never will be mothers and does not address other forms of caregiving labour that women are disproportionately and increasingly responsible for (e.g., care of those who are elderly, disabled or sick). Moreover, even in relation to women who are or will be mothers, the

outcomes of a child poverty focus depend largely on how children's needs are interpreted and satisfied, and on how the causes of child poverty are identified and addressed.

The major policy solutions advanced to date at the federal and intergovernmental levels have not substantially reduced the incidence or depth of child poverty nor substantially addressed the costs of child rearing or the systemic causes of women's poverty. A review of the Federal Child Support Guidelines and the National Child Benefit suggests that the beneficiaries of these programs are generally those who can access employment income or support from a (typically male) breadwinner. The Guidelines define the "costs of children" in terms of actual monetary expenditures on children and exclude the hidden costs of child rearing that are borne disproportionately by women. Low-income women are also the least well served by this legislation by reason of the inability of low-income men to pay support, the inability to afford legal costs of claiming support and the clawback of child support from social assistance. Mothers in receipt of social assistance, even those with full- or part-time employment, receive no direct monetary benefit from the NCB Supplement due to the clawback of benefits from social assistance in most provinces. Many of the structural and discursive features of the NCB also combine to reinforce the exclusion and stigma attached to the receipt of social assistance for both mothers and their children. These features include the emphasis on work incentives, the visibility and effect of the clawback, as well as the notion of "taking children off welfare."

Although it is too early to predict the outcome of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Initiative of the National Children's Agenda (NCA), low-income women face several risks that can materialize as a result of inadequate funding, targeted programming, a lack of input into program design and evaluation, and an emphasis on parenting skills as opposed to developmental care. These risks include stereotyping and increased stigma, involuntary participation, invasions of privacy, and increased burdens and regulation.

The above policies manifest many of the underlying norms and assumptions identified in relation to restructuring discourse. They reflect a reliance primarily on market outcomes, mediated by the family and the voluntary sector. The reforms focus on individual behaviour in relation to the provision of support or labour market processes. Policy design and discourse do not account for, or adequately address, the implications of the de facto dependency of children on women and the impact of conditions in the low-wage labour market on poverty or child welfare. Overall, the reforms least benefit those women and children who are most disempowered and thereby most likely to need assistance. Mothers and children receiving social assistance will generally benefit least from the NCB and Guidelines and face the greatest risks under the ECD Initiative. Among those to benefit least from one or more of these programs are also likely a disproportionate proportion (relative to their representation in the population as a whole) of single mothers, those with a disability, recent immigrant mothers, Aboriginal, particularly urban Aboriginal mothers, and mothers identified as members of visible minorities, along with their children.

A framing of poverty as child poverty can contribute to these outcomes by limiting public understanding of poverty and the construction of adequate solutions. A state focus on child poverty implies that adult poverty is not a social concern but rather a matter for which the

individual is primarily responsible. A state focus on child poverty naturalizes state dependency by linking it to childhood and the age differential. Adult recipients of social assistance are thereby constructed as deviant or unnatural even though existing social conditions systematically generate adult dependency. Women, in particular, experience a derivative dependency as a result of the socially assigned responsibility for caring labour, a lack of affordable, accessible and high-quality child care, and discriminatory or exclusionary conditions within the labour market. A child poverty focus not only renders the intersecting structural causes of poverty less visible but also entrenches a focus on the helpless, passive and vulnerable victim. This focus motivates the charitable response of pity and rescue but also serves to insulate privilege from scrutiny and ultimately to encourage simplistic blaming responses.

Contrary to the hopes of anti-poverty activists, a child poverty focus does not avoid debates on deservingness. Rather, it raises questions about how and why parents are unable to, or unwilling to, support their children. These questions or assumptions are left unaddressed and uncontested. A child poverty focus is particularly helpless against the stereotyping of poor mothers as "bad mothers" who cannot manage their resources responsibly for the benefit of their children. Working class, single mothers, lesbian mothers and racialized mothers are most likely to be perceived or constructed as bad mothers as a result of racism, class inequality and deviation from the idealized heterosexual nuclear family form. In general, a child poverty focus either renders mothers, or the harms suffered by them, irrelevant or implicitly reduces them to the problem.

Women's groups should adopt a strategic vision that seeks to promote a shift in state discourse on poverty from a focus on pity and blame to one of social justice and respect. Such a strategic vision should encourage a united front against poverty partly by recognizing the different degrees to which specific groups of women and children are affected by poverty. The following general recommendations are made in a preliminary attempt to identify such a vision and to support existing efforts within women's anti-racist and anti-poverty activism that are consistent with such a vision.

1. Women's groups need to work to extend the dominant if not exclusive focus of governments on child poverty and present relief from poverty as a universal right.

2. Women's groups must acknowledge that child poverty is a significant component of poverty and that children have an independent entitlement to social provisions.

3. The links between child poverty and the intersecting structural inequalities and constraints affecting parents, particularly the impact of women's domestic labour, must be explicitly recognized in discussions of child poverty.

4. Women's groups must focus greater attention on the needs of those groups of women and children who have benefited least or are most adversely affected by governmental policies to date and resist, in particular, the exclusion and targeting of women receiving social assistance.

5. Women's groups need to seek the input of low-income mothers in the creation of poverty policy discourse, particularly women with a disability, Aboriginal women, and women who are immigrants or identified as members of visible minorities, and women in receipt of social assistance generally.

6. Women's groups must engage with the Children's Agenda as part of the solution to poverty in an effort to ensure that the relationship between child welfare and women's equality is recognized, that an emphasis on developmental care for all children within the ECD Initiative is adopted and that low-income mothers have meaningful input into the structure and evaluation of targeted early childhood development programs.

7. Women's groups should promote the extension of significant benefits under the NCB Supplement to households receiving social assistance.

8. Women's groups need to focus increased attention on conditions within the low-wage labour market in an effort to make visible the contradictions experienced predominantly by women and displace the perceived opposition between the "working" and the "welfare" poor.

9. Women's groups must continue to make links between the experience of women domestically and internationally, and continue to expose Canada's failure to meet its international obligations under human rights treaties and agreements.

The following major recommendations are directed to governments and state officials.

10. State discourse needs to recognize the implications of international human rights obligations, particularly the significance of social and economic rights in relation to poverty.

11. State discourse must acknowledge the reality and harms of adult poverty, and address the intersecting structural causes of adult poverty.

12. Acknowledge child poverty as a significant component of poverty and address it in the context of, or as it is connected to, the intersecting structural causes of poverty.

13. Policy makers need to work to change the negative construction of mothers receiving social assistance and seek to reduce the stigma and marginalization.

14. The needs of, and stigma experienced by, mothers and children receiving social assistance must be partially addressed by extending the NCB Supplement to provide such households with significant monetary benefits.

15. The National Children's Agenda should promote the provision of affordable, universally accessible and reliable developmental care for children.

16. Provide mothers, whose children are affected, with meaningful input into the formulation, implementation and evaluation of programs under the National Children's Agenda.

17. Give low-income mothers an increased role in the creation of poverty policy discourse, and identify their needs in relation to existing educational institutions, families, workplaces and welfare reform policies.

18. Pay increased policy attention to the implications of "market dependency," the conditions of low-wage labour and the ways in which state support can moderate adverse impacts on both parents and children.

1. INTRODUCTION

Most policy analysts would likely agree that, during the 1980s and 1990s, media and government officials and policy makers increasingly discussed poverty in terms of "child poverty." The emergence of a focus on children's experiences of poverty can be traced to the 1970s but gained momentum when the House of Commons passed a unanimous all-party resolution to "seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000" (House of Commons 1989: 6173). Over the 1990s, child poverty emerged as a dominant frame for state discourse on poverty. In the early 1990s, committees of the Senate and the House of Commons conducted hearings into, and issued reports on, child poverty. Faced with increasing poverty rates in the 1990s, provincial premiers cited child poverty as "one of the most critical social policy issues facing Canada".[1] By the end of the decade, governments had undertaken major social policy initiatives such as the Federal Child Support Guidelines, the National Child Benefit (NCB) and the National Children's Agenda (NCA) with the explicit objective of reducing child poverty or diminishing its effects.

Child poverty represents a particular way of dealing with and constructing social inequality as a social problem. Poverty discourse generally distinguishes "the poor" from the "non-poor," defining the former as a distinctive group to be examined and explained (Saraga 1998). As poverty has commonly been statistically defined in Canada, the rate of child poverty represents the percentage of children that in any given year are living in households that have incomes below the low-income cut-off (LICO) identified by Statistics Canada. Using the pre-tax LICO as a poverty measure, 19 percent of children lived in poverty in Canada in 1998 (Statistics Canada 2000a). Using the low-income measure (LIM), or one half of the median income, the child poverty rate in Canada is lower but is still high relative to that of other industrialized countries. According to a recent study by the United Nations Children's Fund (2000), Canada ranked 17th out of 23 industrialized countries in terms of the percentage of children living on incomes that were less than half the national median. Canada's child poverty rate was 15.5% compared to Sweden's rate of 2.6%.

This report reflects, and is based on, a twofold premise. First, no one should be poor. Second, poverty is a social condition that governments should eradicate. The state's responsibility to protect its citizens from poverty and discrimination is reflected in several international accords to which Canada is a signatory. These accords include the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women*, the *International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination* and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Jackman and Porter 1999). The entitlement to social assistance on the basis of need was also recognized in the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) before it was displaced by the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) (Day and Brodsky 1998). The provision of adequate food, clothing and shelter, as well as opportunities to participate socially and productively, are matters of social and economic justice (e.g., Young 1990; Reiman 1990). Structural disadvantages and forms of oppression that systematically produce poverty and substantive inequality of opportunity should be recognized and addressed.

The objective of this report is not to demonstrate why an end to poverty is a matter of social and economic justice. Rather, the central objective is to trace the emergence of a focus on child poverty in state discourse on poverty over the last two decades and to identify the causes and potential implications of this change for women as a group.

The following research questions are addressed.

- Why and how has state discourse around poverty changed since the mid-1970s? What factors account for the pronounced shift to child poverty over the last decade?

- What have been the implications of this shift in policy discourse for low-income women and the different groups of women experiencing poverty, particularly with reference to policies aimed at addressing child poverty (e.g., the Federal Child Support Guidelines, the National Child Benefit and the Early Childhood Development Initiative of the National Children's Agenda)?

- How can women's groups better respond to this shift with a view to advancing equality for women or reducing women's poverty?

It is important to account for the appeal of child poverty as a focus of discourse on poverty and to be cognizant of its potential long-term implications. How a problem is defined helps shape or influence solutions to some degree, although the connection between a discursive frame and the formation of policy is usually mediated by many other discourses. At a minimum, a discursive frame may be important in defining what is perceived as a "social problem" and in generating new cultural norms and understandings of these problems. How issues are defined or framed is important in the construction or reinforcement of dominant social meanings or ideologies.

One central argument in this report is that the framing of poverty as child poverty by governments can make it more difficult to challenge structural barriers and eradicate poverty. This particular way of addressing poverty can reinforce a number of dominant ideologies about work, family and notions of deservingness that attribute poverty to individual or family (mis)behaviour. By ideology, I refer to the tacit norms, assumptions and beliefs that influence perception, an understanding of experience and practice, and the formation of values, meaning and identity.

> Whether or not they are self-consciously recognized, ideologies affect what explanations of events we are likely to accept or reject, what aspects of social relations we tend to regard as natural, normal or essential, and what alternative visions of the world we are prepared to consider as reasonable or realistic (Philipps and Young 1995: 247-248).

As Terry Eagleton (1991) has noted, to have this impact, ideologies must make at least some sense of people's experience and engage significantly with their desires, hopes and needs. Ideologies can also involve systematic distortions, false beliefs and mystification. Like Philipps and Young, by "discourse" I generally refer to the language and institutional

practices through which ideologies are expressed. Discourses organize and construct truth and knowledge at any given time and place. Although discourses are also a site of social struggle in terms of what counts as truth, ideology more directly discloses the relationship between the belief systems expressed through language in a particular discursive context and material conditions of power. The discourses of poverty and welfare reform, through the use of the words "dependency," "work" and "private," for example, express certain ideologies. In welfare reform discourse, "work" generally signifies only paid or market labour, bscuring socially useful forms of unpaid labour such as domestic labour or child care. Terms, such as "dependency" and "private," also reflect and reinforce an ideology of individualism. The belief that individuals are, or should be, primarily responsible for life outcomes legitimizes existing market outcomes and unequal distributions of wealth. Ideologies can thus indirectly reflect and help to reproduce historical and contemporary differentials in power among social groups.

Governments can influence the construction of social meaning and the reinforcement of particular ideologies by defining problems or framing debates in particular ways. The focus of this report is on poverty discourse that emanates from federal agencies, debates or reports as well as intergovernmental advisory and ministerial reports. Even though most areas of social policy related to poverty fall within provincial jurisdiction, the federal government has played a major role in terms of funding and leadership. Throughout this report, I refer to child poverty as either a focus or a frame of state discourse on poverty. I use the term "frame" to both emphasize the extent to which child poverty has been the dominant, if not exclusive, focus of state discourse on poverty in the 1990s and to suggest that this focus has limited what could be discussed or heard in relation to poverty. Government discourse on poverty is, I will argue, closely linked to, and influenced by, state discourse on welfare reform and restructuring. However, state discourse is not monolithic and a number of discourses are influential in shaping policy, particularly expert or scientific discourses such as economics, statistics and psychology (Boyd 1994: 62). Relative to other discursive sites, state discourse may be particularly potent in shaping public consciousness and social attitudes. Norms or ideologies generated or reinforced by state discourse can also become embedded in concrete policies and institutional practices.

Because of the close relationship between women's poverty and that of children, it is particularly important to examine the meanings and implications for women, of state discourse on child poverty. Several feminist writers have noted a displacement or marginalization of women's interests or concerns in public policy discourse in Canada over the last decade (Brodie 1995). In her recent book, Judy Rebick (2000: 70) suggested that, at a general policy level, what were previously identified as women's issues are now being defined as children's issues.

> The Speech from the Throne in October 1999 barely mentioned women, even though maternity leave and childcare, two of the highlighted issues, have been top priorities for the women's movement for decades. Now they are both defined as children's issues. It is almost as if "woman" has become as dirty a political word as "feminist."

The redefinition of women's issues as issues pertaining to children is not necessarily problematic. Freiler et al. (2001: 3) recently argued that "the goal of gender equality can be compatible with a focus on children." A primary concern, however, is whether children's issues are being defined or conceptualized in a way that separates and disconnects them from women's experience of inequality, rendering that experience and its impacts less visible (Boyd 1997: 23). The separate identification of, and emphasis on, children's issues can, for example, reinforce assumptions of gender equality. Such assumptions can obscure the disproportionate dependency of children on the child-care labour of women and its adverse economic implications for both women and children.

Child-centred discourse has particular appeal in anti-poverty campaigns because of the numerous ways in which the reality and hardship of poverty can be denied and avoided by blaming people in poverty for their own impoverishment. A child poverty focus can be seen as a way of moving the policy agenda beyond disputes about deservingness while simultaneously advancing more broadly based policy initiatives. Child poverty challenges, to some degree, the fairness of existing distributions of wealth and income, and appeals to a sense of social responsibility for children. Women may also indirectly benefit from state efforts to reduce child poverty because most children live with their mothers in either two-parent or lone-parent households. A "gendered perspective on child poverty" suggests that measures taken to relieve child poverty can relieve women's poverty because women's inequality is so closely connected with motherhood and child rearing (Freiler and Cerny 1998).

In this report, I evaluate these arguments and identify and assess the risks related to a focus on child poverty. I also assess the extent to which these risks are reflected and reinforced by policy solutions adopted in relation to child poverty. In general, I identify how women's groups can respond to child-centred discourse and avoid or minimize its potential risks or limitations. I argue that there is a need to broaden state discourse on poverty beyond the subject of children, but a children's agenda should be pursued as part of the solution to poverty.

The information used in this report is primarily drawn from an extensive literature review up to September 2001, although some information is derived from interviews with government officials and anti-poverty activists between 1998 and 2001. The report consists of five additional chapters. In Chapter 2, I identify the contextual and specific factors that produced or contributed to a child poverty focus in poverty discourse. While a detailed historical analysis is beyond the scope of this report, it is important to show how social, political and economic changes since the mid-1970s have shaped or influenced this framing of poverty. I place particular emphasis on the process of restructuring and interrelated changes in labour markets, family relations and state policy. However, I also suggest that a number of specific factors contributed to, or reinforced, this development including a child-centred advocacy strategy that, at a time of increasing desperation and government cutbacks, targeted child poverty as a way of keeping poverty on the policy agenda.

In Chapter 3, I examine the interrelationship between women's experience of poverty and that of children and identify the systemic causes of women's inequality and poverty. In this

chapter, I begin to explore the extent to which a focus on children's poverty would or could address the poverty and inequality experienced by women. In Chapter 4, I examine why and how child poverty succeeds in arousing public sympathy and make explicit the assumptions about poverty that are implicitly relied on and reinforced. I identify the ways in which the focus on child poverty may be useful but also try to make explicit how it colludes with elements of restructuring and welfare reform discourse and underlying ideologies, accounting, in large measure, for its broader appeal and resonance. The risks identified are, in large part, ideological and relate to (mis)shaping perceptions and understandings of poverty that limit the range of possible and desirable solutions. Social constructions can, however, have real implications for the lives and well-being of women who live in poverty in terms of both their economic and cultural statuses.

In Chapter 5, I review the policy initiatives undertaken at the federal level in response to the problem of child poverty. Governments have not adopted the broad-ranging solutions advocated by child poverty activists. Although empirical evidence on the precise impact of policies, such as the Federal Child Support Guidelines and the National Child Benefit, will not be available for several years, it is possible to identify the major structural and discursive features of these policies and to highlight their likely effects on women. These policies clearly help to reduce and prevent poverty for some women and children, but they also have varying impacts for different groups of women and children. Monetary benefits under these programs largely depend on women's attachment to either the labour force or another private source of income, typically a male breadwinner. Although the Early Childhood Development Initiative is still being developed in most provinces, I try to highlight some potential risks for low-income women depending on the design of the programming undertaken. Overall, I suggest the risks identified in a child poverty focus are manifest in, and likely reinforced by, the design of social policy reforms enacted to date.

A number of related or alternative discursive strategies are examined in Chapter 6. I explore strategies in this chapter that can shift the response to poverty from one of pity and rescue, the dominant response to the image of the impoverished child, to a response based on respect and social justice. In particular, I address the need to contest dominant discourses and increase participation in the creation of a poverty discourse. I also explore the question of whether a children's agenda can or should be displaced, and emphasize the importance of an inclusive women's agenda in combatting poverty. In terms of specific anti-poverty discursive strategies, I briefly examine a shift to "child and family poverty," critiques of "market dependency" and the use of rights discourse. In the final chapter, I identify a number of policy recommendations that are implicitly, if not explicitly, supported by this report.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF THE FRAMING OF POVERTY AS CHILD POVERTY

This chapter traces the emergence of a focus on child poverty by government officials and policy makers. I illustrate and attempt to account for the emergence and dominance of this particular framing of poverty at the federal and intergovernmental levels. A consciousness of the impact of poverty on children developed over a number of years. It was first noted in the early 1970s and became a frame for state discourse on poverty from the late 1980s through the 1990s.

In the brief sketch that follows, I argue that a focus on child poverty in state discourse was the outcome of a number of specific factors. State officials were responding to an increasing respect or concern for children as individuals with rights. During the last two decades, empirical evidence on the existence and impact of child poverty became increasingly available and established that the rate of child poverty was rising in Canada. Certain social movements, and advocacy and interest groups have also had an impact on public consciousness and the visibility of child poverty.

As importantly, I suggest that the dominance of a child poverty focus in state discourse reflects a restructuring process undertaken by governments over the last two decades. A focus on child poverty is consistent with a new policy emphasis on market outcomes and individual responsibility, a policy orientation toward targeting benefits and a pronounced concern with "work" incentives. The focus on child poverty also likely represents a response to concerns generated by changes in the labour market and family relations that are a product of, or related to, restructuring. These changes have provided the context for, and facilitated the emergence of, a narrower child-centred framing of poverty. They have also shaped the terms in which child poverty itself has been discussed.

Restructuring Discourse and Policy: Changes in the Labour Market, Family Forms and the Welfare State

A number of changes in the social, economic and cultural environment in Canada since the mid-1970s influenced the emergence of a child poverty focus. These changes are linked to a greater degree of global economic integration achieved largely through technological change and a process of restructuring undertaken by governments and financial institutions (Bakker 2000; Abell 2001). In developing countries and formerly planned economies, this process has been virtually enforced through conditions attached to loans by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other financial institutions. Many industrialized countries have also undertaken a restructuring of their economies and state relations, most notably Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. This process of restructuring or structural adjustment has been referred to as "neo-liberal" because its hallmark has been increased reliance on the market as both an allocative and distributive mechanism, a characteristic of laissez-faire liberalism in the 19th century. Neo-liberal policies have included trade liberalization and the formation of regional trading blocks, the deregulation of industries, fiscal cutbacks, a greater emphasis on "work" incentives and targeted intervention, the deregulation or refusal to further regulate the labour market and, more recently, tax cuts.

In Canada, restructuring as a discourse and policy orientation can be traced to the 1970s, but was clearly embraced by the Mulroney Government in the 1980s and maintained by the Liberal Government in the 1990s (Brodie 1996; Haddow 1993; Guest 1997). Government leaders presented this policy orientation as an inevitable outcome of a decline in productivity growth, more integrated markets internationally and a growing national debt. The debt in particular was presented as a compelling reason to cut social programs despite evidence the debt was largely the result of tax expenditures, high interest rate policies and high unemployment, and that spending cuts could have long-term social and economic costs.[2]

As Brodie (1996) noted, governments since the 1980s have generally pursued a market-driven development strategy and abandoned a commitment to full employment and inclusive or universal social safety nets. Central to restructuring discourse and policy has been an emphasis on economic growth through capital accumulation and increased productivity, with economic growth measured largely by increases in the gross domestic product (GDP). Although the state has been very involved in this process, restructuring discourse presents the market as a self-regulating natural source of growth, and individual well-being as a concern primarily of the individual, the household or the voluntary sector.

Income security policies in Canada have clearly reflected a shift toward reliance on market outcomes and a reduced emphasis on the state's role in meeting basic needs through social programs. Policy changes at the federal level have included an emphasis on individual work incentives (through changes to Unemployment/Employment Insurance), reduced government spending through more targeted benefits and a reduced federal commitment to a minimal income floor. The federal government imposed a ceiling on payments under the Canada Assistance Plan in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario in 1990 and replaced CAP in 1995 with block funding under the Canada Health and Social Transfer. Under the CHST, the federal government dramatically cut funding for social programs and abandoned provision of social assistance as a matter of federal interest. The CHST eliminated pro rata funding (reducing the incentive for provinces to fund social assistance relative to health and education) and removed the statutory entitlement to provision on the basis of need as a condition of funding. Critics argued that these changes cleared the way for the expansion of workfare programs, adversely affected women and represented a fundamental shift away from the notion of social entitlement to relief from poverty and provision based on need (Jackman 1995; Day and Brodsky 1998). Provincial governments have also implemented cuts to the public sector, to social assistance and to social justice programs. Cuts to social services and the shift to privatization have been particularly marked in Alberta and Ontario. According to Brodie (1996), the primary thrust of restructuring discourse has been to reduce expectations of what the state can do and to construct the ordinary citizen as someone who does not make claims on the state.

The process of restructuring has been under way at a time of labour market change and increasing economic insecurity for most Canadians. These changes have been attributed to technological advances and to the restructuring process itself, among other factors. In the 1980s, economists noted a pronounced shift away from employment in manufacturing to employment in the service sector and a polarization of "good" and "bad" jobs (ECC 1990). Of particular note has been the increase in non-standard work (part-time, temporary and contract work) and self-employment. Real hourly earnings have not increased since 1994

(Vanier Institute 2001). The minimum wage, in particular, has fallen substantially in real terms. Between 1976 and 1995, the real value of the minimum wage declined by 25% to 30% in almost every province, except British Columbia and Ontario (Schellenberg and Ross 1997: 41-42). High unemployment rates, spurred by the high interest rate policies of the Bank of Canada, also persisted throughout most of the 1990s. The federal government's restructuring of Unemployment/Employment Insurance in the mid-1990s resulted in a dramatic decline in eligibility for benefits and increased social assistance rolls.

During this period, the labour force participation of women, including women with young children, increased substantially. This development has resulted from challenges to traditional gender roles and the need to stabilize household income.[3] Between 1989 and 1993, average real incomes steadily dropped, then rose gradually after 1993 only to exceed the average 1989 income in 1998.[4] However, the improvement in average household income in 1998 was due entirely to longer hours of work and the fact that more family members were in the paid labour force (Vanier Institute 2001). The higher labour force participation of women increased women's control over income, but because women disproportionately perform unpaid caring labour, particularly child care, it has also increased the contradictions women experience between paid and unpaid work. Government cutbacks have hurt women workers directly through layoffs in the public sector. Government downsizing has also offloaded responsibilities for the care of sick and elderly individuals onto women and increased their unpaid labour in the domestic sphere or their low-paid work in private enterprise (Morris et al. 1999).

Increasing evidence suggests that global restructuring has had its harshest impact on women and on people living in poverty (Rittich 2000; Bakker 1994; Abell 2001). Over the last decade, the gap between rich and poor has widened as the incomes of Canadians become increasingly polarized. Between 1989 and 1998 for instance, the average annual income of the top 40% of family households rose while the bottom 60% experienced a drop in income. The income share of the poorest 20% of households declined 5.2% while that of the top 20% increased 6.6% (Vanier Institute 2001). Poverty rates, as defined by pre-tax LICOs, were high in the recession ending in 1984, declined to 1989, then increased significantly up to 1996. Rates fell only marginally between 1996 and 1998. The depth of poverty for low-income households has remained relatively constant since 1984 — between 32% and 34% of the LICO. Over the same period, non-low-income households have moved from an average of 126.3% above the LICO to 152.0%, reflecting again the increased disparity in income levels among Canadians (Canada 2000c: 7).

Restructuring discourse and policy marks a significant change from the more proactive welfare-oriented approach of the 1960s (Brodie 1996). However, it should also be noted that a residual liberal welfare state is consistent with much of Canadian tradition and history (Guest 1997).[5] Poverty rates were also high during the 1960s and '70s,[6] though programs such as Old Age Security, the Guaranteed Annual Income and the Quebec/Canada Pension Plan significantly reduced the poverty of the elderly. In his study of 18 capitalist democratic states, Gosta Epsing-Anderson (1990) characterized the Canadian state as fundamentally residual and liberal in character because the provision of needs has been met largely through the market or family. Government assistance has been largely targeted to the most needy or

socially disadvantaged, and universal or social insurance programs have been modest relative to Scandinavian or European states where publicly funded income maintenance or service programs cover all or most of the population.[7] In his historical study of the *Canada Assistance Act* and the Social Security Review of the mid-1970s, Haddow (1993) argued that the historical heritage of Canada as a liberal welfare state conditions the ideological and pragmatic responses of policy makers. (See also Guest 1997.) He also described the Canadian state, relative to many other capitalist democratic states, as weak and fragmented in terms of its ability to undertake systemic broad policy measures because the state is decentralized along jurisdictional lines (with jurisdiction for social welfare at the provincial level) and along departmental lines. He noted that the Department of Finance had already emerged in the 1970s as "the dominant department in the Canadian state" and was increasingly instrumental in securing a market-oriented strategy and using the tax system to deliver income security benefits (Haddow 1993: 17).

Canada's historical background and the restructuring process under way since the mid-1970s have provided a context that facilitated the emergence of child poverty as a narrower frame for state discourse on poverty. Governments face a potential problem when they adopt a model of individual responsibility because children cannot credibly be held responsible for their own poverty and are perceived as "naturally" dependent. Anti-poverty activists in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States have attempted to use this apparent contradiction to focus attention on the problem of poverty and social redistribution. Whether these efforts have been effective is questionable, as discussed in chapters 4 and 5, because a child poverty focus, in important ways, manifests and reinforces the ideologies reflected in restructuring discourse. A narrower focus or framework for poverty is consistent with reduced expectations on the state. The focus on children rather than adults supports the view that adults should be responsible for their own well-being. Implicit in this is the notion that impoverished adults are undeserving of the rewards and benefits that are unequally distributed by the market.

The state focus on children in the poverty context also reflects a more generalized shift toward child-centred discourse in family and social policy. This shift, in turn, reflects a number of changes in family life and practice that have been generated by the restructuring process. Although this process targets the market, it inevitably affects the household, because the market and family are profoundly interdependent in market economies (Rittich 2000; Bakker 2000). The most significant change has been the increased labour force participation of mothers with children. Although the traditional nuclear family involving a male breadwinner and dependent wife/homemaker and children is still held as the ideal setting for rearing children, it "no longer defines so exclusively what it is like to live in a family, or what a family *is*" (Silva and Smart 1999: 4). Indeed, in 1997, only 22% of two-parent households with at least one child under 16 had one parent in the labour force and another as a full-time homemaker (Statistics Canada 2000b: 110). Other changes reflecting women's increased labour force participation include delayed childbirth and a declining birth rate (an average of 1.2 per household in 1996) (Statistics Canada 2000b: 30, 34, 36).

We have also witnessed an increasing number of other family forms: more common-law households, lone-parent households, step-families and more openness in terms of gay and

lesbian unions. The divorce rate has increased significantly since the 1970s, in part because of more liberal divorce laws, although it has been falling since the late 1980s (Statistics Canada 2000b: 32). Lone-parent households represent 19% of all households with children, and most are headed by women who are divorced or separated (Statistics Canada 2000b: 32-33). All these changes are linked to concerns about the welfare of children. The increase in dual-earner families and lone parenthood has reduced the available time for parenting and has increased stress for households with children, given the lack of accessible, high quality and affordable day care. These changes also reflect challenges to dominant ideologies regarding the nuclear family and full-time motherhood. Thus, a state focus on children can also represent an attempt to allay concerns regarding the impact of these developments on children.

Nikolas Rose (1990: 121) noted that "[c]hildhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence" and that the health and welfare of children have in various ways been linked "to the destiny of the nation and the responsibilities of the state." Historically, state interest in children has often been more direct and prominent when faced with anxieties about the future of the nation, for example, during periods of war. At times of pronounced economic and social change as well as political uncertainty, a renewed expression of interest in children has symbolic value as a reaffirmation of hope and a commitment to the survival of the nation. In the Canadian context over the last two decades, appeals to the image of children have likely also attempted to defuse anxiety about the political state of the nation. A focus on children can appeal to and foster unity among Canadians as citizens and politicians in the face of the threat of Quebec's separation, jurisdictional disputes over social policy and its funding, and ideological differences. The general subject of children is perceived as less divisive than other political issues. It is noteworthy that all members of the House of Commons supported the resolution seeking to end child poverty on November 24, 1989 and that the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* has been widely ratified — though not widely enforced — among member states of the United Nations. As evident in George W. Bush's campaign slogan, "No Child Left Behind," children have been used as rhetoric to serve a variety of different political agendas.[8]

In summary, restructuring and related changes in the labour market and the family have contributed to a focus on children in poverty discourse. A shrinking conception of poverty is consistent with a shrinking welfare state. Other factors, however, have also been instrumental in encouraging or reinforcing this shift.

Children's Rights and International Scrutiny

While state rhetoric about children may be more pronounced during periods of social and economic turmoil, state rhetoric also reflects changing social conceptions of childhood and children. The view that children are primarily extensions or appendages of their parents is still widespread in Western culture. This view has, however, been increasingly challenged by the notion that children are individuals in their own right who have separate interests and are entitled to respect. Although children may still legally be subject to physical punishment by their parents or guardians in Canada, physical punishment itself has become controversial and is not recommended by government authorities. Increasing attention to the poverty

experienced by children, to some degree, reflects a change in the general social status of children.

Increasing international attention to the rights and needs of children since the 1970s has helped generate interest in the situation and needs of children domestically. On many occasions over the past century, the United Nations has adopted instruments that affirmed the rights of children or set standards for their treatment. In 1959, the United Nations adopted a non-binding resolution in the form of the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*. In the late 1970s, the Polish delegation to the United Nations, supported by Eastern European states, proposed a binding treaty or convention on children's rights (Van Bueren 1994: 25). The UN subsequently declared 1979 the International Year of the Child and began drafting a convention. In 1989, the UN issued 10-year anniversary statements regarding the status of children's rights and on November 20, 1989, the General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. This Convention was referenced repeatedly in debates in the House of Commons on the elimination of child poverty on November 24, 1989 (Debates, 1989). Canada ratified the Convention after extensive consultation with the provinces and territories in December 1991. Article 14 of the Convention explicitly recognizes the "right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development."

In October 1990, then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney co-chaired the World Summit for Children held in New York, which issued the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and its Plan of Action. Canada at this time had one of the highest child poverty rates of all industrialized nations, a fact that was publicly highlighted to the embarrassment of the Mulroney Government. The Summit motivated a rhetorical focus on children and a commitment by national governments to develop action plans that could "improve the lives of children throughout the world" (Canada 1992a: 1). The Minister of National Health and Welfare established the Children's Bureau to monitor and co-ordinate Canada's response to the World Declaration. In the Speech from the Throne in May 1991, the Government of Canada again expressed a commitment to developing an action plan that would "improve the education, protection and nurturing of Canada's children" (Canada 1992a: 1).[9] In 1992, the government issued its action plan for children which identified "reducing children living in low-income circumstances and preventing conditions of risk to children" as two areas of highest priority (Canada 1992a: 41).

The government's plan identified five central issues relevant to child poverty: employment and labour market conditions, social assistance (the increase in housing costs and increased usage of food banks), the need for a better integrated system of income supports, support services, such as early childhood development, and the increase in lone-mother families. Initiatives to deal with child poverty were also identified, the most prominent being a child benefit that was described as "a step toward focusing social policy and income security measures on families with the greatest need, while simplifying our system of family and child benefits"(Canada 1992a: 42). Other initiatives mentioned included a child development initiative to ensure that "children have a good start in the early stages of their lives" (Canada 1992a: 43) (including community oriented projects, research, education of parents), increased enforcement of child support orders and criminal enforcement of

prohibitions against child pornography. These initiatives, which notably did not include labour market reform or more universal programs, remained central to governmental approaches to child poverty over the course of the 1990s.

Empirical Research and Justifications for a Focus on Child Poverty

While empirical research can represent a response to shifts in policy discourse and orientation, it can also facilitate or reinforce particular shifts by making particular social impacts more visible.

Several anti-poverty activists attribute the beginnings of a consciousness of the impact of poverty on children to the publication of *Poor Kids* by the National Council of Welfare in 1975.[10] This publication constituted the first attempt in Canada to identify the impact of poverty on children. The report pulled together research from work on Head Start in the United States and identified gaps in what was then known about child poverty in Canada. The report itemized the increased risks for children living in poverty and the apparent correlations between poverty and poor health, lower educational performance and charges of delinquency. By applying poverty lines to census data, the Council found that a large number of children were then living in poverty — 24.5% of all children with the highest levels of child poverty in Newfoundland (45.3%) and Saskatchewan (38.4%). In 1979, the National Council of Welfare also released a report on the child welfare system.[11]

In 1980, Statistics Canada began to record systematically the number and percentage of children living in households with pre-tax incomes below the LICO (the unofficial poverty line). This practice made it possible to trace the rate of child poverty, and indicated that the incidence of child poverty had increased from 15.8% to almost 21% in 1984, dropped to 15.3% in 1989 before climbing to 21.1% in 1996 (Statistics Canada 1999a). The release of the database used in the Luxembourg Income Study in 1987 also made it possible to compare income distributions and transfers across industrialized countries. Using the low income measure (below half the median income), Canada emerged with a relatively high rate of poverty for families with children compared to Germany and Sweden: 17.7% compared to 8.8% and 4.7% respectively. Ed Broadbent noted that a 1989 report by Statistics Canada highlighting the issue of child poverty had stimulated his motion before the House of Commons (House of Commons 1989: 6173).

The cumulative result of this research was the “discovery” of a large number of children living in low-income households. Empirical research on the increasing incidence of divorce also brought to light the increased number of single mothers with children living in poverty that some researchers dubbed the “feminization of poverty.” Statistical and quantitative research on single mothers and welfare reform, much of it from the United States and most of it dealing with the impact of welfare on employment incentives or the impact of lone parenthood on child outcomes, has proliferated over the last two or three decades. More recently, the National Population Health Survey and the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth that is tracking the development of over 22,000 children since 1994-95, are providing extensive sources of data on child well-being in Canada.

Has the empirical research brought to light a justification for the policy focus on children's experiences of poverty? In 1997, the low-income rate of 19.8% for children in Canada was higher than the rate of 16.4% for adults between 18 and 65 years of age, and somewhat higher than the rate of 18.7% for adults over 65 (Statistics Canada 1999a). The higher risk of poverty for this age group reflects, in part, the impact of high unemployment and restructuring on young families.[12] The child poverty rate also climbed from 15.3% in 1989 to a high of 21.1% in 1996 and remained high at 18.8% in 1998 compared to other industrialized countries. These rates exclude poverty rates among children on reserves and in the Northwest Territories. Rates of child poverty are higher in Aboriginal communities than in other sectors of the population because of a high rate of poverty in the Aboriginal population and because a much greater percentage of the Aboriginal population is under 25 than in the population as a whole. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People reported that 56% of the Aboriginal population in 1996 was under 24 years of age compared with 35% of the general population and that relatively higher birth rates have meant a higher growth rate in the Aboriginal population (Canada 1996: v. 2, 803, 931). These facts suggest that child poverty cannot be ignored as a significant component of poverty and an even more significant component of poverty for Aboriginal people.

Although the child poverty rate is undoubtedly high, it should be noted that the birth rate overall in Canada has been declining. Moreover, children under age 18 are not and have never been the largest group living in poverty in Canada. In 1998, 1,274,000 children were living in households under the pre-tax LICO compared to 3,782,000 adults (Statistics Canada 2000a).

Corak and Heisz (1996) suggested that, while children constitute only a minority of the poor population, they may constitute a disproportionate percentage of the chronically or persistently poor and thereby experience more extended periods of poverty. Data available from the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics suggest that 38% of all people living in lone-parent households, 12% of all children under 6, 23% of unattached individuals, 6% of seniors and 6% of couples with children experienced poverty for at least four years in Canada between 1993 and 1998 (Morisette and Zhang 2001). The authors correctly noted that four years is a long time in the life of a child, and that there is a differential risk between children under 6 and seniors. However, these children and lone parents generally constitute a small percentage of the overall population that experiences persistent poverty. Finnie's study (2000) of the low-income population from 1992 to 1996 showed that of those identified as the chronically or long-run poor, 55.8% were unattached individuals (excluding students) and about 43.5% were individuals with children. Of the latter, 15.9% were single mothers and 26.7% were attached individuals. Finnie's study did not identify the number of children affected but it seems clear that children do not constitute a disproportionate percentage of the chronically poor.[13] Rather, Finnie's (2000: 31) study suggested that unattached individuals comprise the single largest low-income group both in the long run and in any single year.

Corak and Heisz (1996: 5) alternatively suggested that child poverty is important because it can have longer-term implications than the experience of poverty at other life stages.

> Being raised in a poor family somehow predisposes individuals to a lifetime of poverty: child poverty begets child poverty. In this sense, child poverty is an important element in the development of an "underclass" or a "culture of poverty", and as such should be at the centre of policy development.

Although Corak and Heisz (1996: 15) identified a significant degree of intergenerational income mobility, their study found that men with fathers in the top 25% of the income distribution are much more likely themselves to be within the top 25% while those with fathers in the lowest 25% of the income distribution were more likely to remain there themselves. Corak and Heisz suggested that these results support the importance attached to fighting child poverty. Finnie (2000: 33), in his study of persistent poverty, also advocated "beginning at the beginning," trying to extend initiatives back to childhood "since the first years of life are where many of the most basic problems seem to originate."

Research on the impact of poverty on children's life experiences and chances has shown significant correlations between families under the pre-tax LICO and harmful outcomes for children. These outcomes include higher infant mortality, low birth weight, a higher risk of health concerns, cognitive and behavioural problems, and lower levels of educational development (FPTAC 1999: 14, 31, 43; Ross and Roberts 1999). Numerous factors may explain these outcomes. Low-income children are apt to live in housing conditions that are cold, damp and badly in need of repair, or overcrowded. Because poverty is increasingly spacialized or geographically concentrated, they are more likely to live in neighbourhoods that are located near hazardous wastes or high traffic density, or that have higher levels of crime. Children in low-income households are more likely to have lower levels of nutrition owing to a diet that has fewer fresh vegetables and fruit, and lower-quality meat products. Poor children are more likely to have fewer recreational opportunities and more likely to experience low-quality day care (low worker/child ratios). As a result of housing shortages and instability, they are more likely to experience a number of environmental changes including repeated residential moves, changes in care arrangements and changes in schools. Their schools are more likely to be inferior and their parents are less financially able to provide them with educational and extracurricular opportunities as well as social contacts. Poor parents are also more likely to experience higher levels of isolation and stress, depression or substance abuse as a result of incomes that are too low to meet basic needs, housing insecurity, employment-related pressures, and the stigma and marginalization associated with multiple experiences of social disadvantage and oppression.

Adults living in poverty also suffer many other harmful consequences including poor nutrition and poor health. One study of child hunger found that parents were seven times more likely to go hungry themselves for lack of money (McIntyre et al. 1998). Health research has established that low-income adults are more likely to rate their health as fair or poor than those in the highest income households and are more likely to die earlier and suffer more illnesses than Canadians with higher incomes. As income increases, Canadians continuously experience improved health and longer life expectancies (FPTAC 1999).

Because adults in poverty also suffer adverse health consequences, the policy focus on poor children likely reflects a greater concern with developmental losses or socialization processes

that can increase the probability of experiencing low income as an adult. The nature of the relationship between childhood experience and adult poverty — what mechanisms are at play — has been the subject of a great deal of empirical research across disciplines. According to Corak and Heisz (1998: 65), this relationship should be "central to the conduct of labour market and social policy." Its relevance appears to lie in the implication that intervention during childhood can generate significant cost savings relative to intervention during adulthood[14] and that policy solutions, other than money transfers, may be more appropriate if human capital formation primarily results from factors other than low income.

An assessment of the burgeoning literature related to these issues is beyond the scope of this report. However, it is important to highlight three of the major strands of research on the relationship between childhood and adult poverty that appear prominent in some government publications.

First, a great deal of empirical research in the social sciences has attempted to trace the connections between childhood poverty and various negative adult outcomes. In 1980, the Senate Committee on Health, Welfare and Science examined the question of whether there were links between poverty and juvenile delinquency. Its report concluded that multiple risk factors were at play and that "the experience of poverty in early childhood has not been shown to be an adequate explanation, in itself, of later criminal behaviour" (Senate 1980: 51-52). In December 1989, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology again reviewed this question and a number of these studies in its report, *Child Poverty and Adult Social Problems*. The Committee noted that child poverty per se did not cause adult social problems but that multiple risk factors associated with child poverty did increase the probability of psychological disorders, juvenile delinquency, poor school performance, illiteracy and unemployment in adulthood. The Committee noted that children in households receiving social assistance appeared to be at an even higher risk of psychiatric disorders and poor school performance. The report emphasized that these outcomes are very costly to the economy in light of increased competition in global markets and changing demographics. These demographics meant that an increasing number of elderly people would, in the future, depend on fewer younger workers (Senate 1989).[15]

A second line of influential empirical research, of a neurobiological nature, suggests a relationship between the secure attachment of parents/caregivers to babies in the first 18 months of life and the formation of neural networks that benefit healthy adult development. These studies also suggest that verbal and cognitive stimulations within the first five years of life have an important influence on neural development (FPTAC 1999: 163, 168; McCain and Mustard 1999). According to the report of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health (FPTAC 1999: 88), "[i]nvesting in prenatal health and the first five years of life is good for children, and for the economy" because the first five years are the "most critical time to promote human competence and potential." While neurological delay does happen in individual cases, these studies raise questions as to how significant neurological delay is in the experience of poverty by most children. The Advisory Committee (FPTAC 1999: 78-79) noted correlations between maternal depression and low income, and between household income and school readiness for both cognitive and behavioural competence. However, while the incidence of emotional or behavioural disorders, grade repeats and

impairment in social relationships was markedly higher for children in the very poor categories (income below 75% of LICO) and somewhat higher for children in poor categories (at 75% to 100% of LICO), the largest number of children experiencing problems overall fell within the middle- and upper-income groups (FPTAC 1999: 85). McCain and Mustard (1999) noted that poor parenting styles cross socio-economic lines and, for this reason, strongly recommended that early childhood development programs be available for all children.

Related to the concerns with child development and low income is a concern with the intergenerational transmission of poverty or welfare dependency in the context of labour market and welfare policy. Finnie (2000: 33), for example, suggested that proactive employment policies for long-term recipients are important so children "learn about the nature and value of work rather than a life of welfare dependency." A significant preoccupation of empirical work in the United States has been the intergenerational transmission of welfare dependency. It arises from the belief that parents in receipt of welfare transmit an acceptance of welfare as a way of life to their children, making it more likely their children will depend on welfare as adults. Conservative attacks on welfare in the United States for these and related reasons have culminated in legislation that mandates workfare and terminates welfare for long-term recipients.

Empirical studies have established a statistical correlation in welfare use between generations (Rank and Cheng 1995) and between some market sources of income and a child's adult income (Corak and Heisz 1998). However, some studies suggest the correlation between welfare dependency among generations is not causal but is explained by economic class or by a combination of other specific characteristics including neighbourhood effects.[16] Most welfare recipients examined by Rank and Cheng were not themselves raised in households receiving welfare, and other studies have clearly established that most households move off welfare in a short time. According to some analysts, the fact that a number of children raised in poor households also escape poverty as adults suggests that factors other than income, such as role model effects and family resiliency, are at work and should be reflected in social policy.

The concerns with child development are important because low-income parents are often less able to provide an environment that optimally stimulates children. However, as rationales for a focus on child poverty or for framing poverty in terms of child poverty, these concerns reflect controversial assumptions about the primary causes of, and solutions to, poverty. The concern with child development in the context of poverty assumes that the lack of optimal development of children is a significant, if not central, cause of adult poverty. Poverty is thus implicitly presented as the result of limited human capital rather than a limited number of jobs, low-paid jobs and a set of life conditions or structures that curtail opportunity across life cycles. Empirical studies on the intergenerational transmission of welfare dependency and poverty tend to connect poverty and individual behaviour more explicitly. For example, Corak and Heisz (1996), by referring to a "culture of poverty" and the "underclass," implied that low-income parents transmit poverty to their children through their attitudes and behaviour, and that inadequate socialization or some kind of transmitted psychological predisposition is a significant, if not central, cause of poverty outcomes. Both approaches emphasize individual characteristics or attributes mediated primarily through the family rather than external factors beyond the control of individuals. Individual characteristics or attributes are not irrelevant to

poverty. Clearly, people cope with, and respond to, structural constraints in ways that vary and, to some degree, depend on their particular life histories and individual temperaments. However, an emphasis on individual attributes can also be a way of assigning fault for being poor and responsibility for change to poor people rather than to the economy or the state. Such an outcome is consistent with the main thrust of restructuring discourse.

The Impact of Social Movements and Interest Groups

The Women's Movement, Fathers' Rights and Pro-Family Groups

As Nancy Mandell (1988: 51) has stated, the fate of women has always been closely linked to that of children. Maternal feminists at the turn of the century premised many of their policy proposals, including women's suffrage and the implementation of a mother's allowance, on the well-being of children and the important contribution of women, as mothers, to social welfare. The contemporary women's movement has been critical of maternal feminism, because it defined women's interests and needs in terms of the needs and interests of children and families. In contrast, the second wave of feminism has challenged the concept of rigid inherent gender roles and the private sphere of the family and motherhood as women's place or biological destiny. An essential piece of the women's movement has been to assert women's right to self-determination and to contest both economic and cultural subordination to men in marriage and social life. While the women's movement has been important in elevating the concerns of children and child care, the separation of motherhood from womanhood has provided a context that has also made it easier for both a separate child-centred discourse and a new ideology of fatherhood to emerge (Drakich 1989).

The new ideology of fatherhood was encouraged by media, social science research on child development and fathers' rights groups (Drakich 1989). Fathers' rights groups have elevated the status of fatherhood and promoted a gender-neutral discourse around children. Fatherhood has become accepted as "emotionally and psychologically vital for the welfare of the child," and fathers have been constructed either as the "new ideal father," the engaged and caring parent or as the "deadbeat dad" (Smart 1996: 54). These developments have been important in debates on lone parenthood and child poverty because the involvement of fathers is believed to "facilitate (both) the post-divorce adjustment of children and ensure compliance with support payments" (Drakich 1989: 72).

Meanwhile, right-wing, pro-family groups still characterize divorce and the increasing labour force participation of women as harmful to children. Pro-family groups, including religious fundamentalist groups and REAL Women of Canada, prefer to limit policy solutions to ones that maintain a primary emphasis on family responsibility.[17] Attachment theorists also express concern about the impact of dual wage earners on the importance of a "satisfactory attachment to a primary caretaker, usually the mother" and on the energy and time required to provide committed parenting (Steinhauer 1993: 2). Despite some support for more active fathering, the father/breadwinner with homemaker/wife is still a prominent cultural ideal. A policy focus on children provides a way of addressing these constituencies by suggesting the state is doing something to allay their concerns.

Anti-Poverty Activism

The focus or emphasis on child poverty was assisted, if not generated, by the activities of several public interest groups or organizations that were formed with the specific objective of raising consciousness of child poverty and developing proactive solutions to child poverty.[18] In 1984, the Social Policy Reform Group comprising members of the National Council of Welfare, the Canadian Council on Social Development, the National Advisory Committee on the Status of Women and the Association of Canadian Social Workers, initiated work on child poverty and child benefits. In March 1985, Christa Freiler, then with the Toronto Social Planning Council, organized a conference called Child Poverty: The Moral Shame of Ontario, which was sponsored by several Toronto organizations. Although the social policy community in Toronto was not unanimously receptive, the conference did galvanize a number of committed activists, largely academics and professional social workers, to form Citizens Against Child Poverty, which later became the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG).[19] The purpose of this organization was to enhance the profile of child poverty and to promote broadly based social policy solutions.

In its first publication, *Fair Chance for All Children*, in 1986, CPAG tried to put forward a more universalistic social democratic approach to children similar to that adopted in European countries. It called for a national income program for preschool children that would obviate the need for social assistance for families with children. The income supports from this and similar proposals would have been sufficient to remove the *entire household* from social assistance, not only the children, but this idea was modified into "taking children off welfare" by the Ontario Social Assistance Review Committee in 1989. The payment of income supports for families with preschool children, independent of social assistance, is analogous to the payment of pensions for seniors and employment insurance for adults.

After the House of Commons all-party resolution in 1989, several organizations interested in child poverty developed a plan to build a broadly based national coalition that would focus public attention on government efforts (or lack thereof) to implement the resolution. The result was the formation, in 1991, of Campaign 2000, an organization that currently represents a coalition of over 85 anti-poverty and related groups. Strategizing and social policy formation for both CPAG and Campaign 2000 were developed by a relatively close-knit group of professionals most of whom resided in Toronto.[20] Solutions proposed by Campaign 2000 have included a progressive and substantial child benefit to assist with the cost of raising children, extended parental leaves, community child care programs, child support assurance programs, a national youth education endowment program and a number of employment-related policy proposals (Campaign 2000 1994). These solutions have attempted to facilitate choice of either personal or community caregiving and to recognize the significance of child care labour.

Campaign 2000 was extremely effective in establishing a public profile for child poverty (Popham et al. 1997). Its communication and media strategies included the staging of child poverty-related events and the release, since 1992, of annual report cards on child poverty on the anniversary of the House of Commons resolution. The social report card typically used an abundance of hard empirical data to illustrate the economic, social, health, education and housing status of families with children in Canada. Campaign 2000 also adopted a

number of other strategies: developing a public education campaign in association with the Body Shop, releasing policy and position papers on Canada Day, sponsoring hearings on the *International Convention on the Rights of the Child* and child poverty, and directing letters on child poverty from a diverse number of high-profile Canadians to the prime minister (Popham et al. 1997: 265). However, the media appeared most receptive to the annual report cards, which often appeared as lead stories. Polls in the mid-1990s indicated a large majority of Canadians believed the federal government had to make child poverty a priority.[21] Judy Rebick (2000: 22) noted that the pollsters framed their questions in terms of child poverty, not poverty more generally and were, as such, constructing the issues "in the image of the country's power elite."

Activists engaged in the issue of child poverty readily admit to the strategic use of a child focus. According to Ken Battle, child poverty was used as a "hook to talk about poverty generally" and as a "deliberate tactic to keep the heat on poverty."[22] Members of Campaign 2000 also described the focus on child poverty in strategic terms as "the most effective way to capture public attention in a short period of time" (Popham et al. 1997: 268). Susan McGrath (1997: 179) noted:

> The founding members of CPAG deliberately chose a child-centred advocacy strategy in an attempt to bring public awareness to the poverty being experienced by Canadian families. The identification of poor children allowed for a construction of the chronic social problem of poverty which would hopefully resonate with the public and create support for more extensive and responsive policies than traditional anti-poverty arguments. The focus on children seeks to avoid the dichotomy of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor which has been part of social policy debates. Children cannot be seen to be responsible for their poverty.

While Christa Freiler sees the focus on child poverty as "strategically useful," she has also argued that children are a legitimate concern, and that women's poverty is largely due to the presence of children.[23] Colin Hughes, another member active in CPAG, argued that singling out children is justifiable as children are "persons in their own right not just shadows of their parents."[24]

According to Freiler and other CPAG members, other policy groups have not wholeheartedly endorsed this strategy. Some women's groups were initially critical of the focus on children as opposed to women's oppression more broadly, and labour groups were reluctant to endorse a focus on children and poverty as opposed to income distribution and inequality.

From the start, tensions arose concerning the participation of low-income people. Popham et al. (1997: 251, 256) noted that at the formation of Campaign 2000, disagreements between professional and low-income people limited the consensus that could be established, and the lack of resources prevented funding broad community participation, especially from low-income people. Although the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO) was part of Campaign 2000 until 2000, some members have been critical of the focus on child poverty or families because it obscured the poverty of individuals without children (who constitute a

significant percentage of the poor population) and reinforced the categories of "deserving" and "undeserving" poor.[25]

Notwithstanding their differences, most of these groups have been and remain members of Campaign 2000, and there appears to be less tension around the issue of child poverty among non-governmental organizations (NGOs), at least from the perspective of child poverty activists.[26] NAPO, however, formally withdrew from Campaign 2000 in March 2000 citing a lack of sufficient resources and staff to maintain its membership.[27]

Business and Conservative Think-Tanks

Business and right-wing think-tanks have also been instrumental in framing the issue of poverty. Haddow (1993: 189) noted that although economic class organizations or business federations generally preferred targeted work incentive measures in the 1960s and '70s, their participation in poverty reform was limited because "no vital class-related interest" was engaged. As the economic situation worsened from the mid-1970s, business opposed new social expenditures of any kind. Their concerns were well represented within the Department of Finance (Haddow 1993: 190).

Ernie Lightman (1991), however, suggested that throughout the 1980s, business groups did not support the demise of government programs but rather the targeting of social spending in ways that would ultimately benefit business through investment in human capital such as education and day care. Whatever the position in the 1980s, it is fair to say that in the 1990s business groups, such as the Business Council for National Issues and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and the major print media strongly endorsed and promoted restructuring by stressing the need for cutbacks, inflation control, deficit reduction, increased productivity and employment incentives. These well-funded lobby groups actively promoted the view that a market-driven approach was the only solution in the face of globalization, and that poverty could be addressed only through economic growth and a competitive economic position.

In terms of specific policy responses to poverty, the Fraser Institute has perhaps been most influential in redefining poverty through its publication and promotion of the work of Christopher Sarlo who uses a physical subsistence measure to define poverty. The Fraser Institute has also promoted market-driven reforms and a reduced role for government, and has been instrumental in the casting of women's and Aboriginal groups as special interest groups. More recently, the Fraser Institute has called for time limits on welfare use similar to the five-year limit instituted through welfare reform in the United States (Clemens 2001).

The C.D. Howe Institute, another think-tank sponsored primarily by business, has also been active in issuing a number of publications over the last decade that have addressed poverty and welfare reform. These publications have emphasized workfare and work incentives, and identified families led by single mothers and child poverty as centrally problematic.[28]

Parliamentary and Senate Debates, Committees and Task Forces

An extensive analysis of parliamentary committee and task force reports is beyond the scope of this report. However, a brief review of a number of such reports does illustrate the

increasing focus of state discourse on child poverty since the 1970s. The following review also illustrates how restructuring has shaped and influenced the identification of the causes of, and solutions to, child poverty itself.

Two prominent reports in the early 1970s made no specific reference to child poverty. In *Poverty in Canada: Report of the Special Senate Committee on Poverty* (Senate 1971) the Senate Committee highlighted the existence and extent of poverty. It canvassed multiple characteristics of "the poor" (working poor, welfare poor, rural poor, minorities) and multiple dimensions of poverty. It recommended a "comprehensive…anti-poverty program for the seventies" in the form of a guaranteed annual income pegged at 70% of the Senate Committee's poverty line. The minority report, entitled *The Real Poverty Report*, in contrast, identified poverty as the result of a power imbalance between workers and business (and a structural lack of high-paying jobs), and discrimination based on gender, race and Aboriginal ancestry.

The Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (Canada 1970) made the poverty of women more visible and recognized the relationship between children and gender inequality given women's primary responsibility for child care. From the perspective of advancing women's equality and relieving women's poverty as a group, the Commission recommended substantial monthly cash allowances for dependent children which would either recognize the domestic labour of full-time mothers or help cover the cost of child care where parents were employed (Canada 1970: 306). The Commission also recommended payment of a guaranteed annual income to the heads of lone-parent families with dependent children, effectively "taking them off welfare,"[29] a national day-care act and more effective enforcement of support orders. The report did not, however, address the effect of market forces on women's poverty.[30]

In the 1980s, we began to witness the development of more of a child focus in relation to poverty and associated social issues. In 1980, the Standing Senate Committee on Health, Welfare and Science published *Child at Risk*, which examined the relationship between the prenatal period and early childhood, including the experience of poverty and criminal juvenile behaviour. Between 1985 and 1988, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology also issued three reports on child and family benefits, and child care.[31] In 1989, as previously mentioned, this Committee revisited the issue of children at risk in its examination of child poverty and adult social problems.

The *Report of the Task Force on Child Care* (Canada 1986) also served to increase consciousness of child care and parental leave as issues that concerned children, women and society even though the report's recommendations were never implemented.[32] In 1988, the Social Assistance Review Committee of Ontario (SARCO) (Ontario 1988: 4), in the most extensive provincial inquiry undertaken in relation to the welfare system, also stressed the "devastating effects of poverty, particularly on children."

On November 24, 1989, Ed Broadbent, shortly before his retirement as leader of the New Democratic Party, introduced the motion in the House of Commons to "seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000" (House of Commons

1989: 6173). The resolution was debated by members of Parliament but ultimately passed unanimously. All the members who spoke to the resolution appeared to acknowledge that the needs of poor children provided sufficient justification for the motion. However, the debates also revealed significant differences among the political parties as to how to achieve this objective. Perrin Beatty, then Minister of Health and Welfare in the Conservative Government, argued that by reducing the debt and taking measures to enhance economic growth the Conservative Government *was* attempting to take care of children and to finance social programs. He suggested that the Government had taken action to support the family through an improved economy, a refundable child tax credit, plans to assist in the enforcement of support orders, and a concern with physical and sexual abuse. Other members, such as Margaret Mitchell, argued that immediate income benefits were necessary to reduce poverty and that "[c]hildren should not be sacrificed to the national debt"(House of Commons 1989: 6209). Some members of Parliament raised related issues, such as obstructions to paid work, the high cost of housing, a lack of reliable, accessible and affordable child care, and the lack of flexibility and support networks experienced by many families.

Committees in both the Senate and the House of Commons conducted hearings and released reports regarding child poverty in the early 1990s. According to Maureen Baker (1997: 166), both committees and chairs deliberately chose to use the term "child poverty" rather than "poverty" to "avoid any implications of the 'deserving' poor and 'undeserving' poor, and to elicit concern and willingness to act from all political parties. After all, if the focus is on children, no one can blame their poverty on laziness, lack of job skills or defrauding the unemployment system."

The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology issued its report, *Children in Poverty: Toward a Better Future*, in December 1991 (Senate 1991). Committee members observed that Canada "cannot continue to compete and prosper in the global arena" if one out of six children grow up poor (Senate 1991: 6). Members acknowledged the relationship with women's poverty, noting that "[w]omen's continued responsibility for child rearing, increases in divorce rates and the relatively recent growth of single motherhood underscore the fact that women have particular needs with respect to employment and employment related solutions aimed at alleviating child poverty" (Senate 1991: 17). Among its formal recommendations, the Committee recommended a two-tier approach involving both income supports and service provision, a national conference on solutions to child poverty, a policy on national child care, an increase in the federal minimum wage, financial support for housing and prenatal education. The Committee also recommended, as one of two options, the adoption of a child benefit very similar to what is now the National Child Benefit that would benefit "working poor" families.

Following passage of the 1989 resolution in the House of Commons, the Sub-Committee on Poverty of the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and the Status of Women decided to examine solutions that would eliminate child poverty by 2000 in accordance with the resolution. In its first report, *Canada's Children: Investing in our Future* (House of Commons 1991: 20-23), the Committee used the 1978-based pre-tax LICOs to estimate the number of children living in poverty, the poverty gap and its duration as well as the effects of poverty.

> As a result of child poverty, society as a whole suffers, both economically and socially: society is less productive than would otherwise be the case; greater use is made of the unemployment insurance and social assistance schemes, and of such subsidized services as day care, health care and housing, greater burdens are placed on our justice system and the prisons; and the future generation grows up stigmatized, marginalized and deprived.… Children are a resource that society cannot afford to waste (House of Commons 1991: 20-21).

The solutions endorsed by the Committee included:

- early intervention programs (prenatal health and education);
- 50% cost sharing of subsidized licensed child care that would be universally accessible, comprehensive and high quality;
- school food programs;
- several housing initiatives;
- levels of social assistance that meet basic needs;
- examination of an increased minimum wage and Guaranteed Earned Income Supplement;
- employment creation and training;
- negotiations toward Aboriginal self-government; and
- an increase in the value of the refundable Child Tax Credit as well as conversion of the Child Care Expense Deduction to a refundable child care expense tax credit.

The Committee also noted that "in order to ensure that families have adequate discretionary income to provide for the educational, recreational and cultural needs of their children, the value of federal child-related benefits not be deducted from social assistance income" (House of Commons 1991: 61).

In its second report, *Towards 2000: Eliminating Child Poverty* (House of Commons 1993), the same Committee challenged the use of relative income measures of poverty, such as the LICOs and LIMs, in identifying the levels of child poverty. The Committee recommended a needs-based measure of income inadequacy identified as "the level before which families would have serious difficulty in living a healthy and physically acceptable life" (House of Commons 1993: 70). The Committee concluded that the use of food banks in Ontario was due to other, non-income factors (House of Commons 1993: 50). It attributed an unequal distribution of income to entrepreneurial risk taking; educational pursuits, choice of area of residence, age distribution and low incomes for immigrants on arrival in Canada.

> It is this economic freedom, the economic diversity of our regions and the diversity of our population base which produces disparate incomes at any point in time. Confusing this with poverty not only misdirects scarce public resources, it incorrectly influences our view as to how our economy should work and how our society should function (House of Commons 1993: 69).

Essentially, the Committee concluded that child poverty was not a significant problem in Canada. The Committee's conclusions were widely perceived as an attempt to escape or minimize international criticism of Canada's high child poverty rates according to internationally recognized LIMs. Repeated references were made to the need to better inform the world about the "true state of poverty" in Canada (House of Commons 1993: 69-72). Most anti-poverty groups including NAPO and the Association of Food Banks, the Canadian Council on Social Development and the Metro Toronto Social Planning Council viewed the Sub-Committee as having a predetermined agenda and boycotted the hearings. Liberal and NDP representatives also refused to participate.

The above two reports demonstrate that the issue of poverty in the early 1990s was being framed in terms of child poverty. Even debate as to the most appropriate income definition of poverty occurred within this discursive framework. Both reports also highlighted the importance of children as future workers and taxpayers to economic growth, a dominant concern of restructuring discourse. Moreover, the reports demonstrated an increasing emphasis on children as investments or resources. While this rhetoric may reflect an attempt to influence the business community, one might question the degree to which a "national investment model" is convincing or persuasive to business interests in light of labour surpluses in the short term, the increasing mobility of capital and the potential for increased levels of immigration in the long term. The policy solutions proposed in the above studies varied, but the policies most consistently advanced included some form of early childhood development, more rigorous enforcement of child support orders and some form of a child benefit.

Much of the policy discussion of child poverty throughout the 1990s focussed on a restructuring of child benefits. The Social Assistance Review Committee in Ontario in 1988 recommended an integrated child benefit that would reduce poverty and "remove children from the social assistance system entirely by using another program to meet their income needs" (Ontario 1988: 115). Discussions of children's benefits were usually directed toward achieving one of two other objectives, either targeting benefits to those most in need or using child benefits to address work disincentives believed to be generated by social assistance. In 1985, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs recommended a more targeted child benefit with larger benefits at the lower end of the income scale, a measure that would ultimately replace the universal Family Allowance in 1993 (House of Commons 1985). Targeting of the Family Allowance, which was first established in 1945, began in 1973 when it was made taxable. In 1978, the Family Allowance was reduced and the refundable Child Tax Credit was introduced to target low-income families. The Family Allowance was de-indexed and the non-refundable Child Tax Credit was established in 1986. In 1989, the government began clawing back Family Allowance payments for high-income families. In 1993, the federal government replaced the universal Family Allowance, the refundable Child Tax Credit and the non-refundable Child Tax Credit with an income-tested single monthly benefit and with the Working Income Supplement to assist low-income "working" families with children. The federal government presented the Child Tax Benefit as a measure that would provide additional support for low-income families and "give children a stronger start in life" (Canada 1992b: i). According to Kitchen, this benefit represented an abandonment of the principle of horizontal equity between households with and without children and, ultimately, an abandonment of social

responsibility for all children (Kitchen 1995). Although the Conservative Government claimed the reform targeted more benefits to those most in need, child poverty groups argued that the money saved had not been redirected to poor and low-income families and that less support was being provided to parents than under the former regime. In other words, universality had been sacrificed without an increase in benefits to the most needy. Moreover, for the first time, child benefits were linked to earned income supplements (Kitchen 1995).

During the discussion of social security reform in 1995, the Liberal Government's paper, *Income Security for Children* put forward two avenues for reform including a child benefit that would provide a more significant financial incentive for low-income families to remain in the paid work force and child support enforcement. The report did not include a gender analysis or an assessment of the differential impact of these policies. In the Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development on Social Security (House of Commons 1995), the Committee identified children and child poverty as one of three broad themes that represented a framework for the renewal of social programs. The Committee ultimately endorsed child support guidelines and recommended implementation of an enhanced Working Income Supplement and a new integrated child benefit that would take children off welfare and again provide families with a greater economic incentive to take up employment. The Committee did, however, address the issue of equality for women in terms of a second theme for the renewal of social programs: enhancing security and fairness. The Committee recommended promotion of an equitable sharing of work and family responsibilities, the elimination of "occupational and financial barriers to women's economic advancement," increased access to education and training, and the need to address linkages between violence, inequality and poverty (House of Commons 1995: 100-101).

Finally, although Aboriginal child poverty is more significant demographically and has been specifically noted in several federal reports, the extensive Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, released in 1996, did not dwell on the subject (Canada 1996a). The Commission acknowledged the high levels of poverty for Aboriginal people generally. It also noted the special place and importance of children in traditional cultures and identified the onerous conditions experienced by Aboriginal children. These conditions included a higher mortality rate, lower levels of health and educational development, a higher incidence of drug and solvent abuse, and a higher rate of youth suicides. However, discussion of these issues was framed in terms of the overall impact of colonialism and the displacement of Aboriginal control over land, resources and communities as well as racism and the effect of the residential school experience. Moreover, solutions were cast in structural terms and aimed to enhance the welfare of communities as a whole. The numerous recommendations by the Commission included fair and accountable self-government for First Nations, a redistribution of land and resources, economic development, training and education initiatives for both on-reserve and urban Aboriginal people, job creation and the provision of child care. The vast majority of the Commission's recommendations, including those related to its central concern with rebuilding Aboriginal nations through a redistribution of land and resources, have not been implemented.

Summary

Since the 1970s, there has clearly been an increasing emphasis on child poverty in state discussions of poverty. Child poverty has emerged over the last two decades as not only the most significant component of poverty but as a frame for discourse on poverty itself. A number of factors were responsible for this focus including increased international attention to children's rights, empirical research on child poverty, the impact of social movements including the women's movement and interest groups such as pro-family groups and business and conservative think-tanks. A child-centred advocacy anti-poverty coalition also mounted a highly effective media campaign to target child poverty.

As the analysis in this chapter suggests, the child poverty focus of state discourse was also an outcome of economic, social and political restructuring. A restructuring process under way since the mid-1970s generated a shift in policy discourse toward the promotion of economic growth, a downsizing of government through targeting and an emphasis on work incentives and individual responsibility. At the same time, the related increased participation of women in the labour force and an increase in lone-parent households raised concerns about the welfare of children in light of double workdays and the challenge to the traditional nuclear family form. While a child poverty focus was consistent with a reduced welfare state, it likely also represented an attempt to allay concerns regarding these developments.

Beyond the focus on child poverty itself, state discourse on poverty has been shaped in a number of ways by restructuring discourse. First, economic growth has been posited as the only way of relieving child poverty (House of Commons 1989). A policy focus on children was also increasingly justified in terms of the functional value of children as future workers and the impact of child poverty on long-term costs and economic growth. Concerns with targeting and employment incentives shaped the discussion of child benefits. The major solutions proposed by government committees to counteract child poverty have been fairly consistent since the late 1980s. These have included a child benefit (that would or would not be clawed back from social assistance), increased enforcement of child support, childhood development programs as well as some mention of increased criminal sanctions for child pornography and child abuse. Overall, there has been little discussion in government reports related to children of the need to improve conditions in low-wage labour markets, to implement pay or employment equity, family-friendly employment policies, or to deal with the increasing contradictions between paid and unpaid labour for women through the provision of accessible, high-quality day care.

3. THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN'S POVERTY AND CHILD POVERTY

Given the assignment of primary responsibility to parents for children, there is a relationship between the poverty of children and that of adult household members. As mentioned frequently in the literature around child poverty, children are poor because their parents are poor (NCW 1998). Because most children live with their mothers, either in two-parent households or lone-parent households headed by a female, there is a close link between child poverty and women's poverty.

In this chapter, I examine women's inequality and poverty, and explore the interrelationship between women's poverty and that of children. I draw on the existing literature to identify the major systemic causes of women's inequality and poverty. As Davies et al. (2001) demonstrated, women living in poverty make choices that are shaped by, and respond to, systemic constraints and dominant ideologies. A lack of support for, and recognition of, the value of child care is clearly an important source of women's inequality and poverty. Other related causes include ideologies of family and motherhood, and conditions in the labour market.

However, not all women are, or have been, mothers and not all mothers are poor. Poverty is the outcome of many complex and overlapping sites of social disadvantage and oppression. All women are more likely to be poor and to earn less than men. In 1998, 18.4% of all females were identified as living in a low-income household compared to 15.3% of all males (Statistics Canada 2000a). However, women without property or secure, well-paid employment will most likely experience poverty. Disproportionately, these are immigrant women, racialized women,[33] Aboriginal women and women with a disability. Children from these groups are also more likely to experience poverty.

- People with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to live below the poverty line as the non-disabled (Fawcett 1996). Adult women with disabilities are more likely to be poor than women without disabilities and more likely to be poor than men with disabilities (Fawcett 1996: 131). According to data in the 1996 Census, 37% of children with disabilities lived in a low-income household (CCSD 1999: 16).

- In 1995, women over the age of 15 who were identified as members of visible minorities were nearly twice as likely to have low incomes as non-visible minority women (37% compared to 19%) (Statistics Canada 2000b: 232). Visible minority women earned, on average, in 1995 about $3,000 less than non-visible minority women (Statistics Canada 2000b: 231). Visible minority women (at 37%) were only slightly more likely to have low incomes than visible minority men who (at 35%) were much more likely to have low incomes than both non-visible minority women (at 19%) and non-visible minority men (at 16%) (Statistics Canada 2000b: 233, 246). However, the average income of visible minority women ($16,600) was about $7,000 lower than that of visible minority men whose average income ($23,635) was higher than that of non-visible minority women ($19,495) but lower than that of non-visible minority men ($31,951) (Statistics Canada 2000b: 246). Over all

the age groups, visible minority women earned, on average, 70% of that of their male counterparts (Statistics Canada 2000b: 231). The 1996 Census indicated that 42.7% of visible minority children up to age 14 lived in low-income households (CCSD 1999: 10).

- Aboriginal women and children, in particular, experience significantly higher levels of low income and more extreme poverty as the legacy of an ideology of White supremacy and the impact of colonization. In 1995, three out of five Aboriginal children lived in a low-income household compared to one out of five non-Aboriginal children (Canada 2000c: 27). Forty-three percent of Aboriginal women aged 15 and over in 1996 had low incomes compared to 20% for non-Aboriginal women, 35% for Aboriginal men and 16% for non-Aboriginal men (Statistics Canada 2000b: 259, 268). Aboriginal women had an average income of $13,300, over $6,000 less than that for non-Aboriginal women ($19,350) and $5,000 less than that for Aboriginal men ($18,200) and less than half of the average income for non-Aboriginal men ($31,404) (Statistics Canada 2000b: 258, 267).

Careful attention must therefore be paid to the gendered and racialized dimensions of poverty, and the disproportionate degree to which women and children with disabilities experience poverty.

Whether poverty or inequality should be defined in terms of a lack of income and the most appropriate income-based measure are widely contested issues. Income-based definitions of poverty are controversial because poverty in advanced capitalist societies represents more than a lack of income. It is also symptomatic of a lack of equal access to wealth and economic power. In a culture that increasingly measures people by their wealth or their ability to produce wealth, being poor and dependent also represents a maligned cultural status. While I acknowledge these general concerns, for the purpose of the following analysis, I generally use poverty and low-income status interchangeably. I also use the pre-tax LICOs as the income measure of poverty as these cut-offs identify Canadians who are substantially worse off than average and have been the most commonly used measures to date.[34] The pre-tax LICO represents the income level, using 1992 family expenditures and adjusted according to family and community size, below which families spend more than 55% of their pre-tax income on basic essentials (food, shelter and clothing). Basic essentials exclude the cost of dental care, glasses, diapers, toiletries and personal items, household cleaning supplies, pets, child care, phone, paper needs, light bulbs, furnishings, appliances, transportation, medical drugs, disability insurance, toys, recreation, reading and educational supplies, tobacco and alcohol, and other miscellaneous goods. As the LICO measures are family based, the rate of child poverty according to this definition identifies the percentage of children living in low-income households.

Women as Mothers

Women have always been disproportionately poor relative to men. Evans (1998: 49) noted that between 1980 and 1995, women represented 58% to 61% of all adults living in poverty; men's share during that time ranged between 39% and 42%. In the 1990s, the gender differential actually declined reflecting the greater impact of the recession and economic restructuring on male jobs.

Gender equality indexes developed by the Federal/Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women in 1994 demonstrated that, even excluding a consideration of wealth or assets, women in Canada received only 56% of the total income of men (61% after-tax income). At the same time, women performed a larger share of total work in terms of both paid and unpaid hours that was equivalent to five weeks per year at a full-time paid job (SWC 1997). An update showed that women received 58% as much total income as men in 1997 (63% after-tax income) (Clark 2001: 4).

As some child poverty activists have suggested, the greater part of the differential between rates of poverty for women and men is linked to the lack of support for, and recognition of, the child-rearing responsibilities undertaken by many women. Reports based on the General Social Survey by Statistics Canada using 1998 time-use surveys revealed that women work an average of two full weeks more per year than men. However, most female labour is uncompensated. Men, on average, put in 4.1 hours of paid and 3.4 hours of unpaid labour; women put in 2.5 hours of paid and 5.2 hours of unpaid labour (Clark 2001: 4). Differences in paid work between men and women in dual-earner families have declined since 1992; however, women aged 20 to 44 still spent 72% more time on child care than men (Clark 2001: 6). Studies in different contexts have identified larger differentials (e.g., Duxbury and Higgins 1998: 6; Hanson et al. 2001). Armstrong and Armstrong (1994: 114-115) also noted that time budget studies may grossly underestimate the time involved because child care, unlike other activities, is a constant responsibility. Caring for children includes meeting their physical needs through meal preparation, laundry, cleaning, changing diapers, bathing, and maintaining children's basic dental and physical health. But caring labour also includes constant supervision in the case of young children, being emotionally supportive, getting up at night, assisting them with homework or with school activities, and responding to their experiences of conflict and stress. Women in dual-earner families miss more days of paid work for family reasons than men (seven days per year for women compared to one day for men) and experience severe time stress relative to men (Statistics Canada 2000b: 111). Women account for almost all parents who are full-time homemakers (Statistics Canada 2000b: 110).

Women assume primary responsibility for unpaid child-care labour for reasons that are linked to a longstanding belief that women are destined for, or best suited to, caring for children. Norms of motherhood have changed over time and across cultures. In mid-19th century industrial capitalism, the obligations of motherhood were separated from the paid exchange of labour in the marketplace and situated within the patriarchal nuclear family. The separation of responsibilities into public and private spheres reflected and reinforced the view that unpaid child care is a "natural" female mandate and the belief that the traditional nuclear family is the ideal setting for the rearing of children. Ideologies of motherhood and the family have shaped the gendered division of labour within the "family" and, in combination with racist and colonialist ideologies and structures, shaped the educational and employment opportunities available to women. Although these ideologies are under strain, in light of increasing numbers of dual-earner households and an increasing diversity of actual family forms, motherhood remains a general expectation for women, and the heterosexual nuclear family remains widely idealized in Canadian culture.[35] In their interviews of recipients of social assistance, Davies et al. (2001) identified beliefs fostered

by these ideologies: that two parents are better than one, that mothers should care for their children full time, that men are, by nature, less able to care for children.

The combined impact of unpaid child care and dominant ideologies is clearly evident in the high rate of low-income status for both elderly women and female lone parents. Of unattached elderly women, 47.9% experienced poverty in 1998 (Statistics Canada 2000a) reflecting both unpaid domestic labour and reduced employment income that generates few if any pension benefits. The effect of unpaid labour on women's poverty is even more pronounced in the case of lone-parent families headed by a female. In 1998, 56.3% of children in such households experienced low income before tax. The average depth of poverty — the difference between the LICO and annual income on average — was $8,950 (Statistics Canada 2000a). Although the vast majority of lone parents are White, a disproportionate number in terms of their percentage of the population as a whole, are Aboriginal or can be identified as members of particular visible minorities. This outcome is likely linked to the higher rates of unemployment and poverty experienced by Aboriginal or visible minority men. Aboriginal children are twice as likely as non-Aboriginal children to live in lone-parent households (Canada 2000c: 27).

In 1991, 20% of all households with children were lone-parent households, 17% of children lived in a lone-parent household and 82% of all lone parents were women (Lindsay 1994). The majority of lone parents are divorced or separated, and the vast majority of custodial parents following a divorce are women (Pulkingham 1995: 2). In a survey of child support awards from October 1998 to March 2000, over 80.4% of mothers had sole custody compared to 8.6% for fathers, with the balance having shared (5.3%) or split (5.0%) custody (Bertrand et al. 1999). Forty percent of low-income children lived with lone-parent mothers and less than 3% with lone-parent fathers (NCW 2000). Although lone-parent households experience a high incidence of poverty generally, there appears to be a significant differential in the incidence of low income between female lone-parent and male lone-parent households.[36] This differential may be attributable to a number of factors, among them the possibility that men receive more unpaid or paid help with child care and domestic labour, or have on average been the primary parent for a shorter period of time.

A growing number of children are born to mothers who have never been married. Between 1981 and 1991, the percentage of never-married female lone parents in Canada increased from 11% to 20%. Many of these women may have been living common law at the time of their child's birth since the incidence of common-law relationships has increased and most of these women (67%) were between 25 and 44 years of age. Among women aged 15 to 24, the percentage of never-married lone mothers actually declined from 38% to 26% between 1981 and 1991 (Statistics Canada 2000b: 18). In the study by Davies et al. (2001), all pregnancies outside of marriage or a common-law union were unplanned and were the result of a lack of, or misinformation about, birth control. In the United States, where poverty has been linked to teenage pregnancies, studies suggest a number of factors are influential including a sexualized culture for young women, a lack of knowledge regarding birth control, violent or coercive sexuality, and a lack of prospects or opportunities that would motivate avoidance of pregnancy (Schorr 1997).[37]

Of children in two-parent households, 12.3% experienced low income in 1998 with an average of $8,919 (Statistics Canada 2000a). Two-parent households include married, common-law and same-sex relationships. Although this would appear to be a low poverty rate, the actual number of individuals living in poverty in two-parent households significantly exceeds that of lone-parent households. In absolute numbers, more children live in low-income two-parent households than in female lone-parent families: 700,000 compared to 529,000 (Statistics Canada 2000a). Finnie (2000) also found high levels of persistent poverty among two-parent households and suggested that the policy emphasis on lone parents has been misplaced as a result of reliance on the U.S. experience. This policy emphasis likely has several other sources: the influence of traditional familial ideology, a significant increase in the number of lone-parent families over the last two decades, and a disproportionate rate of reliance on social assistance by single mothers in terms of family type.[38] Scott's (1998: 18) study of social assistance recipients in 1994 suggested that the largest group (in absolute numbers) of women receiving assistance across Canada were women living with a male partner. Female lone parents constituted only 7% of all non-elderly adults and 27% of all non-elderly women receiving social assistance in 1994. However, lone-parent households headed by a female constituted the largest group of women living with children since only 55% of women living with a male partner had children living at home. In terms of total households, not individuals, the ratio of lone-parent households relative to two-parent households receiving social assistance is a bit less than 3:1 (Canada 2000c: Appendix 3, Table 8).

The vast majority of two-parent households do not appear to live in poverty. However, as other critics have noted, family-based measures of poverty can understate the poverty of both women and children (Pulkingham 1995). Low-income measures are based on the income of all household members and assume a pooling and equitable distribution of income that does not necessarily reflect the actual distribution of income. In households where the husband is the primary wage earner, studies suggest the dependent wife has less access to, or control over, household finances or the spending practices of the husband, and will tend to use available money to meet household rather than personal needs (Pulkingham 1995: 6). Empirical studies show that expenditures on children increase as women's share of household income increases (Woolley 1998). It is important to recognize that economic dependency in a social context of unequal gender relations can give rise to significant costs for women apart from material deprivation. Even where income is shared, it may be subject to terms established unilaterally by the husband and entail deference and subordination to the husband's desires or dictates (Mosher 1990/91). Economic dependence may also inhibit women from leaving violent or emotionally abusive relationships.

Most studies of poverty in Canada note a dramatic change in women's economic situation as a result of marital breakdown. This was often identified in the 1980s and early '90s as the "feminization of poverty." Because women are most often custodial parents, rising divorce rates and the increase in single-mother households have also been associated with governmental concerns regarding child poverty (Pulkingham 1995: 2). The term "feminization of poverty" obscures a number of social facts: the disproportionate representation of individuals with a disability, Aboriginal men and women, and visible minority men and women in the poverty population, and the relative stability of women's poverty in relation to men over the last two decades. According to Evans (1998: 50), women

have always been poor relative to men. Moreover, the rate of poverty among single mothers as a group, although high, remained relatively stable between 1980 and 1995. In contrast, the rate of poverty among married women increased and that of elderly women declined over the same period (Evans 1998: 50).

Pulkingham (1995) argued that attributing poverty to rising divorce rates is overly simplistic and suggestive of false solutions such as family formation, increased impediments to divorce, and increased support payments and enforcement. She suggested that divorce or separation only makes visible women's "unequal access to independent resources, primarily employment income" as a result of child care and is not a cause of poverty for women or children (Pulkingham 1995: 7). Family-based measures of poverty obscure the significant disparities in income during marriage and women's vulnerability to poverty on divorce or separation, and in old age.

Nuclear family formation appears ideal, in part, because it mediates real contradictions between paid and unpaid labour, given a lack of social supports for parenting. Large amounts of income are also needed to address the average poverty gap for lone-parent households.[39] Nonetheless, encouraging marriage or cohabitation as a quick fix to poverty can generate problematic outcomes. To the extent that nuclear family formation entails economic dependence of women on men, this family form facilitates the transmission of traditionally gendered identities (the male breadwinner/female caregiver) and patterns of male dominance and female subordination, to children. Moreover, husbands are increasingly less able to fulfill the breadwinner role. Davies et al. (2001) noted that reliance on social assistance was often the outcome of job loss by fathers or husbands as a result of illness, or cyclical or structural changes in the economy. Their report also described how many of the women interviewed found themselves and their children worse off as a result of spousal relationships with physically and emotionally abusive men. Abusive behaviour ranged from life-threatening violence to substance abuse and addiction by male partners. For many women, marriage or cohabitation had been the result of an unplanned pregnancy and the belief that it was "easier and better for children to be raised by two parents" (Davies et al. 2001: 57). Escaping these abusive situations was inhibited not only by the threat of future violence, among other factors, but by an "internalized traditional vision of the family" and the belief that "lone-parent families are not as stable, legitimate or 'real' as two-parent families" (Davies et al. 2001: 59). Although the women interviewed by Davies et al. do not necessarily constitute a representative or statistically significant sample, more of those who relied on a partner's income to exit social assistance eventually needed it again compared to those who left welfare through employment. Nuclear family formation guaranteed "neither safety nor economic security" (Davies et al 2001: 76).

Mothers in households without employment income or maintenance income — most often women with young preschool children — must rely on government transfers. Unless women have a substantial continuous attachment to the labour force and are eligible for Employment Insurance, they are forced to rely on social assistance. Little (1998: 173) suggested that the state keeps marriage attractive by keeping the alternatives unappealing through meagre welfare benefits, intrusive regulation of women's intimate life and an expectation of paid work without adequate parenting supports. Benefits received on social

assistance fall far below the LICOs and have either been slashed dramatically (as in Ontario where welfare rates were cut by 21%) or declined in real value as a result of inflation (Freiler and Cerny 1998: 62-69). Shelter allowances are often capped at levels significantly below the average real cost, given a serious lack of affordable housing. Recipients are often forced to use their food allowance to pay for the shortfall between the actual and allowed cost of rent, resulting in the high usage of food banks. Across Canada, there has been a 30% reduction in the number of children in households receiving social assistance between 1994 and 1999: a 32% drop for two-parent households and a 26% drop for lone-parent households. The incidence of low-income has dropped from 20% to 18% between 1996 and 1998. However, the average depth of poverty experienced by children in low-income households has remained relatively steady (Canada 2000c: 39). This outcome likely reflects an increase in the depth of poverty for households without earnings (Statistics Canada 2000a: 220). It may also suggest that paid work, or whatever other income source is being relied on, has not delivered most of the mothers and children formerly receiving social assistance out of poverty (Canada 2000c: 39).[40]

In 1994, 1,280,000 adult women, aged 18 to 64, received social assistance (Scott 1998: 18). The majority of these women were not single mothers and were not Aboriginal, did not have disabilities and were not recent immigrants. These groups were nonetheless disproportionately represented in the social assistance population relative to their representation in the population as a whole. As Scott indicated, both absolute numbers and relative risk are important dimensions of the profile of social assistance recipients because low-risk populations often form the greatest proportion of recipients (Scott 1998: 22). On the basis of available data, Scott found that Aboriginal mothers, recent immigrant women and women with disabilities were more likely to receive social assistance than non-immigrant women and women without disabilities. Women identified as visible minorities were slightly less likely to receive social assistance than non-visible minority women (Scott 1998: 17-32). In terms of government transfer payments, including pension plan benefits and employment insurance, visible minority women generally received a smaller share of their income from such sources in 1995 (16% compared to 18% of non-visible minority women), although particular visible minority groups received a somewhat larger share of such income (Statistics Canada 2000b: 231-232). The largest share of the income of Aboriginal women, as with all women, comes from employment, but Aboriginal women in 1996 received 32% of their income from government transfer payments relative to 18% for non-Aboriginal women (Statistics Canada 2000b: 258-259).

Mothers as Low-Wage, Marginalized Workers

Although unpaid child-care labour and traditional ideologies are significant causes of women's poverty, they also understate its complexity. Child-care responsibilities interact in a complex way with disparities in the wealth of one's family of origin, with conditions in the labour market including a lack of supports for people with disabilities and a lack of child-care supports, and with systemic racism and the legacy of colonialism. Lower education is correlated with a higher incidence of poverty, but many of the reasons for higher levels of market poverty and reduced labour force attachment also explain lower levels of education. These include child-care responsibilities, family ideology and practices, concerns about debt

load, parental absence (Davies et al. 2001), and lower educational and occupational expectations generated by sexism, classism and racism.

Although women with children are less likely to be employed than women without children, 69% of women with children under 16 years of age and 61% of women with children under the age of 3 were employed in 1999 (Statistics Canada 2000b: 100-101). Seven out of 10 employed women with at least one child under 16 held full-time jobs in 1999 (Statistics Canada 2000b: 101). About 28% of women work part time and women account for seven out of ten part-time job holders (Statistics Canada 2000b: 103). Empirical studies suggest that women's labour force participation rates and hours of work are strongly affected by the presence and age of children, particularly preschool children, and by the market wage, household income and child-care costs (Chaykowski and Power 1999: S3). As a result of bearing primary responsibility for domestic labour, women experience greater difficulties getting into the labour market, and many are forced to work part time to accommodate domestic labour, or accept lower pay in exchange for greater flexibility. Interruptions in work-force activity constitute perhaps the most significant barrier to women's equality in the work force through its impact on seniority and levels of on-the-job training (NCW 1990; Phillips and Phillips 1993: 59).

In 1997, the ratio of female-to-male earnings for full-time workers was 72.5%, up from 58.4% in 1967 (Statistics Canada 1999b: 10). In terms of hourly wages, which control to a greater extent for time worked, women on average earned about 80% of the average male wage (Statistics Canada 1999b: 21). Note, however, that these comparisons of earnings and wages typically do not include an estimate of job-related benefits that may be substantial. Using data from the Survey on Labor and Income Dynamics, and controlling for numerous productivity-related variables, Drolet found that women's average hourly wage rate was about 84% to 89% of men's. Other studies have found that productivity-related factors explain only between 12% and 30% of the overall wage gap (Statistics Canada 1999b: 12).

While not all productivity-related variables may be observable, some observable productivity-related variables may reflect discriminatory conditions. At any rate, some if not all of the unexplained differential clearly can be attributed to sex-based discrimination and sex-based occupational and industrial segregation. Since 1951, women have been concentrated in service industries, particularly community, business and personal services. Most of these industrial divisions are labour rather than capital intensive and are characterized by low productivity growth, low pay and, increasingly, by small business establishments that are difficult or impossible to unionize (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994: 27). Within these industrial divisions, woman are concentrated in certain occupations, such as teaching, health, clerical, sales and service, which have a significant element of personal service. Even within female-dominated occupations, there is a significant gendered earnings gap that may be attributable to both sex-based discrimination and fewer hours of work. Almost a third of all women in 1991 were employed in the clerical occupational category that is characterized by low wages, poor working conditions and few prospects for promotion (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994: 28). Since 1971, the percentage of women has increased in the "least attractive jobs," as janitors, personal service workers, nursing aides and fabricators (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994: 36). Low-wage work reinforces secondary-earner status and the assignment of child-care labour to

women, which in turn contributes to low wages, part-time work, work interruptions, lower pensions, less seniority and career advancement, and low investments in human capital.

Labour markets reflect sex-based discrimination and segregation as well as differential outcomes related to disability and race. Women with disabilities and dependent children are more likely to be unemployed than men with disabilities or women without disabilities who have children. When employed, they are more likely to earn less than men earn (Fawcett 1996: 73-74, 100-101). Fawcett (1996: 162) noted that "employed women with disabilities who had preschool-aged children were more likely to require some form of job redesign and, unfortunately, this made them more likely to live in poverty." People with disabilities and recent immigrants are more likely to experience persistent or long-term poverty (Finnie 2000).

Increasingly, divisions within paid work and access to the labour market are racially based. In 1996, women identified as members of a visible minority group were more likely than other women to be in the paid labour force, but also likely to earn an average of $3,000 per annum less than other women (Statistics Canada 2000b: 230). Most visible minority women were employed in administrative, clerical, sales and service jobs, and were twice as likely as other women to be employed in manual jobs (Statistics Canada 2000b: 228). Unemployment and underemployment have been significant risks for both men and women during the 1990s. However, visible minority women experienced higher rates of unemployment (15%) relative to non-visible minority women (9%) despite having high educational qualifications (Statistics Canada 2000b: 226). Visible minority women were more likely to be unemployed than visible minority men (13%) who were more likely to be unemployed than other men (9.9%) (Statistics Canada 2000b: 244). Aboriginal women experienced the lowest average income (an average of $6,000 less), and were also disproportionately segregated into the service sector in 1996 (Statistics Canada 2000b). Aboriginal women experienced much higher rates of unemployment both on reserves (22%) and in small to mid-sized urban settings (23%) where the majority of Aboriginal women (72%) lived (Statistics Canada 2000b: 258). However, Aboriginal men experienced an even higher rate of unemployment at 27%, about three times higher than that of non-Aboriginal men at 9.7%. Forty-one percent of Aboriginal women were in the paid work force compared to 48% of Aboriginal men and 53% of non-Aboriginal women (Statistics Canada 2000b: 254).

Some analysts have argued that the decline in the overall gender wage gap or equality index over the last two to three decades does not reflect improvements in women's wages or working conditions as much as it reflects the impact of economic restructuring and the loss of more highly paid predominantly male jobs in the manufacturing sector. In any event, women, especially visible minority and Aboriginal women, remain concentrated at the bottom of the job hierarchy with jobs characterized by low wages, few benefits, little job security or prospects for promotion, and increased non-standard work. In 1999, 41% of employed women between the ages of 15 and 64, relative to 29% of men in this age group, had non-standard work arrangements including part-time, temporary, own-account self-employment and multiple jobs (Statistics Canada 2000b: 103). Many of the jobs in which women are employed also appear to require fewer skills, involve increased supervision and offer less opportunity for personal autonomy or initiative (Menzies 1990). Governments

over the last decade have either abandoned a concern with pay equity or given pay equity programs minimal attention.[41]

Economic conditions over the last two decades and government policies have also increased the contradictions between paid and unpaid work and the cost of this contradiction for low-wage workers who are primary caregivers. Stagnant or declining real wages have meant the full-time earnings of one, often two workers, are not sufficient to lift the household out of poverty. Workers have also experienced a significant intensification of their labour as a result of restructuring, including an increase in workload responsibilities through downsizing and an increase in paid and unpaid hours of work.[42] The provincial government in Ontario has, in fact, embarked on a process of labour deregulation. These changes will intensify the contradictions for low-wage workers, because they increase the potential maximum work week, and change the calculation of overtime and the scheduling of vacations.[43]

The expansion of non-standard employment has generally increased job turnover rates and employee insecurity. Along with the proliferation of small firms and workplaces, increased employee insecurity has reduced employee bargaining power and contributed to declining rates of private sector unionization (Fudge 1991, 1996). Escalating workloads, particularly in the public sector, and increased work–family conflict reduce the capacity of female workers to organize and fight for improved work conditions (Luxton and Reiter 1997). The lack of employee bargaining power and increasing economic insecurity are also conducive to employer abuse and exploitation including harsh, demeaning treatment, an increased risk of sexual harassment and non-compliance with labour and safety standards (Sheppard 1995; White 1993).

The lack of employee bargaining power reduces the likelihood of voluntary accommodation of family-related responsibilities, the provision of sick leave for children and employee control over work schedules.[44] Less-skilled workers are generally less able to negotiate favourable working conditions including flexible work hours. Self-employment has also not been the panacea for women it was originally believed to be, particularly for women who work alone. Own-account self-employed women are still concentrated in low-paid service industries without benefits, such as disability coverage, parental leave, pensions, employment insurance, and without access to pay and employment equity initiatives, or increased training and education (Hughes 1999).

The lack of accessible, affordable and high-quality, consistent child care is clearly a central problem for most low-income women (NCW 1999). Poverty rates generally increase with the number of children and, while remaining high, decrease once the youngest child reaches school age (NCW 2000). For women with paid employment, disruptions in child care lead to low employee morale, employee absenteeism and dismissal, and stress for both mothers and children. In one American study, almost a third of the recipients surveyed had lost jobs as a result of their reliance on unstable, informal child-care arrangements (Henly 1999). In Henly's study, recipients relied on the informal care of friends and relatives, because they could not afford more formalized child-care arrangements. However, informal arrangements often proved to be tenuous, requiring frequent changes. More formal child-care arrangements, either through licensed group day-care homes or day-care centres, tend to be more stable and

reliable. Day-care centres are also more easily monitored reducing the risk of improper or inadequate care. Based on a sampling of interviews with mothers on assistance in the United States, Lucie White (1999) suggested, however, that some mothers would prefer home-based to centre-based care, viewing the latter as too institutional, routinized and beyond their effective control. In any event, some estimates suggest that regulated child-care spaces are available to only 7.5% of children under 12 years of age in Canada (Stroick and Jenson 1999: 11). Centres in particular have few subsidized spaces available, often restrict eligibility to children that are toilet trained and operate only during standard hours. In the low-paid retail and service sectors where many low-income women will work (at jobs such as office cleaners, waitresses, food service clerks, nursing home attendants, telemarketers), hours of work often include evenings and weekends, and rotating shifts. Single mothers face particular difficulties in finding adequate child care, because they are unable to co-ordinate their schedules with another adult in the household. They may either have to pay more or accept constraints on their ability to work shifts, work at a distance from home or travel for work purposes. Both rural and urban low-income women face transportation difficulties in accessing high-quality day care. Mothers of children with a disability, including children with allergies and learning disabilities, often have no alternative but to care full time for them. There is also a question as to the extent to which day cares are sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences.

Women have suffered increased stress in dealing with child care as a result of a number of related developments:

- an increase in their labour force participation rates;
- an intensification of labour in the paid workplace;
- the offloading of care onto women as a result of government cuts; and
- a failure by male partners to shoulder a proportionately increased share of domestic labour and child care.

For the most part, women appear to internalize the costs of these contradictions resulting in higher levels of disability and chronic illness (FPTAC 1999: 13, 32). These costs have likely been greatest for low-income single mothers who have the fewest resources and the least flexibility in meeting the competing demands of employment and child care. Mothers living in poverty do not have access to labour-saving technology, such as freezers, dishwashers, washing machines and dryers, or domestic services, such as nannies, housekeepers and restaurant meals (Hanson et al. 2001; Stairs 1989). Mothers receiving social assistance require more time for unpaid work, because they lack time-saving appliances and they must rely on public transportation to purchase necessary goods. Recipients of social assistance must also spend greater time budgeting, reporting to caseworkers and dealing with health issues (Hanson et al. 2001: 24, 26).

In terms of child-rearing labour, single mothers must inevitably deal alone with their children's stress, homework and the requirements established by schools and day cares. Although admittedly many employed mothers in two-parent families bear a double if not a triple burden, the demands on single mothers can be significant. Given that the majority of lone parents are either divorced or separated, the need for parental attention may be heightened if the children

have experienced trauma as a result of the marital breakdown, particularly if either the wife or children have been victims of domestic violence (Schein 1995: 30-37; Hanson et al. 2001: 25). Children in low-income families who are from visible minorities or Aboriginal backgrounds, or live in a lone-parent household may also confront some degree of prejudice or marginalization at school and need the support, comfort and commitment of their parent to deal effectively with it. A recent B.C. study of resiliency suggested that neither income assistance nor employment status predicted the strength or capacity of household members in coping (Michalski and Wason 1999). Factors that tended to undermine resiliency included the nature of employment, particularly non-standard work, and the lack of external social and emotional supports.

In terms of public day-care initiatives, Quebec has initiated the development of early childhood centres, non-profit organizations that offer parenting courses, outreach programs and 24-hour preschool and after-school day care (including holidays) for $5 per day to all parents. Most other provinces have not adopted strategies that would reconcile the labour force participation of women and men with accessible, affordable and trustworthy child care. The “neo-liberal” reform agenda has also not included measures, such as increases to the minimum wage, work sharing, family or sick leave policies that include children, access to a telephone for family conversations, a shorter work week, increased vacation time or other child-friendly employment policies that would benefit low-income parents. Studies suggest that changes to Employment Insurance have hurt women by penalizing repeat users (because of child care, women move in and out of employment) and by increasing the number of hours that part-time and new workers require to qualify (Davies et al. 2001: 3). The recent extension of parental leave benefits for up to one year at 55% of the worker’s average weekly salary effectively excludes many low-income women, disproportionately sole support mothers, immigrant women of colour, Aboriginal women and women with disabilities, who cannot survive on half a salary (Iyer 1997). Moreover, while leaves are very important in helping women cope with infant care, Sweden’s experience suggests that generous parental leaves tend to reinforce rather than change the gendered division of labour in the workplace and family (Evans and Pupo 1993).

In summary, in addition to more jobs and higher wages, a number of changes are needed to address women’s secondary worker status. These changes include the above-mentioned changes to the labour market, pay equity programs and a more concerted effort to break down racially based and disability-related barriers.

Not All Women Are Mothers

Any effort to ameliorate child poverty will have little, if any, impact on adult women who have never been, and never will be, mothers. Women without children, however, may also suffer significant levels of poverty.

Analysts are often quick to dismiss the situation of women without children because admittedly, there is significantly less of an income gap between unattached men and women (individuals living either alone or with others to whom they are unrelated) than between married men and women (Freiler and Cerny 1998). In 1997, the average incomes of married women amounted to 67.5% of male incomes and fell between 63% and 70% in all age

categories (Statistics Canada 2000b: 137). While the incomes of unattached women were lower than that of their male counterparts in all age categories, the gap was significantly smaller than for other women. Unattached women aged 15 and over had incomes equivalent, on average, to 91.8% of the incomes of unattached men in the same age group. In terms of specific age groups, the differential ranged from 73% in the 55 to 59 age group to 95% in the 35 to 44 age group.

In terms of low-income status or poverty rates, 39% of unattached individuals lived on low incomes before tax in 1998. Unattached or single women comprised a significant number of the total number of women living in poverty in Canada. Of 2,783,000 women living in low-income households, 973,000 were unattached females of which 565,000 were under 65 years of age (Statistics Canada 2000a). Unattached women experienced a higher rate of low income than men: 45.3% compared to 33.4% (Statistics Canada 2000a). While elderly women are acknowledged to have a higher rate of poverty than elderly men, unattached women under 65 years of age also experienced a higher rate of low income relative to men of the same age and family status. Of unattached women under 65, 43.6% in 1998 lived on a low income relative to 33% of unattached men under 65. Scott and Lochhead (2000) also found that rates of poverty for non-elderly unattached women (at 41.7%) were higher than for non-elderly unattached men (at 34%). In absolute terms, the average income gap of unattached non-elderly females was $7,677. The relative income gap for unattached individuals is possibly higher, however, because their LICOs are lower (Morissette and Zhang 2001). Finnie (2000) also found that between 1992 and 1996, single women without children (excluding students) comprised 27.4% and attached women without children 2.7% to total 30.1% of the persistently poor. This percentage is significantly higher than that of males without children (25.7%), markedly higher than that of single mothers (15.9%) and almost as much as that of attached males and females with children (36.3%) (Finnie 2000: 15-16).

In an examination of welfare incomes between 1986 and 1998, the National Council of Welfare concluded that, “in most cases, it was single employable people on welfare who suffered the most” from welfare cuts (NCW 1999-2000: 49). In both 1997 and 1998, a single employable recipient of welfare received from 8% to 27% of the average income of single people under 65 (NCW 1999-2000: 42).

It may be that most unattached women have mothered children at some point. A significant number may have had children who are over 18 and have left home or had children who have died. As mothers, they may have lost custody to another parent or to the state, both risks disproportionately experienced by low-income women. Relative to unattached men, these women may be experiencing the long-term consequences of childbirth or child care on their economic status. From the available low-income statistics, it is unclear how many such women fall within the category of unattached women. To the extent that this category comprises a significant number of women who were formerly mothers or will be mothers in the future, a policy focus on child poverty could have incidental or direct benefits, particularly if solutions addressed the systemic costs of child-rearing labour for women. For women who have never and will never bear or raise children, solutions directed to child poverty will not provide a direct benefit now or in the future in the absence of more generalized labour market reform or income supports.

As importantly, a focus on child poverty does not consider other forms of caregiving labour that women perform. Caring takes many different forms and patterns, and includes the care of relatives who are elderly or have a disability, as well as voluntary community labour. Studies have established that women are more likely than men to engage in formal and informal volunteer activities (Statistics Canada 2000b: 112-114), and employed women are 50% more likely than men to be caregivers to individuals with a disability (Evans 1998: 52). With cutbacks to public services, the care of adults who are elderly or have a disability is increasingly the de facto responsibility of women as unpaid labour within the family and as low-paid labour in the informal caregiving sector. Morris et al. (1999) found that women face greater pressure than men to supplement home-care services without pay and at significant personal cost in terms of their own health and economic security.

In summary, a focus on child poverty could not alleviate the poverty of women who are not and will never be mothers. Such women are undoubtedly affected by a lack of jobs, low wages, systemic inequalities in the labour market and extremely low rates of social assistance. Nor could a child poverty focus address forms of caregiving other than child care that women more often than men perform.

Summary

In this chapter, I have canvassed the ways in which the poverty of women and that of children are interrelated. Most children live with their mothers either alone or in two-parent households. The rate of poverty is higher for women and children who live in lone-parent households although the largest number of poor children live in two-parent households. The rate of poverty is also higher for women and children who have a disability, and those who are Aboriginal or identified as members of visible minorities.

A focus on child poverty could potentially ameliorate the poverty of women as mothers. Mothers can obviously benefit incidentally from income supports or other benefits targeted at children. A focus on child poverty could only have substantial benefits for both women and children if the systemic causes of women's poverty were addressed as solutions to child poverty.

The above analysis suggests that nuclear family formation and economic dependence on a male breadwinner are not adequate solutions to women's poverty nor that of children. Nuclear family formation obscures an unequal distribution of resources within households and can be conducive to domination, control and abuse. Husbands are in any event less able to fulfill the breadwinner role in the current unstable labour market.

Clearly, more social supports for parenting are needed. Virtually all studies suggest the provision of affordable, accessible, reliable and high-quality day care is particularly important. Men also need to undertake an increased role in care-giving labour. Women continue to perform a disproportionate share of child care that is not only unpaid but impairs their status in the labour market. Perhaps most importantly, labour markets must change to reflect the norm of a worker with child-care responsibilities. Sex and racially based discrimination and segregation in terms of access to work and in the divisions between low- and high-paid jobs,

and jobs with “status,” must also be addressed. Economic restructuring has had significant implications for women in terms of the loss of good jobs through cutbacks to the public sector, the offloading of more caring labour onto women, the intensification of paid labour and the increase in non-standard employment.

Under current conditions, the contradictions between paid and unpaid labour are likely most acute for low-wage single mothers. The expansion of employment in the low-paid service sector where shift work, evening and weekend work and non-standard work is common makes it difficult if not impossible to arrange child care. Workers with less bargaining power have less ability to negotiate flexible and favourable conditions of employment including voluntary accommodation by employers of family responsibilities, the provision of sick leave for children and employee control over work schedules. Low-wage workers have less flexibility in meeting the conflicting demands of market work and family. They are also less able to pay for labour-saving technology, domestic services and flexible, high-quality and consistent child care. Further, the demands of parenting can be greater in lone-parent households particularly if the children have been adversely affected by a pre-existing marital relationship or by its breakdown.

An approach that targeted child poverty could have positive effects for mothers if child poverty was linked with the conditions of inequality experienced by women. However, it would not, by definition, ameliorate the costs of other forms of caregiving that are disproportionately assumed by women. Large numbers of unattached women and women in couples without children experience poverty. Unattached women also experience a relatively high average depth of poverty and long-term periods of poverty. To the extent that women who are not and will never be mothers comprise a significant number of unattached women, a child poverty focus could only ameliorate their poverty by addressing the systemic nature of women’s inequality in the labour market.

4. CHILD POVERTY: UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS AND NORMS

In Chapter 2, I argued that a child poverty focus has emerged as a product of a number of factors including a restructuring process under way since the mid-1970s. In this chapter, I examine more closely the ideological impact of child poverty as a dominant focus or a frame of state discourse on poverty. I examine why and how a child poverty focus appears strategically appealing in a climate of restructuring by identifying the underlying norms and assumptions implicitly relied on. I argue, however, that these very norms and ideologies ultimately curtail, or are inconsistent with, the development of policy solutions that address the systemic causes of both women's and children's poverty as identified in Chapter 3. In the next chapter, I suggest that current reforms directed toward ameliorating child poverty also reflect and reinforce these belief systems or ideologies, potentially making it more difficult to move toward the eradication of poverty and its negative consequences.

I argue first that a focus on child poverty reflects and reinforces an individualistic conception of the causes of poverty largely by reinforcing and naturalizing the idea of adult dependence as deviance. A focus on child poverty does not obviate debates regarding deservingness because it raises questions and leaves unaddressed assumptions regarding the conduct and culpability of parents (mothers). It also focusses attention on a passive vulnerable victim and thereby indirectly increases the likelihood of blaming strategies in relation to most real victims of poverty. I then illustrate more specifically how a child poverty focus can facilitate gender-neutral norms and assumptions of gender equality while simultaneously increasing the expectations and burdens of motherhood.

Reinforcement of an Individualistic Approach to Poverty

Adult Dependency as Deviance

Child poverty activists have argued that a focus on children makes it harder to deny poverty as a social problem by blaming or depicting people living in poverty as responsible for their own impoverishment. Strategically, this theme keeps public attention on poverty and avoids protracted debate on issues of individual deservingness. By getting beyond debates regarding individual behaviour and deservingness, activists attempted to advance more broadly based solutions to poverty that would appeal to, and institutionalize, collective responsibility for children.

While such an approach appears sound strategically, it is important to understand precisely why and how a focus on children might avoid debates on deservingness. Why single out children? Why is the poverty of children more compelling than that of adults? Precisely how, in other words, can a child poverty focus be strategically useful?

The obvious answer is that children are socially constructed as ideal victims — "naturally" innocent, extremely vulnerable and dependent — hence *deserving* of social support both in terms of innocence and need. While a child poverty focus may be useful, to some degree, in avoiding debates on deservingness, it nonetheless relies, for its persuasive force, on the fact that blaming children, particularly young children, for their own poverty or denying their

state of need or helplessness is simply not credible. Children are widely seen as naturally dependent. Obviously, very young children are physically and emotionally dependent on adults in a number of ways. Children also experience an imposed economic dependency by reason of their compulsory attendance at school and non-participation in the labour force. In classical liberal theory, children have always presented a special case for state intervention because they are seen to lack the capacity to make informed, voluntary choices. As a result, children cannot vote and are not full participants in the democratic governmental process. For all of these reasons, children cannot credibly be held responsible for their own state of poverty nor their welfare dependency.

Although children are more emotionally and physically dependent on others than are adults, the assumption of natural dependence and innocence is also problematic in a number of ways. First, historians have shown that ideas about childhood have varied according to different historical and cultural contexts. The construction of children purely as economic dependants is a relatively late historical development in Western societies, emerging first in the bourgeois classes in the 19th century. Previously, children were expected to contribute financially to their family and their own support from a relatively young age (Mandell 1988). The extent to which children are conclusively or presumptively innocent or not responsible for their actions has also been contested. Arguably, to conceive of children wholly as victims, they must be rendered almost completely passive and vulnerable, certainly not active moral agents who also require support and guidance in shaping their own lives. While the Child Poverty Action Group identifies children as rights holders,[45] the more traditional view presents children as inherently in need of *protection* or *control*, rather than *rights*.

Recent debates over the *Young Offenders Act* show how relatively easy it is for adults to villainize children, particularly as they approach puberty. In the United States, the image conjured up is that of "children at risk" — poor, often racialized children — who "appear to be dangerous and degenerate" (Minow and Weissbourd 1993: 13). Such concerns may have contributed to an emphasis on the poverty of very young children or "early childhood poverty" and "young child poverty" as it is referred to in American policy discourse.[46] Much of the promotional material for the National Children's Agenda to date also focusses on the very young and the first few years of life. Although these years are highlighted as important developmentally, the references to very young children may also appeal to an underlying notion of innocence or extreme dependence that justifies support.

Singling out children, however indirectly, as deserving innocent victims implies that adults are presumptively *undeserving* of assistance. Adults are thereby assumed to be individuals who should naturally be independent and responsible for their own life outcomes. Fundamental to the strategic utility of a child poverty focus is the natural dependence of children. By appealing to the age difference, the dependency of children is naturalized and rendered inevitable if not desirable. By implication, the dependency of adults in poverty is rendered unnatural, deficient and abnormal. Poverty discourse generally constructs "the poor" as different from the non-poor, implicitly defining them as deviants from a norm (Saraga 1998: 34-37). The focus on child poverty reinforces this construction of difference or deviance particularly in relation to adult recipients of social assistance. By singling out children as a dominant if not exclusive focus of poverty concerns, the message is clear that adults can and should take care of

themselves. Adult dependency on state assistance as an individual characteristic is stigmatized as deviant.

The norm of individual independence is consistent with restructuring discourse which, as indicated in Chapter 2, privileges market outcomes and reduces expectations of the state (Brodie, 1996: 21). It is also consistent with contemporary welfare reform discourse in the United States and increasingly in Canada which presents welfare dependency itself as a primary cause of poverty and constructs independence as waged labour (Fraser and Gordon 1994). Welfare dependency is certainly *not* problem free. However, in this discourse, welfare tends to be portrayed as central to the dynamic of poverty rather than a lack of jobs, low wages or a lack of social supports for parenting.

By reinforcing the idea that the only desirable or inevitable source of dependency is that of childhood, a focus on child poverty also obscures pervasive interdependency as the norm. Disparaging adult dependency on welfare is selectively blind to other pervasive forms of dependency including the dependency of workers on employers for jobs and corporate dependence on government subsidies through expenditures on infrastructure, research and development, tax incentives and property law (Fraser and Gordon 1994). The construction of employment as the defining condition of independence not only masks subordination in the employment relationship but implicitly assumes the legitimacy of labour market outcomes and equal opportunity in the competition for jobs (Fraser and Gordon 1994). In this underlying perspective, adult dependency appears not as a product of social relations or structures largely beyond the control of individuals but as a product of individual or family pathology. Adult dependency is constructed as a matter of personal deficits or shortcomings.

For women, the potential to obscure the intersecting structural causes of poverty is important because it can hamper efforts to increase both consciousness of, and an understanding of, women's inequality and that of different groups of women. Reinforcing a norm of self-sufficiency for adults clearly has significant implications for women who are still expected to function as the primary caregivers of children and others, and who thereby experience derivative dependency (Eichler 1997). Defining independence as waged labour obscures the need for, and the value and costs of, domestic labour, which is performed largely by women. The negative construction of welfare dependency also fails to acknowledge the extent to which women's reliance on welfare can provide independence from abusive husbands and exploitive employers, and from the stressful and irreconcilable demands of both paid and unpaid labour under current conditions.

Thus, to the extent that a child poverty focus reduces the scope for debate regarding deservingness, it also implicitly concedes, or can easily be interpreted as deferring to, the truth of a dominant individualistic view of poverty and its causes. A child poverty focus subtly and indirectly encodes a highly individualistic perspective on the causes of poverty. By legitimating dominant ideologies and discourse, this discursive framing of poverty diminishes our understanding of poverty and undermines or limits the construction of solutions to poverty. Within the dominant individualistic view of poverty, child poverty is at most an exception, a grudging concession, a form of special treatment. When poverty is framed in this way, the norms on which difference and stigma are assigned go unchallenged

and are assumed or taken for granted. Making the unstated norms explicit and contesting them, however, is essential to the process of creating alternative norms *and* designing workable solutions (Minow 1990). With respect to women, for example, it is important to redesign the workplace rather than assume that women with child-care responsibilities can adjust to a workplace designed for a worker without such responsibilities.

Contesting the norm also makes more visible the fact that the norms have been constructed by those with power and express a particular point of view (Minow 1990). The framing of poverty as child poverty is a product of adult discourse, not discourse constructed by children. The focus on adult independence is also most consistent with the experience of members of social groups who are White, male and economically secure. A 1997 Ekos survey found that economically insecure[47] Canadians tended to see child poverty as the result of factors, such as globalization, technological change and bad luck, which were beyond the control of parents. In contrast, economically secure Canadians were more likely to see child poverty as the result of internal controllable factors related to parental behaviour, such as a lack of self-discipline, poor judgment or selfishness, or poor parenting skills (Freiler and Cerny 1998). Older males were particularly unsympathetic to child and family poverty, and questioned whether it should be a national priority. According to this survey, economically secure groups also tended to support the provision of services to poor families with children rather than income supports even though income supports are essential to improve food quality, accommodation and clothing, and to survive the instability of low-wage jobs in the current labour market (Freiler and Cerny 1998: 18).

Contesting the Deservingness of Parents (Mothers)

As indicated by the Ekos survey, a child poverty focus does *not* avoid or obviate debates regarding deservingness. By implicitly reinforcing an assumption of adult responsibility, a child poverty focus simultaneously evokes questions regarding the responsibility of adults as parents for their children.[48] The focus on children inevitably gives rise to concerns regarding the parents, their actions and behaviour and its impact on their children. This tendency to look to and blame the parents is powerfully reinforced by dominant familial ideology — the view that parents are primarily responsible for their *own* children — and by White, middle-class and heterosexual norms of motherhood that construct "good" and "bad" mothers.

Freiler and Cerny (1998: 17) noted how many think-tanks and journalists have "redefined" child poverty as "family failure and/or parental irresponsibility." McGrath (1997) suggested that government officials have co-opted the advocacy strategy by defining child poverty in terms of family irresponsibility and narrowly defining the policy solutions. Kitchen (1995: 436-437) also describes this process as follows.

> Most Canadians are willing to support impoverished children, who can hardly be held responsible for their poverty. But the problem with such children is that they live with impoverished parents, and these parents are held accountable for their economic circumstances. Financial support for parents often raises concern that parents may spend the money irresponsibly. *If such concern about parents' behaviour prevents support for children, than (sic) we risk hurting the children for the sake of punishing*

> *the parents*. Few other industrialized nations have had such difficulties in matching their concern for children with their fear of providing financial assistance to adults [emphasis added] (Kitchen 1995: 437).

Child poverty activists can reasonably argue that the state should not hurt children for the sake of punishing their parents. What is problematic, however, in framing the issue this way is that a separation or conflict of interest between the parents (i.e., mothers) and their children can be assumed. Moreover, assumptions regarding the need to blame or punish parents (i.e., mothers) go uncontested.

While Kitchen would argue that this apparent dilemma should be resolved by extending benefits to the family notwithstanding parental (mis)behaviour, there are other potential implications for social policy. One is to support services rather than income supports or other policy measures that will directly benefit children independent of their parents. Liberal economists have long espoused public education as a primary way of offsetting "family-induced inequality" (Persky 1997: 188). Other policy measures targeting children include school lunch programs and many forms of early childhood development programs. Anything that relieves children's experience of poverty including school lunches, community schools, challenges to school fees, etc. will have incidental benefits for mothers by reducing their own distress. In terms of substantially enhancing child welfare, however, these responses fail to come to terms with the actual dependency of children on their immediate caregivers, most often their mothers, and with the critical importance of the caregiver's well-being to the welfare of children. Children cannot thrive if their mothers are impoverished. Because levels of family or maternal well-being inevitably affect children, effective child-centred policies need to address children within the context of their caregivers and attempt to support and enhance the relationships between children and significant adults in their lives (Schorr 1997).

An equally plausible policy outcome is to deny benefits to both children and parents. Parental conduct is not irrelevant if the conduct can itself prevent the satisfaction of children's needs. To the extent, for example, that mothers are viewed as irresponsible, as unable or unwilling to spend the money they receive on their children or care for them properly, the poverty and suffering of their children can be rationalized as inevitable and unavoidable. There are historical antecedents for this position, most prominently the administration of the Mother's Allowance in a number of provinces between 1916 and 1920 (Struthers 1994; Little 1998). Although concerns with child poverty motivated such legislative initiatives, these concerns were entirely subject to displacement by scrutiny of the deservingness of individual mothers.[49] As a result of such undeservingness, both mothers and children lost the allowance.

There are other more recent examples of this tendency. Arguably the National Child Benefit denies children in households receiving social assistance monetary benefits in order to provide their parents with work incentives that presumably will alleviate child poverty. In 1999, Premier Harris publicly stated that the elimination of a pregnancy nutrition allowance in Ontario was necessary to prevent single mothers from spending this money on beer.[50] Although Premier Harris subsequently apologized for this remark and the nutrition allowance has since been reinstated,[51] his comment reflects a tendency to characterize all mothers on

assistance as lazy and irresponsible parents. Clearly, there are cases of low-income mothers who cannot care for their children as a result of addiction, abuse or severe depression. However, there is no empirical evidence that recipients of assistance generally do not spend family or child allowances on their children. Given the Herculean difficulties of meeting even basic needs on social assistance, such an assumption would seem extremely implausible. Ethnographic studies in fact suggest a tendency on the part of mothers to sacrifice their own needs for their children because of a feeling that they, as individuals, are not entitled to benefits (Burman 1996: 182).

The fact that adults remain subject to assessments of undeservingness in ways that can penalize both themselves and their children casts some doubt on the strategic utility of a child poverty focus. A child poverty focus does not avoid the need to contest individualistic explanations of poverty and to challenge the ideologies underlying dominant ascriptions of undeservingness. Indeed, a child poverty focus can intensify poor bashing, as some groups have argued, by reinforcing the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor and isolating people receiving social assistance, who are members of groups having typically suffered the most extreme forms of disadvantage and oppression. Perhaps precisely because it limits public debate, a focus on child poverty can subtly play on and give free rein to stereotypes and myths related to gender, racial and class divisions. This focus may also encourage conservative lobby groups to push "the envelope much further" by calling for workfare, workhouses and time limits on welfare use as solutions to poverty.[52]

Passive, Vulnerable Images of Poverty and the Charitable Impulse

Some argue that child poverty, because it compels sympathy, can be used as a wedge to expand assistance for all people living in poverty. In Saskatchewan, for example, the death of an infant in an impoverished family due to untimely medical care ultimately led to the free installation of telephones by the publicly owned provincial utility in all households receiving social assistance. A recent television advertisement for Coventry House shows a very young child crying alone in a telephone booth who is then transformed into a young adult who is also alone and crying. By not only physically comparing the child's circumstances with that of the adult but allowing us to see the child in the adult, we feel compelled to help, to provide rescue and refuge.

Lucie White (1990-91: 304), in a discussion of the rhetoric of homelessness, described how a completely passive, vulnerable image of poverty motivates the charitable impulse.

> [O]ur anxiety is transformed into the complex impulse of superiority, aggression, and rescue that motivates charity. As an object of charity, the homeless figure poses no challenge to our culture's norms of personhood. Nor does it command even the most ambiguous feelings of respect. Instead, it arouses expansive feelings of self-righteousness and power. Charity delivers goods that the poor desperately need, but too often in exchange for gratitude, dependency, and humiliation.

Michael Katz (1989: 185-186) also noted how the poor traditionally were regarded as deserving "so long as they remained supplicants rather than militants, objects of charity

rather than subjects of protest." Of course, children, particularly young children, are most easily cast in the role of pure supplicants who can be pitied but not feared because they do not threaten the basic social order. Because children are perceived as unable to speak for themselves, they also cannot be readily dismissed as a special interest group that is acting opportunistically (presumably in opposition to the general interest) in the way that women's or Aboriginal groups have been dismissed.

The image of the impoverished young child directly appeals to the charitable impulse through its depiction of a helpless, passive victim. The voluntary charitable sector has often used images of children (Picard 1997). Perhaps most common is the image of the destitute, famished child of the Developing World. There are, however, costs to reliance on images of passivity and vulnerability. In the context of homelessness in the United States, Lucie White (1990-91) identified the costs as a skewing of policy away from long-term toward ad hoc solutions, entrenchment of a victim focus and an eventual numbing of the public to the problem. Although the image of the starving child appears compelling and may deliver short-term episodic relief, it does little to address the longer-term dynamics that generate poverty in developing countries. Indeed, reliance on this image seriously distorts the more mundane everyday experience of poverty for children in both developing and developed countries (Novak 1995: 72).[53] Although initially shocking, repeated exposure of the public to such imagery may also eventually desensitize viewers even to extreme poverty.[54]

While the focus on child poverty may be able to deliver some benefits to adults, it assists adults either incidentally or only to the extent that they too can be viewed as completely helpless, vulnerable and inarticulate. According to theorists on disability: "[I]n order to represent people with disabilities as deserving of public charity, those theories [tend to] reproduce pervasive cultural stereotypes of them as dependent, childlike and unable to provide for themselves" (Roeher Institute 2001:10). This perception of passivity and vulnerability also makes it easier to pathologize or infantilize welfare recipients and to perceive them either as individuals who are wholly disabled or as child-like individuals who must be monitored and trained, or forced to be economically self-supporting.[55] These perceptions of child-like dependency are subtly reinforced by gendered stereotypes of women as passive and dependent, and by an ideology of White supremacy that constructs non-White men and women as intrinsically inferior.

The problem, of course, is that adults (and children) are seldom if ever completely helpless, passive or speechless in the face of poverty. Women living in poverty are both agents and victims, people who actively negotiate and adopt strategies to cope with their double binds and structural constraints. The framing of poverty as child poverty assumes that "normal" adults are not victims of poverty and thus, tends to render the suffering of adults living in poverty invisible and insignificant. The harms suffered by adults are often greater than suffered by children but are also often transmitted to children. The harmful effects include an increased likelihood of parental depression,[56] as well as the disproportionate sacrifices typically made by women as mothers. Mothers often suffer most from poverty, because they are the ones to eat less, to go without clothes, to feel stressed because of inadequate budgets and to experience the lack of a sense of independent entitlement (Burman 1996). However, within a child poverty focus, poor adults are rendered incidental if not irrelevant. Alternatively, they are blamed and

implicitly reduced to "the problem." In any event, their experience and perspective on issues of public policy are suppressed, and their social exclusion reinforced.

Arguably, a child poverty focus may prevent us from moving "beyond pity to respect" for people living in poverty (Razack 1998). Moving away from pity toward respect would entail acknowledging the impact of social context and oppressive social relations on people's lives. Sherene Razack (1998: 139) has argued that women without disabilities must move beyond a focus on "vulnerability" to "justice" in relation to women with disabilities and must ask "how invested are we, the non-disabled, in our icons of pity?" The same question has been asked in the context of poverty by, for example, Linda Gordon's (1994) historical study of single mothers in the United States who were in her words "pitied but not entitled." According to Martha Minow (1990: 219), helping responses

> fundamentally preserve the pattern of relationships in which some people enjoy the power and position from which to consider — as a gift or act of benevolence — the needs of others without having to encounter their own implication in the social patterns that assign the problems to those others.

The charitable response does more to affirm, even legitimize and insulate privilege, rather than contest it. A charitable response of pity and rescue insulates privilege from scrutiny since the helpless victim is, by definition, someone who cannot challenge the social position of those who provide rescue. Seriously exploring these issues will require acknowledging privilege and complicity to the extent that, as White, middle- or owning-class women or men, we benefit from people living in poverty through the provision of low-wage labour, including domestic labour.

Moving toward justice would also require acknowledgment of the multiple causes and harms associated with the reality of adult poverty. It may be argued that the state focus on child poverty ignores adult poverty in the short term but seeks to address it indirectly over the longer term. One might question, however, why adult poverty in the long term needs to be addressed indirectly through a dominant focus on children. In theory, the implications of this perspective for adults depend on how narrowly or broadly one identifies the causes and effects of childhood poverty. In practice, as discussed in Chapter 2, this focus tends to encourage, if not reinforce, a relatively narrow individualistic perspective. Because it assumes that childhood poverty is a primary cause of adult poverty and focusses on the conditions and experience of childhood, rather than on the causes of poverty generally, family dysfunction and the lack of human capital formation in childhood tend to be identified as primary factors in shaping adult outcomes. Such an approach tends to disconnect poverty from the more systemic factors that determine both its overall magnitude and its distribution among social groups rather than individuals and families.

A narrow definition of harm and a narrow conception of the causes of poverty effectively diminish the responsibility of the state and the public to ensure an equitable distribution of wealth and well-being. As the sphere of public responsibility contracts, markets play an increasingly prominent role in the generation of outcomes mediated primarily by the family and the local community or charity sector. According to Jane Jenson (2001), this leads to less accountability overall and a diminished conception of social citizenship. The result is also a diminished conception of human rights, one that ignores the social and economic dimensions

of human life. Although a child poverty focus does, to some degree, challenge these tendencies by calling for public investment in children, it also, in arguably more significant ways, reinforces them.

In the next section, I look more specifically at the ways in which a focus on child poverty plays out for women as a group and for different groups of women, making more explicit the gendered implications of this shift in state discourse.

Illusions of Gender Equality

The Work Ethic and the Invisibility of Women's Caregiving Labour

The contemporary women's movement generally defined children's issues as women's issues, because women have been expected to be and have in fact tended to be, the primary caregivers of children. In contrast, child-centred discourse isolates children and abstracts them from the adult relationships on which children necessarily depend. In combination with an individualistic approach to poverty, the focus on children independent of their immediate caregivers can facilitate a gender-neutral approach. Contrary to hopes that a "gendered perspective on child poverty" might address the costs of child-care labour for women, a child poverty focus may help reinforce the notion that women have already achieved equality with men and render the domestic labour of women less visible. Putting the focus on children makes it easier to construct men and women as the same and to assume that men and women are equally situated both as parents and as workers. In this discursive setting, women can more easily be identified as market or paid workers, like men, and men can, at least in theory, be assumed to function equally as parents.

In restructuring discourse and government policy discourse on child poverty, particularly in relation to child benefits, women are notable primarily for their absence (Brodie 1995). Many feminist scholars have also noted a tendency toward both child-centred discourse and assumptions of gender neutrality in legal discourse over the last two decades, particularly as a response to fathers' rights groups (Boyd 1994). According to Martha Fineman (1995), "mother" has been "neutered" into "parent" and divested of traditional, positive features. June Carbone (2000: 231) recently argued that a profound shift from "partners to parents" has occurred in the context of family law in the United States, a process that reflects the view that the "gender gap, to be sure, remains, but it retains its greatest significance above the 'glass ceiling'."

While the increasing labour force participation of women in the last half of the last century represents a real gain in the economic earning power of women, gender equality, as indicated in Chapter 3, is not yet a reality, even below the glass ceiling. However, the extent to which a gender-neutral or sameness approach facilitates or impedes the realization of gender equality has been a dominant theme of feminist work. Arguably, a gender-neutral approach to parenting challenges the stereotypical association between women and caregiving for children, and encourages greater involvement by fathers in their children's lives and daily care. Gendered norms of caregiving have greatly contributed to women's poverty. However, as many critics have noted, identical treatment of men and women is not particularly helpful if most women cannot meet established norms as a result of structural disadvantage. A gender-

neutral approach also fosters gender blindness and bias, because it implicitly treats women and men identically when they remain, as groups, differentially situated in relation to the actual care of children and the actual satisfaction of children's daily needs.[57] This fact is obviously true of lone-parent households, the vast majority of which are headed by a female, but it is also true of many two-parent, heterosexual households.

To overcome the inequality experienced by women, the reality and demands of caring labour must be recognized. While centring children in the context of assumptions of gender neutrality or equality can help to obscure this reality and these demands, other factors arguably remain primarily responsible for the invisibility of child-care labour. Linked to the undervaluation of children and child-care labour is the undervaluation of women's work. The lack of attention to work that is socially assigned to women represents a discounting of the contributions made and the costs experienced by women as a group. Indeed, unless the discounting of women's unpaid labour is clearly identified and challenged as sexism, policy makers can simply continue to espouse gender neutrality while assuming that mothers will continue to internalize the material and emotional costs of meeting children's needs.

The lack of attention to child-care labour (and other forms of caring labour) is also a product of the drive to enhance capital accumulation and economic growth in market economies and the process of restructuring. Economic growth, as measured by the GDP has typically depended on the generation of profit and capital investment that, in turn, depends to a significant degree on higher productivity and reduced costs or fewer wage demands in labour markets. Even in the face of increasing evidence of need, state policy has been highly resistant to the socialization of child care, and cutbacks have resulted in offloading more caring labour onto women. Feminist economists have argued that caregiving is productive work that should be included in the GDP (Waring 1990; Bakker 2000). The unpaid reproductive work of women is ultimately a necessary precondition of a paid labour force and is not 'naturally' non-compensable or inherently less valuable than other types of work. Moreover, the amount of unpaid work has an impact on the ability of caregivers to undertake paid work. In an examination of restructuring in transitional economies, however, Rittich (2000) noted that there are strong incentives in market-driven economies to externalize or privatize the cost of caregiving, partly because the labour can be externalized onto women. Although these tendencies are less visible in established market economies, they are strongly reinforced by the restructuring process embraced by governments in industrialized countries, such as Canada.

What are the consequences of the invisibility of child-care labour? If the dependence of children on mothers is masked, it is easier to construct women as waged workers. Although a great deal of ambivalence exists regarding a "work expectation" for middle-class mothers in light of the traditional family model, single mothers receiving social assistance have increasingly been defined exclusively as waged workers through work incentives and requirements (Evans 1995; Scott 1996: 8). An expectation of waged labour can reduce welfare expenditures and may also be rationalized as a way of inculcating a work ethic in children. Such a rationale reflects an implicit assumption that domestic labour is not work, and that the discipline of the market will benefit children. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, the reality of unequal involvement in child care constrains women's labour

market activity, particularly that of low-income women who have fewer resources with which to purchase day-care services and, typically, less flexible work arrangements than middle- or high-income earners. In the absence of adequate social supports for parenting, mandated employment for recipients also indirectly encourages a "family ethic" (Evans 1998). Partial or complete economic dependency of women on men through nuclear family formation provides one way of attempting to manage the contradictions between paid and unpaid labour.

The Family Ethic and Dominant Ideologies of Motherhood

Notwithstanding an official policy of gender neutrality, policy makers can reliably assume that women will continue to bear the costs of child-rearing labour because of the powerful ideas and beliefs surrounding motherhood. Jane Pulkingham (1994: 81) noted that in discussions regarding the feminization of poverty, the "'deserving' status [of women] is usually tied to their status as mothers," and the "legitimacy of feminist demands on behalf of women tend to be established by evoking the moral claim of women *and* children." Middle-class maternalist feminists and philanthropic organizations in the early 20th century certainly relied on women's role as mothers to increase expenditures on children and enhance the status of women. Part of the legacy of this first wave of feminism was to glorify motherhood as a natural female destiny and impose class and culturally specific norms of motherhood. The ideal mother was a woman who, within the context of the patriarchal nuclear family, was entirely devoted to her children and who maintained a clean, stable home.

In the context of child poverty, women's receipt of benefits, if any, is incidentally derived through their motherhood. State discourse on child poverty, however, neither directly challenges nor explicitly relies on the ideology of motherhood as a result of its ostensible commitment to gender neutrality. The effect of gender neutrality in policy discourse is to make the actual obligations of motherhood for low-income women less visible and creditworthy but not necessarily to stop blaming mothers. In a culture and social structure that remains sexist, racist, heterosexist and classist, mothers continue to be blamed for child outcomes, and gender-neutral policy discourse does not appear to have lessened this potential. As suggested previously, the focus on poor children implicitly raises questions regarding the conduct and behaviour of their parents/mothers.

Clearly, the norms and expectations of traditional motherhood, defined as full-time care and devotion, are changing. The traditional norms co-exist uneasily with increasing expectations on mothers to perform waged labour. Boyd (1996) argued that the image of the "SuperMom" does not challenge the ultimate or overall expectations of motherhood but only adds to them. Women are now, like the SuperMom, expected to function adequately in both the home and the paid work force, but can do so only by paying other women to perform child-care labour. Moreover, while fathers have an increased role, they are still not expected to assume equal de facto responsibility for children. According to Smart (1996), fathers tend to be constructed more as parents that "care about" rather than "care for" their children.

Several writers have argued that although some norms around motherhood are changing, the dominant ideology of motherhood still constitutes an effective form of discipline. Women are encouraged and expected to assume primary responsibility for this work (a "choice" that

is structurally reinforced by conditions in low-wage employment and a lack of child-care supports) and are still primarily blamed for child outcomes. Indeed, the dominance of these ideals accounts for the guilt, strain and role conflict experienced predominantly by working mothers, not fathers. Little and Hillyard (1998: 153) noted that fathers on assistance do not experience the same degree of moral or financial scrutiny that single mothers encounter. Moreover, mothers remain subject to the stigma of being a "bad mother" and of failing to meet standards that are increasingly subtle and complex. According to Carol Smart (1996: 47):

> In the late twentieth century, even middle- and upper-class mothers can fail [the test of motherhood] since the addition of psychological and emotional criteria has broadened and deepened the areas of scrutiny. However, the public focus remains largely where it has always been, namely with working-class mothers...the ones who are deemed most likely to fail on the many tests of what makes a good mother [footnote omitted].

As Smart (1996) noted, women are differentially scrutinized and assessed as mothers in relation to their social position. In the United States, Martha Fineman (1995: 67) argued that the "neutering of motherhood" in legal discourse has been accompanied by the designation of motherhood outside the traditional nuclear heterosexual form as deviant or pathological. Nancy Dowd (1995) outlined the ways in which lone parenthood is stigmatized in the United States: it is seen as the cause of poverty (rather than gender discrimination in the wage labour market or insufficient supports), as a family form that is psychologically unhealthy for children, and as the result of immoral and irresponsible sexual activity. As evident by Premier Harris' remarks, single mothers receiving social assistance are becoming an increasingly visible target of welfare reform in Canada (Evans 1992).

Promoting the best interests of children has been the primary justification for discouraging lone-parent families and promoting both the family ethic and full-time motherhood. Although low wages, a lack of child-care supports and social welfare policies structurally reinforce a two-parent model,[58] these beliefs present powerful ideals precisely because they are grounded in concern for the well-being of children (e.g., Richards 1997; Moir 1999). Empirical studies do suggest that children in lone-parent households are worse off on average and face a higher risk of dropping out of school and teenage pregnancy than children in two-parent households. These correlations may, however, be largely attributable to differences in income and support structures, or abuse or marital conflict before separation. A government report (HRDC 1999b: 18) based on the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth stated that "[d]espite the emotional, social and financial pressures involved when one adult is responsible for all child-rearing and household duties, the outcomes for most children in these households are no different from those for children in two-parent households." One study (Lipman et al. 1998: 3) suggested that children in lone-parent households run a higher statistical risk of poor developmental outcomes even when income and social supports are taken into account, but also indicated that "the magnitude of the strength of relationship and variance explained is limited."[59] In the United States, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) argued that half of the general differential between lone- and two-parent families results from a lack or loss of income following separation. The balance comes from a lack of supervision and parental

involvement as well as too much residential mobility (both of which are probably also related to lack of income). As McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) and Lipman et al. (1998) have acknowledged, their studies fail to address the question of whether the children would have been better off if the parents had not separated because they lack a measure of the child's well-being before separation. Households with an alcoholic or abusive parent, or high spousal conflict have both a higher rate of break-up and a higher risk of school failure for children (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Poor child outcomes cannot simply be attributed to an absence of the father when the presence of the father either directly or indirectly through his impact on the mother may have contributed to these outcomes.

These debates reflect a number of anxieties related to the role of fatherhood and fathers and, potentially, class anxieties insofar as the dependency of wives and children have provided an incentive to work and inhibited worker militancy. Some feminists might argue that these responses constitute part of a backlash against women's reduced social and economic dependence on men. For present purposes, significance lies in the fact that the interests of children appear prominently in these debates without acknowledging the consequences for women or the possibility that women can make responsible decisions with the objective of enhancing the joint well-being of themselves and their children. Critics of lone parenthood ultimately rely on an idealized vision of family and of men as nurturing, engaged fathers. Public policy that rendered lone parenthood a more viable family form might actually help to make nurturing, engaged fatherhood more of a reality than it is at present.

Several authors have also shown how Aboriginal women, women identified as visible minorities, and women with disabilities, all of whom are disproportionately poor or low-income mothers, are more likely to be perceived as bad mothers and discouraged from having and rearing children (Kline 1998; Roberts 1993). In legal child welfare discourse, Aboriginal women are more easily constructed as bad mothers and individually blamed for the consequences of racism and poverty. Cultural norms in conflict with dominant norms tend to be ignored (Kline 1998).

In the United States, race has been an explicit part of the welfare debates since the 1970s with stereotypes of single Black mothers, such as the Black matriarch (in the '70s) and the Black teenage mother (in the '80s and '90s) constructed as the prototypical users of welfare. In Canada, as in Great Britain, welfare reform discourse has not explicitly linked race with lone parenthood or welfare dependency (Phoenix 1996). However, poverty is becoming increasingly racialized in parts of Canada, a reflection to some extent of increased real rates of poverty among recent immigrants, most of whom are non-White and Aboriginal populations. In regions like Saskatchewan where Aboriginal women have a higher birth rate and Aboriginal youth constitute a disproportionate number of children in care and in juvenile detention centres, Aboriginal mothers may be even more readily stereotyped as bad mothers.

Child-centred discourse is not inherently emancipatory. In a sexist and racist culture, increasing the profile of children without providing meaningful social supports for parenting can increase the scrutiny of, and blame attributed to, mothers. An enhanced social interest in children can increase the indirect therapeutic state regulation of women by intensifying the cultural standards of parenting. As these standards are traditionally defined by White,

middle-class, heterosexual norms, low-income women can experience increased pressure and stress in attempting to meet them. The possibility of increased direct regulatory coercion, in the name of rescue, is particularly relevant for poor women both because of increased scrutiny and the prevalence of negative cultural stereotypes. Examples of potential coercive measures include the ever-present threat to abortion rights, the potential for increased monitoring of women's activities and behaviour during pregnancy, increased apprehension of children under child welfare legislation and increased penalties under discussion for crimes against children. In the United States, politicians and commentators have seriously discussed increased resort to orphanages and foster homes as an alternative to the funding or support of "irresponsible parents," despite what is known about the devastating impact of such placements on many children.

Historical studies suggest that the focus on child poverty and at-risk children at the turn of the last century relied on the stereotyping of particular categories of low-income mothers as undeserving. The current child poverty focus can also promote sentimentalized middle class notions of rescuing children that rest both on the conceptual separation of children from their mothers and on blaming mothers who are poor, single and/or Aboriginal or identifiable as members of visible minorities. Unless accompanied by meaningful supports for parenting, child-centred poverty discourse can encourage a politics of rescue, a contemporary form of child saving, in many respects analogous to that of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Summary

Because of the interdependence of the lives of women and children, policy measures that target children will inevitably affect women. Whether they do so in a positive or negative way depends very much on how the policy measures are designed.

At a fundamental level, we must ask why it makes sense to address women's poverty through children or to justify it in terms of child well-being. Framing the issue in this way implies that women are important primarily as a resource for children (a long-time staple of patriarchal ideology) and that women's independent welfare is not a matter of social or community concern.

Child poverty appears useful as a way of framing the issue of poverty because of the particular material and ideological context of state discourse that has emerged since the mid-1970s. Women's groups can attempt to stretch the limits of a child poverty focus by stressing the actual interdependence between women and children. However, restructuring and related ideologies are most likely to shape the dominant meaning and policy implications of child poverty unless directly challenged. When viewed in this context and as a dominant approach to poverty, a child poverty focus is problematic.

The focus on children's experience of poverty essentially relies, for its discursive and ideological force, on the construction of children, particularly very young children, as innocent and naturally dependent, hence deserving of social support. A focus on child poverty denies or minimizes the harm of adult poverty, even in the context of families, and implies that adult poverty is not a matter of public or social concern, but rather a matter of individual

responsibility. Implicitly, it reinforces the view that adult dependence is deviant and that adult poverty is primarily the outcome of individual or family (mis)behaviour. Implicitly, it supports a number of idealistic notions about social life (including equal opportunity, fair market outcomes and gender equality within the nuclear heterosexual family) which obscure the actual systemic and structural causes of poverty.

In focussing on children and reinforcing a norm of self-sufficiency for adults, this form of discourse reinforces market definitions of work, obscuring the increasing costs of the contradiction between the demands of paid and unpaid labour that are borne largely by women. Rather than connecting the plight of children with the costs of parenting labour, child poverty discourse separates mothers from children and obscures the persistently gendered nature of caregiving labour and its consequences for women as a group. Although facially consistent with an assumption of gender neutrality and equality, an enhanced interest in children can also increase the actual blaming of mothers for child outcomes in the absence of adequate supports for parenting. Unless dominant constructions of deservingness are explicitly contested, a focus on children can heighten the scrutiny and intensify the blame put on mothers.

5. THE IMPACT OF SPECIFIC CHILD-FOCUSSED ANTI-POVERTY INITIATIVES ON WOMEN

The most significant federal policy measures implemented since the mid-1990s to address or reduce child poverty have been the Child Support Guidelines, the National Child Benefit and the Early Childhood Development Initiative of the National Children's Agenda. The National Child Benefit is part of the broader National Children's Agenda and will be succeeded by a new employment assistance program for persons with disabilities. All these programs are the result of extensive consultation with federal, provincial and territorial governments. The National Child Benefit and the Children's Agenda are the products of agreements between the federal government and all provincial and territorial governments except Quebec. Although both are presented as national programs, Quebec has not participated in these initiatives since the Quebec government claims exclusive jurisdiction over social programs. First Nations have not been privy to the negotiation of these initiatives, but they do have the authority to manage and disburse funding advanced under the programs to members of reserves.

There are other federal and intergovernmental strategies in relation to children. On the criminal front, for example, the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention deals with the need to invest in children and youth from a crime prevention perspective. The new Youth Criminal Justice Act has increased the responsibility of juveniles for crime, and there has been discussion of stiffer penalties for sexual and physical assaults of children in relation to child abuse and child prostitution. The programs assessed in this chapter are more specifically targeted or related to child poverty. These programs are also relatively recent, and empirical evidence on their impact does not yet exist or is not fully documented. The likely impact on women living in poverty is nonetheless, to a significant degree, apparent from their major structural and discursive features.

The following preliminary analysis suggests that these programs are generating beneficial outcomes for some women. However, none of these programs is shifting in any major way the incidence and depth of poverty for women and children nor changing the traditional allocation of public and private responsibility in relation to children. The programs retain an emphasis on the market, in terms of the allocation of benefits to individuals and on the family, as the primary locus of responsibility for children. The programs tend to obscure the hidden costs of child rearing (domestic labour) that disproportionately hurt women and reinforce a residual model of state intervention similar to that in place in the United States a decade ago. Moreover, the impact is unevenly distributed among women and children. Women receiving social assistance and their children, in particular, appear to benefit least from these programs.

Child Support Guidelines

Discourse of Child Poverty

In 1996, the federal government released its Child Support Package. It consisted of a number of reforms:

- a set of numerical guidelines for child support;
- a change in the tax treatment of child support eliminating the tax deduction for the payer and tax payment for the payee;
- the funding of more rigorous enforcement of support awards; and
- an increase in the then Working Income Supplement paid to low-income working families.

The government also established the Child Support Implementation and Enforcement Fund to assist provinces and territorial governments in the implementation and enforcement of the Federal Child Support Guidelines, which came into effect May 1, 1997.

Increasing child poverty rates in lone-parent households were clearly an important concern in discourse surrounding the Guidelines. In 1991, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Family Law Committee expressed concern about the inadequacy and non-payment or irregular payment of awards, the large percentage of women and children that live in poverty following divorce and the significant disparity in standards of living for custodial and non-custodial parents (FLC 1991: 1-3). In 1995, the Committee stated: "A child support formula is an important step towards a child-centred approach to family law and such an approach to determining child support awards is in the best interests of Canadian children" (FLC 1995b: 3). Mary Jane Mossman (1997: 75) suggested that the discourse surrounding the Guidelines constructed the problem of support for children primarily as a problem of "deadbeat dads."

In the House of Common debates (1996: 4900-4901) on second reading of Bill C-41, Gordon Kirkby, then Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, indicated at the outset:

> We are a society that is compassionate, tolerant and civil. We take pride in social programs that are intended to protect the most vulnerable. We care deeply about our commitment to sharing. These values are reflected in the way we treat our children.
>
> Canadians understand the importance of early intervention of safe and secure childhoods if we are to enable all individuals to reach their full potential. Canadians also place a strong emphasis on the importance of individual responsibility while governments have a role in helping the most vulnerable. We also believe in people taking responsibility for themselves.
>
> How do these values relate to our strategy for child support? They require laws and policies that produce adequate and consistent child support levels, that respect fathers and mothers who make their payments and ensure that those who are obligated to pay actually do so.

Mr. Kirkby then alluded to the changing nature of the Canadian family as a result of the increase in lone-parent households and to the "established link" between impoverished women and children and marital breakdown. "The steps we are taking to strengthen and improve Canada's child support system will not end child poverty, but we believe these

steps will help" (House of Commons 1996: 4901, 4904). During these debates, members of the Reform Party complained that the Bill was not comprehensive and that it was biased against male parents because it did not address access issues for non-custodial parents.

The on-line promotional literature and the legislation itself is not as explicit about reducing child poverty or about reducing welfare costs. The legislation sets out the following objectives:

> a. to establish a fair standard of support for children that ensures that they continue to benefit from the financial means of both spouses after separation;
>
> b. to reduce conflict and tension between spouses by making the calculation of child support orders more objective;
>
> c. to improve the efficiency of the legal process by giving courts and spouses guidance in setting the levels of child support orders and encouraging settlement; and
>
> d. to ensure consistent treatment of spouses and children who are in similar circumstances (*The Federal Child Support Guidelines*, SOR/97-175).

Implications for Women

Economic impact of federal guidelines

Because women most often are custodial parents, sharing the same residence and general standard of living as the child, women will benefit indirectly from any increase in child support payments and from more rigorous enforcement of support payments. The extent to which more rigorous enforcement systems have made a difference is not yet known and difficult to monitor since each province has different programs in place. Equally complex is the question of whether the numerical fixed regime established by the Guidelines has improved the economic status of women and children relative to the previous discretionary judicial regime in relation to child support. The Minister of Justice must report to both houses of Parliament on the impact of the Guidelines by May 2002, at which time preliminary evidence will be available.

There are several problems in identifying the relative economic impact of the Guidelines. First, only a limited database exists with respect to the pre-Guideline situation. In 1991, the Family Law Committee undertook a three-month pilot survey in selected cities across Canada, tracking judicial awards in 869 cases. At that time, the Committee indicated that the sample was representative of the general population of cases involving child support with the exception of high-income payers (FLC 1995a: 53). There is also a problem of transition in that by the time the Guidelines were formulated and implemented, courts were beginning to make higher awards (Driedger 2001). Any comparison would have to control for the improved labour market since 1997 that could have affected the payer's income. Additionally, any comparison would have to account for the impact of tax changes since child support is no longer tax deductible for the payer and taxable for the payee. Husbands now have less disposable income than under the former tax regime: some estimates of the differential derived from income splitting are as high as $410 million. Whether this change has resulted in reduced net awards to custodial parents depends on how effective the deduction-inclusion system was in shifting the benefit of income splitting to them in the first

place. Given judicial practices, there is considerable doubt that custodial parents benefited at all from the deduction/inclusion system.[60]

A truly valid assessment would also have to account for the possibility that any apparent increase in the amounts of child support has resulted in reduced spousal support awards. If so, the total income of the custodial spouse may remain unchanged or in fact have fallen. An assessment would also have to address the impact of the Guidelines on private agreements. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Marcil-Gratton and Le Bourdais (1999) found that in the majority of separations involving children before the implementation of the Guidelines, no court order for child support existed. In 32% of separations there was no agreement with respect to child support, a private agreement in 32% of cases and a court order for child support in only 36% of cases. In terms of divorces, it appears that the majority of cases are now proceeding in accordance with the Guidelines, but practices differ depending on the judicial site. Bertrand et al. (2001: 6) noted that "it is difficult to determine how actively judges scrutinize child support arrangements in situations involving consent agreements or uncontested applications." In Alberta, staff workers review all applications in uncontested cases, and courts are not allowing divorces to proceed without compliance with the Guidelines. However, this practice does not exist in many other judicial sites and financial statements are not always required in uncontested matters (Bertrand et al. 2001: 6). Where such data were available (in 79% of cases examined by Horlick et al.), child support awards were either the same or greater than the table amount. Only 5.4% of cases report award amounts less than the table amounts (Bertrand et al. 2001: 36-37).

For these reasons, estimates of the actual impact of the Guidelines are very complex. However, some reasonable estimations of its impact can be made.

The mathematical model used to construct the table amounts in the Guidelines is based on several assumptions: the recipient parent and children in custody share the same standard of living, and both the paying parent and the recipient parent are single adults in each of the two households. The Guidelines consist of two general components, both an estimation of the "costs of children" and an allocation of these costs to the parents.

The estimation of child costs under the Guidelines reflects an expenditure rather than a need-based model and is directly related to income since spending on children increases with income. The Family Law Committee that studied the Guidelines ended up adopting a set of ratios known as the 40/30 Equivalence Scale that is derived from the Statistics Canada Family Expenditure Data Base (FAMEX). The Scale is used by Statistics Canada in the construction of low-income measures. It is based on expenditure data that identify average national expenditures on children (food, clothing, rent, etc. including day care and special summer camps) at different income levels and family sizes across all age groups. Statistics Canada (1992: 185) has stated:

> For the [Low Income Measures], in keeping with the principle of simplicity and conspicuously arbitrary choices, each additional adult is assumed to increase the family's "needs" by 40% of the "needs" of the first adult, and

> each child's "needs" are assumed to be 30% of that of the first adult. Other values could just as easily have been chosen…. The values of 40% and 30% seemed to be in the general range of most other estimates.

According to the FLC, the scale is a reasonable approximation of actual monetary expenditures attributable to children taking into account the fact that precision is impossible to achieve.

The 40/30 Scale attempts to identify the incomes at which levels of well-being are equalized among household members and to recognize the impact of economies of scale achieved through cohabitation. In the post-separation context, the FLC recommended that the 40/30 equivalence scale be applied to allow the first child in the custodial parent's household to count as the second individual (i.e., equal to 40%, and not as the third individual at 30%). The use of 40% reflects the empirically established fact that the average costs of raising children are higher in lone-parent households relative to two-parent households (FLC 1992: 15). The Scale may encompass some increased direct costs, such as housing, car repairs and child-care expenses, but does not necessarily deal with increased costs incurred as a result of greater time pressures experienced by the lone parent as opposed to the two-parent household with children (shopping, reliance on convenience foods) (Zweibel 1993: 396). The National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL 1998: 6) has suggested that FAMEX is based on data that "omits important items (such as savings, mortgage principle payments, insurance and pension accumulations)" even though stability of residence and future income security are benefits that are relevant to, and do benefit, children. Because the table numbers in the Guidelines represent average spending on child-related expenses for families at various income levels, the Guidelines ignore significant cost differences for children of different ages and in different regions. The FAMEX survey includes many families who have no child-care expenses whereas day care often becomes a monetary expense on separation. Day-care costs may be widely underreported and are also much higher for younger children and higher in large urban centres than in small rural communities (NAWL 1998: 7). For these reasons, the Guidelines included child care as an add-on or special expense even though this involves some measure of double counting and was not endorsed by the Family Law Committee in its final report (FLC 1995a: 10). It should be noted that the FAMEX survey did not include the costs of exercising access which can be high in individual cases. The Guidelines include a provision that addresses undue hardship for reasons that may include high access costs. When applying the undue hardship provision, courts often appear reluctant to make adjustments to the table amounts (Driedger 2001).

While payees, generally women, benefit to some degree from the treatment of day care as an add-on, NAWL has pointed out that the Guidelines do "not consider significant non-monetary costs and lost opportunity costs incurred because of the presence of the children in the household" (NAWL 1998: 6). FAMEX data include only actual monetary expenditures on children and neglect the ongoing non-monetary costs of parenting that are mostly borne by women both pre- and post-divorce. These costs include increased responsibility and time spent on household and child-rearing tasks (from full-time care to supervising homework, driving to activities, socialization skills) and current and future employment opportunity costs (arising from limits on overtime, shift work, job-related travel, promotion, job choice and location) (Zweibel 1993: 392-394). As the FLC (1991: 61) noted in its discussion paper,

these costs are not necessarily related to being a spouse; they arise directly as a result of child-care responsibilities and often continue after termination of the spousal relationship.[61] Spousal support is also not available to parents who are not married under the *Divorce Act* or who have not had a sufficiently long-term relationship under provincial family legislation. In its final report, however, the FLC (1995a: 47) concluded that these matters simply were more appropriately compensated for in terms of spousal support.[62]

In terms of allocating the narrower monetary "costs of children" between the parents, the Guidelines appear to base awards primarily on the number of children and the income of the non-custodial parent. The fact that the Guidelines refer only to the income of the non-custodial parent and are not also based on the actual income of the custodial parent generates a strong perception of unfairness to payers (e.g., Williamson 1997). In fact, the "revised fixed percentage of income approach" starts with the assumption that if the parents had equal incomes, it would be fair and equitable that each contribute equally to the support of their children. From this assumption, the Committee concluded that "since the award determined by using the equivalence scale is fair to all concerned when the two incomes are equal, from the child's perspective it continues to be fair that the non-custodial parent should pay the same amount even when the incomes are different" (FLC 1995b: 5). Thus, "the formula takes the gross income of the non-custodial parent and determines how much he or she would have to pay to the custodial household to equalize the two standards of living *if both parents earned that amount*"[emphasis in the original] (FLC 1995b: 5-6). In other words, the formula imputes an equivalent income to the custodial spouse and then applies the equivalence scale to identify an award that will equalize imputed levels of well-being taking into account its payment.

The Committee treated the assumption that parties with the same income should pay the same child support as non-controversial. However, even if monetary incomes of the parents were equal, the custodial parent incurs a number of substantial hidden costs related to the time-consuming tasks of child rearing and lost opportunity costs that may not be compensated by spousal support. Moreover, from a child's perspective, the assumption of equal incomes may be problematic if, as is generally true, the custodial parent's income is lower and not equal to that of the non-custodial parent. Although the child inevitably benefits from the income of the custodial parent if it goes up, as recognized by the courts, more often, the custodial parent's income is less than that of the non-custodial parent. Arguably, from a child's perspective, equalization of living standards would be the preferable option, one that might also address, to some degree, the indirect costs of care giving. The Canadian Bar Association put forward a recommendation that would equalize family incomes (Pask 1993/94: 114-115) but the Committee described such an outcome as a "radical policy change"(FLC 1995b: 5). In its final report, members indicated they had "many concerns" with such a proposal, but these concerns were never specifically articulated (FLC 1995a: 82).

If the objective had been to equalize the standards of living of the two households, awards would clearly have been higher. It is nonetheless true, as the Committee recognized, that the formula provides "some cushion against the decline in the child's standard of living that results from actually sharing in the standard of living of a lower income custodial parent" (FLC 1995a: 13). It has this effect because the assumption of equal incomes raises the joint

income of the parents, which corresponds to increased average expenditures on children and, therefore, a higher table amount.[63]

Notwithstanding the above concerns, evidence at the time the Guidelines were proposed showed that the revised fixed percentage formula resulted in an average increase over current awards of 32%, assuming no change to the tax system (FLC 1995a: 69). Finnie (1997: 85) predicted that "the net (after tax) cost of new awards will, on average, clearly be substantially higher than in the past..., with many of those with existing awards who come under the new treatment likely to see the net cost of their child support payments double or more." Estimates using the 1991 database suggested that the formula would significantly increase awards where non-custodial parents earned over $30,000 a year, which was the income group in which children experienced the most significant disparity in their standards of living following the marital breakdown (FLC 1995a: 15, 69). Given these estimations, the Guidelines will likely result in an improvement in women's lives and reduce the overall disparities in living standards where their spouses have middle to upper incomes. Certainly, court awards indicate a dramatic increase in child support at high-income levels. While this represents an attack on the glass ceiling, it may also skew or distort the averages.

Moreover, there are reasons to believe that the Guidelines have had much less of a positive impact, if at all, on low-income women, who disproportionately are women with a disability, Aboriginal, of a visible minority or recent immigrants. The specific problems for low-income women are discussed below.

Limited Capacity of Low-Income Males/Fathers to Pay: The amount of support is very dependent on the income status and resources of the payer. A low-income non-custodial parent means low child support awards which generally do not meet children's needs. Most poor children live in two-parent families and if poor before dissolution of the marriage, will be poor after (Mossman 1997: 76).[64] In reviewing child support initiatives in the United States since the late 1980s, Marsha Garrison (2000) noted that the poverty rate of children in lone-parent households has not declined and that living standards still differ markedly after separation. In her view, a primary reason is the lack of resources or low income, since divorce is more likely for low-income households, and the fathers of children in mother-only households are disproportionately found at lower income levels (Garrison 2000: 23). Garrison also noted that child support measures in the United States have benefited White custodial parents more so than Black custodial parents, because of the lower income of Black men on average. "Because most poor children do not have 'deadbeat dads' who can contribute significantly more to their support, child support policy will offer the most help to the least needy: it cannot be expected to achieve a major reduction in children's poverty" [reference omitted] (Garrison 2000: 24-25). As indicated in Chapter 3, Aboriginal men and men identified as visible minorities experience a lower average income and a higher incidence of poverty compared to other men in Canada.

A comparison of awards identified in the three-month survey of actual cases in 1991 with those generated by the Committee's then proposed formula showed that the formula:

> produces amounts that are on average similar to the court awards collected when the non-custodial parent earns a low (under $15,000) and medium income ($15,000 - $30,000). Awards tend to be slightly lower than the court awards for cases involving one child and slightly higher for cases involving two or more children. However, when the non-custodial parent earns a high income (over $30,000), the awards are much higher than the court awards, especially for large families (FLC 1995b: 10).

These calculations were subject to a deduction/inclusion pass-through in cases where the custodial parent faced a lower income tax rate than the non-custodial parent. Without a deduction/inclusion pass-through, as is currently the law, the revised fixed percentage resulted in only a 2% decrease in the number of children in poverty (FLC 1995a: 77).

It should be noted that the self-reserve amount for payers (below which no child support is payable) in all jurisdictions except Yukon is $6,730 and in Yukon $8,940. The FLC, afraid that the Guidelines formula would have lowered awards for non-custodial parents at lower income levels, recommended a low income adjusted variant. The adjustment would have increased awards to approximate current judicial awards where non-custodial parents earned less than $20,000 (FLC 1995a: 71-72). It would have reduced the number of children in poverty by 4% and the overall number of people living in poverty, but increased the poverty rate per household by driving "more non-custodial parents into poverty than they deliver custodial families out of poverty" (FLC 1995a: 74). In the final award schedules, awards at low-income levels were substantially decreased from these earlier adjusted versions, and the percentage of income paid as support under the tables appears fairly constant across all income levels (Finnie 1997: 86). Nonetheless, the self-reserve amount is far too low to meet the basic needs of an individual.

Officials appear to acknowledge that the Guidelines will have little impact where both the custodial parent and the non-custodial parent have an income equal to or less than $15,000 with one child. With two children, awards may have increased relative to the prior situation, but the largest impact has been experienced where the non-custodial parent has a greater income. Benefits from increased enforcement of child support awards will also be realized only where payers have the ability to pay.

Deduction of Support from Awards for Recipients of Social Assistance: In 1997, at the time of the implementation of the Guidelines, one source indicated that about 50% of child support awards in Ontario involved recipients of social assistance.[65] Generally, recipients of social assistance must pursue child support as a condition of eligibility for assistance. Following the introduction of the Guidelines, Saskatchewan changed its regulations: recipients entering into voluntary agreements must establish an amount of support within 10% of the table amounts (Kerr 1999: 27). The Guidelines have made it easier to monitor and scrutinize voluntary agreements for maintenance entered into by women receiving social assistance. Data available from Saskatchewan and British Columbia, however, suggest that 75% of lone parents receiving social assistance are still not paid under child support orders even after the implementation of the Guidelines (Kerr 1999: 45).

Even where child support complies with the Guidelines and is paid, any support paid (including both the table amount and any claim or order for special or extraordinary expenses) is treated as income for the recipient and clawed back from the social assistance payment. In the fall of 2000, only three jurisdictions (British Columbia, Yukon and Quebec) exempted some portion of the maintenance award from a set-off as an incentive to claim maintenance. However, the amount retained was only $100 monthly, and the exemption in Quebec exists only for children under 5 (Assie 2001: 18). Saskatchewan includes child support as earned income under its Employment Supplement, but support must exceed $124 to qualify, and the amounts payable are usually low. It should be noted that child support awards are deducted from all other forms of income-tested government transfers to lone parents (e.g., housing subsidies). The Canada Child Tax Benefit is an exception (Assie 2001: 24).

Thus, while support ultimately reduces government expenditures, particularly social assistance expenditures, it generally does not benefit women recipients or their children. This outcome illustrates most clearly how the Guidelines have resulted in a shift to privatized responsibility without any corresponding benefit to many low-income women and children. In fact, enhanced enforcement measures may have resulted in increased burdens and invasions of privacy for mothers receiving social assistance (Josephson 1997). They not only must identify and co-operate in the collection of maintenance from estranged partners as a condition of receiving social assistance but may also have to endure extended relationships with fathers who have caused harm to them or their children. In cases of domestic violence, the requirement to pursue support can only be waived at the discretion of the caseworker or director. Although social service ministries have denied the charge, women's groups have complained that workers have put women at risk (Kerr 1999:13). In a participatory research study of women receiving social assistance in Saskatchewan, women complained that where children had been victims of abuse, "child care supports were constant legal battles that caused stress for participants." Study participants viewed the deduction of child-care supports as "unfair and punitive to children" and "discriminatory toward women, because it placed the burden of the legal battle on the women, while SS [Social Services] took away the benefits of that struggle" (Hanson et al. 2001: 23).

Impediments to Claims for Support: Court maintenance workers or legal aid lawyers are available to assist lone parents on social assistance in obtaining a support order. As mentioned above, any support received is generally clawed back and used to reduce government expenditures. Low-income lone parents not on social assistance and who cannot afford legal assistance to negotiate an agreement or implement a court action generally have no right to legal aid (Assie 2001: 13-16).

Public legal education programs, specialized child support units, court services staff and information telephone numbers in some provinces provide information about the Guidelines or lawyer referrals for free or at nominal cost (Bertrand et al. 2001: 12-14). Divorce kits that assist in self-representation are available for purchase for both initial applications and variations. A number of jurisdictions provide courses or workshops about the effects of separation and divorce on children. Free advice from a lawyer, however, on an individual's specific situation is generally not available. In most jurisdictions, people involved in family law disputes are not eligible for legal aid unless violence, abuse or another criminal matter is

present. Where legal assistance is available in all family law disputes (i.e., in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories), eligibility is restricted by needs testing and limited to very low incomes. New Brunswick provides legal aid services to all child support claimants without needs testing, but only until the client files a petition for divorce (Bertrand et al. 2001: 16).

The lack of legal assistance clearly limits the ability of low-income women to access and benefit from child support orders and may help explain why child support orders have not been obtained in the majority of separations (Marcil-Gratton and Le Bourdais 1999). It may also explain why the anticipated avalanche of applications for a variation order after implementation of the Guidelines did not materialize. In most cases, these applications may not have been financially feasible or cost effective. An appreciable difference is needed to offset legal costs. (In Ontario, costs for a contested but reasonably simple application would likely be about $5,000.)[66] Even if women are self-representing, there are other costs to litigation in terms of time, lost income, uncertainty and emotional stress that may serve as impediments. Litigation is time consuming, stressful and expensive. Mothers may prefer to avoid conflict and in applications for a variation order, avoid potentially having to revisit other aspects of the agreement, notably custody and access, or levels of spousal support.[67] Women who have experienced domestic abuse may also be concerned that their own safety or well-being and that of their children could be jeopardized by any form of legal action against the abuser.

Explicit priority given to child as opposed to spousal support

It is clearer now, relative to the former discretionary regime, that two separate orders for child and spousal support must be made. The Guidelines generate a hard distinction between child support (which is presumptively subject to the table amounts) and spousal support (which remains discretionary) but gives the former priority over the latter through the *Divorce Act*. This priority has a pragmatic basis because it minimizes income splitting for tax purposes. Unlike child support, spousal support remains deductible from the payer's income and taxable to the payee who generally has a lower income than the payer.

In its response to the federal Child Support guidelines, the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL 1998: 12) noted a fear "that the priority of child support has exacerbated the already existing tendency to ignore spousal support altogether, or to award lower amounts." The Association recommends either no priority, or at a minimum, a direction that courts still consider the need for spousal support. How support is divided between child and spousal support is not a material issue, particularly for low-income women, since whatever money there is goes toward the same household expenses. Whether the priorization of child support has induced a shift away from, or marginalization of, spousal support is, however, important because the total net income of custodial spouses may remain unchanged or have declined. Moreover, such an outcome reinforces the invisibility of the costs of child rearing that are borne predominantly by women.

In *Moge* v. *Moge* (1992), the Supreme Court of Canada decided that judges had to consider a number of explicit objectives when awarding spousal support under the *Divorce Act*, including the right to compensatory support for the costs of past, current and ongoing child care.[68] As a

result of the Guidelines, spousal support represents the only way of directly compensating child-rearing labour where payers have the ability to pay. However, since spousal support awards are highly discretionary and subject to other objectives, such as the promotion of self-sufficiency or the satisfaction of need, there is a question as to whether judges actually compensate for the indirect costs of child care — past, current and future — in making spousal support awards. Between October 1998 and March 2000, in a database of over 14,000, only 10% received a spousal support award in an amount other than $0. About 75% of the monthly awards were $1,000 or less and in 98.5% of cases that specified the paying spouse, the payer was the husband (Bertrand et al. 2001: 33). Carol Rogerson (1997), in an analysis of cases since *Moge* up to 1997, suggested that although most spousal awards were more generous post-*Moge*, they were still shaped primarily by need and ability to pay, not fair compensation for unpaid labour. In particular, she noted that courts often ignored the significant costs of post-divorce child care, even in marriages of relatively short duration. Where recognized, the awards had generally been minimal (Rogerson 1997: 367-368). According to Rogerson, in basing awards primarily on need and recasting women as private economic dependants, the radical message of *Moge* has been "diluted" and women's entitlement to compensation for unpaid labour "delegitimated" (Rogerson 1997: 386-387).

John Syrtash (1998) suggested that in the Metropolitan Toronto area there has been an increase in the size and frequency of spousal support awards of an apparently compensatory nature. Not surprisingly, high spousal support awards appear to benefit previously high-income households. The application of a spousal support database in the Metropolitan Toronto area revealed that low-income recipients (as of October 1998) were receiving less overall support. Syrtash (1998: 10) attributed this to the fact that child support is no longer deductible to the payer, although he did not indicate whether support has been reduced on average by an amount greater than, less than or equal to the taxes saved by the custodial spouse. It should be noted that matrimonial or family property awards can also compensate women for their unpaid domestic labour, but most low-income spouses have little property to distribute at the end of their relationship.

Impact on relations with ex-spouse

Another relevant concern is whether the Federal Child Support Guidelines have increased post-separation conflict and hostility, in which case women, especially those in formerly abusive relationships, have more to manage. One American study found that child support modestly increased fathers' contact with their children but also increased the incidence of conflict between parents and children's exposure to conflict, particularly if awards were high relative to the father's income (Seltzer et al. 1998). Marcil-Gratton and Le Bourdais (1999) found that fathers who tended to pay under either a child support order (pre-Guidelines) or private agreement saw their children more frequently. However, children had less overall contact with fathers subject to a court order for support than with fathers subject to a private agreement, or neither a court order nor an agreement.

In Canada, an increased emphasis on child support has contributed to political pressure to move toward shared parenting, because the Guidelines were blocked by the Senate until a joint House of Commons–Senate committee was established to investigate custody/access and concerns of fathers' rights groups. In custody law, we are witnessing an enlargement of

access rights at the expense of the traditional rights and autonomy of the custodial parent, such as mobility rights.[69] These changes raise the concern that non-custodial spouses (generally fathers) appear to be benefiting from increased rights and control over mothers in the post-divorce contest without changing unequal patterns of actual daily responsibility for child care both pre- and post-divorce.

Summary

The Federal Child Support Guidelines and more rigorous enforcement measures have likely improved the ability of many women to provide for their children's needs. The impact of the table amounts is difficult to determine, because of the need to control for a number of related variables, including the potential for reduced spousal support awards. Because amounts in the Guidelines were based on actual monetary expenditures on children at different income levels, the table amounts fail to account for the costly impact of child-rearing labour, which is borne predominantly by mothers. The hidden costs of child rearing are not included in the "costs of children." Although these costs may be offset by access costs borne by the non-custodial parent, the extent to which they are fully compensated for by spousal support awards remains unclear. Even though an equivalent income on the part of the payee is assumed, the explicit focus on the payer's income generates a perception of unfairness. Most important, for present purposes, the impact of the Guidelines on the poorest women and children is minimal. The Guidelines are not expected to reduce the rate of child poverty given the inability of low-income men to pay support and the clawback of child support from social assistance. Among those to benefit least from the Guidelines will be a disproportionate number of single mothers who are identified as women with a disability, visible minority members or Aboriginal women, and their children.

The National Child Benefit[70]

Structure and Objectives of the National Child Benefit

The National Child Benefit (NCB) has three explicit objectives:

I. to help prevent and reduce the depth of child poverty;
II. to promote attachment to the workforce — resulting in fewer families having to rely on social assistance — by ensuring that families will always be better off as a result of finding work; and
III. to reduce overlap and duplication through closer harmonization of program objectives and benefits and through simplified administration (Canada 2000c: 3).

The NCB program came into effect in July 1998 and consists of a direct non-taxable payment by the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency to households with children (the National Child Benefit Supplement) and of expenditures on services and income supports by provincial, territorial or First Nation governments (reinvestments). The Supplement is a tier of income benefits paid by the federal government exclusively to low-income families. It is one component of the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) that also comprises the basic Child Tax Benefit (CTB), an income-tested benefit payable to low to upper middle-income families (formerly the 1995 Child Tax Benefit). The Supplement has been funded through

successive increases in federal funding from $300 million spent on the previous Working Income Supplement in 1996-97 to about $2.5 billion in 2001-02 (Canada 2000c: 11). In the 1999 and 2000 budgets, the federal government also increased the maximum basic CTB (by about $70 per year) and extended payment of the CTB to modest and middle-income families. In the 2000 budget, the federal government indexed the value of all benefits to the rate of inflation as of January 2000. The total federal investment in the CCTB increased from $5.1 billion in 1996-97 to $8 billion in 2001-02 (Canada 2000c: 11).

In 1997, governments participating in the NCB agreed in principle to at least three fundamental design or operating features. First, all participating government actors agreed that the NCB would be paid directly by what was then Revenue Canada (now the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency) to households with children, but the provinces would reduce (or "adjust" as government promotional material describes it) their funding of social assistance for households with children by the amount of the National Child Benefit Supplement. Households on social assistance were to be "protected" from net reductions in benefits in that the decrease in benefits by the provinces or territories could not exceed the amount of the federal increase. Second, the amount of the Supplement was intended to be incrementally enhanced to the point that is "sufficient to remove benefits for children from the welfare system" (Canada 1999: 13; 2000: 4). Participating governments expected the amount of the NCB would be increased over time, with each budget, to approximate eventually the amount of the child allowance paid per child to households receiving social assistance. Indeed, "replacing child benefits delivered through provincial/territorial social assistance systems with a national platform of income-tested child benefits delivered outside of social assistance" has emerged as an overarching objective of the NCB (Canada 2000a). Third, governments agreed to use the funds clawed back from the provision of social assistance as "reinvestment funds" to finance "complementary programs targeted at improving work incentives, benefits and services for low-income families with children."[71] Since 1997, government officials have also initiated the development of an alternative measure of poverty in evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the program. The Market Basket Measure, to be used in 2002, will increase the sensitivity of the poverty rate to living costs that vary by region and locale but is also expected to reduce the overall poverty rate by as much as 25%.

Payment of the CCTB depends on completion of an application and an annual tax return, specifying a fixed address. The CCTB is based on net income and does not include child support payments received as income. Adjusted for inflation, the basic CTB as of July 2001 consisted of $1,117 per annum per child under 18 years of age, $78 for each third or additional child plus $221 for each child under 7 (less 25% of child-care expenses claimed for all children). For families with net incomes of more than $30,004, the base benefit will be reduced by 2.5% for a one-child family and 5% of net income in a family with two or more children, ending at incomes of $76,680 (for a one- or two-child family) and in excess of $90,000 (for a three-child family) (Canada 2000b).[72] The basic CTB has been criticized because it violates the principle of horizontal equity in failing to distinguish between the treatment of high-income households with and without children. Freiler et al. (2001: 38) suggested that targeting in this way reflects a view of children as a private consumer choice rather than a shared responsibility of parents and society.

The Supplement consists of $1,255 per annum for the first child, $1,055 for the second and $980 for each additional child in families with incomes up to $21,744. Beyond this net family income, the Supplement is reduced by 12.2% for families with one child, 22.5% for two children and 32.1% with three or more. By 2004, households with children will receive a maximum CCTB (in nominal terms) of about $2,500 for the first child and $2,300 for the second and each subsequent child (Canada 2000c: 14). The government also intends to increase the income levels at which maximum benefits are available and reduce benefits more gradually for families with incomes beyond those levels. The sum of $2,500 is approximately equal to the amount provided as child allowances to households receiving social assistance (Battle 1997: 5).

It is important to remember that a significant portion of these total funds does not represent additional cash benefits for many households living in poverty but is being expended by provincial and territorial governments and First Nations as reinvestments. All eligible parents receive the benefit of the basic CTB. Since 1998, however, most participating governments have reduced their payments to families on social assistance by the amount of the Supplement in accordance with the agreement.[73] These reinvestment funds have been directed to a wide array of programs. Because there are no legally binding standards or protocols attached to the federal Supplement, reinvestments are neither mandatory nor subject to uniform standards. In 1999-2000, governments and First Nations reinvested about $404 million and made additional investments of about $80 million in the following areas:

- 32% on additional child benefits and earned income supplements;
- 34% on child-care programs and child tax credits (down from 39% in 1998-99);
- 3% on the extension of supplementary health benefits such as optical, dental, prescription coverage for low-income families not on social assistance;
- 10% on early intervention and child development programs (up from 5% in 1998-99);
- 11% on First Nations programs; and
- 10% on other programs (including job placement programs (Canada 2000c: 17; 1999: 15).

Presumably, these are new and additional expenditures. It should be noted, however, that concerns have been expressed regarding the potential use of reinvestment funds by provinces to replace the funding of pre-existing services (Wiggins 1997: 2).

The overall impact of the NCB and provincial reinvestments on the rate and depth of poverty will depend on the direct cash input and on whether the program induces behavioural changes that result in less poverty. This is a complex issue, and preliminary results of studies under way should be available in 2002. In terms of its immediate or static impact, an eventual commitment of $2,500 per year is not insignificant. However, it will not greatly reduce either the rate or depth of poverty, as defined by the most widely used income-based measure to date, the pre-tax LICOs. In 1997, 20.1% of children under 18 lived in low-income families, and 19.5% of all households with children subsisted on low incomes. In 1998, 19% of children lived in low-income households, and 18% of all households had a low income. The slight reduction in the incidence of poverty between these years may reflect the impact of the

NCB, but is likely the primary result of improved economic conditions (Canada 2000c). The NCB Supplement will move households that were close to the poverty line out of poverty but it will likely not substantially reduce the rate of poverty because of the huge depth of poverty experienced by many low-income families. The vast majority of low-income people live far below the poverty line. In 1998, the depth of poverty, as measured by the LICOs, was $8,919 for the average non-elderly, low-income, two-parent family with children and $8,912 for lone-parent families (Statistics Canada 2000a). The depth of poverty for low-income households has remained relatively stagnant since 1984, hovering between 32% and 35% below the LICO: 34% in 1997 and 33.5% in 1998. Between 1997 and 1998, the average depth of poverty for all two-parent households with children and lone-parent households did decline; however, the depth of poverty for households without earners actually increased (Statistics Canada 2000a: 220). Even if benefits were *actually* paid to all households (assuming an average of 1.2 children per household), the NCB would not come close to eliminating the average poverty gap.

Implications for Women

The direct impact on different groups of women: limiting the relief of poverty

The NCB functions both as a wage supplement and as an incentive program to reduce social assistance caseloads and expenditures. The clawback of the NCB Supplement provides a direct incentive to exit welfare by increasing the gains from either employment or any other private income source. For women, any other income source can include Employment Insurance as well as nuclear family formation. In providing these incentives, the clawback also significantly diminishes the extent to which poverty is relieved.

Because of the clawback, the NCB will have a differential direct impact on women depending on the income of their household and on their parental status. Receipt of the CCTB is contingent on parenting a child who is under 18, even though many young adults over 18 must reside with their parents. In most provinces, households with incomes above the welfare thresholds (the income levels at which social assistance benefits are reduced to nil) end up receiving the bulk of benefits from the NCB Supplement. To the extent that the Supplement removes households from reliance on the social assistance system, these households will benefit through the amount the Supplement exceeds their former entitlement to social assistance, if any, and through decreased regulation. The lack of extended supplementary health benefits in some provinces can, however, mean that some low-income families are worse off as a result of the loss of drug and dental coverage for their children (Stairs 1999).

For women in low-income, two-parent households who are full-time homemakers, the CCTB will make it easier for them to cope. Like the former Family Allowance, the CCTB is most often paid to mothers and will increase their share of familial and disposable income. Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that many mothers regarded Family Allowance as a benefit that belonged to the child and not the parent (Burman 1996: 182). Because entitlement to the CCTB is determined on the basis of net family income, women with high-income husbands or partners find themselves ineligible even if the partner's income is not shared equitably with them.

Women in the paid work force who are earning an income beyond the welfare threshold, either jointly as part of a two-parent household or solely as single mothers, also benefit. The NCB Supplement either increases their income or alternatively allows them to reduce hours of work and thereby make it easier to accommodate unpaid domestic labour. Low-income women, however, have a greater overall need for income and many have little control over their work schedules. The NCB may also defray child-care costs to varying degrees either through an increased income level (the Supplement) or indirectly through provincial reinvestments. Child- or day-care funding represents the largest area of reinvestment expenditures, but 85% of this funding goes toward Ontario's Child Care Supplement for Working Families (Canada 2000c: 20). This program provides direct monetary assistance to parents in choosing caregivers but does not guarantee high-quality, accessible and reliable child care. Moreover, the maximum amount payable is only $1,310 per child per annum (Canada 2000c: 65).

Women and children, in households receiving social assistance, benefit from the basic Child Tax Benefit. As a result of the clawback, they have not generally benefited from the NCB Supplement and are not expected to do so, since the announced increases to the Supplement up to 2004 are only intended to replace the child allowance now paid under social assistance. In 1998, the National Council of Welfare estimated, on the basis of a one-month caseload, that only 36% of all families with children that live in poverty would see an increase in their monthly income given the clawback of the Supplement (NCW 1998: 10). According to the Council, the NCB is "a program where substantial sums of new federal money are being spent, but the additional money benefits barely one-third of the poor families with children and bypasses the other two-thirds"(NCW 1998: 11). The Council's estimate might be higher if the movement of households on and off social assistance through the course of the year is taken into account. In any case, large numbers of low-income households with children receive no direct monetary benefit for portions or all of the year that they are reliant on social assistance. Single mothers likely account for a disproportionate number of these households. The study by NCW in 1998 found that only 17% of poor lone-parent families compared to 59% of poor two-parent families would receive a net benefit from the NCB Supplement (NCW 1998: 8-9).

Among those who do not benefit from the Supplement are a significant number of recipients who have earnings from either part-time or full-time employment while receiving social assistance. Katharine Scott's (1998) study of recipients indicated that 51% of all adults on assistance had participated in the labour force in 1994. Ken Battle (1997) has estimated that in any given year, 26% of families rely mainly on social assistance, 16% on both social assistance and income, and 30% have employment as their main source of income. However, these studies do not clearly indicate how many are both employed and in receipt of social assistance. Because of low minimum wage levels in most jurisdictions, it is important to note that a full-time minimum wage job in combination with the Supplement may not be sufficient to lift a recipient above the welfare break-even income (the income at which welfare payments are reduced to nil), permitting the full clawback of the Supplement. Households on assistance with part-time income will also not benefit from the Supplement. Earnings supplements through provincial reinvestments for part-time work are generally low, if available at all.

The benefits from the NCB to mothers who receive any portion of their income from social assistance are largely indirect. Recipients clearly will benefit through indexation of the NCB as social assistance benefits are not indexed at all (Battle 1997). As governments indicate, the NCB may ease the transition to paid work in some income ranges. However, the NCB may also increase economic instability for families (increased residential mobility, etc.), given the unstable nature of increasing numbers of non-standard jobs and high rates of return to social assistance and thereby larger fluctuations in household income. Recipients of social assistance may also benefit from reinvestments although most of the reinvestments appear targeted toward those who are employed through either day-care subsidies or monetary incentives. For First Nations women on reserves, much of the funding is necessarily not linked to employment, because of high unemployment rates in these communities. Recipients on and off reserves may benefit from child-related services such as early development programs. Because many of these services are targeted to social assistance recipients, there is a concern that programming has been, or will be, developed on the basis of negative cultural stereotypes.[74] In general, those to benefit least from the NCB are women who are both in receipt of social assistance and members of those groups most marginalized from and underpaid within the labour force. Among those likely to benefit least will be a disproportionate number of recent immigrant women, urban Aboriginal women and women with disabilities, along with their children.

Promotion of labour force attachment

The NCB has been put forward as a measure that is also intended to "promote attachment to the workforce...by ensuring that families will always be better off as a result of working."[75] Through the clawback, governments have given priority to the goal of promoting attachment to the labour force over that of relieving child poverty.

An examination of the empirical literature on the disincentive effects of welfare is beyond the scope of this report. Many studies suggest, however, that most recipients have internalized a strong work ethic and do not want to depend on social assistance for any extended period. The "welfare wall" is a term used to describe financial barriers that impede movement from social assistance to employment. Proponents of the NCB frequently note that social assistance rates, unlike wage rates, take into account the number of dependants and adjust for family size. Wages, in contrast, are not adjusted to reflect the number of children or children's needs. Moreover, parents in the labour market can also lack access to free supplementary health, dental and drug assistance for their children while experiencing work-related expenses, such as clothing, transportation, child-care costs and income taxes paid on employment income, Canada/Quebec Pension Plan contributions and Employment Insurance premiums, none of which are paid on social assistance income. According to a recent report: "In some cases, parents on social assistance who managed to find paid work risked forfeiting thousands of dollars in child benefits and services on top of seeing their (typically low) wages reduced by taxes and employment-related costs" (Canada 2000c: 5).

The notion of the welfare wall reflects the double bind for recipients who may be forced to divert scarce resources from the satisfaction of their own or their children's needs in order to obtain employment. These costs structurally exclude recipients of social assistance from the labour market, and their reduction will likely have a positive impact for some recipients. While a more rational alignment of incentives for recipients is beneficial, it is also important

to note how an emphasis on the welfare wall organizes and constructs the debate. Discussions of the welfare wall tend to focus attention on individual behaviour in relation to welfare and, together with the emphasis on child benefits, link the source of work disincentives to benefits offered by the welfare system. Welfare benefits, as such, tend to be constructed as centrally problematic rather than external factors such as inadequate wages or the lack of social supports for parenting.

Wages, unlike social assistance, cannot be readily adjusted to the number of children in a market economy. However, this rationale for the subsidy tends to "naturalize" the wage system and implicitly attribute wage inadequacy to children and social assistance benefits. Such a rationale undercuts any lingering assumption or expectation of a market-based family wage, even though only 1.2 children are born on average to each family. It also obscures the fact that a minimum-wage full-time job can no longer support even an individual labourer at low-income cut-off levels.[76]

It also can be misleading to suggest that recipients can lose "thousands of dollars in child benefits" by moving from social assistance to employment. Although marginal tax rates on assistance can exceed 100% when welfare, tax and non-cash benefits of social assistance are considered, the actual transition generally does not entail a financial loss of thousands of dollars in child benefits. Before the NCB, families with single earners at minimum wage were, and still are, eligible to receive social assistance in most if not all provinces. Provincial departments deducted their earnings from an assessment of their needs and paid the difference as a benefit. In Saskatchewan, most families only became ineligible for social assistance when their earnings reached $12,000 to $15,000 (a wage of $9/hour or more) at which point the increased income made up for the loss of one or more child allowances. In other words, those who no longer qualified to receive social assistance had higher total incomes. Thus, the child benefit need not be equivalent to the child allowance on social assistance since the allowance does not generally represent a real loss for recipients in the transition from social assistance to employment.

A household can still be prejudiced by employment in certain circumstances, for example, if the head of the household refused to apply for social assistance; if the direct and indirect costs of employment were greater than allowed for in the assessment of needs up to and beyond the welfare threshold; or if the income gain was offset by the loss of drug and dental coverage and the imposition of income and related taxes. Thus, while the financial differential between assistance and employment through the loss of the child allowance has been overstated in some discussions of the welfare wall, the Canada Child Tax Benefit will not necessarily address all other employment costs. Moreover, discussions of the welfare wall have generally ignored the intangible non-financial costs of employment that arise from the structural contradiction between paid and unpaid labour. These costs include less time to perform domestic labour and to care for and nurture children.

The heightened concern with work incentives and high marginal tax rates likely means that provincial governments will be reluctant to raise social assistance rates, unless benefits are extended to modest-income households, thereby raising the cost of the initiatives. The National Council of Welfare (1999-2000; 2000) noted that welfare incomes have been

virtually "frozen" in most provinces and have in fact declined in real or nominal terms across the country since the implementation of the NCB. The concerns about high marginal tax rates for low- and modest-income earners may also reinforce a shift from income supports to service delivery through reinvestments. Income supports are, however, essential to securing better housing, food and clothing for members of households reliant on social assistance.

Constraints on Labour Force Participation: Although a more rational alignment of incentives for recipients of social assistance is beneficial, the NCB inflates the significance of financial incentives relative to other reasons for labour force participation and renders other more significant structural causes of poverty less visible. Large numbers of households are unable to respond to such incentives as a result of structural constraints. These constraints include the fact that, until recently, unemployment has been high for most of the last two decades by historical standards and remains disproportionately high for some groups of men and women. Unless the economy is expanding and new jobs are created, work incentive and training programs will likely only affect the *distribution* and not the *magnitude* of poverty among the low-income population (Handler and Hasenfeld 1997:101).

Perhaps more important, neither the CCTB nor any of the provincial reinvestments address the conditions of paid work for parents. The low wage jobs available to most recipients of social assistance offer few benefits and little prospect of getting most workers out of poverty in the longer run. Moreover, women who manage to leave social assistance still face contradictions between the ongoing demands of paid and unpaid labour. While employment may increase their ability to meet the material needs of children, it will also reduce the time available for child care and for building networks of emotional support. The costs of double workdays and increased stress may be especially acute in the case of single mothers The Supplement and some of the reinvestments have defrayed the costs of child care to varying degrees across the country. Most of these measures, however, have not substantially reduced the cost of child care and most have done little to address issues of availability (convenience) and reliability (trust) that are as critical to employment decisions. The funding of child care through the tax system in this manner may also further "privatize" child-care labour and reinforce its "invisibility and under-valuation" (Young 1997: 312).

Several U.S. studies have indicated that keeping jobs has been equally if not more problematic than finding jobs for welfare recipients. Frequent job loss has been the result of the nature of the job (short term, seasonal, low wages relative to the costs of employment including child-care costs, "inherently unpleasant" jobs, inflexible or irregular hours), a lack of social or technical skill on the part of the recipient and health problems, wife abuse and family crises, child-care breakdowns, insecure housing arrangements and transportation costs, particularly where a commute involves dropping children off at school or to a caregiver (Hershey and Pavetti 1997).

To date, many of these concerns have been substantiated in the Self Sufficiency Project undertaken in British Columbia and New Brunswick. This experimental research project offered single mothers on social assistance a generous subsidy (one that approximately doubled their gross annual earnings) for three years provided they obtained and maintained

paid employment for at least 30 hours per week. Only 34% of those offered the Supplement had accepted the offer by the end of year one, and only three quarters of these remained on the Supplement at the end of 18 months. Recipients of social assistance who did not take up the Supplement frequently cited a number of concerns:

- exhaustion and stress from the dual responsibilities of paid and unpaid labour;
- the difficulty in finding affordable, trustworthy caregivers for children;
- the loss of quality time spent with children;
- insecure jobs and worries about getting fired if children were sick;
- a shortage of jobs with stable day-time hours and good prospects;
- transportation problems (for both employment and child care);
- poor pay and loss of health benefits for themselves (and children);
- low self-esteem;
- poor health;
- lack of skills; and
- employer discrimination against older women, lone parents, people with disabilities and those on social assistance (Bancroft and Vernon 1995).

Those who refused the Supplement were disproportionately better educated than others in the program; most takers ended up getting jobs as cashiers, waitresses and store clerks, in gas stations, at food outlets, as chambermaids at hotels, and as telemarketers (Bancroft and Vernon 1995: 33, 40).

A subsequent developmental assessment of the impact of the Self Sufficiency Project on children indicated that, in the short term, there was no negative impact on children under 3, small positive benefits for children aged 3 to 8 and small negative effects on adolescents. Researchers postulated that the positive outcomes were related to the substantial increase in parental income offered by the Supplement (Morris and Michalopoulos 2000). It should be noted that half the recipients who took up employment felt that it had a positive impact on their relationship with their children, because life was more stable or their children had more respect for them. The remainder felt the impact was negative — the children saw less of their parent and worried about the parent's stress levels (Bancroft and Vernon 1995: 43-44).

Low levels of social assistance, while believed to provide employment incentives, can also constitute a barrier to employment. As a result of abysmally low social assistance rates, recipients can no longer afford stable residences, telephones, newspapers, transportation or suitable clothes, let alone adequate nutrition, all of which make it harder for them to get a job.[77] The stress of not having enough money to cover basic needs can also undermine recipients' physical and emotional health, and contribute to a chronic sense of disempowerment (Davis et al. 2001: 76). The lack of drug, dental and optical coverage for adults and children when not reliant on social assistance is also a problem in provinces that have not used reinvestment funds to address this deterrent fully, if at all. Additionally, because adjustments that account for the

impact of full- or part-time sporadic employment typically take several months due to staff shortages, recipients also face the likelihood of overpayments which make budgeting in the future even more difficult.

Obscures Unpaid Domestic Labour and Encourages Economic Dependence of Women: The emphasis on labour force participation is also problematic because it implicitly defines work as wage labour, and obscures the need for, and the value and costs of, domestic labour. For women receiving social assistance, this emphasis obscures the social value of the work performed by them including child care, shopping, economizing, volunteer activities, the socialization of children and community group activity (Swift and Birmingham 1999: 84). It reinforces the dominant view of employment as the normative measure of autonomy and membership.

The NCB encourages the economic dependency of women on men both directly and indirectly. The clawback of the Supplement, while on social assistance, directly encourages attachment to a typically male breadwinner as a way of qualifying for the Supplement as do some of the reinvestments programs.[78] While these benefits are helpful in the short run, they may reinforce gendered patterns of caregiving and will not relieve the long-term costs of child care for women, including a higher incidence of poverty. As mentioned in Chapter 4, an expectation of market work that fails to account for the need for domestic labour also indirectly encourages a traditional familial model as the "ideal family form."

The construction of deviant or undeserving others

Several structural and discursive features of the NCB intensify the stigma of being on social assistance and the social construction of recipients as undeserving others. Particular features of the NCB that reinforce stigma include the emphasis on "work" incentives, the presentation of the Benefit as a child benefit in response to child poverty, the visibility and effect of the clawback, and the notion of taking children off welfare.

The emphasis on work incentives reinforces an individualistic view of poverty as a matter of individual effort and consent. It obscures domestic labour, and implies that jobs are available (why else would incentives be offered) and that a failure to respond to the incentives is the result of a lack of motivation or work effort. The focus on the child allowances payable on social assistance constructs welfare benefits themselves (as part of the welfare wall) as centrally problematic rather than inadequate wages or the lack of social supports for parenting. The presentation of a wage supplement as a child benefit also tends to deflect attention away from unequal power relations in the labour market. It obscures the extent to which the current labour market and the unequal distribution of wealth generate low wages, unemployment and poor working conditions, and the extent to which employers benefit from having a subsidized flexible pool of low-wage labour.

Further, the fact that recipients of social assistance benefit only through early childhood development programs rather than income supports reflects (and potentially reinforces) negative stereotypes and assumptions regarding their ability to parent and manage resources responsibly. According to the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO 1998: 1), the NCB is experienced as "insulting and discriminatory by families on social assistance." Although the

NCB is intended to address child poverty, the children in households receiving social assistance get nothing more while families with higher incomes obtain additional benefits. In a social climate rife with disrespect toward recipients, the clawback can reinforce a sense of not belonging for both recipients *and* their children. Having presented the NCB program as a primary response to child poverty, the government appears to be punishing children in families on social assistance or at least making them pay the cost of providing their parents with "work incentives." The poverty of children on assistance is seemingly not important enough to warrant direct subsidies. In fact, participating governments are explicit about their intention to make families with paid employment and their children "better off." All this indirectly implies that children in families on social assistance matter less or are less deserving of benefits because of their parents' income source.

As currently conceived, the major objective of the NCB is to displace the child allowances payable on social assistance with a federal payment. "Taking kids off welfare" in this manner is believed to reduce the stigma of social assistance for children (Ontario 1988: 115). It will not change the day-to-day reality of children whose families depend on social assistance. The idea, however, promotes a fictional separation of children and mothers and encourages children to identify separately from their parents on the basis of the provision of public assistance. In encouraging a separate identification, it implies that there is something wrong with their parents. Essentially, it undermines children's respect for their mothers.

This construction of deviance, while believed to deter reliance on social assistance, has several adverse consequences. The stigma of social assistance can be internalized, contributing to low self-esteem, which in turn affects the individual's ability to obtain employment. Because of negative stereotypes, employers often view receipt of social assistance as a reason not to hire the individual. Further, stigma divides the "welfare poor" from the "working poor" and obscures the fact that they share common ground and interests. Finally, it makes it easier for men and women of other classes to minimize the harms of poverty and deny or avoid collective responsibility for eradicating these harms.

Summary

The National Child Benefit Supplement is a means-tested benefit payable only to low-income households. The Supplement benefits those single mothers who can access employment income by reducing the cost of employment for them and curtailing their exposure to the welfare system. The impact of the Supplement is limited, however, because it does not substantially reduce the average poverty gap and is clawed back from households receiving any or all of their income from social assistance. The NCB, therefore, benefits least those households that generally suffer the worst poverty. The NCB functions as a wage supplement and as an incentive program to reduce social assistance caseloads through either employment or another income source, generally nuclear family formation. While the Supplement will likely have some dynamic impact on employment, the magnitude of its impact is subject to a number of external or structural constraints on labour force participation including unemployment rates and a lack of reliable and accessible child care. Symbolically, a number of structural and discursive features of the Benefit combine to reinforce dominant ideologies regarding individual responsibility for life outcomes and the relative importance of employment over caring labour, and to reinforce the exclusion of social assistance recipients. Although the NCB

is a state program, it ultimately undermines collective responsibility for children by conditioning net benefits on parental withdrawal from social assistance.

The Early Childhood Development Agreement Under the National Children's Agenda

Structure and Objectives

The National Children's Agenda is a "cooperative effort by governments in Canada to ensure that all Canadian children have the best opportunities to develop their potential." Under the Agenda, the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Council of Ministers on Social Policy Renewal has set out a shared vision, values and goals for children, and identified a number of policy areas in which governments could co-operate to better support children (HRDC 2000: 21). Enhancing early childhood development was one of the areas identified and is the first initiative under the NCA to be developed.

In September 2000 first ministers from the federal government, and the provincial and territorial governments announced an agreement on early childhood development programs and services to be funded as part of the NCA. The federal government agreed to provide $300 million to $500 million per year over five years ($2.2 billion), beginning in April 2001. The early childhood development initiative will focus on the prenatal period to age 6 and pursue the following objectives.

> To promote early childhood development so that, to their fullest potential, children will be physically and emotionally healthy, safe and secure, ready to learn, and socially engaged and responsible; and
>
> To help children reach their potential and to help families support their children within strong communities (CICS 2000).

To satisfy these objectives, the first ministers agreed on four key areas for programming:

- promotion of healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy (possible examples cited are prenatal programs and information and infant screening programs);
- improvement of parenting and family supports (examples cited are family resource centres, parent information and home visitation);
- strengthening early childhood development, learning and care (possible examples are preschools, child care and targeted developmental programs for young children); and
- strengthening of community supports (community-based planning and service integration).

The provinces and territories are free to invest in any or all of the above areas, depending on their own identified priorities and local needs. Governments are to report annually on their activities but federal funding is not contingent on provinces having achieved any given level of performance.

The Early Childhood Development Agreement supplements a number of federally funded programs that are community-based and presented as investments in children and youth. Health Canada funds the Community Action Program for Children to ensure that children have a

"healthy start in life," as well as the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program and Aboriginal Head Start. The National Crime Prevention Centre has implemented the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention that has identified children and youth as priorities, and emphasizes prevention and early intervention to stop child and youth victimization and reduce the probability of future criminal behaviour. The federal government also indirectly funds reinvestments under the NCB, many of which are directed toward early childhood development. Like the NCB, the Agreement is intended to finance and expand provincially funded early childhood development programs and services.

In press releases on the Early Childhood Development Initiative, the first ministers described their commitment to giving "children the best possible start in life" as an "investment in the future of Canada" and its "future social vitality and economic prosperity" although "parents and families play the primary role in supporting and nurturing children." They noted that "[e]arly childhood development programs and services should be inclusive of: children with different abilities; and children living in different economic, cultural, linguistic and regional circumstances" and that "[g]overnments will work with the Aboriginal peoples of Canada to find practical solutions to address the developmental needs of Aboriginal children." (CICS 2000).

Implications for Women

Will the Early Childhood Development Initiative empower women, particularly women living in poverty? Within this report, I cannot even begin to evaluate the variety and kinds of programs that may fall within the umbrella of the NCA. Critics have complained that overall funding levels are inadequate and amount to little more than $100 per child under 6 over the next five years (Lauziere 2000: 1). Some social policy analysts had asked for an investment of $7.5 billion, not $2.2 billion, over the five-year period (Battle and Torjman 2000: 6). Lauziere (2000: 2) noted that there is no indication of how provinces will establish priorities, and that it will be difficult to monitor the allocation of funds since they will be provided through the CHST.

A detailed vision of an integrated early childhood development system that would combine child development, child care and resources for parenting has been articulated in several recent reports (Beach and Bertrand 2000; Stroick and Jensen 1999; Friendly and Rothman 2000). According to Beach and Bertrand (2000), the ideal system would be comprehensive, both child and family focussed, universally available and accessible, integrated, accountable, of high quality and delivered locally by the community. Such a program would provide important benefits for all children and parents. According to Friendly and Rothman (2000), the cost of such a program could approximate $10 billion annually.

As matters now stand, there is not enough money in the initiative to even begin to provide comprehensive, high-quality, reliable and accessible child care. Even though the agreement was apparently intended to include all Canadian children, the lack of adequate funding increases the likelihood that most programs will end up being targeted and focussed on child development. Targeted programs of this nature, depending on their structure, can empower women and children by improving parenting skills, providing networks of support and facilitating collective action. In the United States, studies of Head Start indicate that the

program has improved outcomes for children, increasing IQ levels at least in the short term, and having longer-lasting impacts in reducing, to some degree, the incidence of remedial classes, grade repeats and dropping out of school (Ames 1997: 108). The Ames study of 42 predominantly White mothers in upstate New York also suggested that the program empowered mothers by building support networks and by providing information that helped them negotiate government agencies to get the resources they needed.

While acknowledging these potential benefits for both mothers and children, it is also important to identify potential risks and negative consequences of a children's agenda for mothers. In the balance of this section, I briefly attempt to identify some of the more significant risks posed to low-income women by substantial funding of programs that are not universal or blended with child care. The following analysis is not necessarily exhaustive, but does underscore the need for careful scrutiny and evaluation of the impact of these programs from the perspective of low-income women and their perceptions of their needs. In general, the analysis suggests that low-income women would be much better served through a universal and integrated system of developmental care.

Targeting and stigma

The public dialogues held during the development of the NCA emphasized a need for universal, non-stigmatizing supports and services such as pre- and post-natal care, nutritional care, child care, preschool and literacy programs (Saskatchewan 1999b: 11; Canada 2000d: 5, 6). Although the Early Childhood Development Agreement was written to be inclusive of all children, some targeted programs are contemplated, and the lack of sufficient funding may dictate that a great number of programs are ultimately targeted.

Beach and Bertrand (2000: 22) noted that early intervention can "help ameliorate the negative impact of physical, psychological, social and economic challenges." Although some components of a developmental program may need to be targeted, there are several problems with an approach that lacks universal developmental care as its core component. First, at-risk children are difficult to identify, and there is concern that children will be labelled on the basis of social identity and generalized statistical correlations. Given these broad correlations, an at-risk child could be identified as any child of a single, Aboriginal or poor mother, or a mother with a disability, reinforcing the stigma experienced by these women. Statistical research indicates that behavioural problems are more frequent in children from low-income populations, but these correlations are not necessarily the outcome of "poor parenting," because of the many social impacts on poor children (such as dangerous neighbourhoods, inadequately funded schools, etc.) over which parents have little if any control. Moreover, even though the percentage of children experiencing problems declines with income, the greatest number of children facing developmental risks or having emotional and behavioural problems live in middle- and modest-income families (FPTAC 1999; McCain and Mustard 1999).

Targeted programs stigmatize and segregate children and families that have certain social identities and fail to benefit all genuinely at-risk children. Brodie's comments (1996: 20) on the impact of targeting in social policy generally are apposite.

> Targeting, however, may simply have the effect of pathologizing difference instead of exposing the structural links among race, gender, poverty, and violence. It encourages us to point to single mothers as "the problem" with welfare or to aboriginal women as "the problem" in the growing incidence of violence against women. In the process, these women are disconnected from the structural biases that make their lives "different." They become arbitrary statistical and administrative categories that require some sort of therapeutic intervention to produce self-sufficient individuals. At the same time, targeting makes invisible the problems shared by women who fall outside the identified groups. The potential exclusions, therefore, are double-sided — the targeted are pathologized as non-citizens, and the problems of non-targeted groups are rendered invisible [reference omitted].

According to Beach and Bertrand (2000), there is also evidence that children do better in inclusive rather than segregated settings and that early child development programs benefit all young children, not only those identified as at-risk.

Even if early child development programs are not explicitly targeted, they may end up being perceived or experienced that way unless they are combined with child-care services. Many parents may not see themselves as in need of assistance or may be unwilling to define their children as at risk.[79] For this reason, early child development would be better provided under the rubric of "developmental care" available to employed parents and full-time homemakers, without stigma or segregation. Programs that directly supported mothers in dealing with both employment and parenting would facilitate higher participation levels and benefit more children.

Involuntary participation, invasions of privacy and increased burdens

To the extent that the Early Childhood Development Initiative focusses on at-risk children and low income is used as a statistical indicator of risk, a significant focus of the initiative will be children in poverty. Since secure attachment to a primary caregiver is still seen as central to, or the best predictor of, healthy child outcomes, mothering will either directly or indirectly be an important element of these initiatives (FPTAC 1999: 12). One question is whether maternal participation in these programs will be voluntary or whether it will be mandated by tying participation to eligibility for social assistance. Given the range of programming contemplated, including prenatal screening and home visits, mandatory programs can significantly increase the power of agencies to monitor the lives of low-income women.[80]

One important feature of the U.S. Head Start program, from the mothers' perspectives, was that a large number of employees were former parents involved in the program and were themselves living on low incomes. The participation of these women engendered trust and loyalty, reduced isolation and provided an opportunity to build a sense of community. While low-income mothers do suffer from social isolation, increased communication with social workers or even workers in the voluntary sector can reinforce power differentials more than overcome patterns of isolation. Given the climate of suspicion that exists in relation to single mothers on welfare in particular, will mothers experience these programs as simply another

arena for surveillance? Little (1998: 178) noted that in Ontario "[o]ver and over again, the mothers interviewed emphasized that there are very few people they can trust."

Participation in parenting classes can also be time and energy consuming. Head Start in the United States and other publicly funded preschool programs are inaccessible to many employed mothers who need to have child care that covers hours of employment. For mothers who are already stressed for time and subject to employment or job search requirements, early childhood development may simply be one more burden. One must question whether increasing the burdens on women in these situations is the kind of support they need.

Control, implementation and evaluation of programs

Programs funded under the Early Childhood Development Agreement are intended to be community-based but the meaning of "community-based" or "community driven" is not defined. Who constitutes community and who will have the most significant input into the type of programming available, its implementation and evaluation? Will low-income women be involved in decision making? Will they have fair representation? Or will the programs create other arenas for the assertion of power and authority over them?

The Early Childhood Development Initiative clearly contemplates a significant level of involvement from the voluntary sector. However, the voluntary sector may not be very representative of women in the low-income population in all parts of the country. Burman's (1996) ethnographic study of members of the "helping professions" in London, Ontario found significant differences in attitudes toward poverty. According to Beach and Bertrand (2000: 27), "communities are complex environments, with many interests and voices." The Ames (1997) study of one head start program illustrated how the program was initially structured on the basis of strong parental participation and control. Her work also showed how the control of funding by local business and social service professionals ultimately undermined a proactive role for mothers by limiting information available to parents, controlling the agenda and leaving little for parents to determine by way of substantive decision making. Workers also faced increased pressure to become more accountable and bureaucratic, reducing their flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of parents and children.

This is similar to other accounts of initiatives that were initially woman centred but became, over time, bureaucratized and professionalized. "Expert" discourses can control the definition of need and position clients as passive recipients of professional services (Fraser 1989). Careful attention will have to be paid to the issue of evaluation, taking into account the heightened vulnerability of mothers receiving social assistance.

Value and ideology formation

As suggested in Chapter 2, governmental interest in children may reflect a concern that children are not being properly socialized in an increasing number of families. Early childhood development programs may provide an effective vehicle for the imposition of White, middle-class values in shaping children, particularly if the programs are child rather than family focussed. Unless culturally sensitive, these programs can raise concerns about

cultural clash, particularly for children from ethnic minorities and Aboriginal households. Even family-focussed programs can feel like a set-up for parents to the extent that they may reinforce an expectation to meet idealized norms of parenting without providing the material resources (time, energy and money) to do it successfully.

In the public dialogue on the NCA, participants in Saskatchewan expressed a need for cultural sensitivity and concerns over a perceived emphasis on abilities or outcomes and investments. This emphasis suggested a primary concern not with children's immediate health or well-being but with their future roles as workers. Participants noted that the focus on healthy child outcomes could implicitly define children with a disability as unhealthy. They felt the principle of inclusion and respect for differences in emotional, physical and intellectual abilities had to prevail over that of achievement and success (Saskatchewan 1999b: 11, 12, 18, 19). Some participants noted that child poverty needed to be addressed before developmental goals could be achieved and that children's work extended to play and included creative, cultural and spiritual elements (Saskatchewan 1999b: 7). Some participants also felt the middle years of childhood were equally important. "We need to be less concerned about 'windows of opportunity' for child development and more cognizant of varying learning and developmental patterns" (Saskatchewan 1999b: 18, 19).

More generally, the early childhood development initiative may also be important in shaping or reinforcing an individualistic perspective on poverty. Overall, ECD programs can reinforce a view that poverty is the outcome of parental deficits. Ames (1997) suggested that this underlying premise, a deficit theory of poverty, has accounted, in large part, for the continued existence of Head Start in the United States despite a decade of welfare reform. Early childhood development programs generally suggest that outcomes depend on individual effort and behaviour including education, self-esteem, resiliency and the acquisition of parenting skills. Ames (1997) noted that Head Start was popular with mothers, because it gave them hope for a way out of poverty and provided them with some important benefits, but women remained poor and concentrated in low-paying, low-opportunity jobs. These programs nourish a belief that children can, through intervention at an early age, be given a head start in the competition for jobs and material goods, and that this form of intervention can compensate for the disadvantages of child and parental poverty. In implying that these programs can generate an advantage to offset structured patterns of inequality, they reinforce and foster a myth of equality of opportunity. In emphasizing individual effort and behaviour, these programs can also undermine the concept of government or public responsibility for the eradication of poverty.

In general, the Early Childhood Development Initiative of the National Children's Agenda is potentially positive but one which can, depending on the structure of the programming undertaken, also stigmatize and segregate low-income children, increase burdens and invasions of privacy for low-income mothers, and reinforce individualistic conceptions of poverty. Achieving the vision of universal developmental care will be a struggle at the federal level, in terms of increased funding, and at the provincial/territorial and local levels, in terms of program design.

Summary

All the programs examined have positive features that can provide substantial benefits for many mothers and children. However, it is questionable whether payment of the "costs of children" as identified under the NCB and Guidelines will raise substantial numbers of households out of poverty or substantially reduce the depth of poverty. These programs tend, moreover, to reinforce a hierarchy of women based on traditional criteria of deservingness — either paid work or attachment to a (typically) male breadwinner. The mothers and children to receive the greatest benefits are those who can access employment income and/or spousal support, either before or after a divorce. The mothers and children to receive the least in monetary benefits from these policy reforms are clearly mothers who are reliant on social assistance. Among those to benefit least from one or more of these programs are also likely a disproportionate number of single mothers, those with a disability, recent immigrant mothers, Aboriginal, particularly urban Aboriginal mothers, and mothers identified as members of visible minorities, along with their children. These policy reforms are structured to supplement or enforce "private" responsibilities, consistent with the basic thrust of restructuring discourse. By relying primarily on access to the low-wage labour market or nuclear family formation, and support as solutions to child poverty, these programs fail to address the structural dimensions of poverty for women or the most serious cases of need. None of the reforms directly increases the value attached to caregiving labour nor substantially relieves the contradictions women experience between paid and unpaid labour through the provision of child-care supports. None of the reforms addresses the impact of adverse conditions in the labour market on low-income women and their children. In general, the discourse and structural impact of these reforms can reinforce the view that poverty is simply the outcome of family breakdown or "deadbeat dads," malingerers on social assistance or mothers with poor parenting skills.

6. STRATEGIES FOR CHANGING HOW WE TALK ABOUT POVERTY

From Pity to Respect and Social Justice

In the last chapter, I identified problems associated with policies designed to counteract child poverty. These policies were forged largely at a time of "panic" over the deficit that lent a particular sense of urgency and inevitability to scaling down our expectations of the state. With a budgetary surplus over the last two years, social policy has been, more visibly, a matter of moral and political choice. Yet we have seen no change in the dominant assumptions of restructuring discourse and the rhetoric of blame and individual responsibility. Indeed, the move toward tax cuts in times of budgetary surpluses reinforces the trend toward privatization allowing middle-class individuals to benefit their own children through tax savings. As Kitchen (1995: 434) stated: "One of the clearest examples of how economic individualism divides families are the efforts of parents to equip their children with competitive advantages over the children of others in the struggle for economic success." As Rittich (2000: 261) noted, one product of the restructuring process may well be "a culture of tolerance for inequality."

The analysis in chapters 4 and 5 suggests that the construction of poverty as a problem exclusively or predominantly of child poverty and the choice of current policy solutions to poverty must be challenged and contested. A focus on child poverty implicitly reinforces an ideology of individual responsibility by constructing adult dependence on state assistance as deviant. This underlying assumption obscures other forms of state dependency as well as important structural causes of poverty including the dependency disproportionately experienced by women as a result of their care of the young, sick and elderly. A focus on child poverty makes it more difficult to identify and challenge structural constraints and work toward long-term solutions because adult poverty in general and its intersecting systemic inequalities are not identified as social problems. The emphasis on the passive, dependent and innocent child reinforces a focus on the characteristics of the ideal victim and supports rather than undercuts individual blaming strategies. This kind of framework also leaves uncontested an assumed separation or conflict of interest between parents and children and potentially reinforces a tendency to blame individual mothers for child outcomes.

The major policies implemented to date encourage employment and nuclear family formation as solutions to children's poverty. Both the National Child Benefit and the Federal Child Support Guidelines generally leave unassisted those women and children most in need (i.e., women with children who are most marginalized from or underpaid within the labour market and women who are unable to claim or obtain child or spousal support). As indicated in Chapter 3, nuclear family formation ensures neither economic nor physical security for women and children. Moreover, these policy "solutions" do not resolve the contradictions women predominantly experience between paid and unpaid labour and which are most acute for low-income single mothers. Neither do they address the structuring of access to paid work and divisions within paid work according to gender, race and disability. The structural and discursive features of these policies, particularly the NCB, can also reinforce negative cultural stereotypes regarding recipients of social assistance.

Both state discourse on child poverty and the policies adopted to counteract child poverty have been influenced and shaped by the dominant ideologies underlying restructuring discourse. What alternative discursive strategies can be used to counteract, avoid or minimize the substantial risks and negative outcomes of a child poverty focus or restructuring discourse more generally? Is it possible to maximize the progressive potential of child-centred discourse while minimizing or avoiding the limitations identified with child poverty discourse? The analysis that follows is guided by the following principle arguments.

- Within poverty discourse, child poverty cannot be ignored as a significant component of poverty but the exclusive child focus of state discourse on poverty needs to be displaced.

- Outside of poverty discourse, child-centred discourse and advocacy can potentially provide benefits for low-income women and children. A children's agenda can be part of a solution to poverty. To minimize risks, the needs of children should be perceived broadly in relation to their caregivers. Child care should be a central component and the benefits should be broadly based.

- The sexism inherent in current work/family structures must be challenged through a children's agenda and a women's agenda. An inclusive women's agenda is vital in identifying the simultaneous impact of class inequality, sexism, racism and ableism.

Generally, these arguments reflect the need for a shift in poverty discourse away from a rhetoric of blame (away from an individual perpetrator/victim focus) to an appreciation of complexity, constraints and contradiction as the lived experience of oppression. They reflect a need for a shift away from pity and rescue toward the provision of social supports and empowerment. The movement toward social justice will require both a women's agenda and a children's agenda, among other agendas. It will also require an expanded concept of social citizenship that can embrace both adults and children, and make discursive space for caring and interdependence. It will require a commitment to a set of social and economic rights that can protect all citizens, adults and children, from the harmful impact of poverty.

The suggestions I sketch or map out are not exhaustive of existing or potential strategies, and collaboration and active dialogue among affected groups are essential. The focus in the following discussion is on general discursive strategies, not particular policy alternatives. As such, I identify the potential for shifts in substantive themes, the expression of themes or their location in specific discourses which, in turn, would facilitate a shift to a more broadly based social justice agenda.

Contesting Dominant Discourses

Policy discourse on poverty issues has become increasingly empirical and technical. The discourses of economics and statistics can provide important information; however, the sheer dominance of these discourses limits participation in the creation of poverty discourse and can have undesirable effects on the construction and definition of problems and solutions. Drawing on Nancy Fraser's analysis of needs discourse, Ruth Buchanan (1997: 97) noted that the "process through which the need is to be interpreted and satisfied…is usually the

stage at which expert discourses play the most significant role in containing the transformative possibilities of political claims."

Because empirical work is highly technical, subject to a specialized terminology and knowledge base, the work is not readily accessible, its limits and normative assumptions are not easily identified and its significance is not easily interpreted. As Philipps (1996) noted, technical discourses derive and exercise power in large part through their claim to "scientificity" or objectivity, and value neutrality. These discourses tend to deny their normative content and frame policy questions as purely technical, capable of neutral solutions. However, the focus on means and efficiency displaces an explicit discussion of goals, and "[s]pecific bits of technical discourse can be loaded with any number of cultural ideologies through the assumptions they make, the questions they ask, what evidence they find to be relevant, and what conclusions they draw from a body of evidence" (Philipps 1996: 153). These discourses tend to disqualify or render suspect work that is more explicit about its value orientation. Many feminist economists have traced the biases in assumptions of objectivity and demonstrated how these assumptions, among others, can exclude women's experience and that of other disempowered groups (Ferber and Nelson 1993; Bakker 2000; McDonald 1998).

Actuarial or risk assessments can raise particular problems in the poverty context. Causal relations are difficult to establish empirically, and correlations are relatively easy to establish in large samples. In the public mind, correlations are often exaggerated or confused with causal relationships. This confusion can reinforce negative stereotypes and the false and simplistic assumptions of dominant ideologies (e.g., that most recipients of social assistance are single mothers or that poor child outcomes can be attributed to the absence of a father). Risk assessments can target or pathologize high-risk groups while obscuring the fact that the problems identified are more broadly distributed. As objects of scrutiny in statistical studies, poor people appear as fractured parts of a multiple regression equation or as abstracted statistical categories. In representing people in poverty "as rational utility maximizers and as causally conditioned, predictable and manipulable objects" (Fraser 1989: 174), their lived experience loses a coherence that could provide a basis for empathy. Actuarial calculations can also undermine development of a sense of identity for groups living in poverty as political actors (Simon 1988).[81]

These tendencies can be challenged with a view to increasing participation in the creation of poverty discourse. Feminist scholars and activists must continue to challenge the dominant assumptions and norms in expert discourses such as economics, psychology, medicine and law, all of which have a significant impact on policy formation affecting people living in poverty. Philipps (1996) argued that assessments of technical discourses in particular must expose the partiality of technical and quantitative knowledge, challenge the implicit or explicit assumptions of value neutrality and keep the issue of moral and political choice central.

An attempt must also be made to raise the value of other discourses in the area of social policy. As part of this effort, continued and extended emphasis on qualitative, ethnographic and participatory community-based research should be encouraged. Because this type of

research allows for the voices of experience and personal accounts of poverty, it can increase understanding and provide insight into the complexity of people's lives. It can give more nuanced and coherent accounts of the impact of poverty and assist in shifting opinion away from simplistic explanations and blaming and punitive responses. It can draw connections between life events and structural patterns of oppression, including dominant ideologies, and break down constructions of deviance and "otherness." It can also break away from passive, vulnerable images of people living in poverty allowing them to participate in the interpretation of their needs and to identify how the institutions of education, market work and family must change to meet these needs.

A Women's Agenda and/or a Children's Agenda?

Some critics argue that the women's movement has paid insufficient attention to children and the role of caregiving in the home or family. In the United States, Minow (1995) noted that children's rights activists blamed the women's movement for failing to place a high enough priority on children's rights. To the extent that a lack of attention has been true of the Canadian women's movement, it may reflect a number of factors including a reaction to the first wave of feminism with its problematic emphasis on motherhood. The shift in focus from children and motherhood to womanhood counteracted the widespread assumption that women were biologically destined to be mothers and that children needed the full-time care of their mothers. Minow (1995) suggested that the women's movement did not ignore children as much as it tried to identify new ways of meeting the needs of children through an equal sharing of responsibility between men and women, and community support. Most activists and scholars have been critical of the invisible nature of unpaid caring labour and have acknowledged that the advancement of women's equality was closely tied both to child rearing and to current conditions within the labour market.

This report documents how, increasingly, children's issues have been identified separately from women's inequality and unpaid domestic labour. Current policies directed at reducing child poverty tend to screen out the existence, value and costs of caregiving that is performed predominantly by women. In the policy initiatives undertaken to date, the "costs of children" have been constructed narrowly, either determined by actual monetary expenditures (the Child Support Guidelines) or by external factors, such as work incentives for low-income women (the NCB Supplement and the principle of less eligibility). In neither case do the costs of children substantially lift households with children out of poverty or address child care or the costs of women's domestic labour that are explicitly compensable only through privatized spousal support. The NCB reinforces an expectation of paid work for single mothers in spite of the absence of adequate parental supports and the difficulties in reconciling high-quality care of children with low-paid work in the current labour market.

In light of these developments, one might question the extent to which a children's agenda is capable of acknowledging and addressing domestic labour concerns, among other issues relevant to women's equality. Arguably, a women's agenda could identify more accurately the needs of both women and children, and address them more effectively.[82] Within a women's agenda, caregiving could have more prominence, and the welfare of children

could be connected more directly with the inequality experienced by women. Within a women's agenda, these issues would not be marginalized to the same degree.

Whether these issues would receive greater policy attention within a women's agenda, however, is questionable. Child-centred discourse can facilitate assumptions of gender neutrality but, arguably, the absence of state attention to child-care labour or the more general marginalization of women's concerns is attributable largely to other factors. As indicated in Chapter 4, the invisibility of care work in state discourse is a product of sexism and restructuring discourse with its focus on individual or family responsibility and on market-driven economic growth. The drive to enhance efficiency, although less visible in advanced market economies than in transitional economies, generates strong incentives to ignore unpaid caring labour which is not part of the bottom line and can be externalized (Rittich 2000). As indicated in chapters 3 and 4, these costs can be externalized onto women as a group, partly because women as mothers are naturally expected to perform this kind of labour.

Any attempt to reclaim these issues exclusively within a women's agenda would reinforce the cultural expectation that mothers are primarily responsible for children and would potentially discourage men from undertaking that role. The disproportionate role of women as caregivers and its adverse impact on women's economic status must be acknowledged and addressed in policy discourse. However, to address this in the long term, men must be actively encouraged and provided with incentives to be involved caregivers. Explicit reliance on motherhood potentially discourages the association of men with caregiving and can be perceived as the reinforcement of a traditional ideology of rigid or inherent gender roles.

Most important, women's groups need to support a children's agenda, because children are individuals having an independent right to social provision and support. As demonstrated, child poverty is a significant component of poverty. Although child poverty should not be the exclusive or dominant focus of state discourse on poverty, children clearly are victimized both by poverty and welfare reform policy. Children as a group have also been victimized and oppressed in Western cultures based on their status as children.

Moreover, a children's agenda has the potential to put a brake on diminished collective responsibility and to acknowledge the need for community support of all children. In particular, a broadly based children's agenda that emphasized child development and care has the potential to generate more positive outcomes for both women and children than a narrow focus on child poverty. This shift could avoid an emphasis on "innocence" and naturalized dependency with its implicit blaming of parents. Because child development is relevant to children across classes, such a policy frame could attract more unified popular support and encompass community-based services as well as income supports. Framing the issue as child development and care has the potential to shift the language in a way that more readily captures the actual process of child rearing and affirms the importance of intangible needs — high self-esteem, a loving connection with adults, emotional support and nurturing, and a sense of belonging and entitlement within the community. The provision

of developmental care could also provide meaningful supports for parenting by combining child care with parental training and resources.

Freiler et al. (2001: 70-71) argued that social policy that treats children as citizens with a clear entitlement to having their needs met can ultimately advance women's equality. Advocates of a children's agenda cite Sweden as the paramount example of a country with child-centred family policies that have reduced both gender inequalities and the percentage of children living in low-income households (as measured by LIMs) to about 3%. This compares to 14% in Canada.[83] Children's lives can also be improved through the empowerment of women both because child poverty is a product of women's inequality and because empirical studies demonstrate that increasing women's resources increases expenditures on children.

For reasons identified in this report, it is important that women's equality remain a separate claim based on fairness and social justice and that women not seek empowerment or equality primarily through or on account of their children. The implication that women are less inherently deserving of state assistance than children should be avoided, particularly in light of a patriarchal history in which women have been viewed and treated as a primary resource for children. As part of a social justice approach, the reality of adult interdependence and the impact of current structures of inequality must be emphasized. While a focus on children can provide an opportunity to make the sexism and adverse effects of current conditions more visible, women's empowerment is not just a means to improving child welfare, but an important end in itself.

Furthermore, child-centred discourse is neither inherently progressive nor regressive. The extent to which child-centred discourse generates positive outcomes for women will ultimately depend on how children's developmental needs are interpreted and met (Fraser 1989). Developmental needs can also be narrowly defined in terms of the needs of business and enhanced productivity, and restricted to tangible outcomes like reading skills. This particular rendering of need tends to marginalize and stigmatize children with disabilities. As well, it hives off significant emotional, spiritual and cultural needs, and casts children as bundles of talents having instrumental rather than intrinsic value.

One important issue for women is whether children's developmental and health needs will be perceived as best met through primary parental responsibility (again through the traditional family form, labour force participation and parenting classes) with minimal social supports or through substantial social provision. Conservative arguments that children's needs are best addressed through the traditional nuclear family and full-time motherhood can limit the policy options available. As well, if programming is based on negative cultural stereotypes of mothers receiving social assistance, mothers may be treated more as obstacles than as a means to the satisfaction of their children's needs. As evident in the discussion of the National Children's Agenda, targeting poor children can reinforce the perception of structural inequalities as individual psychological problems and increase stigma, scrutiny and burdens for low-income women.

The risk of such negative outcomes can be minimized if the developmental needs of children are broadly defined and the benefits are broadly based, if not universal. Universal child care

would best ensure that all children's developmental needs are met, would broaden support for child development and health by providing significant benefits for both full-time homemakers and mothers in paid work, and would avoid de facto targeting. Unless child development policy is structured in this way, there is a risk that child-centered discourse will normalize and obscure gender inequality more than relieve it.

In any event, it is important not to polarize the policy agendas of women and children but to acknowledge both their separateness and their interdependence. Because of the actual interdependence between the lives of women and children, these agendas necessarily overlap, but one should not be conflated with the other. It is equally important that women's groups not abandon a children's agenda, leaving it to be defined by groups that are unsympathetic to women's equality and its relation to child welfare. Women's groups need to continue to work through both agendas to build unity and alliances with a view to promoting the joint well-being of women and children. The failure to value caregiving adequately should be addressed in both agendas because it has negative implications for women *and* children as well as for men, and for the quality of social life in general.

An Inclusive Women's Agenda

In Chapter 4, I noted that the policy solutions to child poverty currently advanced by the federal government reflect assumptions of gender equality (between men and women) and reinforce a hierarchy of women based on traditional criteria for deservingness — connection with male breadwinner or paid work. The most disempowered, marginalized women and children were being helped least and were most subject to individual blame. Disproportionately represented among those least assisted were single mothers, racialized women, urban Aboriginal women and mothers with a disability.

Obviously, an inclusive women's agenda is needed, one that attends to the needs of diverse groups of women and ensures that all women benefit from social policy. For women with a disability, this means that attention must be given to adequate supports and to the vision paper of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services (HRDC 1999a). Particular attention must also be paid to low-income mothers who are Aboriginal or identified as members of visible minorities, because racism structures economic inequality, and because racist and culturally insensitive stereotypes are more likely to identify such women as "bad mothers."

As noted in Chapter 3, poverty is disproportionately high among Aboriginal women and women identified as members of visible minorities and their children. In the United States, one factor Minow (1995: 295) identified as a barrier to dealing more effectively with child poverty was "historic racism and intergroup distrust" which prevented people from treating the children of racialized others as their own. Lillian Rubin's 1994 study of working class families in the United States over the previous two decades demonstrated that economic restructuring had adversely affected these families. She also documented an escalation of racially based anger and antagonism. Racism does more than structure inequality; it also deflects attention from the distribution of economic power and its consequences. Because of the increasing racialization of poverty and the increasing associations between what is

constructed as race and poverty as a cultural status, significant progress on an anti-poverty front cannot be made without confronting racism. Fighting racism is essential to the struggle for economic justice, particularly in regions with concentrated Aboriginal or non-White populations.

As suggested in this report, a child poverty focus is not likely to advance the struggle against institutionalized and systemic racism. Rather than identifying systemic barriers, state discourse on child poverty is more likely to reinforce the blaming of individual parents through cultural stereotypes, particularly as mothers. A focus on child development would most benefit the struggle against racism if programs were broadly based, and recognized and validated cultural differences.

For many Aboriginal people, self-government is important, because of its concern with resource ownership and control, not just subsistence income. In the wake of attempts by the Canadian state to "colonize Aboriginal childhood," Aboriginal groups and First Nations have identified children as central to the physical and cultural survival of their nations and communities (McGillivray 1997). Increasingly, Aboriginal women are taking up leadership roles in their communities. However, these women suffer from high levels of poverty, and most live in mid-sized urban settings. Aboriginal women generally, and urban Aboriginal women in particular, need an increased role in creating the discourse around poverty and inequality both from within and outside a women's agenda.

Specific Anti-Poverty Discursive Strategies

A central argument of this report is that poverty should not be *framed* in terms of children if narrow cultural understandings of poverty are to be avoided. Within poverty discourse, several approaches to decentring child poverty are briefly discussed below.

Child and Family Poverty

One shift contemplated and attempted by the Child Poverty Action Group has been a move toward an emphasis on family poverty (McGrath 1997). There are a number of benefits to such an approach relative to a narrower focus on child poverty. The focus on families can potentially appropriate some of the positive elements of family discourse from conservatives. By including family in the definition of the problem, it could displace the reliance on family as a solution to poverty and imply that family poverty is a social not a private problem. Because "family" includes both adult members and caregivers, this frame does not as readily stigmatize adult dependency as difference nor reinforce a passive, vulnerable image of victimhood. It also links the interests of children more directly with parents and could allow for the recognition of a plurality of family forms including lone- parent families.

However, there are still potential limitations. Family poverty and the poverty of adults remains important only because of the presence of children, which still implies that adult poverty is less problematic and less deserving of public assistance. There are also concerns that "family" will be normatively interpreted as the traditional nuclear family and will obscure gendered relations including the disproportionate poverty and domestic labour of women. A focus on families can maintain an illusion of gender equality by rendering women's

caregiving role less visible. One must question whether overall, this approach would be any more effective than child poverty in alleviating the poverty of women and children, especially those on social assistance.

The Links Between Poverty and Violence

Women across socio-economic groups experience violence. Poverty, however, makes it more difficult to escape violence wherever it is experienced, be it in the family, workplace or in educational institutions. A women's agenda can identify and expose the "violence of poverty" (White 1993), and the links between state action (or inaction), poverty and violence (Abell 2001). Child prostitution has recently been the subject of legislative activity in several provinces. While child prostitution likely requires special remedial measures, the violence targeted at all prostitutes, adult women as well as children, must be an important subject of state discourse. It is also important to extend the analysis of violence and subordination to welfare reform policies and to the increasing criminalization and surveillance of people living in poverty, particularly those receiving social assistance (Abell 2001).

A Critique of Market Dependency

An obvious alternative discursive shift is to a more critical class-based analysis of market dependency or waged work, particularly low-waged work. This perspective has traditionally been an important component of a social justice strategy. In the current context, it can also play an important role in shifting policy discourse, because the provision of "work" incentives and the promotion of labour force attachment have been the primary reasons for denying additional monetary benefits to the poorest mothers and children. According to the National Anti-Poverty Organization, the welfare poor have been used as scapegoats for the economic malaise of the last two decades. If the American experience is any indication, the rhetoric around the work ethic and work incentives may only intensify with recessionary shifts in the business cycle.

A policy focus on the labour market is important for a number of other reasons. In low-wage workplaces, unionization is often problematic if not impossible, and it is not clear how workers/mothers can organize for mutual support in these contexts. Current policy solutions toward child poverty clearly do not address conditions within the labour market itself. If anything, the current focus on children and family policy may deflect attention from the extent to which the labour market and economic system are generating poverty. There is also a need to examine other concrete effects of market dependency for both parents and children, including the relationship between child well-being and a low-wage labour market, in combination with the lack of adequate social supports for parenting. Unfortunately, concerns with the impact of the labour market on children have usually been addressed only in terms of the impact of the absence of the primary caregiver. The impact of the inflexible character of the labour market itself has not been a focus of inquiry. Concerns about the labour market and children must move beyond simply repositioning women in the family given the increasing number of dual-earner and lone-parent households. Policy makers must also move beyond encouraging employers to do more out of their own economic self-interest, an argument that does not appear effective, particularly in the low-wage context. Rather, a number of changes must be explored including mandatory sick leave for children, more flexible work hours, a shorter work week and, perhaps most important, more extensively

subsidized day care. The question of whether, and to what extent, welfare and other social supports can moderate or limit the abuse of employees in the paid workplace needs more emphasis in policy discourse as well as the impact of other forms of economic development such as local co-operative initiatives.

A focus on the labour market is also needed to defuse the construction of deviance and difference around welfare that is created by restructuring discourse and reinforced by a state focus on child poverty. Much of the antagonism toward social assistance recipients may be a result of demeaning conditions of paid labour that ultimately undermine, rather than enhance, autonomy in any meaningful way. More attention to the conditions of low-wage paid work could contest the hard line usually drawn between the working and welfare poor. It could identify common ground and interests, and build alliances between groups that are otherwise divided. Poverty is a hazard for both and is generated by a number of causes including an unequal distribution of wealth, the lack of jobs, low-wage jobs and a lack of child-care supports. Anti-poverty groups are working actively to make visible the shared interests among people living in poverty by emphasizing that even with the child benefit, workfare, etc., people are still facing poverty.

Finally, the focus on market dependency is a way of making employers more visible in the discourse of poverty. A low-paid and flexible work force ultimately benefits employers, particularly transnational corporations who can use the threat of cheaper foreign labour to keep labour costs low. In this respect, a focus on the labour market can help make connections to the impact of economic restructuring on an international basis and link poverty to a larger context of growing economic and social inequality.

Rights Discourse

Finally, a rights discourse may be beneficial in connection with labour market reform and poverty. A number of social rights can be advanced including the rights to paid work, a living wage, humane conditions of work, a child-friendly workplace and a shorter work week for family responsibilities, and the right to be free of violence. NAPO has tried to raise concerns about low-wage exploitative labour but, generally, has not been heard or has been dismissed, its concerns seen as further evidence that people in poverty are lacking in a work ethic. Rights rhetoric can give dignity to these concerns.

Rights have been criticized as individualistic and as incapable of dealing with intersecting inequalities. However, there have been efforts to account for overlapping sites of disempowerment and the integral connection between political and economic and social rights. Whereas needs claims can motivate paternalistic responses, rights discourse emphasizes a common humanity that is important in struggles against poverty. The rights of children and adults in this discourse have equal status; neither is privileged and blame is irrelevant. Social rights, such as labour or human rights, are also an important way of counteracting or neutralizing the fact that current structures generate particular legal rights through property and contract law that legitimize an unequal distribution of economic power. If the claims of those living in poverty are not identified as entitlements, they may continually be deferred to a “future moment.”

> Distributive outcomes which result from market-based processes tend to be defended in terms of entitlements and rights. Access to remedies by way of "social policy" and income transfers, by contrast, is more precarious; such remedies are more likely to be regarded as either questions of charity or "political" matters, matters which are contingent on other priorities, demands and the levels of resources available (Rittich 2000: 240).

Rights discourse is important in enhancing the stature of these concerns even without resort to courts and litigation strategies. As Day and Brodsky (1998) demonstrated, constitutional litigation has not proven particularly effective in relation to poverty claims under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.* Rights discourse may potentially be more effective in mounting pressure for legislative or statutory reform, such as changes to federal and provincial labour codes. An international human rights framework may also be invoked to pressure Canada to respect its own international obligations.[84] International rights agreements and treaties ratified by Canada explicitly guarantee a right to non-discrimination and to adequate food, clothing and housing as well as health care, education, social security and freely chosen employment (Jackman and Porter 1999). Anti-poverty groups have increasingly used these instruments and access to international committees both to legitimize social and economic rights domestically as universal human rights and to build alliances with women's and anti-poverty groups internationally. The importance of such international coalitions was manifest in the Women's March against Poverty and Violence on October 17, 2000. Abell (2001) identified a number of potential violations of international rights agreements and treaties that are relevant to women and children in poverty. Although rights discourse will not get around the need to contest assumptions of undeservingness and dominant ideologies, it can compel attention and increase the visibility and credibility of anti-poverty activism.

Summary

In this final chapter, I have argued that discursive strategies should be employed to de-centre child poverty in state discourse. Although child poverty cannot be ignored as a component of poverty, the child focus of state discourse on poverty needs to be displaced because it has negative implications for our understanding of poverty and social inequality more generally. Strategies that could facilitate a shift toward a social justice perspective include increasing participation in the creation of poverty discourse, exposing the links between state action, violence and poverty, emphasizing the low-wage labour market as a locus of policy reform, and using rights discourse to ground concerns related to poverty. In general, these strategies would help to promote a shift within poverty discourse away from individual blame toward an appreciation of the need for social supports and empowerment. An inclusive women's agenda is critical in identifying the simultaneous impact of class inequality, sexism, racism and ableism in producing women's and children's poverty. Although child poverty must be de-centred in state discourse, the entitlement of children as individuals to social provision must be recognized. Rather than abandoning a children's agenda, women's groups should continue to work through an agenda for both women and children to address the developmental and care needs of all children. A children's agenda could provide significant benefits for low-income women and children without stigma and segregation if the programming was broadly based and included child care.

7. CONCLUSION

November 24th, 2000, the target date for the elimination of child poverty, passed with barely a mention in much of the print media in Canada. Although Canada was in the throes of a federal election, child poverty did not figure as a significant topic in the electoral campaign. Social policy reforms implemented since the late 1990s have had some impact in reducing child poverty, but rates remain high relative to most other industrialized countries. Moreover, those mothers and children experiencing the greatest need have received the fewest benefits relative to other income groups.

I have argued that it is important to oppose current solutions as unduly narrow and limited, and to oppose the construction of poverty by governments as an issue exclusively or predominantly of child poverty. Framing poverty as child poverty tends to naturalize dependency and reinforce dominant ideologies that ultimately blame adults/mothers for their own poverty and that of their children. A child poverty focus keeps us locked in a mind set of pity and rescue as a charitable response to poverty, and entrenches a narrow focus on the victim as vulnerable and passive. At the same time, it obscures the significant impact of structural constraints in the lives of women in poverty and fails to go beyond simplistic blaming responses.

Whether a shift away from poverty discourse to a more generalized focus on child development will ultimately assist all mothers and children depends on whether the solutions are broadly based and include developmental care. If services under the National Children's Agenda are targeted and focussed on parenting skills, this discursive shift may potentially reinforce the stigma and cultural subordination of the poorest mothers and children. Child-centred discourse is neither inherently problematic nor inherently progressive in terms of promoting gender equality. The outcomes for women ultimately depend on how needs are interpreted and satisfied and these are, to a significant degree, political and moral issues, not purely matters of technical expertise (Fraser 1989). Policy solutions to the needs of children have had a distinctly conservative edge, reflecting the dominant ideologies and interests underlying restructuring discourse. They have not focussed on child-care labour nor on the contradictions between paid and unpaid labour, but have reinforced the private market and family as the primary institutions for the provision of needs.

The exclusion and targeting of people receiving social assistance must be resisted. Strategies that might aid in a shift away from pity or rescue to social justice include a focus on the low-wage labour market as a locus of policy reform, and the promotion of rights discourse and increased participation in the discourse around poverty partly by challenging the assumptions and dominance of technical discourses. In all these contexts, a women's agenda has a vital role in making the sexism of current structural conditions explicit and persistent gender inequalities visible. Within a women's agenda and through a children's agenda, the sexism inherent in current work/family structures and its disproportionately adverse impact on women must be challenged. Only an inclusive women's agenda can identify and address the simultaneous impact of class inequality, sexism, racism and ableism in producing poverty for both women and children.

I have emphasized the need for a broader and more complex understanding of poverty as well as the importance of acknowledging different outcomes for different groups of women in the struggle to eradicate poverty. The following recommendations for women's groups have been advanced in this report.

1. Women's groups need to work to extend the dominant if not exclusive focus of governments on child poverty and present relief from poverty as a universal right.

2. Women's groups must acknowledge that child poverty is a significant component of poverty and that children have an independent entitlement to social provisions.

3. The links between child poverty and the intersecting structural inequalities and constraints affecting parents, particularly the impact of women's domestic labour, must be explicitly recognized in discussions of child poverty.

4. Women's groups must focus greater attention on the needs of those groups of women and children who have benefited least or are most adversely affected by governmental policies to date and resist, in particular, the exclusion and targeting of women receiving social assistance.

5. Women's groups need to seek the input of low-income mothers in the creation of poverty policy discourse, particularly women with a disability, Aboriginal women, and women who are immigrants or identified as members of visible minorities, and women in receipt of social assistance generally.

6. Women's groups must engage with the Children's Agenda as part of the solution to poverty in an effort to ensure that the relationship between child welfare and women's equality is recognized, that an emphasis on developmental care for all children within the ECD Initiative is adopted and that low-income mothers have meaningful input into the structure and evaluation of targeted early childhood development programs.

7. Women's groups should promote the extension of significant benefits under the NCB Supplement to households receiving social assistance.

8. Women's groups need to focus increased attention on conditions within the low-wage labour market in an effort to make visible the contradictions experienced predominantly by women and displace the perceived opposition between the "working" and the "welfare" poor.

9. Women's groups must continue to make links between the experience of women domestically and internationally, and continue to expose Canada's failure to meet its international obligations under human rights treaties and agreements.

The following major recommendations are directed to governments and state officials.

10. State discourse needs to recognize the implications of international human rights obligations, particularly the significance of social and economic rights in relation to poverty.

11. State discourse must acknowledge the reality and harms of adult poverty, and address the intersecting structural causes of adult poverty.

12. Acknowledge child poverty as a significant component of poverty and address it in the context of, or as it is connected to, the intersecting structural causes of poverty.

13. Policy makers need to work to change the negative construction of mothers receiving social assistance and seek to reduce the stigma and marginalization.

14. The needs of, and stigma experienced by, mothers and children receiving social assistance must be partially addressed by extending the NCB Supplement to provide such households with significant monetary benefits.

15. The National Children's Agenda should promote the provision of affordable, universally accessible and reliable developmental care for children.

16. Provide mothers, whose children are affected, with meaningful input into the formulation, implementation and evaluation of programs under the National Children's Agenda.

17. Give low-income mothers an increased role in the creation of poverty policy discourse, and identify their needs in relation to existing educational institutions, families, workplaces and welfare reform policies.

18. Pay increased policy attention to the implications of "market dependency," the conditions of low-wage labour and the ways in which state support can moderate adverse impacts on both parents and children.

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ENDNOTES

[1] McGrath 1997: 178 citing a communiqué from the 17th Annual Premiers' Conference, August 21-23, 1996, "Social Policy Reform and Renewal."

[2] For a discussion of these factors, see sources cited by Philipps (1996: 158-159).

[3] A study of market poverty (income independent of government transfers) suggested that "approximately 450,000 families were market poor in 1994 even though they had at least one supporting adult who had worked all year. And about 100,000 families were market poor despite having had two supporting adults work all year" (Schellenberg and Ross 1997: 41).

[4] According to Statistics Canada (2000a), the average total income for families was $62,116 in 1998 compared to its peak in 1989 of $60,480.

[5] A theoretical analysis of the Canadian state is beyond the scope of this report. Functionalist theories of the state suggest the state has serviced the goal of capital accumulation and legitimation, or the state mediates the competing demands of capital/production and labour/social reproduction. Functionalist theories offer important insights, but also tend to overstate the unity of dominant interests or groups and fail to explain historically significant differences in the extent and ways in which these functions are pursued or achieved. The analysis in the text reflects a view of the state not as a monolithic institution but as the site of a discursive, ideological and economic struggle (Boyd 1994).

[6] According to data from the Luxembourg Income Survey which uses a low-income measure, the child poverty rate was 15.2% in 1971 (Cornia 1997: 56).

[7] Epsing-Anderson (1990) found that residualist liberal welfare states were typified by a low level of working class mobilization. A primary objective of working class movements has been to use the welfare state to reduce the market dependence of workers.

[8] See Minow (1995: 294) for a discussion of the different strategic ends served by the rhetoric of children.

[9] Action plans have also been initiated at the provincial level (e.g., by Saskatchewan in 1993).

[10] Interview with Christa Freiler, October 16, 1998.

[11] The National Council of Welfare did not itself focus on child poverty in succeeding years. A report on the working poor in 1977 was influential in making visible the fact that people in poverty do work and a further report on women and poverty in 1990 highlighted the dynamics of women's experience of poverty.

[12] Some child poverty activists have argued that children deserve special attention because this life-cycle group has the highest rate of poverty. Addressing child poverty is thus a way of addressing intergenerational equity. The force of this argument depends on dividing the population into age groups according to life cycles of dependency and comparing the status

of the elderly with that of children. This comparison makes visible significant differences in levels of public support which can be attributed to the fact that the elderly vote, and the belief that families or parents should be responsible for their own children. Arguments based on generational equity do not appear to have been accepted or reflected in government policy discussions or measures of child poverty. Comparison of the public provisioning of the young with the elderly can challenge the assumption of private responsibility for children although some analysts have expressed concern that benefits for seniors could be identified as a cause of child poverty and reduced on this basis (Gee 2000). Comparisons of dependency also reflect the assumption that the very young and old are the only groups that are naturally dependent and cannot be employed (Gee 2000).

[13] Note that Finnie's analysis was based on the Longitudinal Administrative Database and thereby was restricted to non-students aged 20 and over who filed tax forms for all years from 1992 through 1996. Children were not directly included because they did not file tax forms. The number of children in the household did not generally have a strong impact on annual entry rates into poverty except for very large families and single mothers. Single mothers and unattached individuals experienced higher rates of entry and re-entry into low income and lower rates of exit than did attached individuals.

[14] In his study of the charitable sector in Canada, Picard (1997: 19) noted that workers frequently expressed the view that "for every $1 invested in an 'at-risk' child, $6 can be saved down the road."

[15] For a critique of "apocalyptic demography," see Gee (2000).

[16] Rank and Cheng (1995) concluded that socio-economic background rather than welfare use affects human capital and household characteristics except in the case of children who become female heads of households. Vartanian (1999) found that welfare only has an intergenerational impact on African American women for reasons that are not explained.

[17] See <www.realwomenca.com>.

[18] Much of the history that follows is the result of interviews with members who have been active with CPAG over the last decade including Christa Freiler, Andy Ranachan and Colin Hughes.

[19] CPAG was never formally affiliated with groups of the same name in the United States or the United Kingdom. They did not pursue common strategies. Unlike the group in the United Kingdom, for example, CPAG never did individual case advocacy.

[20] Christa Freiler, Marvin Novick, Rosemarie Popham, Andy Ranachan, Brigitte Kitchen and Colin Hughes met every second week in Toronto to strategize.

[21] Angus Reid, July 1994; 89% of Canadians.

[22] Interview with Ken Battle, October 17, 1998.

[23] Interview with Christa Freiler, October 16,1998. Freiler's only regret is that the objectives were not identified as the elimination of "child and family poverty."

[24] Interview with Colin Hughes, October 16, 1998.

[25] Interview with Mike Farrell, October 17, 1998.

[26] The National Action Committee of the Status of Women and the Canadian Labour Congress remain members. The Alternative Budget which is produced by a number of non-governmental organizations does emphasize child poverty but defines it in the broader context of poverty and addresses a number of measures to reduce poverty generally.

[27] Interview with Bruce Tate, February 28, 2001.

[28] See publications in the Social Policy Challenge edited by William G. Watson and John Richards (1994, 1995a,b) and John Richards (1997).

[29] "The assistance would be restricted to a group of citizens who, due to circumstances beyond their control, are in a difficult and vulnerable position: their income is substantially below that of the average Canadian and the care of dependent children restricts their participation in the labour force" at 324. "Sole-support mothers have a characteristic in common with the elderly: they have a tenuous relationship with the labour market and the question of work incentives for them is of little concern to society" at 325.

[30] For a critique, see Abner et al. (1990) who argued that the report reflected the view that poverty was an "an individual phenomenon, not a matter of structural inequity" and assumed gender equality within a dominant nuclear family form.

[31] The Standing Committee's report in 1991 on *Children in Poverty* made reference to three reports published under the Chair of Senator Arthur Tremblay: *An Analysis of Child and Family Benefits in Canada: A Working Document* in 1985, *Child Benefits: Proposal for a Guaranteed Family Supplement* in 1987 and *Child Care* in 1988.

[32] The Chair recommended a nationwide system of child care that would be cost shared by the federal government rather than through the tax system. The Bill proposing the Canada Child Care Act in 1988 was subject to serious opposition by women's groups and child-care advocacy organizations for its support of for-profit day care and died when the election was called in1988. Subsequent federal governments reduced funding for day care, and the Canada Health and Social Transfer in 1995 gave the provinces more control over funding, further reducing the possibility of a national day-care program.

[33] I use the term "racialized women" to highlight the social process that identifies some women as "different" and shapes their experience according to their presumed race or colour. I also refer to "visible minority women" because most statistical studies use this term to identify social impacts. The Census Dictionary defines "visible minorities" as it is defined under the 1986 (now 1995) federal *Employment Equity Act* to mean "persons (other than Aboriginal persons) who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Statistics Canada 1997: 97). Persons filling out census forms are asked to identify members of their

households as falling within 10 groups (Chinese, Filipino, Black, Asian, Latin American, etc.) as well as "white" and "other." "Aboriginal persons" includes persons who have identified with at least one Aboriginal group including North American Indian, Métis, Inuit, registered Indian or treaty Indian. Both Aboriginal women and visible minority women are subject to racism and in this sense racialized.

[34] For an examination of the controversy over the income definition of poverty, see Wiegers (2001).

[35] See Chapter 4 for a further discussion of the family ethic and dominant ideologies of motherhood.

[36] The rate of child poverty in "economic families" other than two-parent families and lone-parent households headed by a female was 27.5% in 1998. Scott and Lochhead (2000: 12) similarly found a differential in the poverty rates of lone-parent households headed by a female (45.4 % poverty rate for one earner and 96.9% for no earner) and lone-parent households headed by a male (31.3% poverty rate). Only 3% of male social assistance recipients were lone parents in contrast to 25% of female recipients (Scott 1998: 18).

[37] Luker (1996) argued that teenage pregnancy is more the result than the cause of poverty and that even delayed childbirth would result in poverty for most of the young mothers affected. Another study recently suggested that the baby-sitting of younger children by daughters while the mother is employed reduces the time available for school work and can lead to an identification of young women with mothering (Zuckerman 2000).

[38] Forty-two percent of lone-parent mothers received social assistance in 1994, compared to 9% of all women living with male partners and 22% of male lone parents (Scott 1998:19).

[39] Scott and Lochhead (2000: 33-34) noted that 63% of women who exited poverty between 1993 and 1994 had experienced an increase in family income of at least $10,000.

> Moreover, the increases in family income that moved women above the poverty line were attributable to increases in personal income *and* the income of other family members. This finding underscores the importance of *dual-earner* families, and accounts for the very high rates of persistent poverty encountered by women in single-adult households (i.e., lone parents and unattached individuals) (emphasis added).

I would add that it also may account for high levels of poverty among two-parent households where one parent, typically the wife, is not employed.

[40] Reports suggest that the extreme welfare reform measures undertaken in the United States have had a major impact on the number of people receiving welfare but have not increased the income of former welfare recipients. One study indicated that the number of households in extreme poverty had increased between 1996 and 1997 (Zuckerman 2000: 816).

[41] As Abell (2001) noted, the federal government has appealed the pay equity decision of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal with respect to Public Service Alliance of Canada workers, and mandatory pay equity has only been enacted in Ontario. Abell also noted (2001: 7) that the Conservative Government in Ontario has cut employment equity funding.

[42] See the CLC (1998). The Congress has supported a move toward work time reduction including an employee right to refuse overtime and to reduce voluntarily their paid work time through shorter work weeks or days, sabbaticals, job sharing or leaves.

[43] *Employment Standards Act*, R.S.O. 1990 c. E-14 as amended, see Abell (2001: 14).

[44] In the United States, research suggests that part-time workers and employees of small establishments receive fewer benefits than full-time workers in medium and large workplaces (Blau et al. 1998: 313-330).

> Workers in low-wage jobs are half as likely as managers and professionals to have flextime; less likely to have on-site child care [which they are not likely able to afford in any event]; more likely to lose a day's pay when they must stay home to care for a sick child; three times less likely to get company-sponsored tax breaks to help pay for child care (Holcomb 2000: 40).

Holcomb noted (2000: 42) that "short-notice overtime, rotating shifts, and strict attendance policies" are becoming if anything more common. Note that the wages in female-dominated workplaces may already be discounted to reflect high turnover rates as a result of child-care responsibilities.

[45] According to CPAG (1986: 3), every child has a right to equality of life chances and "should, as a right of birth, grow up in conditions conducive to his or her optimal development. Children have a right to become productive, fulfilled, and responsible citizens." "Optimal development" requires that the knowledge, skill, and talent of all children be nurtured and that their faculties of reason, love, and moral capacity (eg. Compassion, generosity, the ability to give and receive pleasure) be allowed to develop."

[46] See, for example, the National Center for Children in Poverty, Joseph L. Maibiman, School of Public Health of Columbia University <http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/main4.html> accessed January 14, 2002.

[47] According to an Ekos survey in 1997, economically insecure individuals include those who are unemployed, concerned about their current or future financial situation or employment.

[48] According to Bruce Porter (telephone interview February 28, 2001) of the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, the focus on child poverty "backfired" and "ended up taking poverty off the agenda, rather than putting it on" by shifting the focus from poverty to parenting skills.

[49] In the Ontario *Mothers' Allowances Act* of 1920, undeserving mothers included those who were unmarried, the wives of prisoners or those who were otherwise deemed by a committee to be unfit or unsuitable for the care of children.

[50] "What we're doing, we're making sure that those dollars don't go to beer, don't go to something else, but in fact, if there are requirements for the health of the mother, they'll get it from us.… But it won't be a blanket cheque that can be spent on anything. It will be spent to the benefit of the child" (Philp and Mackie 1999).

[51] "In answering the question earlier today, I did not intend to suggest that all who were receiving the allowance were misusing the money.… If anyone has drawn that inference, I apologize" (Philp and Mackie 1999: A-8).

[52] Interview with Peter Gilmor of the Anti-Poverty Ministry, Regina, August 29, 2001.

[53] For example, the first conference on child poverty in Ontario, entitled, Child Poverty A Moral Shame received very little media coverage as a result of the Ethiopian famine (Interview with Christa Freiler, October 16, 1998).

[54] Gordon (1995: 76-77) noted that adults may physiologically respond in a protective way to the physical image of a child. However, emotional appeals based on distressing imagery can backfire insofar as viewers are not able to deal with it psychically and shut down or "numb out."

[55] Conservative critics of welfare dependency argue that it produces a child-like dependency or pathology. According to one welfare official, "when you're treated like a child you start to act like one." However, most recipients exit welfare for periods of time, if not permanently. Evidence suggests that the longer one is in receipt of welfare, the more difficult it is to leave, but this may also be the result of skills deficits or employer attitudes toward welfare recipients rather than the psychological impact of "state dependence" per se. Many welfare recipients may resent being treated like children but a child-like demeanor may also be the most rational response to a bureaucratic system that allows recipients no voice. Even if welfare systems do shape recipients' behaviour and understanding of themselves in various ways and to varying degrees, the better solution is not necessarily an end to the satisfaction of needs but changes in welfare administration.

[56] The Federal, Provincial and Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health (FPTAC 1999: 79) noted that children of depressed parents were four times as likely to be living in low-income households than in high-income households based on the 1994-95 National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLCY).

[57] Treating men and women as identical in relation to parenting or acknowledging their differences as groups raises the sameness/difference dilemma that has been confronted in many other aspects of social policy affecting women. Minow (1990: 20) defined the dilemma of difference. "The problems of inequality can be exacerbated both by treating members of minority groups the same as members of the majority and by treating the two groups differently." To treat men and women as the same in relation to parenting obscures

the gendered reality of unequal contributions, expectations and costs. To treat them as different and to acknowledge the differences runs the risk of reinforcing those differences by encouraging an identification of women with them and to further entrench the traditional sexual division of labour. The long-term solution proposed by Minow is to change the background norms against which difference is assigned by, for example, changing norms in the workplace and providing child-care supports. In the short term, however, the dilemma of difference poses a strategic problem.

[58] Social welfare policies reinforce a traditional familial model both by low welfare benefits and by basing entitlement on family income.

[59] According to research by Lipman et al. (1998) stronger predictors included hostile parenting (which has a worse impact in lone- as opposed to two-parent families), maternal depression, low household income (in both lone- and two-parent families) and low maternal education. Low household income was most consistently and significantly associated with child difficulties. Another study found that lone-parent status constituted a risk only for children aged 4 to 11 (Landy and Tam 1998). Note that it is easier to find statistical significance where large sample sizes are used as with the NLCY data. In addition, since single cross sections of data were used in these studies, more data is needed to sort out causal relationships such as whether the poor outcomes were a result of marital discord and abuse or violence prior to separation. While the study by Lipman et al. (1998) apparently controlled for the impact of social supports, several psychological studies have concluded that the size of one's social network is more important than family structure in terms of both maternal behaviour and child outcomes. See Burchinale et al.(1996) where family structure was not consistently related to either when social support was taken into account. Research that carefully evaluates and critically scrutinizes the different measures of child well-being, widely used in empirical studies of child development, would be very useful.

[60] There is significant evidence that the differential was not being transferred to the payee, because judges usually grossed up an award at the recipient's support tax rate rather than the payer's tax rate or some rate in between the two. See *Thibaudeau* v. *Thibaudeau*, [1995] 2 S.C.R. 627 per Claire L'Heureux-Dubé J. Feltham and Macnaughton (1999) argued that usually judges systematically underestimated the recipient's support tax rate resulting in even less after-tax money for recipients than in a no inclusion-no deduction system.

[61] The Family Law Committee (FLC 1991: 6) estimated that the direct time costs of child rearing may amount to 20 to 27 additional hours per week.

[62] Some legal analysts would argue that these costs are impossible to quantify fairly in a fixed regime because the impact can vary according to the mother's individual situation. (Interview with Julien Payne, November 29, 1999.) Zweibel (1993: 396) suggested the non-monetary costs of child rearing could have been taken into account within the guideline formula in several ways by

> computing a monetary value for the work and treating it as income to the non-custodial parent; not imputing income to the parent who forgoes income-generating work to care for children; not reducing child support as the

> custodial parent's income rises; and increasing child support when the non-custodial parent fails to comply with regular visitation schedules

or by adopting a model that equalized standards of living.

[63] In fact, an award based on an assumption of equal incomes can produce higher dollar amounts than one based on the pre-existing income shares model which does take both of the actual incomes into account (FLC 1995a: 13). For example, where a non-custodial parent has an income of $50,000 and a custodial parent of $30,000, the income shares model would generate a lower award than if a revised fixed percentage were used (FLC 1995a: 12-14). This occurs primarily because the higher income ($100,000 relative to $80,000) will generate a higher level of expenditures on children. Finnie (1997) also noted that where the custodial parent's income is higher than that of the non-custodial parent (a case perceived to be unfair to payers), taking both parents' incomes into account would not generate substantially different awards.

[64] The poverty of such children will likely be exacerbated by the loss of economies of scale.

[65] Kulig (1997) noted that money for special expenses (day care or ballet lessons) was to be treated as income and deducted from benefits in Ontario. Note that recipients may jeopardize their eligibility for assistance if they agree to an order in an amount less than the table amount under the Guidelines.

[66] Interview with Julien Payne May 10, 2000.

[67] Payers may also privately and voluntarily agree to pay more under the Guidelines to keep the tax benefit.

[68] (1992) 99 D.L.R. (4^{th}) 456 (S.C.C.).

[69] See for example. eg. *Gordon* v. *Goertz*, (1996), 19 *Reports on Family Law* (4th) 177 (S.C.C.).

[70] I provide a more extensive analysis of the National Child Benefit in Wiegers 2001.

[71] Canada (1997), specifically the online page entitled "How the National Child Benefit Will Work."

[72] Note that the amount of the basic benefit received by residents of Alberta varies by age of the child(ren).

[73] In 1998, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador passed on the full amount of the Supplement to recipients of social assistance. New Brunswick did so again in 1999-2000 and New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador and Manitoba did not recover the approximately $200 increase in the Supplement in 2000-01 (Canada 2000c:15). In February 1999, Alberta also used a portion of its reinvestment funds to increase shelter benefits for families on welfare.

[74] Interview with Sherrie Tingley, Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, February 20, 2001.

[75] Canada (1997), specifically the online page entitled “Objectives and Principles of the National Child Benefit.”

[76] According to Jane Ursel (1992), governments have used ostensibly “family” policies to subsidize wages and promote particular labour policies in the past. Ursel claimed that the implementation of Family Allowances in 1954 was intended to dampen wage demands, given increased living costs, and prevent inflation. Of course, in a capitalist economy, organized around the private ownership of property and the sale of labour, need for state support will always be generated by deficiencies in the labour market. Thus, every welfare and family program will redress failures or inadequacies in the market economy and, to this extent, constitute a way of subsidizing production. What is interesting, however, if Ursel is correct, is the tendency to present such policies as, or in terms of, family policies. Even though the benefit does address, to some extent, the problem of low wages by supplementing them, its presentation as a child or family benefit and its rationale may deflect attention away from the extent to which the current labour market and an unequal distribution of wealth generate low wages, unemployment and poor working conditions.

[77] Interview with Mike Farrell (National Anti-Poverty Organization) October 17, 1998. See also CSPC and OSSN (2001).

[78] For example, the Saskatchewan Employment Supplement includes maintenance income as qualifying income to provide an incentive for recipients of social assistance, lawyers and judges to seek and order maintenance.

[79] Interview with Marian Bedard, December 8, 1999.

[80] Examples of possible programs include prenatal care and screening of at-risk pregnant women, post-natal screening for risk factors, immunization, kindergarten, access to information, child-care options, comprehensive parenting programs and supports, targeted services for children and families experiencing significant conditions of risk, specialist services for children and families with high needs, follow-up and monitoring of children and families (Saskatchewan 1999a: 11-12).

[81] Income definitions of poverty, which are based on statistical groupings, may also have this impact. Political mobilization has more often occurred around work or around the shared experience of welfare recipients.

[82] Interview with Sherrie Tingley, February 20, 2001.

[83] Even in Sweden, women continue to perform most of the domestic labour both in the home and in the labour force as low-wage public employees. Women also experience a gender gap in wages (Hort 1997).

[84] See the work undertaken by the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action <http://www.fafia.org>.

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