

A historical snapshot of inequality in Canada ^[1]

Know thy history: Looking back on child care

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Inequality was one of Canada's most talked about political topics in 2011. The international Occupy movement focused attention on inequality of wealth, which both international and national organizations have identified as a growing problem in Canada.

- *Divided we stand: Why inequality keeps rising* ^[2] (OECD, 2011)
- *Canada country note* ^[3] (OECD, 2011)
- *Hennessy's Index: A number is never just a number - Inequality* ^[4] (CCPA, 2011)

Looking back in history, concern about inequality between various groups has been a frequent theme in Canada

Regional inequality among provinces is a long standing issue for Canadians.

- *Economic help as duty of confederation* ^[5]. Ottawa Citizen, 4 Feb 1938

The equalization program ^[6] which provides payments that "enable less prosperous provincial governments to provide their residents with public services" was eventually established to address regional disparities in finances and resources.

- *Divided and distracted - Regionalism as obstacle to reducing poverty and inequality* ^[7] (Yalnizyan, 2005)

Inequality between the status of English and French as official languages became a major issue in Canada in the early 1960's.

- *True Canadian equality urged: Nationhood crisis blamed upon old system* ^[8]. Montreal Gazette, 6 Dec 1967

The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism ^[9] was established by the federal government to address language inequality and resulted in the Official Languages Act of 1969. The primary goal of the act was to "ensure that Canadian citizens had access to federal services in the official language of their choice."

Inequality between men and women motivated the establishment of the **Royal Commission on the Status of Women** ^[10] more than 40 years ago. It identified the multiple barriers to equality faced by Canadian women. This was not the beginning of the struggle for gender equality in this country, but was a key benchmark. Despite advances made by women this struggle is ongoing as women's gains have been threatened in the last few years.

- *Speaking truth to power: A reader on Canadian women's inequality* ^[11] (Hennesey & Finn, 2010)

Racial inequality is another ongoing issue in Canada. Despite the creation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and an increasing awareness of the inequities faced by Aboriginal Canadians and other racialized populations, they still face inequities in access to education, employment and wealth.

- *"Equality rights' will change country* ^[12]. Montreal Gazette, 17 APR 1985
- *Promoting equity and dignity for Aboriginal children in Canada* ^[13] (Ball, 2008)
- *How do race and gender factor into income inequality?* ^[14] (Block, 2010)

Poverty is a persistent perpetuator of inequality despite a number of tax and benefit programs that address this issue in Canada. Poverty has been especially relentless for women, children and families, Aboriginal Canadians and other racialized groups.

- *Campaign 2000 reports* ^[15]

In 1971 the **Croll report on poverty** called for a guaranteed annual income supplement and increased welfare rates for over 4 million Canadians living below poverty levels.

- *A 'magna carta' for four million: Guaranteed income plan 'too costly', says Munro* ^[16]. Ottawa Citizen, 11 Nov 1971

The **Real Poverty Report** published by Croll's ex-committee members went further and identified the "corporate control of politics and the mass media" that was leading to the inequality of income distribution in Canada.

- *Poverty probe dissidents back guaranteed income* ^[17]. Calgary Herald, 19 Nov 1971

The tax system, skewed compensation and perk systems continue to perpetuate income and redistribution inequality in Canada. These were most recently highlighted in the CCPA report **Canada's CEO elite 100: The 0.01%** ^[18]

Recently, there has been an interest in **generational inequality** as young families find it difficult to survive and thrive as their parents and grandparents were able to do in Canada.

- *Does Canada work for all generations?* [19] (Human Early Learning Partnership, 2011)

Early childhood education and care plays a pivotal role in addressing the various forms of inequality faced by Canadians.

It is a key strategy for promoting women's equality, reducing child and family poverty, promoting economic prosperity by allowing parents to work, and providing the younger generation of Canadian families with the support they need to thrive financially and personally.

Further reading:

- *Why Canada can't work without good child care: How early childhood education and care supports the economy* [20] (Friendly, 2008)
- *Can early childhood education and care help keep Canada's promise of respect for diversity?* [21] (Friendly & Prabhu, 2010)
- *Tackling women's and children's poverty- Early learning and care services are part of the solution. Presentation to HUMA Standing Committee in their study of the federal role in poverty reduction* [22] (Prentice, 2009)

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