

# There is a deadly cost to cutting social programs [CA-ON] <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** McQuaig, Linda

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## EXCERPTS

Ten years ago, Mike Harris slashed Ontario's welfare rates by 22 per cent, thereby cutting by almost one-quarter the incomes of Ontario's most vulnerable families.

The young kids in those vulnerable families are now teenagers. Recently, there's been an upsurge in violent crime by gangs of teenagers. Is it far-fetched to think there might be a connection?

There's ample research to show that conditions of poverty, economic disparity and social marginalization are among the factors that lead to crime, notes Wendy Cukier, who teaches justice studies at Ryerson University.

But in recent years, our ruling elites have steadfastly ignored such well-documented and intuitively obvious connections, as they've redirected an ever bigger share of the national income to themselves, via tax cuts.

That was why Harris cut welfare rates - to deliver tax cuts, with the biggest tax savings going to the richest members of society.

Did we really think this wouldn't affect poorer children, who already faced more difficulties than their schoolmates?

The Harris government also cut spending on an array of programs aimed at ensuring disadvantaged kids integrate into the mainstream. It cut funds for teaching English to immigrants, for social workers in the schools, for community recreation.

And when some kids behaved badly, it banned them from school with a "zero tolerance" policy. Where did we think they would go?

For an angry teen who feels excluded from the mainstream, a gang offers a sense of belonging, prestige, dignity and status among his peers. The mainstream offers less and less.

Of course, the mainstream offers jail. The Boxing Day slaying has renewed calls for toughening up our criminal justice system.

That's understandable. But it's also what we've been doing for the past decade. The courts generally deal harshly with violent criminals - as they should.

But if we really want to make this a liveable society, not just enjoy the satisfaction of locking up bad people, we should intervene much earlier.

We still don't seem to grasp the connection between slashing social supports and social breakdown, including violent crime.

In the midst of the current election campaign, the Liberals and the Conservatives are promising massive tax cuts, rather than massive social re-investment.

Tax cuts may put more cash in our pockets. But are we really better off if we have more cash for shopping &mdash; yet no longer feel safe to go shopping?

Economics teaches us there's no such thing as a free lunch. Recent experience in Toronto should remind us there's no such thing as a free tax cut.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/06/01/there-deadly-cost-cutting-social-programs-ca> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/res/issues/2006federalelectionintro.htm> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/election> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding>