

The Federal budget and women ^[1]

Behind the numbers: A blog from CCPA

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EXCERPTS:

The only mention of either men or women in the 400-odd page 2012 Budget Implementation Bill is with regards to the appropriate use of donated sperm and ova.

In analysis and discussions of the proposed omnibus bill, differential impacts for women, Aboriginals, racialized persons, newcomers, and *the poor* are frequently left out. It's hard to blame anyone, there's a lot to talk about in this whopper.

Still, it's important to take a moment to ask not only what are the costs and benefits, but who benefits, and who pays the costs. The cumulative affect of regressive policy change adds to growing inequality.

What specifically in this budget impacts women? Here are a few issues that I noticed:

1. Rolling back the age of eligibility for OAS. OAS & GIS is the only income for many women where they are guaranteed to receive the same amount as men, regardless of their labour force history. For women between the ages of 65 and 69, OAS & GIS make up about 38% of their total income. For men of the same age, it's 26%. For women between the ages of 65 and 69, OAS & GIS reduce poverty by 21 percentage points. For men of the same age it's 15 percentage points. It's clear that rolling back the age of OAS is NOT gender neutral.

2. Working While on Claim EI Pilot Project. The most recent version of the Working While on Claim pilot project allowed claimants to earn either \$75 / week or 40% of weekly benefits, whichever was greater. This project had the greatest effect for women, single parents, part-time and temporary workers. This is markedly different from changes announced in the 2012 Budget, which eliminates the option of keeping all of the first 40% of weekly benefits in earnings, and instead only allows claimants to keep 50% of any earnings. For example, under the previous pilot project, a claimant could work about 1 day a week and keep those earnings on top of their weekly benefits. Under the new rules, a claimant would have to work for about 2 days /week to earn the same amount of money, but if they are able to work more, they get to keep half of that too. When you consider that claimants may have to pay for childcare or eldercare to return to work, it becomes much less likely that this change will be an incentive for low wage women to take available temporary employment while on claim.

3. Public Sector Cuts. Public sector cuts disproportionately affect women as both employees and as users of public services. Public service cuts are a particular issue for low-income women, aboriginal women, persons with disabilities, recent immigrants, and rural women. In Canada, public services play an important role in reducing inequality, and cuts to public services are bound to result in increasing levels of inequality for women and other vulnerable groups.

4. Research and Advocacy for Women's Issues. Budget 2012 eliminates the National Council of Welfare and the Centres of Excellence in Women's Health, and places significant pressure on Statistics Canada. The resources that charities devote to political advocacy are to be more closely monitored, silencing dissenting voices.

What's left out?

1. Access to EI. Only 37% of unemployed women were able to access regular benefits in 2011, compared to 45% of men. Women's work patterns are still very different from men's. Women are far more likely to work part-time, and still have a wage ratio of about 71-74% when compared to men with the same level of education. While half of men still work a standard 40-hr week, women are more likely to work 30-39 hrs, even if they are employed full-time. This means it takes longer for most women to qualify, and when they do qualify, their benefits are lower. There is nothing in this budget that addresses the reality of precarious work and the numbers of workers that are unable to access benefits. A national uniform entrance requirement of 360 hours would reach more vulnerable workers.

2. Childcare. Reviews of Quebec's affordable childcare program show that it results in women returning to the labour force, and that governments benefit from this increase in income tax revenue. There are benefits to children, mothers, families, and communities. This is compared to the UCCB, that has no demonstrable benefit whatsoever.

3. Violence against women. Economic inequality makes women more vulnerable to violence. You might think I'm stretching here, and I'm

not saying that pay equity will eliminate violence against women. But my point is that economic equality has far reaching implications, and ones that you might never have considered if you didn't sit down and explicitly employ a different lens.

Region: Canada ^[3]

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