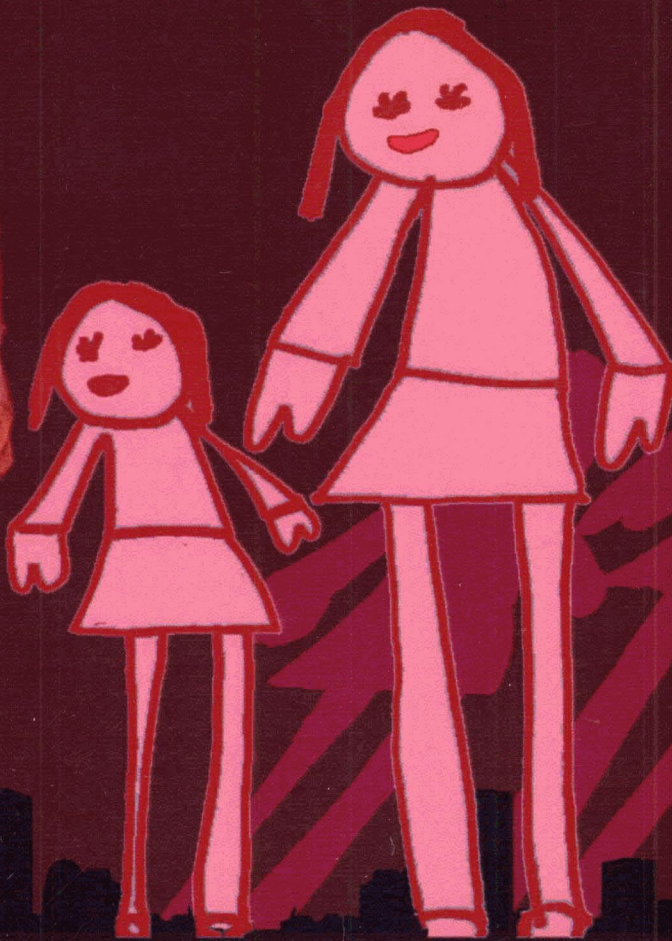


# Between a rock and a hard place



Examining how the Lack of Universal Childcare  
Impacts Marginalized Women's Equality



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# Introduction

## a) Background to Project

Since its beginnings, Grassroots Women has identified the question of childcare as central to the lives of working class women. To address women's need for childcare, Grassroots Women launched a campaign calling for "Childcare for all!" in 1999. As members clarified the importance of identifying childcare as a women's issue, Grassroots Women re-launched its educational and political campaign in 2003 under the banner "Universal Childcare is a Women's Right".

Early discussions confirmed the urgent need for researching and analyzing childcare policy from the experiences and perspectives of working class women. Despite childcare's importance to women achieving genuine equality and development, there is a thundering silence surrounding the issue of childcare from the particular perspective of working class women.

For example, within progressive organizations generally, childcare is often given only a token mention. Among childcare advocacy groups there has been a shift to discussing childcare in terms of children's rights and alleviating child poverty, rather than the question of women's equality. (Timpson, 2001) Organizations within the mainstream women's movement have been long criticized by grassroots, (im)migrant, and Indigenous women's organizations for their emphasis on domestic work and focus on getting women into non-traditional careers rather than a systemic analysis of the divide between public and private spheres. (Wilson, 2003) Furthermore, because of their positioning, middle class, liberal feminists have often been complacent within the lobby for a strong national childcare program. (Daenzer, 1997)

Therefore, in March 2004, Grassroots Women launched *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* with the objectives of:

- 1) Documenting the stories, analysis, and ideas for action of working class women in relation to childcare.
- 2) Examining the impact of current childcare policy on women's genuine equality and liberation.
- 3) Examining the impact of policies of globalization (privatization, deregulation, and liberalization) on childcare policy.
- 4) Taking collective action for universal childcare that serves the interests of working class women.

*Between a Rock and a Hard Place* is being released at a timely juncture. Childcare is increasingly coming under the public eye. Federal, provincial, and territorial ministers are in the process of developing "a framework for improving access to affordable, quality, provincially and territorially regulated early learning and child care programs and services." It is our sincere hope that the collective voices of working class women highlighted in this report will be silenced no longer. These voices have a significant contribu-

tion to make towards formulating the type of childcare program that needs to be developed in Canada.

## **b) Organizing and Educating at Grassroots Women**

Grassroots Women was initiated as a discussion group in 1995 by the Philippine Women Centre of BC (PWC). PWC invited a group of working class women to come together to discuss their concrete experiences of displacement and forced migration; serving as cheap labour in the service sector and domestic work; and, being burdened with increasing responsibility for their families when there is no national childcare program, health is being privatized and housing is unaffordable.

Grassroots Women was born out of the desire of these women to address the systemic political and economic marginalization of working class women. Founding members saw a need for a women's group to support the empowerment, development, and participation of working class women in advocating for their human rights and equality rights.

These founding members, as well as newer members, believed that there was a need for a women's group that understands the roots of the marginalization of women in the social, political and economic reality of their lives. As Grassroots Women, we have always examined how the process of neo-liberal or imperialist globalization deepens the extreme exploitation and oppression of working class women, particularly of Indigenous women and

**Grassroots Women was born out of the desire to address the systemic, political & economic marginalization of working class women.**

### **What do we mean by 'working class'?**

We use the term 'working class' to denote those who sell their labour power or ability to work in exchange for wages from an employer. In capitalist economies, members of the working class are nominally free to choose their employer and job. Workers are not bought and sold (as in primarily slave based economies) or forced to pay a portion of what they produce to the owners (as in primarily feudal economies). This nominal freedom masks the dependence of workers on the owners of the factories, machines, land, raw materials, and the money needed to invest in new ventures. It also masks the exploitation of workers, as the majority of the value created by workers in the production process goes not to the workers but to capitalists in the form of profits.

We also understand there are distinctions between the working class in the service sector (offices, insurance companies, health care, education, etc) and the working class in the productive sector (factors, mines, construction, etc). These distinctions lie particularly in the way these groups understand their place in society.

While we understand that all women face political inequality in capitalist societies, it is only working class women who face economic exploitation. In fact, even among working class women there are significant differences in the extent and ways in which particular groups of working class women are marginalized both economically and politically. For example, systemic racism and immigration / citizenship status render Indigenous and (im)migrant women the most marginalized among working class women in Canada. Therefore, to genuinely liberate all women from exploitation and oppression, we must focus our efforts on the experiences and struggles of the most marginalized of all working class women.

Third World women (who live in both industrialized and underdeveloped countries). We understand that this exploitation and oppression impacts the rights of all women. We believe that we will not have achieved genuine equality until all oppressed and exploited people are liberated.

Grassroots Women focuses on educating, mass organizing and mobilizing. Community-based education has always played a central role in our activities. We have hosted / facilitated numerous forums, workshops and discussions among working class women and allies on campaign themes as well as other topics including the history of the women's movement in Canada and trafficking of women. The emphasis of this education is to raise public awareness and support for our issues.

Our campaigns have both a local and an international character. They emphasize the issues of primary concern for the most marginalized women around the world. They include: "No to Wars of Aggression!", "Women Resist Imperialist Globalization" and "Health for All! Stop the Privatization of Health!"

In 1999, Grassroots Women launched a campaign calling for "Childcare for all!" As members clarified the importance of identifying childcare as a women's issue, Grassroots Women re-launched its educational and political campaign in 2003 under the banner "Universal Childcare is a Women's Right". This campaign began with a number of workshops and forums in the community focused on gathering the stories of mothers and childcare workers, especially those under the Live-in Caregiver Program. Since that time, the campaign has strengthened and grown. We have met with both provincial (Minister Jenny Kwan, 2000) and federal levels of governments (Standing Committee on Finance, 2003, and Minister Ken Dryden, 2005). Through this project, Grassroots Women launched a postcard campaign calling for universal childcare and scrapping of the Live-in Caregiver Program. As part of this postcard campaign, 4000 postcards have been sent to the Prime Minister of Canada.

Women in this project also launched our first ever Mother's Day March and Rally in 2004.

**Integration of research & political action is the essence of Participatory Action Research.**

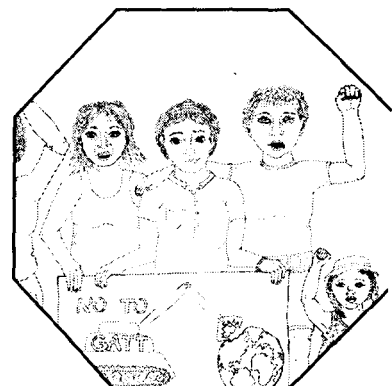
In addition to our ongoing organizing, educating, and mobilizing, some of our major activities since 1995 include:

- ◆ Annual events and activities honouring International Women's Day (1996 - present)
- ◆ Founding member of the No! to APEC Coalition and International People's Conference Against APEC and Imperialist Globalization (1997)
- ◆ Host of *Towards our Liberation: An International Women's Conference Against Imperialist War and Plunder* (November 2002)

Since 1995, a diverse group of women have joined our campaigns, discussions, forums, workshops, rallies and marches, and conferences. Through Grassroots Women's events and activities, we have been able to forge genuine connections between Third World women and working class women living in industrialized countries.

### c) Methodology

The urgent need for *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* is informed by the knowledge that only by directly involving those who are most in need of childcare can campaigns



and alternatives for childcare be developed that truly meet the needs of the most marginalized women.

Therefore, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) model. PAR is a model of research developed in Latin American countries and continues to be used by oppressed communities around the world. Unlike traditional academic research, PAR is based on the philosophy of empowering marginalized communities. Instead of being subjects for study, women engaged in the PAR process are involved in analyzing their own experiences and consciousness raising in order to become empowered to take action for change. These are integral aspects of research in the PAR process.

*Between a Rock and a Hard Place* was implemented by a core group of women, including mothers, childcare workers and other marginalized and working class women.

Participants in the project shared their stories, analysis and ideas for action through written 25 questionnaires, 9 focus groups, and 7 interviews. These were facilitated by members of the core group. To ensure that we were going to where women are, focus groups were held at community centres, post-secondary institutions, housing coops and social housing units. Interviews were held in women's homes and work places. On-site childcare was provided when required by Grassroots Women volunteers. We thank all those groups / centres / individuals who hosted Grassroots Women during this project.

After reviewing the transcripts of the focus groups, women from the core group were able to identify common themes from the various stories. These stories and themes serve as the basis for the report. Analysis of the content was done during the interviews / focus groups / questionnaires with the participants and by the core group while reviewing the transcripts. The analysis was brought back to the participants for confirmation and deepening through a series of evening sessions. The process helped develop the skills and understanding of individual members as well as of the core group itself.

After their first introduction to the project through participation by questionnaire, focus group, or interview, many women joined other Grassroots Women activities that emerged as ideas from the focus groups. For example, in one focus group, mothers discussed the idea of reclaiming Mother's Day. In May 2004, we organized the first of what is to become an annual event: a Mother's Day March and Rally. Other women declared their interest in gaining a deeper understanding of childcare as a political issue under capitalism: they organized and participated in a series of educational "studies" about reproductive labour. This integration of research and political action is the essence of PAR.

The result of the PAR process can be seen in the vivid stories of the participants that weave throughout *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. The experiences of the women participants have not been distilled or summarized as in traditional academic research because we believe that it is the words of the women themselves that best describe the impact of childcare policy on our collective equality as working class women. However, all participant names have been changed for the sake of confidentiality.

#### **d) Profile of mothers**

While childcare is an issue for all women, it is working class women (both employed and unemployed) in particular who bear the brunt of existing childcare policies.



Therefore, the emphasis in *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* has been on involving the participation of such women.

In total, 70 women participated in this study. The first set of charts lists general information for all of the participants. Some of the questions documented in the following charts were not structured into focus groups / interviews; therefore, this information is not available for all women.

In terms of age, the women participants were fairly evenly distribution between 26-45 years. (Chart 1) Approximately half of the participants were born in Canada and half were born

### AGE OF PARTICIPANTS

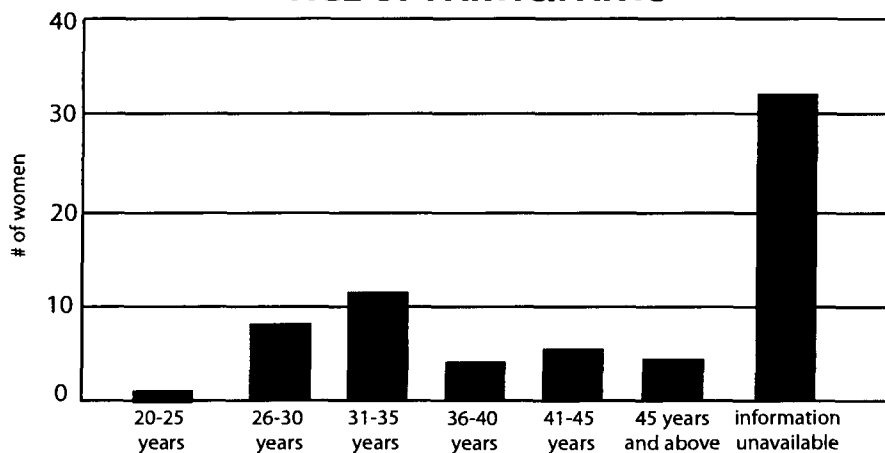


Chart 1

outside Canada. Of the 21 women born outside Canada, 14 came from the Philippines under the Live-in Caregiver Program. Immigration status is a key factor in the position of different women in Canadian society; migrants and immigrants face systemic racism and anti-immigrant sentiment, lack of recognition of credentials, and systemic barriers and personal discrimination when trying to access social programs.

### BIRTHPLACE OF PARTICIPANTS

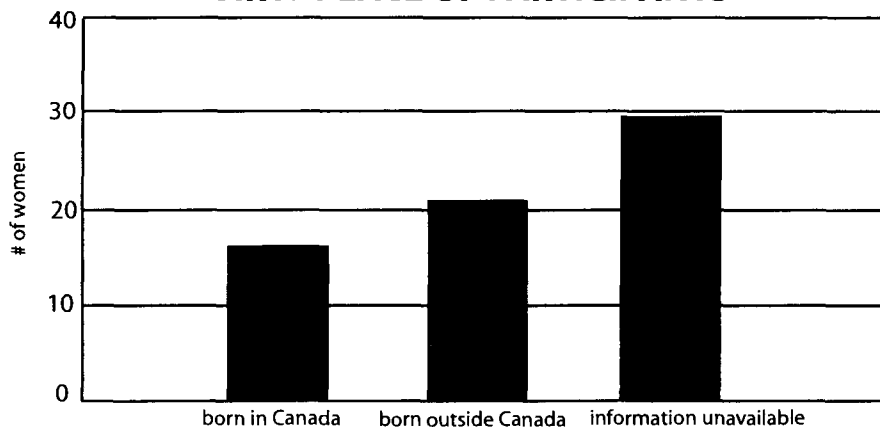


Chart 2

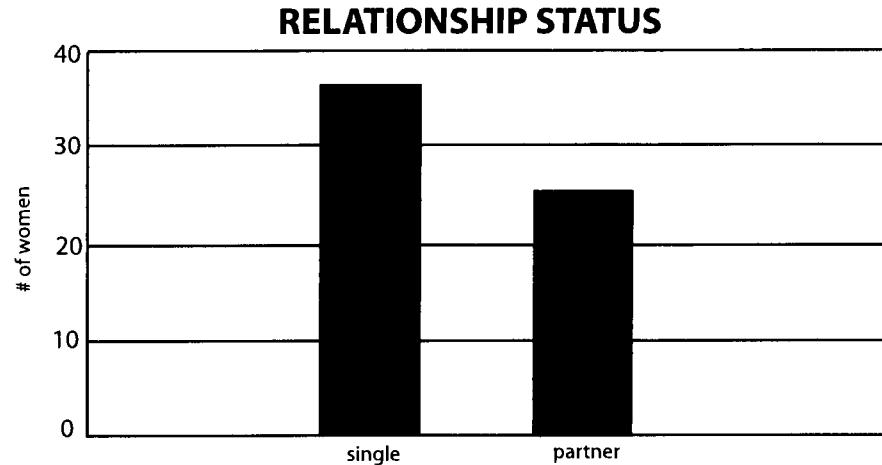


Chart 3

Similarly, the relationship status of the participants was fairly evenly distributed between those with a partner and those without. (Chart 3) However, this chart only takes into account the current relationship status. A number of the participants were at one time raising their child alone, but had a new partner / got back together with their partner at the time the study was completed. Within the focus groups, women agreed that while all mothers and childcare workers face struggles with childcare, the situation is particularly severe for single mothers.

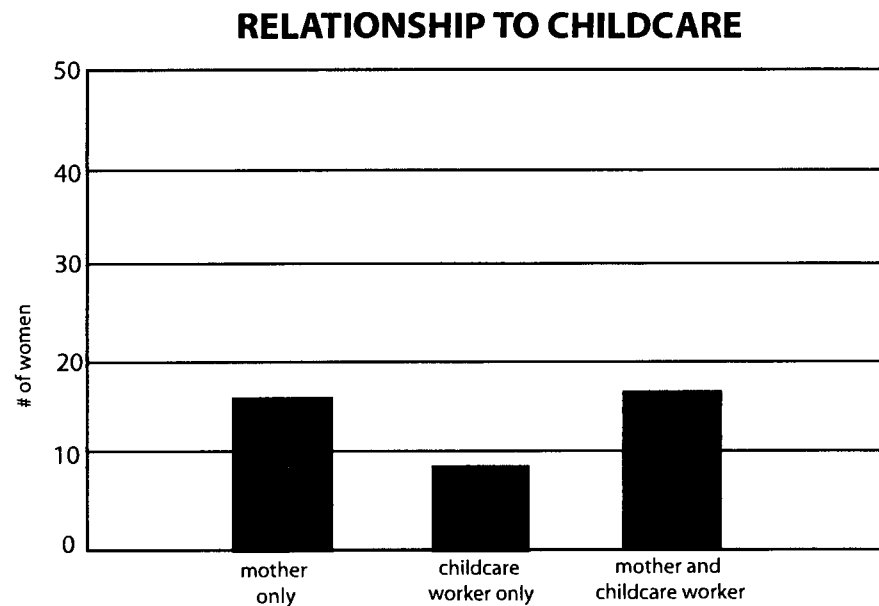


Chart 4

While the majority of those interviewed were mothers, it is interesting to note the large number of women who were mothers as well as childcare workers. (Chart 4) The category "mother and childcare worker" takes into account all those mothers who also worked as childcare workers (of any type) at any point during their child's upbringing.

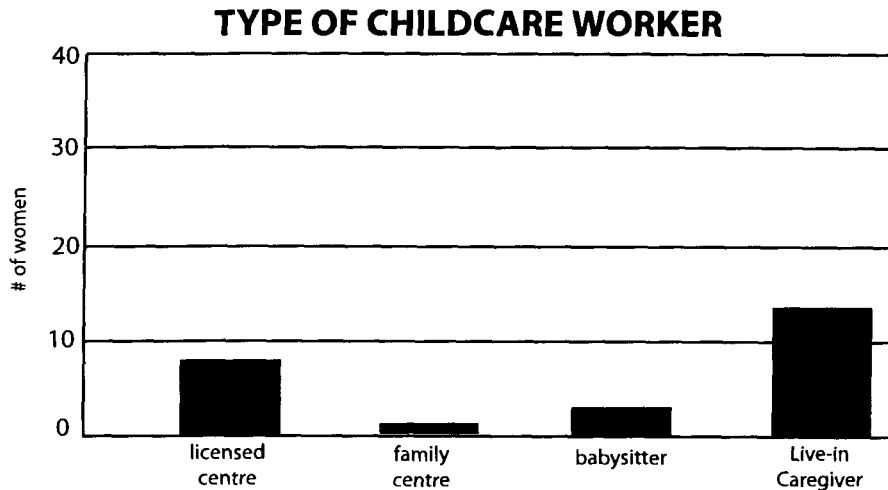


Chart 5

### Childcare workers

Of the 26 women who worked as childcare workers, the majority of those interviewed were either LCPers or licensed center-based childcare workers. (Chart 5) This chart does not take into account those women providing childcare for extended family members without pay. Clearly, given the large number of women who are providing childcare for low wages and under difficult conditions in the unregulated sector in Canada, this study only touches the surface of the impact of childcare policy on their lives.

### Mothers

The following set of charts relates to the 62 mothers who participated in this study.

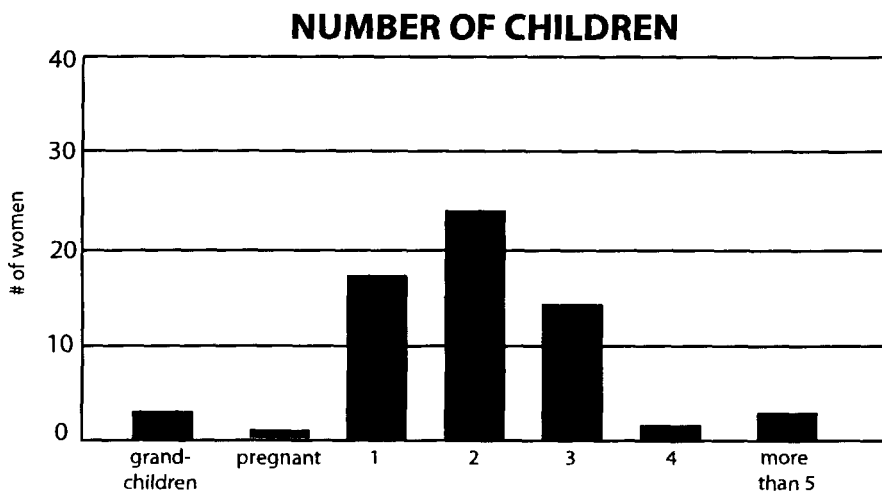


Chart 6

The majority of those interviewed currently have children under 12 years old. (Chart 7) The ages of children were grouped in the following categories due to the differences in childcare options for children of each age group: less than one (EI or infant care), 12-18 months (infant care), 18 months - 3 years (toddler care), 3-5 years (preschool age care), 5 years (Kindercare), 6-12 years (before and after school care). Interestingly, those mothers with children aged 5-

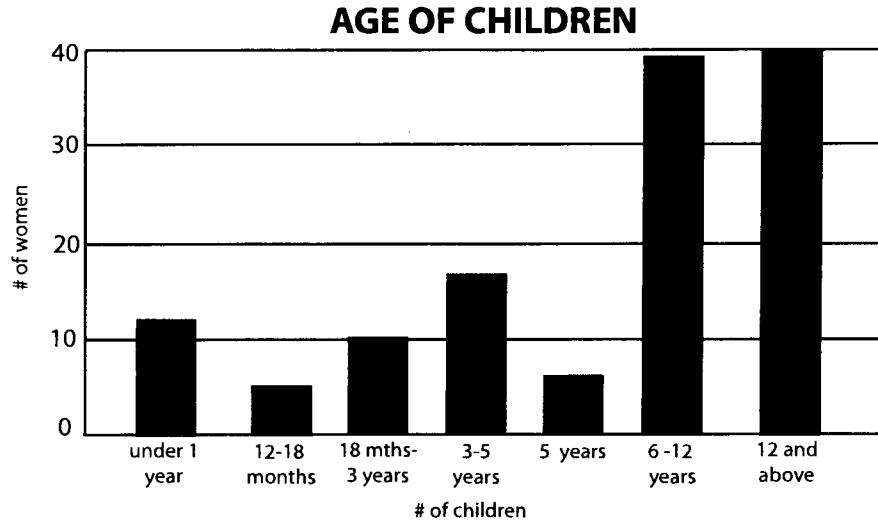


Chart 7

12 explained that childcare challenges do not end when a child is school aged. Because of the lack of Kindercare and after / before school care, the difficulties with childcare are just as severe if not more severe than when children are under 5. Those women with children over 12 were able to share about their experiences in the past. They were able to compare their experiences with the current childcare situation based on other women's sharing about the current childcare system. They commented on the mushrooming childcare crisis over the past 20 years.

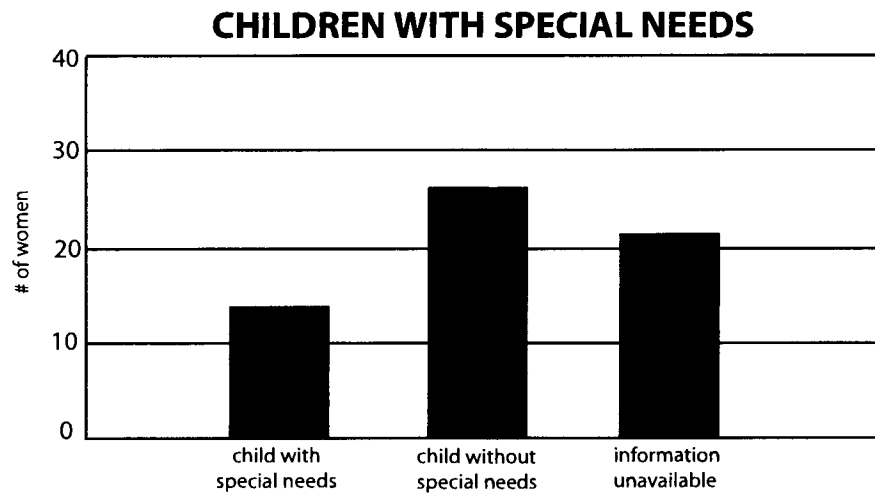


Chart 8

Mothers with special needs children face particular challenges with childcare due to a lack of spaces for children with disabilities in childcare facilities and a greater need for information and resources to support raising a child with disabilities. (Chart 8)

Chart 9 refers to all the different forms of 'childcare' strategies that mothers in the study have used. Some of the childcare options were used in combination; others were used for a short period and then a different option was used. Changes in the childcare strategies mothers used were based on a combination of many other factors including changes to the childcare subsidy program, age of children, the mother's job situation, and relationship with family. (Note: Family centers and non-licensed centers were used as distinct categories based on the type of childcare women identified; however, family childcare can be either licensed or unlicensed.)

### CHILDCARE STRATEGIES

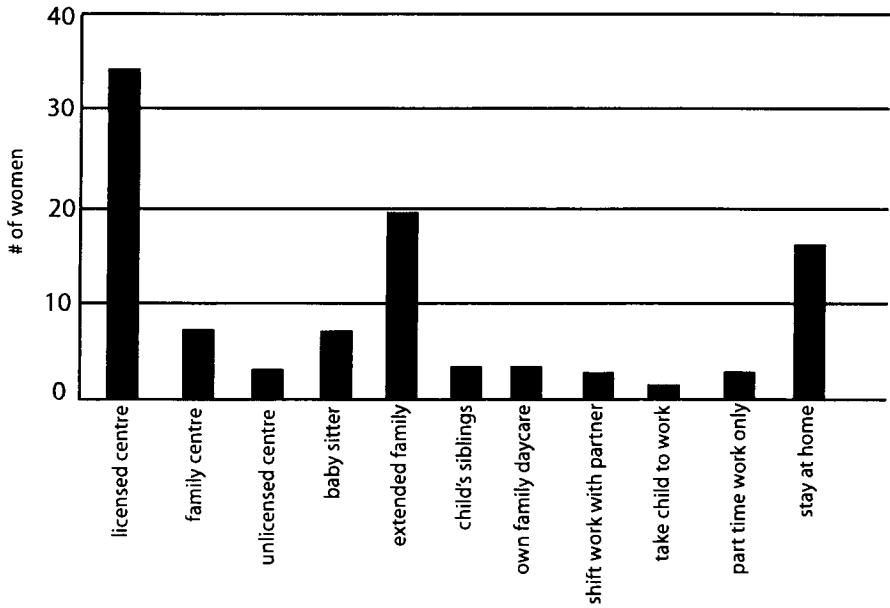


Chart 9

Chart 10 refers to all the different forms of 'childcare' strategies mothers who are participated in the study are currently using. Many of the childcare options are being used in combination in order to meet the mother's need for childcare, which often cannot be met by only one type of childcare arrangement. (Note: Family centers and non-licensed centers were used as distinct categories based on the type of childcare women identified; however, family childcare can be either licensed or unlicensed.)

### CURRENT CHILDCARE STRATEGIES

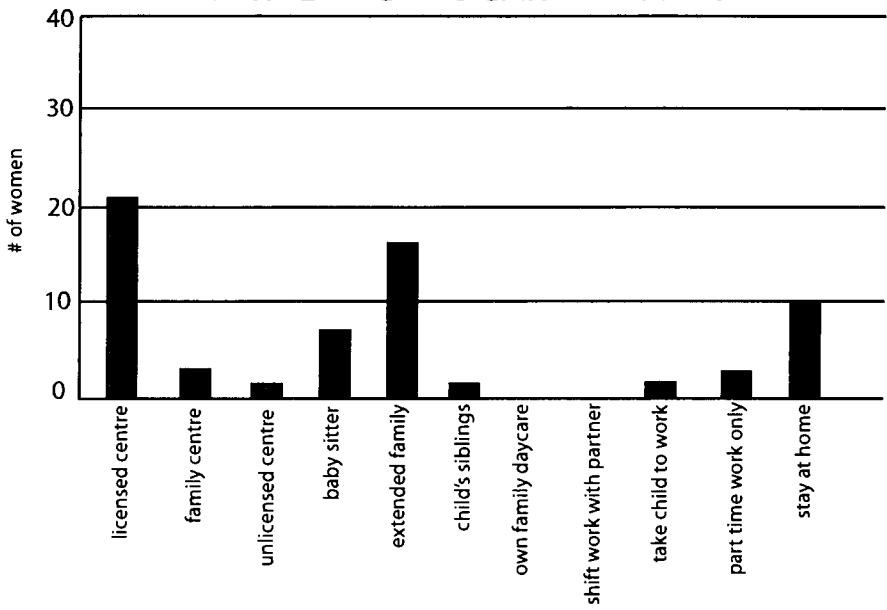


Chart 10

Women who participated in the study shared that their source of income when their children were young often included a number of different sources at different times during their chil-

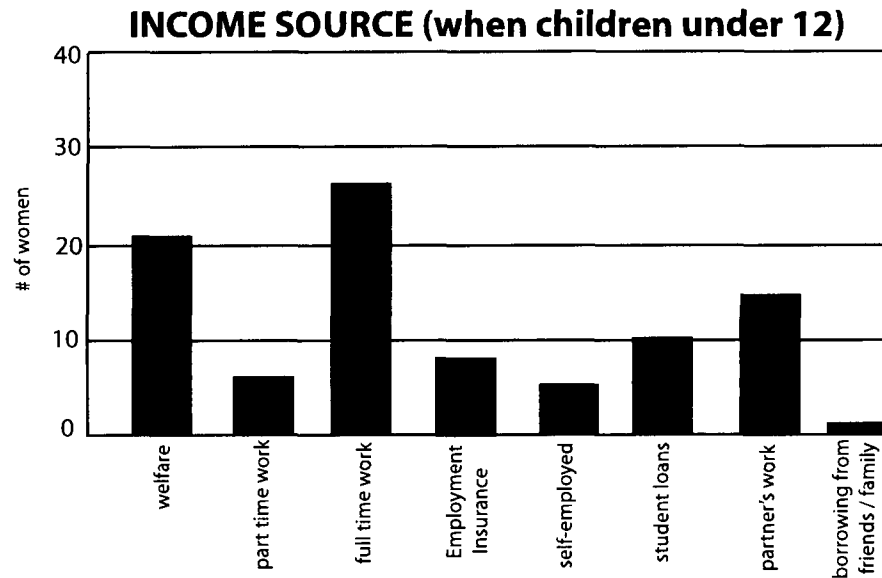


Chart 11

dren's early years. (Chart 11) Many women relied on EI, welfare, and / or their partner's income during the first few years of their child's life. Quite a few of these women moved into the workforce – either on a part-time or full time basis – when their child got older.

Chart 12 looks at how many women have accessed government support for childcare. While

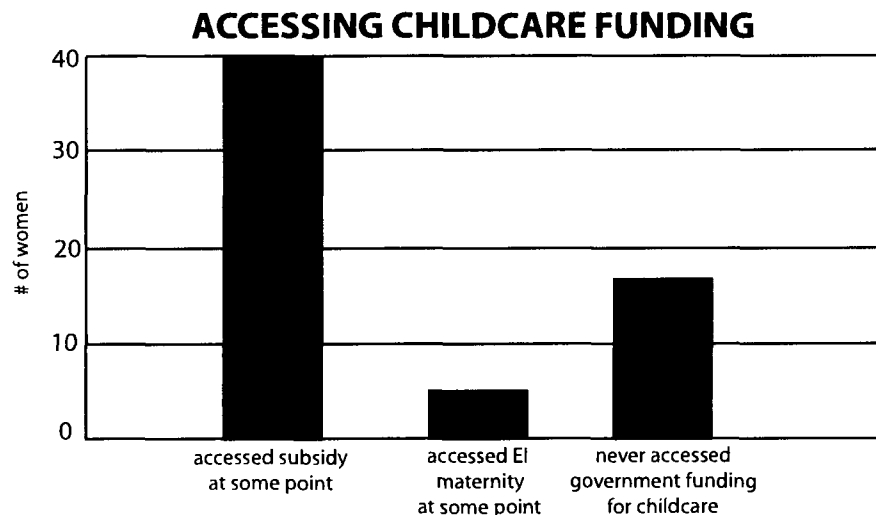


Chart 12

40 of the 62 mothers shared that they accessed a childcare subsidy at some point, many women explained that this subsidy was not always available to them due to changes to subsidy rules and changing employment status (i.e. income). Of greatest interest are the 18 mothers who have never had support for childcare despite their marginalized economic position.

# Context

**C**hildcare policy has not been developed in a vacuum. Therefore, to fully understand how and why childcare policy exists in its current form in Canada, it is necessary to understand the Canadian context; what childcare policy has historically existed in Canada; and, childcare policy in the present era of globalization – more accurately named imperialist globalization.

## a) Canadian context

Canada is part of the historic pattern of conquest and colonization of the American continent by Europeans beginning in the 15th Century. The Canadian nation-state was built through disinheritance of Indigenous people and exploiting the labour of poor immigrants from various parts of the world.

Canada continues to be built in part on the exploitation of countries of the Third World, which experience underdevelopment as they serve as the dumping grounds of finished products and surplus capital and suppliers of cheap labour and raw materials for industrialized countries. As such, Canada has actively supported the creation and development of numerous other multilateral institutions operating globally and regionally that support and extend this unequal dynamic, including those developing protocol and rules for international free trade. However, while Canada is a rich capitalist country, it is also under pressure from more powerful capitalist countries, especially the US.

From the 1940s until the 1970s, Canada implemented Keynesian policies of state intervention and central planning in an attempt to mediate the uncertainties of an economic system based on a search for seemingly limitless profit. While it is still identified as a welfare state, Canada has begun implementing neo-liberal policies – which have long been integral to the exploitation of the Third World – domestically. Neo-liberal policies include privatization, deregulation, and liberalization. This has intensified since the 1970s as a result of the deepening global economic crisis caused mainly by overproduction.

Under the policies of imperialist globalization, the financial and political elite of wealthy nations seek profit worldwide through exploitative and inhuman practices. The benefits of imperialist globalization go first and foremost to a small ruling class while its heaviest burdens are borne by marginalized and working class people world wide, particularly women.

Even prior to the implementation of neo-liberal policies, working class women in Canada saw few of the benefits and suffered many of the costs of the Canadian welfare state. Marginalized women and their children had and still have the lowest rates of access to healthcare, education, pensions, childcare, social housing, and unemployment insurance. Social programs and supports were not only won through hard struggle, but because they serve the needs of the Canadian State. Marginalized women are targeted by the most extreme examples of these efforts for social control including child apprehensions,

### Georgia:

"What matters is not people, human rights, or our right to health care or childcare. What matters is money, money, money."

### Erika:

"The government wants to pocket all the money for themselves. They don't care for the well being of the working people. They just care about getting richer and richer. So, it is up to people to find their own solutions."

penalties under welfare and student loans, and increased surveillance by police and other state authorities.

Under imperialist globalization, women are being hit from all sides. Neo-liberal policies of privatization, deregulation, and liberalization lead to ever rising costs; decreasing wages and work security; and, dwindling social services. With the restructuring of the labour force — often referred to as "flexibilization" — women workers are being drawn into increasingly unstable and unprotected sectors of work, particularly in the service sector. Much research argues that "employers are seeking flexible labour that is already ideologically constituted by gender as secondary, disposable, temporary, less valuable and semi skilled."

(Zeytinoglu and Muteshi, 2000) as well as in the sectors seen as an extension of women's 'natural' caring and reproductive abilities. Yet despite the exploitative nature of this work, under imperialist globalization, women are forced to accept more unstable working conditions because of increasing costs brought about by the deregulation of hydro, tuition, rent, etc.

In addition, as the primary caregivers in the family, women are burdened with increasing responsibility as health care is privatized. Workers in the health sector — particularly low wage earners — have had their hard won union rights tossed aside in the push to privatize. Similarly, student fees were deregulated in BC in 2001 and they have subsequently been raised from 15-58% per year.(NUPGE, 2002) putting post secondary education even further out of reach of working class women.

Women's experiences of childcare cannot be separated from their conditions of work, health-care, housing, and education. Therefore, women's need for childcare is even more pressing. Likewise, women's struggles to find affordable, accessible and quality childcare compound their existing marginalization in other areas of life.

**Darlene:**

"[Canada has no childcare program because ] the government's goals are centred on support of big business, profit and support of the rich, elite, and privileged class."

**Sarah:**

"How many decades has the market had to solve the problem of childcare? It cannot solve this problem, because the wages are already as low as they can get, and there's no profits being made in daycare."

**Marginalized and working class women have always borne the greatest burden of exploitative government policies and practices.**

## b) Childcare policy in Canada

Canada has never had a national childcare program as part of its range of welfare state social programs. The government has consistently developed childcare policies based on the assumption that the marketplace will provide what childcare is needed.(Friendly) Existing childcare policy falls under four mostly disconnected areas: domestic worker policy, parental leave programs under unemployment insurance, tax based subsidies, and provincial regulations for predominantly private childcare programs. With the absence of national childcare, Canada's defacto childcare program has become its international recruitment of domestic workers.

### i) Domestic Worker Programs

Canada has used domestic workers since the 1700s, starting with Indigenous women and black women slaves. However, by the turn of the 20th century, Canada began recruiting domestic workers from abroad. At first these women came from Great Britain, then later from poorer European countries.

According to Macklin, "Hiring non-white workers to fill the labour gap [in domestic work] was



clearly the last resort."(1992) She notes the recruitment of Caribbean women in the 1920s and again in the 1950s under the Caribbean Domestic Scheme in place from 1955 to 1967. Women under the program were granted landed immigrant status provided they worked for one year as a domestic worker.

In 1973, Canada established a temporary visa system for domestic workers, known as the "Temporary Employment Authorization Program." The 1973 program marked a regression in the rights afforded to foreign domestic workers as it allowed the women to stay in Canada only as "visitors" and only as long as they continued to be employed as domestic workers.

A more regulated immigration program, the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM), was created in 1981. The FDM marked the institutionalization of Canada's importation and exploitation of Third World women to do domestic work. In the FDM, the foreign domestic worker was an anomaly: she "occupies the technically non-existent category of 'visiting immigrant.'"(Maklin, 1992: 693)

The Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) replaced the FDM in 1992 and remains the official Canadian government program for domestic workers. Canada continues to justify the program by stating there is a shortage of live-in domestic workers within Canada. The program targets domestic workers to provide childcare, elder care, and care for people with disabilities. (However, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* will focus on those domestic workers doing childcare.)

**The fundamental pillars of the LCP perpetuate the exploitation and oppression of Third World women.**

While the LCP may offer a childcare option for upper middle class families, the fundamental pillars of the LCP perpetuate the exploitation and oppression of Third World women. They are forced to travel great distances away from family and friends due to massive economic crisis in their home countries only to be met by the mandatory two-year, live-in requirement and temporary immigration status granted to women under the LCP.

In January 2005, the LCP was subjected to a review conducted by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. However this review focused only on conditions of work, permanent residency (i.e. would women continue to qualify for permanent residency only after completing 24 months of work under LCP or at another point), and eligibility for entrance into the program. (Forum hosted by the NAPWC, February 2005)

## ii) Parental Leave Programs

Women (and men) may qualify for one year maternity / paternity leave through the unemployment insurance system (raised from 6 months to one year in January 2001). To qualify, a worker must have completed 600 insured hours in the last 52 weeks or since the person's last EI claim. The benefit is 55% of the workers earnings up to a maximum amount of \$413 per week. Taxes are deducted from this amount. Although, low-income families may qualify for a higher benefit rate in the form of the Family Supplement, the fundamental construction of this program disproportionately benefits higher-income families. In addition, workers who have had less stable work histories may be excluded altogether.

### iii) Tax Based Subsidies

The tax system also plays a role in the federal government's childcare policy. Tax based subsidies for childcare include the childcare expense deduction and the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB). The CCTB is made up of two main parts: the base benefit which is available to over 80% of families with children and the National Child Benefit Supplement which provides low-income families with additional child benefits on top of the base benefit. The childcare tax deduction disproportionately benefits people with higher incomes as it reduces their taxable income and potentially moves them to a lower tax bracket.

### iv) Regulated Childcare Programs

The first state sponsored childcare programs in Canada emerged during the Second World War. With a shortage of workers for war-related industries, the Canadian government established the Dominion-Provincial War-Time Agreement in 1942 to draw more women workers into the labour force. Ontario and Quebec participated in this agreement allowing them access to federal government funding for up to 50% of childcare costs. The Canadian government insisted that nurseries were to aid in times of emergency and should not be viewed as an ongoing social service. Therefore, after the war the agreement was cancelled as women's labour force participation was viewed as expendable.

**Consistent with international trends, Canada's approach to social policy — in the past few decades but more radically in the 1990s — has taken on an increasing neo-liberal character.**

Women's demands for a national childcare program were echoed by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. The Commission recommended the introduction of a national day care act in 1970. This recommendation was repeated by the 1984 Royal Commission on Equality of Employment and by the national 1986 Task Force on Child Care.

A national day care act was never introduced. However, by the mid-1970s, all the provinces and territories had started using federal government funding provided through the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) for up to 50% of the provision of childcare. Provinces / territories used funding primarily for fee subsidies distributed to parents who used childcare services. But by 1989, all provinces / territories - except British Columbia - had started to fund certain aspects of regulated childcare services through operating grants. Provincial childcare regulations and monitoring systems were implemented across the country by 1980. However, the majority of families have been forced to continue relying on informal childcare arrangements as there have never been enough affordable or accessible childcare spaces for all children in Canada.

Starting in 1984 and 1995, proposals for a national approach to childcare became part of the platforms of many political parties. Despite these promises, a national childcare program has yet to be implemented. For instance, in 1988, the Conservative government proposed a National Childcare Act, but it died when an election was called. The re-elected Conservative government did not introduce the Act after winning the election.

In 1997, the federal/provincial/territorial governments agreed to work together on a National Children's Agenda. In 2000, the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Agreement was signed "to improve and expand early childhood development supports for young children (prenatal to age 6) and their parents." (Treasury Board of Canada website) Federal funds were made avail-



#### **Karen:**

"The government keeps putting all its money into unlicensed, unregulated care when they keep spouting quality, accessibility, and affordability. They're speaking with forked tongues. It's the poor that are really getting hammered."

able to the provinces to serve this aim.

The latest federal/provincial/territorial childcare agreement is the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care. It was signed in March 2003. According to federal government descriptions, this agreement provides "a framework for improving access to affordable, quality, provincially and territorially regulated early learning and child care programs and services." As part of this agreement, it was decided that \$1.05 billion would be transferred from the federal to provincial governments between 2003-2008.

### c) Globalization and childcare policy

Consistent with international trends, Canada's approach to social policy - in the past few decades but more radically in the 1990s - has taken on an increasing neo-liberal character. This includes massive reduction of government spending through downsizing and privatizing of social programs; deregulation or dismantling of measures or controls put in place - often through our hard struggle - in specific industries or sectors to control the effects of the political and economic system on our lives and the environment; and liberalization of all perceived barriers to trade.

Childcare policy in Canada is not immune from the neo-liberal policies and practices of imperialist globalization. Market based neo-liberal policy denies the value of the work women do in bearing and rearing children and otherwise caring for their families and attempts to boost markets by taking resources out of social services initially aimed at providing or compensating that labour.

#### i) Cuts to social spending

Doherty roots Canada's childcare crisis in the "reduction of federal funding and withdrawal from the social policy field, coupled with provincial downsizing." (1998) Many researchers point to the repealing of Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) funding in 1995 as a turning point for social programs in Canada. In 1995, there was a reduction in the amount of federal transfer payments to the provinces/territories for health, post-secondary education and social services. This occurred when CAP was scrapped and replaced by the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST). The increase in childcare spaces that began in 1973 stopped after 1995. (Doherty, 1998)

**Many women's and childcare advocacy groups have already raised questions about federal funding under MFELC because program requirements are not being developed at a national level.**

In the arena of childcare policy, there have been some positive steps forward in terms of increased and targeted funding for childcare, for example through the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Childcare (MFELC). However, many women's and childcare advocacy groups have already raised questions about federal funding under MFELC because program requirements are not being developed at a national level, and therefore vary from province to province.

Despite receiving almost \$250 million from the federal government for early childhood development, in BC, the government has cut its budget for childcare every year since being elected in 2001. (CCABC, 2005) For example, \$24 million was cut from the childcare subsidy program; funding was also cut for Child Care Resources and Referral Services in 2004 and wage

Provincial government funding for childcare is 20% less than it was in 2001/2.



supplements for childcare workers in non-profit centers. (Kershaw, 2004)

After federal funding was increased in 2004, the BC government -in a pre-election bid- announced the increased of childcare subsidies and funding to childcare up to or higher than they had ever previously been. (BC government advertisement, Vancouver Sun, January 2005). They promised \$33 million in funding for childcare from December 2004 – April 2006. However, most funding increases have been one time initiatives. Over \$8.5 million for one time offers (such as transition funding in the shift to new subsidy rates) have been announced since November 2004. (CCABC 2005) However provincial government funding for childcare still only totals \$42 million, 20% less than it was in 2001/2. (CCABC, 2005)

These funding shell games raise cause for concern for women needing childcare and childcare workers as to the direction of future discussions over childcare policy in Canada.

## ii) Downsizing

Government workers dealing with childcare subsidies have come under increasing attack in the past four years in BC. Many positions were cut from the Ministries responsible for operating and delivering childcare subsidies as part of the elimination of 4,000 to 5,000 provincial government positions in transportation, health care, and supports for children and families. (BCGEU, 2002).

**23% of childcare in Canada is offered on a private, for-profit basis by individuals or businesses. In Alberta, 70% of childcare programs are operating on a private for-profit basis.**

In December 2004, services for providing childcare subsidies were consolidated in the Lower Mainland. There is currently only one subsidy office located in Richmond. Women in suburban or rural areas have struggled with this consolidation, as they are forced to deal with any questions they have regarding subsidy over a 1-800 number or by mail. This is particularly challenging for women who speak English as a second language.

Due to downsizing, women have an even harder time accessing childcare subsidies. They have fewer quality government services and supports. Downsizing of Financial Aid Workers has lengthened the waiting period for women trying to get a subsidy – sometimes up to 6 weeks – as financial aid workers desperately try to keep up with the requests. It has meant that women must travel a greater distance to apply for a subsidy. As well, women who speak English as a Second Language have been virtually denied access to child subsidy as there are no specifically designated second language workers. Mothers who speak English as a second language are not even allowed to have someone contact the 1-800 number for them due to the "confidential" nature of information required when applying for childcare subsidies.

## iii) Deregulation

By 1980, all provinces and territories had implemented childcare regulations and monitoring systems. Research shows that in recent years there has been both a tightening and a loosening of regulations in child care. (Doherty et al, 1998)

In terms of staff training, more provinces/territories now require a base or increased level of education, both in licensed centres and for family childcare providers.

However, staff child ratios have faced deregulation in two provinces. The family child care reg-

### Sylvia:

"My worker used to be so helpful. This time, six weeks later and no response. My worker said, 'The file is on my desk.' He sounded like he was about to cry because the staff has been cut back. He wasn't unfriendly, he just doesn't have time."

Only 7.7 – 11.6% of childcare in Canada is publicly provided by governments.

ulations in four provinces allow for two family child care providers to provide care for up to 12 children. Regulations are less rigorous for family care than for licensed childcare centers.

In BC, funding changes since 2001 have favored private, unregulated caregivers. The BC government has called on the Resource and Referral Centres to remove restrictions for private, unregulated caregivers when advertising their services.

#### iv) Privatization

According to Friendly, "We have a privatized market model [for childcare], not public service approach. Regulated childcare is primarily privately initiated, operated by private non-profit or for-profit groups and largely funded through parent fees." (2003)

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), almost all childcare regulated under provincial/territorial child care legislation, is privately operated. Only 7.7 – 11.6% of childcare in Canada is publicly provided by governments. The majority of this childcare is found in Quebec.(2004)

The main distinction lies in whether this childcare is provided on a not-for-profit or a for-profit basis. Currently, 77% of childcare is operated on a not-for-profit basis, mainly by non-profit organizations and parent or other voluntary boards. (OECD, 2004)

23% of childcare in Canada is offered on a private, for profit basis by individuals or businesses. (OECD, 2004) However, in Alberta, 70% of childcare programs are operating on a private, for-profit basis now. (CUPE)

Some childcare centres - particularly those in poorer neighbourhoods where parent fees are lower - obtain private sponsorship for desperately needed help to supplement their underfunded childcare programs. This effectively commercializes childcare curricula and changes childcare centers into areas for corporations to seek new markets:

According to a study conducted by Doherty, nine provinces / territories are supporting the development of family day care rather than licensed childcare centers.(1998) While CAP stipulated that federal funding for childcare could only be used for public or non-profit childcare, this changed under the CHST. (Shrybman, 2004)

Under the 2001 cuts to childcare funding in BC, privately provided childcare fared the best. While licensed childcare and subsidy programs were hard hit by these changes, private family childcare was actually entitled to increased funding from the government. These changes are justified with neo-liberal rhetoric. Governments speak of 'individual choice' and consumer sovereignty in their moves to increase support for un-licensed and for profit care.(Teghtsoonian, 1996) Kershaw demonstrates how this rhetoric "conveys a sense of political neutrality and individualizes responsibility for social inequalities." (2004)

Increased funding for privatized childcare options will have particular impact on the type of national childcare program that is being discussed by the federal / provincial / territorial governments. Under NAFTA / WTO trade provisions, Canada has maintained the right to implement new social programs including childcare. However, if these pro-

**The Australian childcare chain, ABC, has included Canada in its 5 year business plan. One of New Zealand's corporate childcare providers, Kidicorp, revenues ran to \$17.3 million in 2004.**

**Sylvia:**  
"Every now and then the Royal Bank comes and does stuff like bring free t-shirts and junky toys. Once a year the RBC takes the kids to the Aquarium and feeds them pizza, but the kids have to listen to a banking 'presentation' first."

In Alberta, 70% of childcare programs are operating on a private, for-profit basis.

grams are provided with a private, for-profit model, the protection for the program is null and void. To protect a national childcare program from commercial childcare companies under NAFTA / WTO trade, Canada must implement public and non-profit policy options for childcare from the beginning. (Shrybman, 2004) "If a new child care program allows for an increase in the "Mom and Pop," or small commercial child care operators, there is a stronger likelihood that larger, foreign child care corporations will demand access to the "market.""(CUPE)

Currently, Canada does not have significant foreign or corporate investment in the childcare sector. However, if there is increased and stable funding provided by the federal government, childcare operations could prove to be a desirable sector for foreign or new national childcare care corporations, especially because in this case it would be subsidized by public funding. For example, Canadian corporations have developed significant interests in health and education sectors, particularly because funding for infrastructure development and user fees have been typically provided through government funding.

In other countries, childcare provision has become an avenue for corporate profit making. For example, one of New Zealand's corporate childcare providers, Kidicorp had 51 centres licensed with a capacity of 2170 children by March 2004. Kidicorp revenues ran to \$17.3 million for the year from running its childcare centres and another \$3.7 million from property transactions. (Ruth, 2004) Already, the Australian childcare chain, ABC, has included Canada in its 5 year business plan.(CCABC, 2005)

**Childcare should not be about a provincial federal debate, but addressing and redressing the continued marginalization of women and children.**

#### v) Forced migration and privatization

Although it is often not discussed among mainstream childcare advocates and organizations, domestic worker policy is part of the privatization of childcare. In the absence of a national childcare program, the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) is Canada's defacto childcare program.

Domestic worker policy is created within the neo-colonial relations between developing and developed nations.(Daenzer, 1997) The underdevelopment, poverty and mass unemployment facing many Third World nations – due to the impacts of colonialism and imperialist globalization – mean that millions of people are forced to leave Third World countries every day in search of a source of support for their families. Estimates say that nearly 1 out of 6 people in this world, more than one billion people, are crossing national borders as migrant workers. Of these 1 billion, 13 million are from Asia and 72% are women. (Women and the Economy)

This massive out migration is often institutionalized, as in the case of the Philippines with the Philippine government's Labour Export Policy (LEP) implemented as part of IMF / WB imposed Structural Adjustment Programs.

The implementation of Canada's FDM corresponded to the implementation of the LEP. The percentage of Filipinos coming to Canada under the FDM rose to 60.2% by 1990.(Macklin, 1992, 693) By 2003, Filipinos comprised 93% of those coming to Canada under the LCP.(SIKLAB, 2005)

"When women in industrialized countries leave the home to work, hiring a nanny becomes an afford-

As of 1988, there were more than 100,000 foreign domestic workers in Canada. By 1998, it was estimated that over 90,000 Filipino women have come to Canada as domestic workers.

#### **Darlene:**

"When you think about immigration, they are actually doing better off the backs of Filipino women than they did off the slaves because the slaves they didn't get the head tax and all the other stuff they're going to get off domestic workers."

able option for most middle and upper class families. At the same time [as the FDM was created], Canada abandoned its national child-care policy, choosing instead to address the social responsibility of child care by providing this option for families who could afford a domestic worker." (PWC, 2000)

In Canada, domestic workers provide childcare in a privatized setting. As of 1988, there were more than 100,000 foreign domestic workers in Canada. (New Internationalist, 1988) By 1998, it was estimated that over 90,000 Filipino women have come to Canada as domestic workers. (PWC, 2000)

## vi) Future developments

Once again, a childcare program is being proposed at a national level, based on pre-election promises.

These promises were made in response to the growing need for such a childcare program. For, despite the lack of a national childcare program, 53% of children were in some type of childcare in 2000/1 – up 11% from 1994/95. (Stats Can, 2005)

It is also in response to public outcry. Women's groups – such as Grassroots Women – and childcare advocates have continued to build and advance campaigns for universal childcare. Eighty-six percent of Canadians believe that there is a need for a publicly funded national childcare program. (CCCF, 2003)

As well, the federal government and big business seek to balance their need for workers, particularly in the growing service sector – where women serve as the majority of workers – with their demand for new workers and existing workers to be cared for. (See *Universal Childcare and Genuine Women's Equality* for a more detailed discussion of this point regarding reproductive labour.) Childcare policy is one strategy that the government can use to meet these contradictory goals.

On February 11, 2005, federal and provincial leaders met to hammer out what was promised as Canada's newest social program: national childcare. However, no agreement was reached about the proposed \$5 billion in federal funding for childcare over the next five years.

With 70% of its childcare centers being privately owned, Alberta refused to sign any agreement if for-profit childcare was not included. Other provinces also did not want to sign on to an agreement with nationally determined commitments for the funding.

While the federal budget of February 23, 2005, committed money to childcare, there was no long term commitment made to a national childcare program and no accountability or stipulations tied to monies given to the provinces for the first year. As well, the LCP remains absent from the discussion.

While a great deal of emphasis has surrounded debates between the federal and provincial governments over jurisdiction for childcare programs and spending of childcare monies, the fundamental issues are being pushed into the background. Squabbles between provincial and federal governments must cease in favour of constructively and vigorously addressing and redressing the continued marginalization of women and children.

# Project Findings

The stories and analysis of the mothers, grandmothers, and childcare workers who participated in this project are the basis for the project findings in *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. Their experiences can be understood in terms of specific stories and struggles with childcare, as described in the section entitled *Always Making Do. The Prices We Pay* exposes the impact that childcare policy has on women's development in all spheres of life. Women's individual and collective strategies for addressing their childcare struggles are highlighted in the section *Response and Resistance*.

## a) Always Making Do: Childcare Challenges

Through sharing stories and experiences, women highlighted their struggles and concerns with the existing childcare system, primarily in British Columbia. Three interconnected themes of affordability, accessibility, and quality have been well documented by researchers (OECD 2004, Doherty, 1998) and are confirmed by the actual experiences of women in their quest for childcare. The most recent report condemning the state of childcare in Canada comes from the OECD. Reviewers found that childcare development has slowed in Canada in the 1990s, and is a patchwork of uneconomic and fragmented services. (OECD, 2004)

In the focus groups, it became clear that it is even more difficult for women to access the childcare they need now than it was one or two decades earlier. Women with adult children compared their experiences to those of women with young children and were astonished that the childcare crisis had become even more pronounced, particularly under the policies and practices of imperialist globalization.

**Rosa:** *"My son was born in '76, so the first time I put him in daycare was in '79 and I got a subsidy and I was doing some part time work. Other than that, I was on welfare. [The subsidy was] great. But you had to be doing a certain amount of work and all that. But I think that back then it was easier. Pretty much just walk in. They were like, 'Sign here,' and they'd give it to you. It wasn't a big deal. Things have been over the years progressively getting really tight."*

### i) Affordability

Throughout their stories, women commented on the high cost of quality, regulated childcare.

**Melissa:** *"If I had to put both my children in daycare, the cost of care would be almost equivalent to my net income. I would leave the workforce to look after my children."*

Government support for families wishing to access childcare is offered in the



form of a demand side subsidy. The subsidy system for childcare is "a monthly payment that helps BC families with low-incomes to meet the costs of childcare." (BC Ministry of Human Resources, 2005) However, women reported that the subsidy system is riddled with problems. This affects mothers who need subsidies as well as childcare centres who have a higher proportion of mothers needing subsidies.

**Karen, a childcare supervisor:** *"The barriers to subsidy have gotten so great that not only are parents not getting subsidy but they are closing files, they are not back dating [payment of subsidy]. So centers are losing huge financial supports for their childcare program. Subsidy doesn't seem to know that actually childcare is a business. You have to pay for staff, supplies and wages. It's so easy for them to say no I can't back date it for four months.[when the child started at the centre]. And we lose \$2400 on that kid. Centres are closing their doors. Boards are saying it's not our mandate to have a centre that runs a \$20,000 deficit."*

A number of mothers did not know about the subsidy program and had never accessed regulated childcare because of the barrier of the full cost of childcare programs.

Other working mothers had applied for the subsidy but did not qualify for it because their income was higher than the income threshold of the subsidy program. In order to qualify for a full subsidy a single parent of one child, working full time, must make less than \$8.82 / hour; in order to qualify for any subsidy a single mother of one must make less than \$17.94 /hour. (Goldberg, 2003, 11)

**Cindy, a single mother:** *"When I went back to work, I had been looking quite a lot at childcare. What I discovered is that the childcare subsidy is really deficient. It's like outrageous. The level of income you can earn and the subsidy they give you. It doesn't match. People do it. I know I could budget better, but it's crazy. So I went back to work 3 days a week and I basically just tell them I work full time so that I get enough subsidy. Every time I have to reapply, it's just this horrible feeling in the pit in my stomach. Oh crap, what happens if they talk to my employer. ..."*

Hourly pay (35 hours/week)	Gross annual income	Monthly subsidy* (as of 2003)	Childcare costs**	Childcare costs paid by mother
<b>(for a single mother with a 4 year old in licensed group care)</b>				
\$8.82	\$16,056	\$368	\$589	\$221
\$11.09	\$20,184	\$306.17	\$589	\$282.83
\$15.61	\$28,404	\$6.17	\$589	\$582.83
\$17.94	\$32,652	\$0	\$589	\$589

\*Subsidy rates have increased slightly since 2003.

\*\* Average monthly cost of childcare in Vancouver. (West Coast Family Information and Referral, Fee survey, November 2004)

In order to qualify for a full subsidy a single parent of one working full time must make less than \$8.82 / hour; in order to qualify for any subsidy a single mother of one must make less than \$17.94 /hour.

Studies show that only 22% of single mothers and around 5% of mothers with partners actually receive subsidies for childcare.

Studies show that only 22% of single mothers and around 5% of mothers with partners actually receive subsidies for childcare. (Cleveland and Hyatt, 1997) Those women who do not receive subsidies have to shoulder the entire cost of childcare individually. For many women, regulated childcare is their largest monthly budget item.

Childcare fees are high because parent fees cover up to 34% to 82% of the costs to run a childcare center. (OECD, 2004)

However, even for those mothers who (1) know about the subsidy program and (2) qualify for it, the top-up required of them in addition to their subsidy is often unmanageable.

**Cindy, mother of one toddler:** *"If you get a full childcare subsidy, that still leaves you paying between \$100-300/ month in childcare. So then you've \$1000 to work with and your housing charge if you're in a coop is going to be \$350, so then you're down to \$650, you've got groceries, transportation...So what are you supposed to do? 'We're eating dirt tonight! Mud pies all around.'"*

Immigrant women, who are under sponsorship agreements, may also be denied a childcare subsidy because according to Citizenship and Immigration Canada the sponsor is still financially responsible for them for up to ten years. (Abbotsford Community Services, 2000, 58)

Because of the cost barriers for accessing regulated childcare, many women are forced to find other solutions to meet their childcare needs in the unregulated sector; by staying at home and going on welfare; or by having extended family or siblings take care of younger children or leaving children on their own.

**"The childcare subsidy is really deficient. It's outrageous, the level of income you can earn and the subsidy they give you: it doesn't match. People do it. I know I could budget better, but it's crazy."**

Working class women surviving on little more than \$10,000 a year are less likely to have children in regulated childcare than those with incomes above \$50,000 or those surviving in poverty at below \$10,000 a year but who do qualify for subsidy.

**Amanda, a single mother:** *"My daughter was 10 going on 11 and they wouldn't pay any subsidy once she was 11. They said she was old enough to take care of herself – it's the cut off. So the two younger kids could get daycare. But my 11 year old had to find her way home from school, get herself to school on her own and she had never been in that situation ever before. The government just said that they don't cover any child over 11. My daughter was an immature 11 year old. I didn't feel very comfortable with her on her own like that at all."*

Clearly, the high cost of childcare and the current subsidy system does not serve the needs of working class women. To qualify for the subsidy, women must be living in abject poverty. Working class women surviving on little more than \$10,000 a year are less likely to have children in regulated childcare than those with incomes above \$50,000 or those surviving in poverty at below \$10,000 / year but who do qualify for subsidy.(Canadian National Child Care Study, 1988)

**Denise:** *"There is a lack of affordable and available childcare to families, particularly for those who fall in the working class category. Subsidy is not available for those parents, which makes it difficult to make payments. Furthermore, fees continue to rise. There needs to be more choices around childcare!"*



## Conclusion

In conclusion, fees for regulated childcare centres often put them out of reach of marginalized and working class women. Even the cost of family daycares or babysitters represents a substantial portion of women's incomes. The subsidy system – intended to assist families in accessing childcare – is riddled with problems. It is difficult and humiliating to qualify for. Even if women do qualify, they often have to pay large top ups to meet daycare fees. Therefore, women are left to use "make do" strategies which include relying on informal childcare provided by family, friends, and siblings.

### ii) Accessibility

Another major theme in women's discussions about childcare revolves around accessibility. This refers to a number of different aspects of accessing regulated childcare.

Finding a spot in a licensed childcare center can be a difficult experience. There were regulated childcare spaces for only 15% of the 2,091,000 children under the age 6 in 2001. However, the reality is even worse as this 15% includes preschool and nursery schools, which are not full day programs. (Doherty et al, 2003, 10)

**Sheila:** *"My friend couldn't find childcare for her son. He was under 18 months. She was starting at [a post-secondary institution]. She was taking him around places...[At one place], a girl was crying and she wouldn't stop. So they put her in the dark, and my friend came and was looking in the window and there was a man standing in the room and the little girl was being punished for crying. Some weird daycare. She didn't even want to go in. She just couldn't find adequate childcare basically. She ended up driving from her place – she was living in her in-laws basement in Dunbar – to [her post-secondary institution] everyday. But first she has to go to 63rd or something crazy like that to drop off her son, and then go way back."*

**"When I was on maternity leave with my second son, I had to pay to hold the space open even though we weren't using it because of the waiting list of people waiting for a space to become available."**

Mothers are often told that to find childcare for infants and toddlers they must get on waiting lists as soon as they know they are pregnant.

**Nicole, a receptionist:** *"When I was on maternity leave with my second son, I had to pay to hold the space open even though we weren't using it because of the waiting list of people waiting for a space to become available."*

Some women said they were still waiting to get into childcare centres in their neighborhood after being on a waiting list for two years.

**Sylvia, nursing student:** *"We're currently looking for daycare for Christian. Every place we call pretty much has an eighteen-month waiting list. And I had no idea. When I was looking for daycare for Lauren it was three months. And I thought ok, I can handle three months. As long as there's a month in the summer when I have some solid childcare. But then 18 months. Or, "Our waiting list is closed." We found one place that could take him sooner and it was \$1000 I month. I get \$460 as a maximum subsidy so we pay \$540. And I'm on student loans. That's almost half of my monthly income."*



13 licensed East side Childcare Care centers in Vancouver, experienced a 14.3% decrease in enrollment and 26.6% decrease in their waitlist from April to December of 2002.

Due to cuts to subsidy programs in 2002, some centres in low-income neighborhoods did experience openings in their waiting lists and childcare programs as women were forced to pull their children out of programs. For example, 13 licensed Eastside childcare care centers in Vancouver, experienced a 14.3% decrease in enrollment and 26.6% decrease in their waitlist from April to December of 2002. (VCCCCIC, 2002) However, these spaces still remain difficult for working class women to access because of costs.

For mothers with school age children, there is the added problem that many schools do not have before and after school cares located on their premises.

**Sarah**, single mother of a five year old: *"That is the other thing for me that has been a big challenge, and I am sure it is for other women. [You need to find] before and after school care so you can choose your child's school. People don't understand that if there's not before and after school care, you can't send your child to that school no matter how good it is or how much you want them to be there. If there is no care, you can't go."*

Location and transportation proved to be other factors impeding accessibility.

**Nicole**, mother of two: *"The area I lived in before now had only 2 licensed facilities within about a 20 minute drive radius. In my case, both were church run. Great staff, but religion was very much a part of their routine. I don't have any problem with religion but in this case, it wasn't an option! Bible study sessions and grace and bibles for presents..."*

**"I have trouble finding before and after school care close to my home. Last semester, picking up my daughter from after school care added an hour and a half transportation to my bus ride home."**

Because many women could not find centres in their local areas, they had to struggle with high costs of transportation, access to transportation, and large amounts of travel time.

**Renee**, single mother of two: *"I have trouble finding before and after school care close to my home. Last semester, picking up my daughter from after school care added an hour and a half transportation on to my hour bus ride home from school."*

This is especially true for women with more than one child. Because of age differences, siblings are often put into different facilities.

**Gina**: *"I spent months before I moved down here calling and calling places which costs money for every wait list. Finally I found one for him and Andy was in a different cause I couldn't find a spot for him in [the same daycare]. Andy was in a daycare [in one city] and Michael was in one in [another city]., and I was coming here to go to school [in another city] and trying to pay all the additional costs. I was driving for the first while but that was really expensive with parking. I spent [so much] in transit everyday, each way."*

Children with disabilities are enrolled in whatever centre can accommodate their needs. Childcare centers often have few staff who are trained and qualified to work with children with disabilities and have restrictions on how many children with disabilities they are able to work with.

**Geraldine**, mother of a child with disabilities: *"We had to settle for sending him to our third choice of school. He got into the schools, but we couldn't find a childcare*



*program that would accept him close to the schools we wanted. When the centres found out he has Downs Syndrome, they said, "Let us think about it." They would all come back and say, "No, we don't have funding to work with him." So I wouldn't want to send him there anyway. So we had to go to the school where they had childcare."*

Once mothers find a centre to accept their child, the centre may be many kilometers from where the family lives.

Kindergarten is one of the hardest years for many mothers. Because kindergarten is only 2 hours per day and Kindercare programs have been substantially cut back, mothers often have extremely limited options for childcare during this year.

**Tammy:** *"Kindergarten is hell year. I don't know how they expect people to do it. When their kid turns five, and goes to kindergarten, there is no after school care. Kindergarten is only half a day. So you're supposed to come with childcare for the rest of the day and transportation between those two forms of childcare. Two hours a day. I know that in my daycare some kids have their parents picking them up from kindergarten and then taking them back to the daycare for the second half of the day. [It] didn't work out. They just couldn't juggle it. I think my choice is going to have to be to keep her in daycare and not take her to kindergarten and then start her in Grade One."*

Childcare program opening times and days prove a major challenge to working class women.

**Nicole, mother of two teenage sons:** *"When I dealt with home daycares, we had to take holidays when she did. We had no back up if she was sick. I got no notice when a home daycare closed. She had a nervous breakdown and she closed that day! Aaacck!"*

Women reported they are unable to find centers that can accommodate their work schedules, which often begin very early in the morning or go late into the night.

Others work shifts on weekends. Opening hours are a particular issue because so many women work in the service sector where 9-5, Monday - Friday work is almost non-existent.

**"When I dealt with home daycares, we had to take holidays when she did. We had no back up if she was sick. I got no notice when [she] closed. She had a nervous breakdown and she closed that day!"**

**Genevieve, mother of a six month old:** *"I find it really stressful. I don't have any family support. Grandparents – that's out of the question. I don't know a lot of people here. I don't have long time friends that I can trust. I am a shift worker. I do graveyards. I do evenings. I do days, sometimes when I am lucky. But mostly graveyards, evenings and afternoons. I mean who is going to take my child from 10pm to 8am, unless it is a family friend that she can sleep over."*

Due to cost, work hours, and school schedules, some women prefer to have their child in part time care. However, this is extremely hard to access and retain.

**Sylvia, a student:** *"We found a part time spot for Lauren, and they said if someone comes in and they want a full time spot they're going to bump you out. They make more, because if I want three days a week it is hard to find someone who wants two."*

Women found there to be a lack of culturally appropriate childcare programs. Because of all of the other challenges with getting childcare, culturally and linguistically appropriate care becomes the lowest priority. However, this affects both the child's and the mother's experience with the childcare program.

**Sarah:** *"If my mother wasn't doing [my childcare] my son couldn't go to French immersion school cause there is not enough before and after school at any of the French immersion schools in this catchment area. So if my parents were not willing to do that, he would be at an English school whether I wanted him to be there or not. He would be at whatever school had before and after school care. I don't think people realize how far and how deep this goes into the legal system, into our education system."*

## Conclusion

There are numerous factors impeding women's access to childcare. These include lack of availability of spaces; long waiting lists; limited location of spaces and therefore transportation requirements; particular spaces for kindergarten and school aged children and children with disabilities; inflexible times and days of childcare programs; and, a lack of culturally appropriate programs.

### iii) Quality

Due to barriers of cost and accessibility, many mothers feel that they are forced to settle for childcare that does not offer the care and education that they wish for their child(ren).

**"I came home one day and I walked in and it just smelt like poo in my house. I guess she had been letting him roll around without a diaper on. He had pooped and she didn't notice."**

**Nicole:** *"When we were looking for a daycare, we saw so many awful, awful home daycares. Old unsafe cribs. Dirty. No outdoor play areas. Yards not fenced in... One person proudly showed me her extensive kid video collection. No toys to be found but lots of videos. She showed me how nicely the kids sat in a semi-circle in front of the TV."*

Some mothers felt that the childcare programming and the physical environment they were forced to accept were damaging for their child(ren)'s development.

**Geraldine:** *"I know so many women who don't have any choice. They can't afford or get into good childcare programs, so they end up having to settle for these terrible family daycares that are shoved in some dark crowded basement somewhere where all they do is plunk the kids down in front of a big screen TV for the whole day. These centres should be illegal! There is no accountability. No training. They are isolated and no one watches them or can see them. And moms don't have the time to run around looking into so many different centers. And lots of centers don't even let you watch or see what is happening."*

Others spoke about the lack of safety and hygiene.

**Cindy, single mother and office worker:** *"I didn't feel that my son was in big danger but she was doing weird stuff that it is kind of hard to describe. I came home one day and I walked in and it just smelt like poo in my house. I guess she had been letting him roll around without a diaper on. He had pooped and she didn't notice. I stepped in it. That was really pretty much it. But then I had to wait until I found someone else. I mean what am I supposed to do? Not work. Oh yeah, that'll work. So then I won't eat."*

A few mothers shared that their children experienced abuse or discrimination in childcare pro-

grams. Both they and their child(ren) suffered long term trauma because of this.

Even in licensed, regulated centres, the ability to offer quality programs is directly related to the economic class of the neighborhood.

**Sylvia:** *"Schools that pay to have their equipment installed get the benefit of having a playground for their kids. A benefit of having your kids at school in a rich area, or sending them to a private school. This past summer my daughter attended a day camp in [a low income neighborhood] run by teenagers for \$50 / week ( which is a lot if you are broke). Now the group leaders are great, nice, fun, but they are teenagers and the program has barely any money. But there is NO educational component. Other kids are going to "Arts Camp" or "Literacy Summer". Some of those camps are \$600/week but the kids get excellent care and learn a lot."*

Some childcare workers spoke about how high ratios of children to workers and the stress of cut backs to childcare budgets affected the quality of the program. Because childcare workers – even in regulated settings – are overworked and underpaid, the quality of childcare suffers.

**Maryanne, part-time childcare worker:** *"Having run down teachers or childcare workers – when they have 8 children they're watching and to know that the child in the bathroom is safe and outside the children are ok and you have a parent that you need to talk to or that you should be talking to parents everyday anyways to have an ongoing relationship with them. Or someone else will pick up the kids – you're supposed to check the ID but how are you supposed to do that or accept emergency forms .... When you are frazzled. Or if somebody drunk shows up to pick up the kids, how do you address that... or you have somebody watching a child from outside an area. You're like, we don't know who that is and watching them and trying to get it so that the children don't notice them. Ok, we have to stay inside, but they need to go outside. Whatever. That's going to impact families when you're not able to suit their needs. ... What's available now, the quality has gone down."*

**"The current childcare system is a system that allows you to have your child in licensed, quality group care only if you are wealthy enough to afford it. Otherwise, you take your chances."**

While studies consistently show that funded, regulated childcare offers the highest quality of care (Doherty et al., 2000b), due to affordability and accessibility, less than 20% of children aged 0-6 years find a place in a regulated childcare program in Canada. (OECD, 2004)

Due to affordability and accessibility, less than 20% of children aged 0-6 years find a place in a regulated childcare program in Canada.

**Kelly:** *"The current childcare system is a system that allows you to have your child in licensed, quality group care only if you are wealthy enough to afford it.*

*Otherwise, you take your chances with untrained caregivers who care for children from their homes. When the subsidies were cut by this government, I know of many families that simply 'disappeared' from the group centers and ended up with older children (10-12) at home alone before and after school and many children being cared for by family members who may or may not have been able to cope with small children."*

Other mothers reported that they are 'making do' by using their extended family to provide care. These family members are usually untrained and often elderly. For them, it is often difficult or impossible to provide stimulating, quality care.



**Karen**, a childcare worker for 20 years: *"People just can't jump through the hoop [to get a subsidy], so they aren't using quality childcare. We've got many kids down here that are being babysat by grandparents who fall asleep to have a nap at 2:00. The kids just go outside and their backyard is Hastings Street."*

Many mothers also said that when they were able to access quality childcare, it made a significant difference in their lives and the lives of their children. Quality childcare includes developmentally appropriate practice that supports children's intellectual, social and emotional, and physical development based on their individual and collective needs. It is stimulating, engaging, accessible, and culturally appropriate. Quality childcare also includes an element of support and education for parents. It also requires stable and consistent childcare workers; adequate ratios of adults to children; reasonable group sizes; and, a healthy and safe physical environment.

**Amanda**: *"When I first had my oldest daughter, I was 17 myself. And they had excellent daycare programs for teenage mothers. They were just opening up the one in Aldergrove. That was the second one in the Lower Mainland. The first was in Guildford. The people who were running that daycare were fabulous workers. The women were amazing. They went all out to really provide a good, excellent daycare for young mothers who wanted to get their grade 12. That was a really good experience. It was like a family environment."*

**"What saved my life was finding childcare spaces. They love their daycare. I know they're safe and fed. And it's the first time that that pressure has been taken off of me."**

They felt that this positive experience of quality childcare was important for all women.

**Gina**: *"What saved my life was finding childcare spaces [at my post secondary institution]. Even though it is more expensive, four hours out of my day I have back. They are really convenient, and they're great with the kids. It took so long to get the subsidy. They were just like, 'It's alright. Just keep trying. Do what you can.' They've been nothing but supportive here. Which is why I think everybody should have access to childcare like that. It costs me lots of money, but I never worry about them. They love their daycare. I know they're safe. I know they're fed. They're really looked after. And it's the first time that that pressure has been taken off of me. Every other daycare I've always worried. I would show up at strange hours just to check on them. We shouldn't have to deal with that as mothers. Ever."*

Women do almost 2 times the hours of "home maintenance" work per week than men do. 75% of women stated they had the primary responsibility for arranging childcare and were 4 times more likely to stay home with a sick child than men.

By 2001, 62.3% of mothers whose youngest child was less than three were working; 73.4% of women whose youngest child was 3-5 years old were in the work force.

## Conclusion

There is a lack of consistent, quality childcare in Canada. Due to a lack of affordability and accessibility, many mothers are forced to settle for childcare programs that they believe are of inferior quality or are unsafe. This is compounded by the stress facing childcare workers and childcare centers due to funding instability, job insecurity, and high ratios of children to workers. When women are able to access quality childcare, they find it to be extremely beneficial to themselves and their children.



## b) The Prices We Pay: the Impact of Childcare Policy on Women's Lives

Women are still primarily responsible for family and childcare.

**Geraldine:** *"Childcare is definitely a women's issue. I am the one who does all of the work around Jack's childcare. I go to the centres. I am the one fighting with the school to make sure he is getting the support and learning that he needs. Right now I am on the Board of Directors at Jack's childcare center."*

Working class women continue to provide the majority of reproductive labour in the private sphere in advanced capitalist countries. This includes all tasks necessary to reproduce exploitable labour power or to get workers ready to sell their labour power for wages. This reproductive labour includes, but is not limited to, child birth and childcare; feeding and clothing the family; cleaning; and, providing emotional and physical care for sick or injured family members. (See *Universal Childcare and Genuine Women's Equality* for further discussion.)

**Sylvia:** *"My partner has been looking after Christian for the last eight months while I've been at school and people just think that's great! But I think, 'But it was great that I stayed home for nine months before that.' But nobody said that was great. They all think, 'Wow you watched Christian for eight months.' I think, I watched Lauren for five years. But [the father] gets a lot of credit cause it is not socially expected..."*

Canadian studies show that women do almost two times the hours of "home maintenance" work per week than men do. Women have the primary responsibility for childcare: in one study over 75% of women stated they had the primary responsibility for arranging childcare and were four times more likely to stay home with a sick child than men in the study. (MacBride-King, 1990:9)

**Sarah:** *"I know a lot of moms in the situation where their ex just comes and drops the child off at work and says, 'That's it. My time's over. I've got a party to go to.' And the mom is standing there at work. Here's your child. Are you supposed to hide them under your desk?"*

Despite providing the majority of reproductive labour, women are also increasingly found in the labour force. By 2001, 62.3% of mothers whose youngest child was less than three were working; 73.4% of women whose youngest child was 3-5 years old were in the work force. (OECD, 2004)

**Wendy:** *"I am pregnant and I am already anticipating problems of getting affordable childcare as I am going to be a single parent. My ability to maintain my employment with my present job will depend on childcare for my very young child from 1 year till school age. And that is 6 years old, not 5, because of the half-day kindergarten."*

Women are also the vast majority of those caring for children in the public sphere. In 1996, women were over 95% of the 226,680 people doing childcare in Canada. This does not include those doing informal or unregulated childcare, so the percentage of women is likely higher. (Statistics Canada, 2002.)

**"Childcare is such a barrier. Mothers – especially single mothers – cannot make a single decision without considering our children and wondering who and how they will be cared for in our absence."**

In 2000/01, of children in childcare, 25% were enrolled in a daycare center; 14% were looked after in their own home by a family member; and, 34% were looked after in someone else's home by a non-relative.



However, current childcare policies trap women "between a rock and a hard place."

**Darlene:** "Childcare is such a barrier. Mothers - especially single mothers - cannot make a single decision without considering our children and wondering who and how they will be cared for in our absence."

Regulated childcare in Canada is expensive, inaccessible, and overall not of high quality. (See *Always Making Do* for further discussion.) Unlicensed and family care is often of lower quality and can cause tension among family members. The Live-in Caregiver Program may free a few women from the pressures of reproductive labour in the private sphere, but this is only achieved on the backs of highly exploited women domestic workers.

While childcare policy is an issue for all women, it is of particular importance to working class women because of the high costs of childcare, the need for working class families to have women working for their very survival, and because they working class women are the ones who bare and raise future workers.

**Sarah:** "Daycare is a luxury in the minds of most people. You know my child support is not the difference between a beemer and a Volvo. It is daycare or not. It makes you feel like pulling your hair out and saying, "Don't you understand? If the daycare falls apart, my life is gone to hell in a hand basket right there." Cause it is so vital. They don't understand."

**"It always falls to women. We pick up the slack and the government just depends that no matter how stretched to the limit we are we'll all just pick up the slack."**

Indigenous, immigrant and migrant women are hit the hardest of all because of the ongoing impact of colonialism; underdevelopment and forced migration; and, systemic racism.

**Melanie:** *I left the Philippines because of the economic crisis and I wanted to help my family. My dad is only a farmer. We are just working for the landlord. We only have a small amount. Maybe 60% for the landlord and 40% for us. Since I was in Elementary, that's what we're doing. I don't really know what life is like abroad, but I can see people lining up for their passports, so I thought maybe going abroad is the solution to our situation. Way back home we're poor, and then when we arrive here we're slaves or something. Working as a package deal under the LCP.*

Because childcare is so essential to their lives, working class women have developed complex strategies to "make do".

**Lina:** "It always falls to women. We pick up the slack and the government just depends that no matter how stretched to the limit we are we'll all just pick up the slack. I always just found a way to get to work shifts if they called me. I was just like I have to do this obviously, so I would just wing it. And like I said I had some flexibility. But it doesn't feel good to tell your sitter, 'Oh, I can't pay you everything I owe you.'"

'Make do' strategies include taking on part time work or work where women bring their children; having extended family take care of children; "going without"; and / or, withdrawing from the workforce. In 2000/01, of children in childcare, 25% were enrolled in a daycare center; 14% were looked after in their own home by a family member; and, 34% were looked after in someone else's home by a non-relative. (Statistics Canada, 2005)

Women spend between 33 to 60% of their income on childcare



**Gina:** "Now I'm working three jobs and I'm trying to do my school and take care of the kids. And I just don't see how I'm going to keep up the pace."

**Janice:** "I've even considered taking my three year old out of the family daycare she's in to keep her at home and try to get my nephew to babysit because he's going to live with me. Then I'm not going to have to pay but that means that she's going to be missing out on going out of the house and being with other kids. Now, she's in a home daycare and getting an educational piece."

These 'make do' strategies required under current childcare policy lead to isolation, stress, instability, poverty and exploitation, and underdevelopment. These are the recurring themes throughout women's stories about the hardship caused by childcare policy in all spheres of their lives: economic, education and development, social relations, health and well-being, and political.

## i) Economic sphere

Paid work, economic self-sufficiency and childcare are often linked by advocates of childcare and policy makers. "The whole society benefits when families can be economically self-sufficient because affordable, reliable child care enables parents to work, and when children's non-parental care provides the stimulation that assists them to be school-ready at age 6." (Doherty, 1998)

However, the workforce is highly segregated. There is a dichotomy between women whose experiences lead them to see work as an emancipatory right, and women who are forced to work in low-wage occupations to make ends meet.

Yet, the relationship between work and childcare policy has typically been considered in a class neutral context, where childcare policy as a cheap labour strategy is not examined. In the stories of working class women, there is a fundamental connection between childcare policy and women's exploitation and economic marginalization.

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They don't get it! There's  
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milk!"**

### High cost of childcare

The cost of childcare has a direct economic effect on women. Studies differ about the percentage of income women are spending on childcare. Statistics Canada studies show that in 1998, childcare costs were 23% of the median income for all husband and wife families. (Statistics Canada, 2000); other studies state the costs for childcare can reach 60% of women's incomes.

Women who participated in the study explained that they ended up spending between half to 2/3 of their income on childcare.

(See *Always Making Do* for more information on the affordability of childcare.) This leaves less money for women to meet the rest of their needs including rent, food, and transportation. Often women are forced to make difficult decisions between paying for food and paying for childcare.

**Sarah:** "\$50 / month [childcare top-up] is huge to me or any woman living in poverty. There's no such thing as just \$10 / month. They don't get it! There's no such thing as \$5 / month. That's milk!"

Saving money for their children's education, to purchase a car to get to work and childcare centres, or to save for an emergency is impossible.

**Gina:** "You're not allowed to save. In fact, they asked me if I could get a line of credit to pay my credit card. They asked me if I had applied for a line of credit first to pay my daycare."

### Forced into cheap labour positions

Childcare policy has major implications on women's work status. For example, with the current subsidy system, the income threshold for qualifying is very low. Therefore, women find themselves in the terrible position of either maintaining a very low income from work in order to qualify for subsidy or shouldering the entire cost of childcare on their own.

**Jeanine:** "You can't work too much cause you can't qualify for subsidy. If you work too little, you can't survive."

Keeping their income low enough to qualify for subsidy means living far below the poverty line and traps women in work sectors that are less stable and where they are more exploitable. Shouldering the entire cost of childcare can leave women with less money than if they received lower wages.

**Cindy:** "If I started working full time taking my wages instead of having them hidden in the benefits, I would probably see less money in my pocket than I do now. I looked into working a fourth day a week and I was going to lose \$80 from my pocket. The subsidy for childcare once they start clawing it back, they claw it back 60% on every dollar that you earn over a certain amount net. By earning an extra \$125 / week, I was going to lose \$80 out of my pocket."

**"If I started working full time and taking my wages instead of having them hidden in the benefits, I would probably see less money in my pocket than I do now [because of the subsidy system.]"**

Many women shared that they are constantly juggling the number of hours they work or looking for other ways to get paid so that their subsidy is not affected. Others were forced to take under the table work that they did not have to declare as part of their income.

**Donna:** "I had to end up taking work under the table and not telling student loans and the childcare subsidy people so that we could kind of manage it. You're just criminalized, and then you always feel like you are doing something wrong. And what you are trying to do is survive."

Under the table work is notoriously underpaid, unstable, and risky.

**Donna:** "When Matthew was a baby I worked in a restaurant and would work 12 hour shifts with no overtime. He would only hire single mothers or women coming off welfare because he knew that you have no options. He would threaten to call welfare and tell them if you quit cause then you couldn't get back on. He went for months without paying us. I remember one time over Christmas, he said he couldn't pay us cause it was Christmas. His kids came in all brand new GAP clothes that they had just gotten and he told us that we couldn't be paid for December and January."

Because women wind up having to keep their wages low enough to qualify for a subsidy, their work in the productive sphere is cheapened. This benefits companies – not mothers or other women – who have women willing to work for less.

Lina is a mother of three children under the age of 12. While living in a small town, Lina was a single mother. She worked doing home support (HSW) and working in fisheries. As a HSW, she did 3-hour split shifts, first thing in the morning and in the evening. She made around \$1000 / month and received a small subsidy for childcare. Lina took her children to before school care at the local elementary school. In the evenings, she paid someone to take care of her children in her home. Because the subsidy was not enough, Lina ended up paying \$2-300 / month on childcare. With her Child Tax Benefit, Lina support her family of four on little over \$1000 / month. Now, Lina is working at 3 part time / on-call jobs in Vancouver and living with her partner. Because their combined income is just above the income threshold – when Lina does get shifts – she does not qualify for childcare subsidy. Lina has had to pull her children out of childcare. She is not sure what to do with them when she is working and they come home from school.

**Alexis:** "We're forced to work at home doing sewing, piece work, that kind of stuff in order to support our families. My friend did fashion design before the kids. After that she started doing private sewing for people, but people didn't want to pay her a whole lot... Then she took up a job driving other kids to school. Little things where you can bring your kids. That's another thing about being on welfare is that you can't really survive on what they give you, but you can't work over the table, so you have to work under the table and you end up working all sorts of shit jobs just to make that extra little bit to try to pay for things."

The subsidy system also causes major economic instability for women. A number of women said that they had lost their subsidy at the drop of a hat: because they had a live-in boyfriend, when policies changed, etc. Despite losing their subsidy, women still needed childcare in order to work / go to school, so they were left having to shoulder the full cost of childcare – often with little more than a weeks notice.

**Amanda:** "There have been times where I've had a live-in boyfriend and my daycare just went away. Because I have this live-in boyfriend. They're supposed to supply my daycare. I didn't know that was in the deal you know! It was awful. All these ups and downs needing daycare. Give up my power and be financially dependent just because the government decides that you sleep with someone three nights a week or four – whatever it is – but to believe that they are responsible for you financially."

Women workers are affected because of childcare in other ways. Childcare dictates where women can work: they must be close to a childcare centre in order to avoid hours of transportation per day and to be able to drop off and pick up their child(ren) within the opening hours of the centre. Regulated centres are typically open no earlier than 7:30 am and close by 6:00pm.

**Nicole:** "I guess overall, we did what we had to do in terms of childcare – we worked within the system because you had no choice but to do that. Including the fact that I changed jobs so that I would be closer to home I daycare I school. And I haven't applied to jobs for the same reason."

**"There have been times where I've had a live-in boyfriend and my daycare just went away. Give up my power and be financially dependent just because the government decides."**

Women have had to stay in worse jobs (fewer benefits, lower pay, less opportunity for advancement) due to the location of their childcare and the difficulty in getting childcare in a new center.

Childcare also affects the type of work women can do:

**Rosa:** "When I was looking at career paths – I would love to work with my hands. I would love to do some kind of carpentry. The trades are really good money and they really want women to be involved. And they cannot. Cause they start at 7 – 7:30 in the morning. Daycares open at 7:30am. So how am I gonna to do that? I'm not magic lady. So it's totally not open to me. There's all these BCIT programs for women in trades, but the whole industry is set up for people who don't have to care for kids. There also isn't flexibility for the morning start. There isn't availability for shift work. When you're kicking people off of welfare they're not going to be able to get a 9-5 job. It's not going to happen."

According to Statistics Canada, over 69% of part time workers are women

On average, "flexible" workers receive \$5 to \$8 less per hour than those employed as permanent, full-time workers.

Many jobs – particularly in the service sector – require evening, weekend, or night shifts. The

hours do not correspond with the hours of regulated childcare centres, or even most family day-care centres. Some women were not able to find work in sectors they had the skills for because they could not find regulated childcare during the required work hours.

**Sarah:** *"Childcare is not taken into account with most jobs. Like the Teaching Assistant jobs – give someone else the office job and give me the one that doesn't require night classes or being on campus. People say, "Just go get a better job." Ok, sure I'll do that. I never thought of that before!"*

Because the only jobs they could get neither paid enough nor offered work hours when childcare centres are open, some women were forced to accept night shifts in order to alternate work and childcare with their partner.

**Andrea:** *"I work nights. My husband works mornings. But my mother-in-law gets off... well she arranged her schedule – luckily she could do that cause ... she gets off at 3:00, comes up and I get ready for work and leave. Cause I start at 3:45. I wouldn't mind doing morning shifts. That way me and my husband could be there and could spend some time with him together. Right now, we're just kind of making it work."*

**"Instead of reentering the workforce full time, I ended up selling Avon door-to-door, caring for other people's children in my home, and working part time."**

Childcare policy is one of the major reasons there are so many women in part time work. Many women stated that instead of having to pay such a large portion of their income for childcare, they had decided to take on only part-time work while their child was young. Therefore, it is not surprising that over 69% of part time workers are women. (Statistics Canada, 1994) As well, "Single mothers, and more generally women, are significantly over represented among flexible workers and the vulnerably employed." (Burke and Shields, 1999: 3-4)

**Kelly:** *"Instead of reentering the workforce full time, I ended up selling Avon door-to-door, caring for other people's children in my home while they looked for group are situations they could afford, and working part time."*

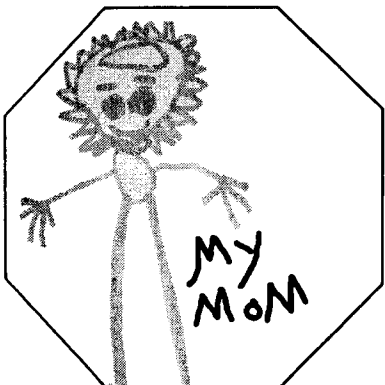
Still other women shared that they were forced into particular "flexible" sectors because of their need to have their children with them during their work. For example, women took on courier jobs so they could keep their children in the vehicle while they worked. Others worked as night janitors, bringing children to the building as they cleaned. Some women took telemarketing jobs they could do from home.

**Bonnie:** *"[To save money on childcare] I do my work with my kids around. At times it means sitting them in front of the TV with them while I do some work. Also I may work while they are watching a movie and I sit with them but work instead."*

The impact of flexibilization cannot be underestimated. On average, "flexible" workers receive \$5 to \$8 less per hour than those employed as permanent, full-time workers. (Burke and Shields, 1999: 3) Flexible workers typically do not receive the same benefits or other rights accorded to full time workers. And, childcare is not available to correspond with flexible work.

**Lina:** *"I was working at the fish plant and that was difficult because the hours were long and it was in the evening so that was full time care. Obviously I did have problems then because I was only allowed so many full time days [to be covered by child-*

In 2001, welfare rates covered only 63% of living costs. This only got worse after cuts in 2002.



care subsidy]. Then at the start of the season we worked so many days in a row – about 25 days in a row. It's resource based so you just gotta go for it. So I had to kick in for childcare costs."

**Donna:** "On one hand their policy is to move to more and more on-call labour but on the other hand you're supposed to have childcare. So when they call you up with two hours notice how are you supposed to be ready? Emma just got to this point where everyday she woke up and said, "Who am I going to be with today?" Was she going to be with me, with George, at preschool, or was I going to have to call in a babysitter?"

For immigrant women and women of colour there is an ever greater chance of being found in the flexible sector: "There is increasing evidence that it is mainly racialized minorities, immigrants and women in the low-economic classes who are found in the poorly paid, insecure jobs of the flexible workplace." This is due to the way "race, class, gender and citizenship have been underlying forces in the constructions and arrangements of flexible work." (Zeytinoglu, 2000)

Childcare also affects how women are able to advance in their employment to positions with better pay, increased stability, and more stimulation.

**Alexis:** "I finished school and I was hoping ok once you finish school you're into the work force or to be able to put what I studied into practice. And I just haven't been able to do that because I have no childcare for my daughter."

Women faced discrimination from employers. For example, they were asked if they were pregnant or had children during job interviews.

**Donna:** "The work place is so discriminating that I have also felt that you have to be quiet about your childcare problems and family problems otherwise they're going to favour somebody else who doesn't have those things. Like if your kid gets sick and you're not going to be there... and you make that public knowledge in the workplace it actually... you have to be quiet about it, silent."

**"The work place is so discriminating that I have felt that you have to be quiet about your childcare problems otherwise they're going to favour somebody else who doesn't have those things."**

Because women end up working in part time positions and they have to take time for family emergencies, they are often passed up for promotion. Full time workers are preferred or required for the work.

Other women found that balancing low paid work with the high cost of childcare was difficult, if not impossible.

**Kelly:** "I did not re-enter the workforce after my second child was born because it would have cost my entire wages to pay for 2 childcare spots. After my third child was born, it was simply beyond my ability to pay even if I was willing to work simply to pay for care."

These women were left with no option but to look to income assistance to support childbearing and rearing.

**Alexis:** "I'm on social assistance now. But if I go back to work, am I going to make enough money to cover her childcare or pay the rent? So right now it just seems like it is easier to be on social assistance cause you don't have to worry about it."

Yet, on welfare, mothers live in desperate poverty. In 2001, welfare rates covered only 63% of

Sarah is the single mother of one six year old. Before going to university, Sarah worked as a receptionist. Sarah and her son share a room in her parent's rented town home. Sarah pays her mother to do her before and after school childcare. This is her mother's only source of income. When Sarah tried to access a childcare subsidy, the social workers questioned whether she really paid her mother. In the end, Sarah was unable to qualify for a childcare subsidy because she has negotiated a maintenance order with her ex-husband, which puts her above the income threshold. Sarah's ex-husband does not always pay his child support on time, but Sarah must continue to pay for her childcare costs. She has found that it can take months for the government to follow-up on his missed payments. Sarah is wondering if she'll have to max out her credit cards and declare bankruptcy if her ex does not pay child support again.

living costs. This only got worse after cuts in 2002. (Goldberg, 2002)

**Alexis:** *"I think without adequate or a national subsidized or even free childcare it just forces people to live in a lower income because so much of their income is being paid to childcare. While the women, if they want to go back to work they can't. What we are doing is work. But we're not being paid for it, and that time. So you're on welfare. They pay you this really shit wage cheque."*

Furthermore, welfare is even less of an option for women now due to changes to the welfare system: women must now return to work when their youngest child reaches the age of three, not seven. They often wind up back in the work force after a long absence, primarily into low skilled and low waged work, with the same challenges of finding childcare. Women get trapped in a vicious cycle: they can't afford a childcare space until they have a job, but they can't take a job without childcare.

**Darlene:** *"I spent a week on the phone looking for childcare. Once a job or school placement is decided, mothers have very little time to find daycare. It's not feasible to have daycare when it's not needed in case a job or school opportunity arises."*

**Cindy:** *"I couldn't really reserve space anywhere, cause I didn't know what my employment situation would be. The company that I was working for had lost a number of programs and I didn't know what kind of a job I was going back to."*

**"When I'm done school I'm going to owe about \$60,000 and a good chunk of that went to the daycare because I was paying for infant childcare and toddler care for five years on student loan."**

### **Forced to rely on other sources of income**

Childcare policy also affects how other potential sources of income – including student loans, child support, and credit – are used.

Until January 2005, student loans were counted as income in determining the level of childcare subsidies because the policy dictated that mothers must exhaust all other sources of income before applying for childcare subsidy. The result of this policy was that mothers who also study were essentially using their student loan to cover the costs of childcare, as well as for its intended use of tuition, books, and living costs. Because of this policy, women amassed tens of thousands of dollars in student loans, loans that they will be burdened with for years to come. Thus, their economic status is not just marginal while in school but for the years after when they must repay the loan. While the January 2005 policy change offers a positive step forward for women who might access education and childcare in the future, it does nothing to ameliorate the economic position of women who were hit by the previous policy.

**Donna:** *"When I'm done school I'm going to owe about \$60,000 and a good chunk of that went to the daycare because I was paying for infant childcare and toddler care for five years on student loans. I finished my Masters right as the tuition increases started coming in. There's no way I could have made ends meet if the tuition was what it is now. 'Cause I was just making it. You know, at the end of the semester there was no money. There was three weeks where you had no money. Absolutely no way I could have done it now."*

Child support is another troublesome area for women when combined with childcare policy. In child support legislation, childcare is a negotiable amount with no minimum amount required to be paid. Yet, child support will often put women above the income threshold for qualifying for



subsidy, leaving them to cover the cost of childcare on their own.

This causes significant problems if child support is not paid on time or at all. Despite losing a substantial portion of income, women cannot stop paying their monthly childcare costs and must find any means possible to continue payment. It can often take months or years for Family Maintenance Enforcement to recover unpaid child support. During that time, women must continue to declare child support as part of their income and at the same time struggle to find other sources to cover their childcare costs.

**Sarah:** *"I'm not eligible for a subsidy when they do exist because I have child support. People who get child support are getting a daycare subsidy in the mind of the government. 15 days after it was due, I get paid. I can't pay my childcare unless I get child support. People don't seem to realize the incredible importance of that child support. It is my childcare subsidy. Without it, I cannot go to school. I cannot go to work. I'm trapped in whatever life I am left with at the end of the day. That's my income, and they don't care if I get it or not. If I don't get it that's my problem. I have a friend who lives a few doors down and it's the same as welfare. If you have an agreement, they take whatever you are supposed to be getting off of your welfare cheque and give you the remainder. And if your ex doesn't pay you, well that's what Family Maintenance Enforcement (FME) is for. And FME is the most pathetic government department that has been ... I have no idea how they get away with a 60% success rate. And if you can't feed your child, well we'll take that child from you no problem. Then you can fight the system to get them back. The system that won't help you get the money in the first place. Nothing is said in child support about childcare except that it is – makes me laugh every time – an extraordinary expense. [laughs] I found paying \$1000 / month pretty extraordinary personally."*

Because of their dire economic position, some women were forced to rely on family and friends for money / resources. Others were told to do so by their welfare workers. Since the friends and family of working class women are often facing similar economic marginalization, this is often not even possible.

**Lina:** *"That's what the subsidy people always say: 'Well can't you borrow from friends or family?' Well no. They're all broke too."*

Even if borrowing is possible, it can put a strain on relationships. Mothers who relied on this support explained that it was also extremely unreliable because friends and family can withdraw their support at any time, due to their own personal situation.

Of even greater concern is the fact that women's economic instability – coupled with pressures to rely on family and friends – can trap women in abusive relationships.

**Lina:** *"Women need childcare when they're leaving relationships and when they're with a crummy guy, that's when they need the support."*

This systemic pressure causes women to be dependent on partners. They often feel unable to leave partners – even those who are emotionally and physically abusive – because they have no way to cover the costs of supporting their family. As well, quality childcare is even more

**"That's what the subsidy people always say: 'Well can't you borrow from friends or family?' Well no. They're all broke too."**

The BC mean income for family child caregivers is \$18,900, and \$9,500 after expenses are deducted. The average annual salary of childcare workers in BC is \$23,537.



important when women and children have experienced abuse.

**Donna:** *"We were leaving an abusive relationship so I really needed them in good care. I couldn't just leave them with relatives or with teenagers or anything like that. So I was getting \$300 / month subsidy but the daycare was costing \$1500 / month for both of them. It is so expensive. It was \$600 subsidy, so \$900 / month. So basically all of our money was going to tuition and daycare and living."*

### Class based childcare benefits

Since the Canadian government distributes maternity benefits through the Employment Insurance (EI) system, the policy disadvantages those who have little power in the labour market. These tend to be younger, less educated and poorer women, as well as women of colour and disabled women. Because the benefit represents only 55% of maximum insurable earnings, mothers without a working partner are less likely to be able to take advantage of maternity benefits since they would be unable to survive on the reduced income.

**Melanie:** *"I worked at a magazine shop on a part time basis. Three days a week. So I was just receiving \$800 / month while I'm working. So when I went on maternity leave I'm just receiving 55% of my income. You know I was like holy smokes, how can I have the life that I want?"*

**"When I was on EI, my husband was in school... You just kind of make it work with what you have. Buy less. Visa helped. We would just charge diapers and stuff we needed."**

As well, 55% of part time, casual or low wage work does not even represent survival income, shortening the time women can avail of maternity benefits provided through the EI system.

**Andrea, a factory worker, explains:** *"When I was on EI, my husband was in school. So he was struggling with some of his bills, but I had enough to pay for mine. We didn't really struggle, but you just kind of make it work with what you have. Buy less. Visa helped. We would just charge diapers and stuff we needed."*

The qualification period for EI is 600 hours in the last 52 weeks. This disadvantages women who work part time / casual jobs. They must work longer periods of time in order to complete the required number of insured hours.

Childcare tax benefits are also class and gender biased. People with higher incomes stand to benefit more from tax based subsidies, so working class women are particularly disadvantaged by the tax based childcare system. Young has found that women typically have less access to childcare tax subsidies and the amount women receive is less than the amount that men receive. (2000)

As well, many women wind up using unregulated childcare because of the high cost of regulated childcare. They are often forced to use providers who do not want to claim the small income they are able to earn providing childcare and therefore do not provide receipts for tax purposes. This means that mothers do not have receipts to use for the child care expense deduction. So this tax subsidy is not available to them.

Some of the women in the focus groups pointed out that the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) – designed to help families with children and particularly low-income families – was very ben-

84% of childcare workers work in non-unionized settings.

Subsidy rates for a childcare worker in the child's home for a child over 18 months is \$15.90 / day.

eficial to them. Yet, they agreed that the CCTB is not universally available. It can be clawed back from women on welfare – as is the case in BC where welfare rates are reduced by the amount women receive through the program.

**Lina:** *"I remember if you were on assistance there were times when they would top up my income if I made under \$1000. But then they would take off a percentage of my child tax benefit. So I was like, this is not helping me."*

The CCTB is also not available to those who have defaulted on student loans and it is affected by other sources of "income", such as scholarships for school.

**Sarah:** *"Because I was lucky enough to get a scholarship last year, my child tax benefit got cut back almost \$100 cause of that line 150 income again. It's funny how things are income in some cases and not in others. Always in ways that benefit women the least."*

The CCTB is also not available to domestic workers under the LCP. Despite the fact domestic workers pay statutory taxes and provide financially for the cost of their children's upbringing – children who are in their home country due to the restrictions of the LCP – domestic workers are not able to receive either the CCTB or childcare expense deductions in their taxes.

### Exploitation of childcare workers

Since women compose the overwhelming majority of those doing both regulated and unregulated childcare work in Canada, it is important to consider how they are affected in the economic sphere.

**Georgia:** *"While I was in school, I started to pick up subbing shifts at a number of different childcare centers. Mostly I would get a call around 7am and be asked to go in that day. It is totally unreliable income – you can have lots of shifts or none. There is no guarantee. And then they call you with no notice. But if you don't take shifts, then they often don't call you for shifts, so your name goes down to the bottom of the list. You make little over minimum wage – even at unionized centers – and it is really stressful to walk into a school and not know the children but to be very responsible for them."*

**Subbing is totally unreliable income. You can have lots of shifts or none. And then they call you will no notice. But if you don't take shifts, your name goes to the bottom of the list.**

Childcare is an extremely low paid sector of work. The BC mean income for family child caregivers is \$18,900, and \$9,500 after expenses are deducted (Beach et al., 1998: 81). The average childcare worker earned \$20,600 in 2000.

This is well below the average income for workers overall: \$34,000. (Statistics Canada, 2002.) and is \$2951 below Canada's Low Income Cut Off (LICO) line for a family of two in Vancouver. Childcare workers in unionized centers fair better than the 84% of childcare workers who work in non-unionized settings. (Doherty et al, 2001)

**Karen:** *"This field is already underpaid. And people do things over and above what you get paid for because it's a caring field. More so than any other field."*

When a provincial grant for wage supplements for childcare workers was cut, along with other grants for childcare centers, many childcare workers faced massive roll backs in wages.

Josie was born in the Philippines. She came to Canada in 1994 as a domestic worker under the LCP. She was responsible for caring for two children under 5, doing housework including cleaning, laundry, and cooking. Josie was often asked to stay with the children after 5pm by her employers because they would be out for work or socializing. As Josie's room was in the basement, she wound up working 24 hours a day because the children would sleep with her in her room. After completing her 24 months under the LCP, Josie met her husband and became pregnant with her own child. Now she has three children: 7, 5, and 8 months old. Josie worked as a hospital worker with the Hospital Employees' Union. When laundry and food service work was privatized in 2004, Josie lost her job and was rehired by the new private owner at half her wages. Despite being on EI with her 8 month old, Josie was forced to supplement her wages and accept shifts because the EI was not enough to live on. Her younger children had been in childcare because she was able to access a subsidized space for children with disabilities. However, with greatly decreased wages, yet without access to subsidy, Josie is not sure how she will be able to find childcare she can afford for her three children.

**Maryanne:** *"Our wages were cut about \$6 / hour as of April 1, 2003, because the government took away the wage supplement. Because the center I was at – like many other centers – was experiencing financial difficulty, they just cut our wages to what they had been 6 years before that or something. I mean \$6 / hour is a large chunk. It was a third of our wages. Well, no more. From \$15 to \$9."*

Many childcare workers do not receive benefits. They work many hours of unpaid overtime in order to fulfill the responsibilities of their job.

**Tammy:** *"Any extra work at the childcare center is work I give, donate or volunteer. Burnout is an issue as a childcare worker."*

Many of the women who participated in the study explained that the overtime was not forced on them, but they felt obligated to do overtime because of a concern for the families that they were working with particularly with recent cuts to childcare and welfare in BC; unspoken expectations from employers / parent boards; and, a fear of losing their job.

**"Overtime is a fact of life in this job [childcare]. In terms of getting paid for it, that's non-existent. There's no other way that it can be done because there is a lot of work."**

**Gloria:** *"Overtime is a fact of life in this job. In terms of getting paid for it, that's non-existent. Well there's no other way that it can be done because there is a lot of work. We may make the work for ourselves, but it is something that we feel is important in our school. If something needs to be done, we're going to do it. Whether it be at 4:30 or 5:00 or 5:30 or we bring it home. There is no overtime pay. But the overtime is expected of us. Programming is always in your head. I'm doing it now and I'm off on maternity leave. I'm thinking of things that can be done."*

Other childcare workers explained that they were coerced into working overtime.

**Maryanne:** *"[With the cuts at our center, we were told] You guys are going to work overtime every day. Two staff. You're going to clean the place. You're going to supervise sleepers and non-sleepers. You're going to be able to take kids to kindergarten and back. You're going to work overtime every day and you can't take holidays because we can't afford for you guys to take holidays right now."*

There are also many women who do unregulated childcare or "babysitting". For example, mothers often pay a low wage to a friend or childcare for taking care of their child.

**Renee:** *"Because [I couldn't afford] childcare for my daughter, the only job I had was babysitting which is isolating and had very bad pay."*

Childcare subsidy policy cements these low wages as the amount of subsidy available for "in-home" or family care is so low. Currently, subsidy for childcare in the child's home for a child over 18 months is \$ 15.90 / day. (BC government website) Any wages paid beyond this rate come from the mother herself.

**Lydia:** *"Since subsidy is such a low rate we can't afford quality care. So, there are a lot of babysitters out there accepting a very low wage because parents can't pay more."*

Many women rely on family members to provide childcare. This is typically unpaid work provided by grandmothers, aunts, or siblings. They are given remuneration in the form of gifts, food,

or housing provided for out of the salary of the mother. These childcare workers often have no economic independence at all because they are entirely reliant on the mother for their survival.

The most vulnerable and exploited among childcare workers are domestic workers under Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP). LCP restrictions – requiring that workers live in their employer's home and have only temporary immigration status – create a group of "modern-day slaves." (NAPWC forum, February 2005)

The childcare workers under this program bear the brunt of extremely undervalued child care work: they work in isolation, with low pay – often far below minimum wage – and long working hours, and under conditions that are not adequately monitored.

**Melanie:** *"I worked for three years as a live-in caregiver. I worked with a family. It was a really tough experience. You look after the kids. Then you have to clean. Then you have to cook. You have to do everything. You make only \$700 net income per month. I just receive \$700 / month for working 24 hours."*

Some women are not paid at all for their work and have very little avenue for retrieving unpaid wages:

**Tina:** *I found this job in North Van. I worked there for three weeks. Then suddenly my employer said, "Oh, we're going to move to Calgary." And suddenly she said, "Oh I don't have my money right here." She said, "Do you have a bank account?" I didn't have a bank account yet cause that was my first job. "Does your sister have a bank account? Can you give me her bank account number?" I gave her my sister's bank account. My sister said, "Don't give my bank account. Just get the money." I went back to North Van and then I saw the house was closed. They weren't there anymore. So they didn't pay me for that three weeks."*

Because of their live-in status, women often work on-call 24 hours per day.

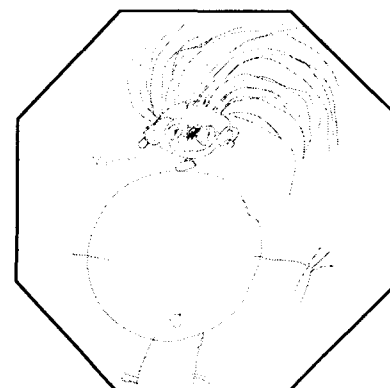
**"I worked as a nanny for two years in White Rock in a big house with 6 bathrooms. They only paid me \$5 /hour. Even though I work overtime, they still paid me \$5 / hour."**

**Tina:** *"I worked as a nanny for two years in White Rock in a big house with 6 bathrooms. They only paid me \$5 /hour. Even though I work overtime, they still paid me \$5 / hour. Because I don't know about that, I say yes. Everything is yes. Every time they ask, I say, "Yes, ok, and fine." Almost every day they go to their friends' or watch movie outside, and ask me to watch their kids while they are sleeping. They say, "We'll be back at nine, and then till nine, eleven, and mid-night I am still waiting." They call, "We're gonna be late." I want to go to my room, but one of their kids was getting up in the middle of night and sleep-walking. I had to watch that kid."*

Despite having to pay for room and board out of their meager salary, many employers do not provide a private room and bathroom and restrict the amount and type of food domestic workers can eat.

Ironically, childcare workers of all discussed categories – because of their low rates of pay – often have a hard time affording quality childcare for their own children. For domestic workers the situation is even more difficult. While they provide childcare for Canadians, domestic workers under the LCP are not allowed to bring their children with them. Even after completing the

In January 2005, funding for childcare for those attending provincial government ESL classes was cut to 25% of earlier rates.



LCP, domestic workers remain trapped in low wage work. This prompts many domestic workers and former domestic workers who have children of their own to leave them in the Philippines to be raised by extended family. Despite the fact that they are paying for their child's childcare costs, they are not able to avail of the childcare subsidy or CCTB.

Even more extreme are cases where domestic workers who have gotten pregnant while under the LCP are fired or threatened with deportation. One domestic worker in Montreal was taken by her employer to the hospital. She believed she was there for a check up, but her employer had scheduled her for an abortion – without her knowledge or consent. (NAPWC forum, February 2005)

### Continued economic marginalization

Childcare policy not only stalls women's economic development, but continues the marginalization of future generations in working class families.

**Darlene:** *"The childcare situation has meant limited opportunities for myself and my children. I didn't have quality time for my children. They lacked elementary school preparedness and suffered poor grades."*

Because quality childcare is unaffordable and women are able to save for their children's future education only under extreme duress, working class children also face a more difficult struggle to access education and better paying jobs.

**Donna:** *"Schools [in the eastside] are basically in crisis. And dealing from crisis to crisis and everything else goes by the wayside. Others are going on ski trips and fancy basketball uniforms, while these kids haven't even eaten and then they wonder why the test scores are different."*

**Schools [in the eastside] are basically in crisis. Others are going on ski trips and fancy basketball uniforms, while these kids haven't even eaten and then they wonder why the test scores are different."**

This in turn impacts mothers as they get older and face the position of being senior citizens with family who can't afford adequate elder care as quality seniors' housing and increasingly privatized medical services are out of reach for many working class families.

### Conclusion

Mothers who participated in this study directly linked their experience of childcare policy to their economic marginalization. Women are burdened with the high cost of childcare and are forced to maintain a low income in order to qualify for subsidy, trapping them in cheap labour positions or under the table jobs. Women remain trapped in part time / flexible work, including work that can be done at home. Other mothers need income assistance in order to their support child bearing and rearing, where they are classified as dependent and trapped in desperate poverty. None of these options are adequate to meet the basic needs of women and their children. Childcare workers — particularly domestic workers — make extremely exploitative wages, are often compelled to do unpaid overtime, and have few benefits. Overall, childcare policy cements women's position as a pool of cheap labour. This affects their day-to-day quality of life and long-term economic stability.



## ii) Education and development

While there is a substantial body of literature discussing the positive impact of quality childcare on children, there is little discussion of how childcare policy affects women's education and development. Women's experiences show that the current childcare program in Canada directly contributes to women's lack of access to formal education and often to their stalled development.

### Difficulties accessing formal education

Women who participated in this project shared that childcare has a major impact on their access to formal education, starting with difficulties paying for childcare and the exorbitant cost of education but extending far beyond.

*Donna: "I went to childcare center [at my post secondary institution] and it cost about \$700 / month more than my subsidy for the two when they were small. So now I'll be paying that off for the rest of my life cause I was on student loans."*

Childcare is essential for mothers to be able to attend classes, ESL programs, and /or practicums / work placements. Although in-class hours may be limited to short time periods (for example, four hours per day), the actual time required of a student is much greater. It includes transportation to and from school, research time at the library, studying time, etc. Therefore, without childcare for a substantial portion of the day, mothers are stretched to attend educational programs.

*Donna: "When I was in grad school, all the classes were night classes so that people can work during the day. "When I complained that daycare on campus wasn't open for night classes, they said it had never come up... But it is so impossible for women with young children to grad school because childcare is so expensive."*

As part of the massive provincial budget cuts, in January 2005, funding for childcare for those attending provincial government ESL classes was cut to 25% of earlier rates. This has virtually left women unable to access ESL classes, which severely limits their ability to attend further educational programs and their ability to find decent work.

*Carrie: "ESL schools have had to choose which group of students they're going to offer courses to. Basically they are excluding one group of students over another. And it is women who are being excluded."*

**"When I complained that daycare on campus wasn't open for night classes, they said it had never come up... But it is so impossible [for mothers to study] because childcare is so expensive."**

In order to avoid the question of childcare, other mothers waited until their children were older to attend school. They faced the challenges of having been out of the educational system for a long time. When finished attending school, these mothers are older workers who have a harder time getting hired.

*Rita: "It took me years to be able to go back to school because I could only go while my child was also in school."*

For many mothers, the thought of being left with tens of thousands of dollars of student loans after finishing a degree was a barrier to even beginning post secondary education.

*Sarah: "[If my ex didn't pay his child support, which is my daycare subsidy] Probably I would have to quit school and go back to work. I wouldn't have any choice and then*

*a lot of my – a good portion of my income – cause I was a secretary before I went to school – would be spent on care.”*

Finding childcare spaces in time to enter an educational program can also be a challenge. This can be a major added stress to an already difficult application procedure and sometimes too great a barrier for mothers hoping to go to school.

**Darlene:** *“When I was first accepted into school finding daycare and subsidy was not only a joke, but it was a nightmare. I ended up in tears several times, no one would help me and then finally social services got involved and I got the top up. Ugh!”*

### Challenges of being a student

Mothers who do manage to attend educational programs face numerous challenges in addition to the struggles faced by students in general. They find themselves always juggling between concern over their child(ren) and their own school.

**Renee:** *“It’s hard to focus on my school. Sometimes I am unconcerned with school because I worry about my daughter suffering.”*

**Sylvia:** *“I have little time to study. I have little money for extras like new books. My clothes look like crap and I am exhausted in class.”*

**“I have little time to study. I have little money for extras like new books. My clothes look like crap and I am exhausted in class.”**

Many women were forced to miss exams, deadlines, or classes because of a sick child, a reality that was not appreciated by instructors or administrators.

**Sylvia:** *“Weeknights while my partner is at work, I watch the kids. This is very hard, as I am also in full-time school in a very demanding program, and find it very hard to get all of my work done after the kids are in bed; especially if I have to be up at 6:00 am. I need nighttime care but we can’t afford to pay more.”*

**Darlene:** *“When I took this course at [a post secondary institution] it was to teach people on welfare how to budget. This one lady stood up in the class and said, “I would advise you right now to find someone to look after your child if he’s sick because you have to show up here.” I was like who wants to look after my child if he’s sick? I don’t! You can’t take him to another mother. There’s nobody I know that at the drop of a hat is going to take my sick child cause everybody is out working.”*

Others were left in difficult positions because they were unable to access required evening classes since their childcare was only available in the day.

**Gina:** *“I had night classes, so I had to find people to baby-sit nights for me, which fortunately I knew about asking for that additional funding. But they were so strict. They told me, we need a letter from your professor, schedules. If class was four hours, they wouldn’t pay if I needed someone to watch the kids one hour on each end of the class. I’m like, it’s really six hours cause I have to drive there.”*

**Sarah:** *“I had a friend who needed to go to an evening class to get a degree. We had to organize a pool of rotating daycare for her in the women’s studies department so*

Donna is the mother of four children: 8, 6, and 1 year old. Donna worked in a restaurant doing 12-hour shifts with no overtime pay, for an employer who would only hire single mothers or women coming off welfare because he knew they had no options. He threatened to call welfare and report the women if they quit, so they wouldn’t be able to get back on to welfare. The father of Donna’s older children was extremely abusive. She left him when they were still very young. Because of the traumatic experience of violence, it was very important to Donna to put her children into high quality childcare. She put them into daycare at the university she started to attend. Because Donna was forced to take the maximum amount of student loans before qualifying for a childcare subsidy, she is now over \$60,000 in debt. In order to cover her childcare costs, Donna worked at three jobs, attended university, and kept her children in childcare only on a part time basis. Donna and her children are now living with her new partner. She is wondering what will happen with her 1 year old as there are no infant / toddler childcare spaces available in her neighborhood.



that she could get this course. Otherwise she would have had to add a year to her degree to wait until it was offered during the day."

Some mothers tried to use only part time daycare. Some organized their school schedules based more on childcare needs than their educational program.

**Donna:** "What I ended up doing, too, is trying to get away with less days of daycare. To have two little kids and go to school and work and then work through the night so that you're not paying for childcare and then you are just a total wreck. You can only sustain that for so long."

Others only studied part time. This makes the educational process much longer.

**Jeanine:** "I can only take 1 course part time so I can pick up my daughter 2 days a week at 4:00 pm."

However, there are certain stipulations for how much school a woman must attend before qualifying for a childcare subsidy, regardless of the requirements of her educational program or living situation.

**Sylvia:** "Another thing that really irks me is having to have a certain amount of credits to get subsidy. So my practicum this summer is nine credits and you need to have ten credits to get subsidy. So I'm a credit short, so I have to take another class. Even though I don't need another class. Then I have to pay \$300 and have to buy books and I have to go to class. It's ridiculous. It's really not set up to help people."

## Other impacts on women's development

Lack of access to a quality childcare programs also has more general impacts on the development of working class women.

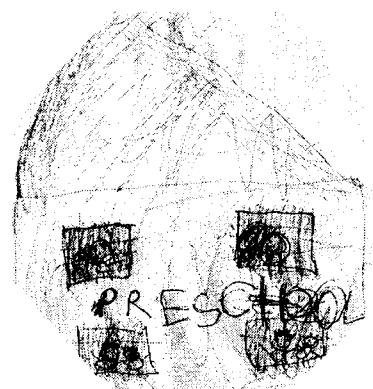
**I'm still a little bit lost at who I am. It can get hard when you are constantly stimulating a child. You're waiting for the stimulation back.**

**Genevieve:** "You are trying to advance yourself. Yet you're trying to be the perfect mother to these kids. You're trying to be better in life so that you have something that you can say, well I'm this as a woman. You want to be someone and do something. That's the problem."

One of the common themes emerging in this study was the isolation women face when they do not have childcare. Single mothers, especially, felt stuck at home, extremely tired due to lack of sleep because of the requirements of child rearing. This limits their time and energy to interact with other adults or even read / learn on their own. In fact, many women felt lack of childcare effectively stalled their development.

**Gloria:** "I'm still anxious to do other things. I'm still a little bit lost at who I am. Maybe it is because you spend a lot of time with the child instead of adults so you end up pondering these questions when you're alone. It can get hard when you are constantly stimulating a child. You're waiting for the stimulation back so maybe I need to find more stimulation back. I think that's why I try to get involved in different community groups so that I know that there are other people that are facing the same issues as I am."

**Bonnie:** "I do not have any personal time since I cannot afford to do anything else but



*what can be fitted in the hours I get childcare."*

They spoke of the difference even one day of childcare could make in their own development.

**Cindy:** *"Everything is much easier when you sleep. Also the breaks. When Taylor's dad started taking Taylor on Sundays all day, I had one daytime off. Now it's 24 hours. I was able to go back to school and start the path to become a Certified Management Accountant. Once I'm done that, I'm going to be able to make way better money and make way better choices in my life. All it took was 8 hours a week. I just needed 8 hours so that I could vacuum without a child sitting on the vacuum cleaner. Go out for breakfast with a friend."*

The lack of childcare continues to affect women's ability to further develop in their chosen fields.

**Alexis:** *"Before I was more ... I wanted to write my herbal exam. But I can't do that now cause I am with her all the time and I don't have time to study. Sometimes I see my friends who graduated with me and they have their clients and they are moving ahead in a different part of their life and sometimes I look at that and I would also like to do that. "*

**"Sometimes I see my friends who graduated with me and they have their client and they are moving ahead in a different part of their life and sometimes I look at that and I would also like to do that."**

Andrea is the mother of a 2 1/2 year old. She lives with her husband and his extended family. Andrea works in a factory doing inventory: auditing and shelving parts. She took a one year maternity leave on EI and used credit to pay for whatever food, clothing or diapers were not covered by her EI. Once she went back to work, Andrea had to take a night shift so that she could look after her son during the day. When she leaves for work, her mother-in-law or brother take care of her son until her husband gets home. Andrea does not always like how they take care of her son, but she doesn't want to say anything to jeopardize her childcare. Andrea knows that everyone in the family is struggling with money, but she can't afford to give them any money for childcare. She is wondering what she will do in the next year when her mother-in-law can no longer take care of her son.

Other mothers spoke about the positive impact quality childcare programs had not only on their children, but on their own development. Many childcare programs provide both informal and formal education about child development and parenting strategies. Those mothers who are unable to access quality childcare under current policy miss out on this opportunity.

They also find themselves in a position of being required to meet all of their child's educational needs. Some women found this very stressful as they felt that they didn't have the training or skills to provide their child with comprehensive education. Other mothers explained that they had made the choice to provide their child's education because of the lack of quality childcare. However, their own stress level increased due to being solely responsible for all aspects of their child's development, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with little opportunity to pursue other aspects of their own development.

### **Stalled development of childcare workers**

Some childcare workers shared that they were employed as childcare workers without basic education in Early Childhood Care and Education Programs. They did not feel prepared to handle the level of responsibility and educational programming required of them in childcare centres. They said there was little support for development within the field.

**Georgia:** *"It was also stressful. I mean I had no training for handling certain situations, yet I was totally responsible. We had a child with Down's Syndrome who only spoke sign language. Not one of us could speak sign or frankly had the least idea about working with him. I really feel bad looking back. The situation that drove me to quit was when I was told that the child who was coming to before school care (an 11 year old who was as big as me) had molested children in 6 previous centres that he had been at. But his mother did not believe it and so he was getting basically no support / counseling. I was there alone with him and a few other children every morning. I just*

*thought there is no way I can turn my back, I don't know how to support him, and I couldn't take that level of responsibility."*

Childcare workers often didn't have time and / or opportunity to use the education and training they received in the Early Childhood Care and Education program. Due to the intense pressures of having many children to work with at one time, working with a wide variety of families, and dealing with stressful budget cuts, childcare workers often find that they are limited in being able to use their education to develop programming and curriculum. Those who do curriculum development often complete it during unpaid overtime.

**Tammy:** *"We don't have enough programming time. This puts a lot of stress on existing time frames. Often we compromise because of lack of time and resources."*

Instead of developing themselves as teachers, observers, and researchers, childcare workers become mired in the administrative and day-to-day operations - just to keep centers afloat. This stalls the overall development of childcare workers.

**Maryanne:** *"Working in childcare is a really exhausting thing. I would come home from work and sleep. And I thought, "Oh yeah when I'm working even 20 hours a week at childcare I'll still be able to do some reading and get some writing done and whatever. But, I was exhausted. My brain couldn't function and do those sorts of things. Of course, it's the added stress of finances [of the childcare center]."*

Due to the level of extreme isolation and exploitation and exploitation, domestic workers experience what the Philippine Women Centre refers to as "stalled development and the destructive and violent phenomenon of de-skilling." (PWC, 1997) Due to the nature of their work, domestic workers are denied access to development in the area of their education and professional experience, which includes teaching.

**"Working in childcare is a really exhausting thing. I thought, I'll still be able to do some reading and get some writing done. But, I was exhausted. My brain couldn't function and do those sorts of things."**

Furthermore, LCP regulations bar domestic workers from taking academic courses. In order to study, domestic workers must apply for a student visa; however, this jeopardizes their status as a temporary worker.

Ironically, despite providing childcare for years under the LCP, there are few former domestic workers who are providing childcare in regulated centres in Canada. Even their childcare work experience in Canada is denied and their development is further stalled after completing the LCP.

## Conclusion

Current childcare policy severely limits women's access to both formal and informal education. Those women who do manage to access formal education are burdened with massive debt, which can take decades to repay.

Because childcare is considered an individual, rather than social, responsibility women remain isolated in the home and laden with the primary responsibility of providing care and education for their child. Women need childcare to be able to participate in both the so-called "private" and "public" spheres. While their stories made it clear that they find spending time with their child is fulfilling and imperative, women concluded that being isolated at home forcibly stalls their comprehensive development.

Childcare workers – particularly domestic workers – face exploitative working conditions that hardly provide opportunities for use of their education and training or for their further development. In fact, the working conditions caused by childcare policy forcibly de-skill these workers.

### iii) Social relations

Current childcare policy greatly affects women's relations with their family, friends, communities, as well as the Canadian State.

#### Isolation

Because of the lack of affordable and accessible care, many women spoke about being trapped and isolated from others in society.

*Karen, a childcare worker, explains: "We had parents coming through the door that weren't qualifying for anything and just turning around and walking away, never to be seen again. Right back into isolation. It's me and I don't qualify, I don't know why. And feeling just really shitty about it."*

**"We had parents coming through the door that weren't qualifying for anything and just turning around and walking away, never to be seen again. Right back into isolation."**

This isolation leaves women without adult support and access to other community support and resources. Isolation can also lead to depression and drug / alcohol abuse. Isolation leaves mothers more vulnerable to violence from partners as they have less access to support and few people will even know what is happening within the confines of the home.

*Karen: "Abuse happens when you isolate. Drug and alcohol abuse either by themselves or by their partners. Physical abuse because they're isolated. Or it's, 'I can't feed my kids and I feel bad and I'm scared they're going to take my kids away,' or 'We just won't have anything to eat today.' Access to other parents so you can feel good about your parenting skills or find out about parenting. But I know that if you take your child to preschool or daycare and you meet somebody or you find somebody you can connect with, it's so much more than just daycare."*

#### Childcare policy creates divisions

The lack of a universal childcare system creates divisions among different marginalized social groups.

*Georgia: "It is like a divide and conquer kind of thing. At the preschool, moms start resenting other moms who bring their kids in sick. When one mom brings her kids in sick and another kid gets sick, they start blaming her. "That mom made my kid sick." But the first mom had no option. She had nowhere else for her kid to be. The other mom is stressed out cause her kid is sick and what is she going to do... But it ends up with everyone blaming each other. As childcare workers, we say if the kid is sick leave them at home so everyone else doesn't get sick. But then for the moms, how do you leave your kid at home? They get frustrated with us. But, there's no program that can really support moms with sick kids. So we blame each other: other moms and the childcare workers instead of blaming the problem on the whole childcare system."*

The high costs of childcare and individualizing of the childcare issue push women into dependence on extended family and friends for childcare support.

**Ella:** *"But it is really so bad what they say right now about the culture of responsibility. It is so right wing. They are just telling women to go back to the family. When it is already a capitalist country where you are supposed to have no more family unit. And now they are telling us... build a strong family."*

Because of the lack of universal childcare, many families sponsor grandparents to come to Canada for the primary purpose of providing childcare.

**Domenika:** *"What my parents did – what a lot of Filipino families did – is they will sponsor their parents and grandparents. That's what my mom did. It was the childcare option. The funny thing is that a lot of my friends here we have the same experience, my grandparents raised us. But some of our grandparents were just so old. Like it should be us taking care of them but we're like 10, so what are we supposed to do. Now my cousin who got married in Montreal, his wife is doing that too. She's sponsoring her parents to come because she just had a baby but it is going to take a year. But she doesn't know what to do. She herself was a former domestic worker and she can't get back to the nursing profession and my cousin is working like two full jobs. So they said the only way they can look after the child is to have the grandparents here. They can't afford childcare."*

According to a study with seasonal agricultural workers in BC, many families "admit to forcing children on relatives, particularly elder relatives." Grandparents often feel that they have no choice but to do childcare, as well as cooking and cleaning for their children and grandchildren. (Abbotsford Community Services, 2000, 36)

In order to do childcare, other members of the family often have to compromise their own work or education. This in turns affects the overall economic status of the family.

**"It is like a divide and conquer kind of thing. We blame each other: other moms and the childcare workers instead of blaming the problem on the whole childcare system."**

**Andrea:** *"This last summer I did morning shifts but my brother was there to help me cause it was summer and he had no school. He dropped out. He helped me watch my son while I did the morning shifts for pretty much the whole summer. I went back to night shifts with a different position. [My family helps with childcare and] I'll probably treat them out for something."*

Women felt that their own relationship with friends or family members providing childcare was also affected.

**Gina:** *"I was getting subsidy but it was so minimal. But [my babysitter] didn't ask for extra money from me, but it actually wore on our friendship. We had been friends, but it's a lot of work to expect... and I needed the hours cause I was trying to keep up my high grades so I could get scholarships."*

Women shared that if they don't like how their child is being taken care of by a family member, they can't say anything for fear of losing their voluntary childcare. This can cause serious family disruptions or tensions.

**Andrea:** *"With my family, I can just tell them whatever [if I don't like something], but my husband family... like he'll kind of tell them but they won't take it I guess ... they won't take it to change their actions. Just as input. I don't know. With my family it is ok for me to voice my opinion. It's my family. With his I find it a bit different. He doesn't want to say anything. We're scared of losing childcare too. We don't want to jeopardize anything."*

For some women, reliance on extended family is not an option.

**Gina:** *"I'm a former foster kid too. At one point they asked me, 'Well couldn't your mother look after your kids?' I was like, 'You took me away from them, you think I'm going to leave my kids with them?' Not to mention that they're only in their fifties, they're still working full time. If they had gone to therapy or something. But I was just like, 'What are you thinking?'"*

**Genevieve:** *"Most people don't have any family support or we're really far from there. My parents are not even fifty yet and they're in Quebec. My mom is trying to work anyways so even if she was there she can't stay with Juliet all day long."*

These women have fewer choices for "making do" and will be forced into the most extreme options, including leaving young children at home alone. This impacts mother's relationships with their children.

**"I think that was probably the lowest point of my life trying to get daycare and to just come to the point where I didn't care about anything. It was absolutely crazy making."**

**Darlene:** *"I was thinking that the three of them have to hop a bus and come back home. I could get my 14 year old daughter to run back from high school and hope that they just stay in the backyard. But, it's not her job to look after her siblings. I think that was probably the lowest point of my life trying to get daycare and to just come to the point where I didn't care about anything. It was absolutely crazy making."*

Family separation caused by childcare policy has a devastating affect on families. Nowhere is it more pronounced than for domestic under LCP, some of whom are separated from their children for over a decade. of workers under the LCP from their children has a devastating impact on families. Reunification is extremely difficult both on mothers and their children.

**Domenika:** *"My mom had no childcare here in Canada so she sent me to live with my lola back in the Philippines. But after a year she just couldn't take being separated from me, so she brought me back here. But when she picked me up the airport I didn't know who she was. I wouldn't even hug her."*

There are also tensions between mothers and childcare workers. Workers are dependent on mothers as their "employer."

**Georgia:** *"The centre operates on the parents registration fee and that's how the childcare workers get paid. So it is this big conflict cause the parents don't want to pay more cause they can't afford it, but if they don't pay more then the workers don't get paid more and the cost of living goes up but your wages don't go up. Instead of the program being supported by the government, being accessible to all families, it is thing where there is the childcare workers against the parents. And it is this big conflict."*



In essence, the privatized child care model creates a system where marginalized women are forced to pay low wages to other marginalized women in an effort to access child care in order to survive financially, thus pitting mothers against child care workers.

**Cindy:** *"So she gets paid about \$35 / day. Which is appalling. Absolutely. She doesn't mind. She knew that's what she was getting into. But man, I'll tell you. I just feel guilty sometimes about how much I pay. I'm just so lucky that I found her."*

In turn, concern over losing their jobs or facing a decrease in wages, due to lack of funds in child-care budgets, pits childcare workers against mothers to extreme levels:

**Darlene:** *"The first daycare my son went to was on the west side. It was horrendous in that they wouldn't even say hello when my son and another boy entered because the mothers of these children required subsidy. It was nuts. They had their own poor bashing gang there. If you had money, you got respect. Later, I was told by a daycare that they don't want people like me who require subsidy. That was after I spent a week one the phone trying to find a spot."*

Centre-based childcare workers are easily pitted against domestic workers where they must compete to provide low paying childcare. This can be seen through attempts to professionalize Early Childhood Education as a means of excluding other forms of childcare work.

**"I often hear: 'If you couldn't afford childcare, you shouldn't have had kids in the first place.' Are you saying only rich people should have kids cause only rich people can afford quality childcare?"**

The current childcare system also creates divisions between mothers and social workers. Mothers must deal with social workers / Financial Aid Workers for childcare subsidies, welfare, and other services and supports. Many women found that their worker tried to support them, but was trapped within the restrictions of inadequate childcare policy.

**Lina:** *"I found that my worker was nice... it was what she had to deal with. It was the system right. She tried to accommodate that as much ... to give me [subsidy] until he was 13. She stretched as much as she could, which was really cool. It was just that she was the bearer of bad news."*

A few women had very negative experiences with social workers. They felt the worker made no effort to support them, acutely harassed them or discriminated against them.

**Gina:** *"I don't have a maintenance order because our safety depends on not having one. Every time I have to talk to somebody new [in the ministry], they always bring it up. But then I provide a letter from numerous people in the medical staff at BC Women's. Plus, the fact that I had to move from [a small town] for our safety. They totally backed off. I say, 'If you just go back you have all the paperwork.' But I am very articulate and very demanding."*

In terms of relations within communities, women shared stories of facing blame and discrimination if they expressed or exposed their difficulties with childcare. This discrimination was often based on the idea that women are the primary care givers and childcare is the individual responsibility of the family. However, this is a false division as all members of working class families would benefit from a universal childcare system.

**Kelly:** "I often hear: "Well you should have thought of that before hand. If you couldn't afford childcare, you shouldn't have had kids in the first place.' For a long time that kind of stumped me. Then, I realized: are you saying only rich people should have kids cause only rich people can afford quality childcare? Is that the underlying premise here?"

**Gina:** "Childcare has become an issue that I will not be silent on anymore about. I got really bad backlash in [a small town] 'cause I was in the paper because I protested against the cost of childcare and how certain people get paid a certain amount to be childcare workers and others are making \$2-3 / hour to watch our kids in their homes and they're trying to raise their own families. And I was trying to advocate for universal childcare and then I got hate mail saying things like "People like you don't deserve to have childcare. You should have kept your legs closed." Terrible mail was sent into the newspaper about me. People who didn't even know me said, 'How dare you ask for people to pay your childcare.' Stuff like that. That is a big reason that I left [that small town]."

### Social control and criminalizing women

In their relationship with the Canadian State, women felt that childcare policy was often used as a form of social control. For example, women are required to give their bank statements to social workers in order to qualify for a subsidy.

**"I don't think they have a right to see where I shop, how I pay my bills, and when I pay my bills. It's not their business. But, the only way I got subsidy was to reveal all of my banking stuff."**

**Gina:** "I don't think they have a right to see where I shop, how I pay my bills, and when I pay my bills. Whether I go to the liquor store. Whether I go to Womyns' Ware, or whether I go out for dinner or not. It's not their business. Their business is you made this much money. Childcare is this much. But, the only way I got subsidy was to reveal all of my banking stuff."

Women also identified EI maternity benefits as a form of social control and unstated family planning policy. Iyer contends that the policy's lack of universality and equality reflects ideological assumptions about who should be validated as mothers and who should be punished for motherhood.(1997) While maternity benefits are provided to well paid, consistently employed women as a right, women who need income assistance to support child rearing and women employed in part time or casual sectors are not afforded these same rights.

**Gloria:** "I'm on EI for a year. And it just ticks me off – the more I think about it. I've been working since I was 16 years old: part time, full time, working while I was going to school. But I've been working and paying into this system. I think first of all that it is unbelievable that you can have been working all these years and they only give you 55% of the wage that you make. So in my field, since you're not getting paid that much in the first place, it's almost a slap in the face. The other things is that I've been thinking if I have another child, I need to work a certain amount of hours: 600 hours or around 6 months full time. Now for me to go back full time is just not an option because of childcare. And for me to work that many hours, it's going to take me – since I'm only working two days a week – it's going to take me a long time. So they are basically telling me when I can have my next child if I want to get paid for it. No matter how many years you work – all that time – cause it's not right before you have the second child, it's null and void. It's like it means nothing to them."



In order to access childcare subsidy, women's relationships are also put under a magnifying glass:

**Donna:** "It's a policing of women issue. Like when Matthew and Emma were 2 and 4, I had been getting a subsidy for four years during my undergrad and I had to take a means test same as if you are on income assistance. It was a male daycare worker and he said, 'I find it hard to believe that you haven't found somebody else to live with yet ,after all these years.' You're not qualified as soon as you are living with someone else, even if its not their kids."

Because of the inadequacies of the childcare subsidy system, many women were unable to survive on their income with the subsidy they received. This puts mothers in a difficult position. Either they try to survive on a desperately low income or they have to lie in order to qualify for a higher subsidy. Women felt they were forced to lie in order to put food on the table. In essence, women are criminalized for their survival strategies:

**Sylvia:** "We still get full subsidy, but I stretch the truth on my income."

**Donna:** "So then you're criminalized, so if something goes wrong you don't go in there and say why are you treating me this way because they may find out those little white lies. They just want to control you."

Mothers also worry that their children will be apprehended by the State.

**Lily:** "Cause I've done all that for nine years. I should get a medal for mother's day. cause my son was not feeling good. Drugs. He's back in high school."

**Donna:** "But they don't see that. It's only when you screw up that they notice mothering."

Apprehension is a particular issue for Indigenous mothers, who explain that apprehension of children is used by the State, as an especially virulent form of social control. Instead of providing needed support to mothers, children are apprehended. Indigenous children make up 40% of children in care.(Morton, 1998, in Kellington, 2001, 27) but Indigenous people make up less than 6% of the population of BC.(LSS, 2002) Apprehension of Indigenous children has been consistently linked to experiences of abuse and family separation caused by the residential school system and structural factors of colonialism including systemic racism, poverty, and displacement.

**"You're criminalized, so if something goes wrong you don't go in there and say why are you treating me this way because they may find out those little white lies. They just want to control you."**



Indigenous children make up 40% of children in care, but Indigenous people make up less than 6% of the population of BC.

**Janice:** "When they took my children the foster parents really worked hard with me to make sure that I got my kids three days a week. She really pushed for me to have extra stuff. But when the kids got home [from foster care] it was different. They didn't get what they got at the foster home. Like I couldn't afford all those pop tarts and pizza pops and stuff. I don't have a microwave you know. And still to this day I don't have one. But I totally believe that is why a lot of parents lose their children because since my children came home, my daughter hasn't been home. It's been 7 1/2 years and she's been on the street and I tried helping her. My son was totally the opposite. But still I lost my daughter."

Immigrant and migrant women face higher rates of child apprehension and monitoring by the

Darlene is the single mother of three children: 19, 14, and 9. When she moved to Vancouver, she was on income assistance, but quickly got accepted into an educational program. What she expected to be a quick process of getting her children into childcare turned out to be a nightmare. She found out that with the childcare subsidy she would receive, she was expected to pay an extra \$700 / month top up. With no access to childcare and therefore no access to education, Darlene felt there was no way she could ever get off of welfare. After having a complete breakdown, Darlene finally managed to convince the social workers to cover the cost of childcare. When childcare subsidies were cut in 2001, Darlene was back to square one. She could not afford to go back to school. She couldn't afford to pay daycare, and she couldn't risk taking her son out of the spot that he had in the daycare and lose that spot. Now, Darlene is wondering how to pay for daycare she isn't using and how she can ask her 14 year old to take care of her nine year old son after school while she is working.

state due to systemic racism. (Bagon, Serafico, and Tomeldan, 2000, in Kellington, 2001, 24) Ironically, women who come to Canada to look after children under the LCP face apprehension when their own children come to Canada. PWC has found that due to the long separations of families caused by the LCP – often up to 10 years long – there are complex difficulties faced by families in reunification. Personal narratives have shown that these difficulties have lead to apprehensions. (NAPWC forum, February 2005)

**Domenika:** *"A lot of other women are coming in here with children back in the Philippines and so they are separated. One woman was separated from her child for 17 years while she worked here as a domestic worker. So when the children come to Canada, they are teenagers and they are total strangers. No clue who they are. Of course the relationship is gone."*

Research shows that poverty greatly affects how families are able to take care of their children. (Pulkingham and Ternowetsky, 1997; in Kellington, 2001 53) And women are often penalized for the way they take care of their children because of their poverty. Women shared strategies they use to "make do" under existing childcare policy leave them more vulnerable to having their children apprehended.

**Lily:** *"[When I have to go out and I can't get childcare,] I train my kids if anyone calls, "She's sick in bed."*

**Donna:** *"She's in the shower."*

**Sylvia:** *"I went out to do some grocery shopping and I said to Lauren, "Don't answer the phone." Cause she's going to answer the phone and say, "I'm just here by myself." So, I told her just don't answer the phone, I'll be back in 10 minutes. Then I forgot my key, so I'm down here ringing and ringing."*

**Ella:** *"Especially if you live in the suburbs and your neighbours are always looking and we're a woman of colour. I said oh shit..."*

**Sylvia:** *"Especially when all they have to do is pick up the phone and make an anonymous phone call and the ministry has to do an investigation right away."*

**A lot of women are coming with children back in the Philippines. When the children come to Canada, they are teenagers and they are total strangers.**

#### iv) Health and well being

Current childcare policy also affects women's health and well-being. It is clear that women's emotional, mental and physical health all suffer from the lack of quality childcare accessible to them.

#### Stress, anxiety, and humiliation

Overall, women must deal with a great deal of stress and instability in their lives due to childcare policy:

**Gina:** *"It's been really up and down. Constantly they're cutting me off and we go through this process where I have to reveal my whole life to get \$400 from them to get childcare."*

**Brianna:** *"I think that women are affected by the childcare system. Having to scrape by every month is not a good way to live and adds stress to life."*

Women described the incredible workload and the stress of caring for their child(ren) for 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**Gloria:** *"I have a whole new appreciation for every mom in the world. Because it is a tough job and I never knew how tough it is. 24 hours. It is tougher than any job that any body in the world can do. Their happiness means more than your own. So it's tough. Everybody makes it look easy. Or else they lie. I tell the truth – it's hard. It's hard work. And it's 24-7 and it takes 150% of your energy."*

Childcare is necessary, even for those women who have made the choice to educate their child at home.

**Paula:** *"I spent so much concentrated time with her that when there was the odd time when she had daycare it was a big relief. She was in some daycare situations – subsidized – when I was on welfare. At times. So I could have some time off as a single mom."*

Organizing childcare can also be stressful:

**Geraldine:** *"What you end up doing – like I know women who live in rural BC – they end up dropping their kids off at friends houses. Juggling, juggling, juggling constantly, and it's a nightmare for them. And they have to have a car so that you can get around so you can get your kid to this place."*

**Sylvia:** *"Because there is no childcare available on short notice, you need to schedule your emergency two weeks in advance!"*

Women have a great deal of anxiety about how to pay for childcare, particularly as subsidies have to be renewed every 3-4 months.

**Lina:** *"If you're together and you make a certain amount which is not a lot – like we made enough that they didn't have to subsidize us. Which wasn't a hell of a lot. I mean I think we got a small subsidy a couple of times, but that was it. And I feel fortunate because I have a partner. If you're a single person, then... I mean I've gone in that route too and I'm thinking it's just insane. The amount of pressure they put on women, it is just nuts. It is really stressful. It's got to change! It is really good that we are getting women's input. Cause obviously these structures aren't created by women."*

**"I think that women are affected by the childcare system. Having to scrape by every month is not a good way to live and adds stress to life."**

Women who went through the process of applying for subsidy found it both humiliating and frustrating.

**Bonnie:** *"It is kind of humiliating to depend on subsidy and fill in all the documentation required every time for it."*

New requirements demand that women must show their bank statements to the social worker, which is invasive and violates women's privacy rights. Women felt a great deal of anger at being judged for where and what they spent their negligible income on.

**Lina:** *"They always make you feel like you're doing something wrong. They put you under the microscope. They make you ill at ease like you are doing something wrong."*

Almost one-third of the 1,844 childcare centres and one-half of the 2,273 family child care centres that operated in BC 1997 closed by 2001.



Many of the mothers feel anxious about leaving their children in childcare situations where they worry about the quality of care and possible abuse of their children.

**Sylvia:** "Once [to save money on childcare] my daughter was once in a 'family' day-care in someone's house, but it was pretty bad. The only way the woman got a break was to plunk the kids down in front of the TV. I felt pretty awful – when her mind is the most malleable and her learning curve the steepest, she was watching teletubbies on TV in someone's basement with a bunch of babies. That only lasted 4 months then I couldn't hack it and pulled her out without even having another spot."

This is tied to feelings of guilt for leaving children in low quality care. But women explained that they had no choice: they couldn't afford better care and they need to work in order to survive.

**Amanda:** "My daughter was abused at a private care. A friend of a friend who was home and out of work because of maternity reasons, but their partner who was home and in the same environment had allegedly abused my daughter. I couldn't prove it. I took her to the police to report it. She was three years old. She wouldn't even admit that this person cared for her. So that person didn't get charged. Nothing came of it. I stopped working after that. I just went through a horrible depression and blamed myself. I lost work over that. My daughter doesn't remember that. That was such a long time ago. She's had counseling and I've had counseling. That was the worst experience. Now my kids are basically watched by family members only and group day-cares. But group daycares are so expensive and there's not enough subsidy for single mom."

**"They always make you feel like you're doing something wrong. They put you under the microscope. They make you ill at ease like you are doing something wrong."**

The feelings of guilt are connected to white, middle class, neo-conservative values of motherhood which are being pushed within the policy debate surrounding childcare. According to Teghtsoonian, participants in policy debates spoke about "choice" for women in terms of childcare; however, "they were implicitly excluding from this option mothers who are poor or single or women of color." (Teghtsoonian 1996)

**Tammy:** "Well if you have money it is [motherhood] valued. The whole middle class concept of mother child bonding stuff is all for the middle class and upper class people with no clue about working moms."

Women uncovered conflicts between what is publicly lauded as women's natural role of motherhood versus working class women's reality of "making do" in a variety of ways negatively impacts how women see themselves.

**Gloria:** "To know that you are not alone. And that you're not crazy for thinking this way. That you're not a bad mom if you think like this. Cause that's societies pressure. How could you say this? And oh my gosh this is tough. And I didn't really like him today. That is society saying that you are not being a very good mom. But deep down inside you know that you are. Or that you are doing the best that you can."

Because of the stress, some women ended up being driven to the point of breakdown.

**Gina:** "In February, almost two years ago, they sent me a letter just ten days before



*the end of the month saying you are no longer getting the surcharge [disability benefits for retraining which cover the entire cost of childcare]. February – I'm writing midterms. I have one and a half semesters to go before I graduate from my undergrad. 10 days to figure out what I'm going to do. There wasn't even a phone number on the form. It just said, you will no longer receive the surcharge. So I had to hunt around to try and find it.. I spent ten days... I had a nervous breakdown literally. I ended up down in the clinic downstairs. I thought about killing myself. I thought about giving my children up. I thought if I have to quit school, I have this debt. I haven't finished my degree. I can't see my way out."*

Others found that the only way to qualify for full coverage of desperately needed subsidy was to declare that they were at the point of breakdown and that their children were at risk.

**Sarah:** *"I have a friend who right in the middle of her school year lost 70% of her subsidy and the only way she could get some of it back was to go and argue that she is a bad mother. She needs daycare because otherwise she'll beat her kids up."*

A risk assessment is completed by a social worker who declares that the mother is unable to care for her child competently without support. In this case, the childcare is fully covered.

**Darlene:** *"I had a week to get my children into daycare. I spent the entire week on the phone, mostly in tears. I don't think I ate. I don't think my kids ate. I was just trying to find somehow some money even if I was borrowing, anything, because my FAW wasn't ... I had no extra money. So it wasn't until Thursday afternoon when I just called up and said, "Come and get my kids. You win. You got them. You broke me down. I can't get back to school. I can't get off welfare. I can't do anything." Because what am I supposed to do? I can't come up with an extra \$700 I month to put my kids into daycare. So finally they put through to the social worker and the social worker has to come to your home to see if you're fit. 'Cause I had a fit on the phone. So then I finally did get the top up. But it was only after pure desperation. And I had never actually thought about giving my kids up until I finally just thought I can't be the mother that I need to be when I am stuck on welfare all of the time with no money and no way out."*

However, the impact of having a risk assessment completed is quite severe. Women felt that having to declare that something was wrong with them was humiliating and overwhelming.

**"Well if you have money it is [motherhood] valued. The whole middle class concept of mother child bonding stuff is all for the middle class and upper class people with no clue about working moms."**

**Gina:** *"[When they came in to do the risk assessment] my kids are of course going crazy cause they can feel that I am stressed out. I lived in this tiny, tiny place. My boys and I shared one bedroom and I had a roommate and she had the other bedroom. And I was just like I am barely pulling by and here you are visited my home to analyze my parenting. It was a horrible, horrible experience."*

The fact that childcare is only fully covered if a child is "at risk" is based on the idea that in order to qualify for childcare you need to have done something wrong. In this case, childcare is not afforded as a right, but as a substitute for bad parenting. Women agreed with the perception that having a risk assessment makes someone more vulnerable to

having their child apprehended.

**Tammy:** *"You'll get into the funky stuff with the risk assessment and you have a much higher risk of having your child apprehended by the government on tips and hints. It happens in this building. Mothers on welfare who the Ministry comes up and does the risk assessment of the kids because they fear the child's safety is at risk and that can be physical, emotional, whatever level of risk. This is what happened to a woman at [my post secondary institution] who couldn't get a top up while the government will top up if they are at risk. Well if women want to access daycare they just say, "My kids is at risk." But, then you have a much higher chance of having your child apprehended. Then they take your kid and put them in foster care."*

### Barriers to healthy lives

Many of the women felt physically exhausted by the constant juggling of childcare needs, as well as other responsibilities including work and education.

**Alexis:** *"Yesterday when I was visiting my husband [in jail], I slept for like an hour on the grass. I said, "Can you guys go?" I just passed out. I was just really tired. I can't even imagine with two... It will be even worse because they are not going to sleep on the same schedule. So when am I going to get to sleep? I notice with the baby I don't have time to take a shower sometimes. Even to prepare food is really hard when you're by yourself."*

**"If women want to access daycare they just say, "My kid is at risk." But, then you have a much higher chance of having your child apprehended."**

Because of the high cost of childcare, many women "go without." This can mean anything from living in cheaper accommodations (i.e. with extended family) to eating less healthy food or never going out.

**Donna:** *"So basically all of our money was going to tuition and daycare and living. We never ate very well. They had meals at daycare, so I felt like I could do noodles at home for dinner, frozen vegetables. But pretty difficult."*

**Sarah:** *"I live in my parents house and I share a room with my son. When childcare costs go down because my son is getting older, my ex has a right to reduce his child support. It has nothing to do with his ability to pay now or the standard of living my son should have. It has nothing to do with any of that."*

With less healthy food, substandard housing, and no access to increasingly privatized health-care, women and children's health is at risk.

**Lina:** *"[Lack of] childcare is causing a breakdown in a huge way. And not to mention you've got limited money to eat with so then you're forced to give your kids crap. And then now they're privatizing medical. It's like it's this horrible spiral. This just doesn't make any sense. It's crazy. This has severe repercussions on women and their children's emotional and physical health."*

**Sylvia:** *"I do imagine that if we didn't have to pay for childcare, what would I do with our \$225-400 per month? Wow, we could eat out or see a movie or get our teeth cleaned!"*

Women also need childcare in order to access health care for themselves.

**Alexis:** *"I'm with her all the time. 24, 7. So right now it's a struggle to find someone to look after her. One time I had to go see the dentist. I had to make arrangements with my aunt. She came and sat in there with her. It was ok cause she was sleeping so she didn't cry. But like next month I want to get surgery on my leg and the big question is, who is going to look after her?"*

This stress is compounded because when their child is sick, women workers are forced to use their own sick benefits – if they qualify for sick days – or go without pay for the shift. Women students have few options because a sick child is not recognized as a reason to miss class or a deadline.

**Gina:** *"Somehow as women we figure it out if our kid is sick cause we are going to get fired if we don't figure it out. Unless we're lucky enough to have a union job. Even then it is sometimes hard. They go, 'You have already taken two sick days and suddenly you get sick...' Like my kids had chicken pox one after the other. It was like a whole month."*

Finally, childcare centres offer more than just childcare. Women found them to be sources of information about what community resources and health services do exist. For those who cannot send their child to a childcare center, this is another barrier to accessing quality health supports and services.

### **Lack of health, safety and security for childcare workers**

Childcare workers also face a high degree of stress and insecurity. In part, this is due to a constant fear of layoff notices. There is a high rate of closures among childcare centres because of the exorbitant costs to run a centre and the low levels of government support. For example, almost one-third of the 1,844 childcare centres and one-half of the 2,273 family childcare centres that operated in BC 1997 closed by 2001. (Kershaw, 2004, 2)

**"I do imagine that if we didn't have to pay for childcare, what would I do with our \$225-400 per month? Wow, we could eat out or see a movie or get our teeth cleaned!"**

**Tammy:** *"There is a prevailing feeling of insecurity. Job security is not a given. Children are not getting what they need. Women are having to always bear the brunt of legislated poverty."*

Childcare workers also face a degree of stress and guilt because they are not able to offer the quality of care and education that they wish to be able to provide.

**Rosa:** *"Even when I was providing daycare, somewhere in my heart I would often feel with a lot of the kids that they weren't getting the care they needed. But it was hard. I was tired. 5 kids. All day long. Every day. I felt that was stressful living with that interior knowledge. It wasn't perfect."*

It is difficult for childcare workers to provide quality care because of high ratios of staff to children, low budgets for resources, and stress over funding cuts. "Child care programs that are under continued financial stress for their very existence and viability ... provide lower quality child care." (Doherty et al., 2000b)

**Maryanne:** *"I was a disgruntled employee. I wasn't happy anymore. I'm having to have sick days just so that I can cope. I'm wanting to avoid work. And it's a place that I never thought I would be in, especially in childcare. I was happier working in retail than I am in childcare. I think a lot of it was the stresses of this center is possibly closing down. All the stress on the employees to try to get more families to come. It's like your job is on the line, so what are you going to do? We need to get more people to come. I actually brought a little sandwich board that me and my roommates made. It was a lot of stress of this center is going to close down. I was like, you know what, our center is not a healthy place. The staff are exhausted. They're stressed. They're depressed. They're not providing quality childcare. And yet, I'm trying to encourage more families to come here. It was not our fault at all. That's what we were left with."*

In terms of physical health, childcare is a high-risk field. Childcare workers are exposed to numerous colds, flus, and other common childhood diseases. Back strain and knee problems are common due to the amount of lifting and kneeling required on the job. Yet, many childcare workers found it was extremely difficult to take sick time off of work. Some felt guilty about the impact an unknown substitute would have on the children they care for. Others – such as those with their own family childcare centres and workers in smaller centers which do not have extensive substitute lists – found it almost impossible to have their position covered in order to take off sick time.

**"Because it is a small center, being sick is really not an option. Usually if I am sick, I just go into work anyways. If I take the time off, it is really the other worker who pays the price."**

**Georgia:** *"Because it is a small center (with only two staff on at any one time), being sick is really not an option. We don't have a big sub list that we can call. And if we just call in someone that doesn't know the center, it is really hard for them to fit into the program. And it often means more work for us. Usually if I am sick, I just go into work anyways. If I take the time off, it is really the other worker who pays the price. My co-worker got sick the other day and couldn't find a replacement except for another parent. So I had a class of 20 children (13 of whom are boys that are busy and hard to handle even normally) with only one parent to help."*

**Sheila:** *"I felt so guilty when I got the flu and it was the first time I had been sick since I was thirteen and I was 26 and I got the flu. I felt so guilty. I thought I can't call in sick. blech. I have to call in sick. Blech. I just couldn't even use the phone. I just couldn't even stop vomiting. But I felt so awful cause I was thinking it was 7:30 and they're going to leave in half an hour and I didn't get the flu until three in the morning. My feeling was what are they going to do?"*

The exploitative and stressful conditions of the LCP make it a high risk job for physical, emotional, and mental illness.

**Melanie:** *"Some of our women, they're really having a hard time, financially and separation with the family. It's really hard. Some women even think about suicide. There's one woman who cut her wrists cause she can't stand anymore. She worked almost 24 hours on call in her employer's home. If you look at that it is really anti-woman. In my analysis they don't really care about our situation. Cause we can't access anything cause they say we are under working permit."*



Domestic workers under the LCP often have no choice but to work when they are sick as sick leave is not covered under the Employment Standards Act for domestic workers in BC. Furthermore, when women are sick, employers often put pressure on them to work and women comply for fear of being deported. Domestic workers also feel compelled to work even when they are sick in order to comply with the immigration regulations that they complete the LCP requirements within a three-year period. As well, the responsibility for payment of medical insurance premiums is not clear. These fees comprise a substantial amount of the low wages of a domestic worker.

## Conclusion

Overall, the current childcare system negatively effects women's mental, emotional, and physical health. Because of the stress of never knowing if she will be able to afford childcare from one month to the next and all the strategies women use to "make do" with childcare they can afford, working class mothers face a high degree of instability. "Going without" and sacrificing nutrition, decent housing, dental care in order to afford childcare / or just to survive, has a detrimental impact on women's health.

Childcare work means high stress and high risk. Yet, because of domestic worker and childcare policies, these workers are often denied their rights to sick days and other benefits. Overall, childcare affects marginalized and working class women's entire quality of life.

## v) Political Sphere

Childcare policy and its ideological underpinnings affect women's ability to participate and develop in the political sphere.

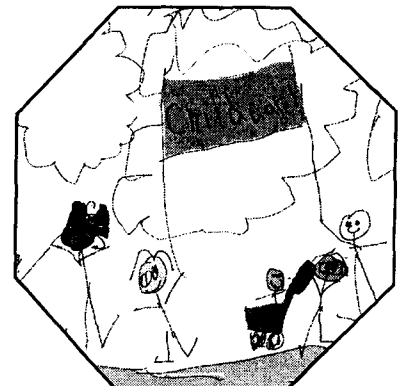
Because childcare is presented ideologically as the responsibility of the family, and primarily the mother, there is a tendency to blame problems related to childcare on the mother. This happens in society in general, among government policy makers (for example with the risk assessment process), and even among mothers.

**"Trying to find childcare and pay for it was hell. It was crazy making. I just felt like I was doing something wrong. But, I didn't know what I was doing wrong."**

**Darlene:** *"Trying to find childcare and pay for it was hell. It was crazy making. I just felt like I was doing something wrong. But, I didn't know what I was doing wrong."*

Often, women feel that they are somehow inadequate or incapable of providing the level of care and education for their child that society demands. This self-blame masks the systemic and policy basis for women's childcare problems. It suits the interests of policy makers and business owners, because it is less likely that women will take collective action for change if they believe their marginalized situation is due to an individual failing.

**Sarah:** *"You can't give a subsidy to parents and say ok, there's national daycare. What have you done to better working conditions, to increase wages, to attract people to becoming ECE workers because they can actually make money doing it. What have you done to address all those huge issues? Nothing. That does nothing to address those issues. And it just shows you that in minds of many policy makers we are free and available any time they need us, any time they want us, we are and they'll just come get us*



*right. Come do the job now. Here it is. That is their opinion that somehow we'll all agree to just go ahead and exist and keep on going with the status quo cause they want us to do that. So again, who's going to benefit if the daycare system comes down like that. It will be the wealthy people, not us. Not people like me. We need to fight for childcare that will work for us!"*

Because childcare also affects women's economic status, some mothers are often so worried about day-to-day survival that it is difficult for them to get involved in any type of political activity.

**Lina:** *"I think we all get affected by the state of the world. I remember I got depressed after I had Jonas cause I was like oh my god, I feel so tied down and we're broke. I wanted to do so many things and I felt like I couldn't. That feeling of just being weighted down by not having any money and always having to worry about it. Just survival was really a depressing state. I'm so glad I'm with Grassroots Women now."*

Other women are concerned about losing what little they have by participating in resistance. For example, women fear that they will lose their childcare subsidy or their job as a childcare worker if they stand up for their rights.

**Gina:** *"The hardest thing that I found too was justifying political acts. Two reasons. I'm a single mom. And if you take your kids to rallies, they could actually take your kids away. First thing. Second thing. Justifying paying for daycare so that I can go to a protest march or do some political act where they ... or even when I've written political pieces, I always know I'm on the edge. Like how far can I push the government before the government does something in retaliation."*

**I got depressed after I had Jonas cause I was like oh my god, I feel so tied down and we're broke. I wanted to do so many things and I felt like I couldn't.**

However, it is clear from this project that concern over participating in political action is not the major impediment to women participating in political activity. During many of the interviews or focus groups, women who began by blaming themselves or seeing their situation as their individual fault were quickly able to connect their experiences to that of other working class women.

**Gina:** *"When I first came down here, I spent two years with my head buried in the sand until I had that breakdown when they cut my surcharge and I said ok, I can't pretend that this is not happening to every woman out there who has children. And I can't hide just because people are going to be mean to me because I am a single mom."*

Thanks to the process of political conscientization that is part of PAR, women were able to see that their day-to-day experiences are common experiences among working class women. Women in the focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires expressed a desire to act politically to end their exploitation and work for universal childcare.

**Sarah:** *"If single mothers don't stand up to that threat [of losing custody] we will always have to deal with it."*

However, the lack of childcare affects the manner in which mothers can participate in political action.

**Geraldine:** *"Getting this group of people together [parents with children with dis-*



abilities] is this nightmare. And it's the same with women and childcare stuff cause everybody's got these kids. What the hell do you do? You can't just mobilize on a dime. You can't get arrested and do this direct action stuff cause you've got these kids and they'll get scooped up by social services. So your strategies and how you can go about it, they're limited."

Often planning meetings are in the evening when mothers are putting children to bed. Many organizations do not include childcare as part of their activities or include children in the planning process. This limits the participation of mothers.

**Sarah:** "I asked, "Why aren't you offering childcare to everybody for any event because this is a road block for single mothers to participate in political activity on this campus? Leadership on this campus." We got that changed. But it is just getting people to think. Do you have a meeting in the pub, guess who can't come? If you have your child with you, you can't come. My program is having a dinner on Sunday afternoon at 5:30. I can't come for that. My son can't come with me because people will be drinking. He'll be the only child there. What's he going to do? So I can't go."

### Asserting rights as childcare workers

Childcare workers face a particular challenge in asserting their collective rights as workers. Childcare workers tend to be isolated with few staff working in each center. Domestic workers typically work on their own in their employer's house. Building collective resistance needs to take different forms than in other sectors where there are many workers who can stand up together for their collective rights for example, health care or the elementary school system.

**Gloria:** "Obviously people who are in this field are underpaid. It's not something that nobody knows. It is something that we all know. I think the parents in the school know. But basically we have to accept it. I've been given the attitude "well at least you're not getting paid minimum wage." "That is the only thing the school can do." It's not every year that you'll find a member of this parent executive that is pushing for your wages. They just deal with it. They follow this pay scale. It's maybe once in a blue moon that you'll find a parent who is saying you know what, you deserve to be paid more. What can we do about it? As the staff member, you're your only advocate. Occasionally there'll be someone else."

**"You can't just mobilize on a dime. You can't get arrested and do this direct action stuff cause you've got these kids and they'll get scooped up by social services."**

Another challenge for childcare workers is their relationship with their "employer". For childcare workers in parent run centers (one of the most common forms of administration in the non-profit sector), any attempts to assert for better wages and working conditions will hurt the families they work with. Childcare workers in working class / poor communities expressed ambivalence about raising childcare fees to secure their rights as workers.

Domestic workers straddle an uncomfortable divide between public and private sectors. While they are hired as workers in the public sphere, living with their employer they are often referred to by their employers as 'part of the family'. Elize Delpont describes how domestic workers experience the, "Highly personalized and socially invisible working relations with an employer," resulting in a lack of, "the benefits of collective bargaining and the entitlements of ordinary

workers rights."(1992, p183, in Bakan and Stasiulis, 2001)

For example, many domestic workers did not receive pay, were underpaid, or had their rights violated in some way. Yet, they have little recourse for action because they are worried that if they complain they will be deported or will lose their jobs and will not be able to complete the required 24 months of work in a three year period; they often don't have information about Employment Standards; and, there is a power imbalance in terms of how Employment Standards cases are decided.

**Melanie:** *"The government is trying to use us especially women from the Third World countries. We have no choice. In our contract, we have to work as a live-in caregiver. We can't work any kind of jobs except the nanny jobs. We have no choice. We have to work and do whatever they want. Otherwise, if they don't like you anymore they can kick you out right away. We have to finish this program within three years – the 24 months – otherwise we can't qualify to apply for landed immigrant. So we working with those families. Five kids. A huge house. The youngest one is special needs. Sometimes she gets operated. She really gets crazy. So she's 7 years old but she acts like 2 years old. Then she came to my room and knocking at three in the morning. "Can I come in?" I'm just like the mom. Cause she sleeps with me. So I have no choice the babies crying. for three months I was paid. For the next few months she's just giving me \$200 I month. She kept saying "next week I'll give you the rest."*

**"The government is trying to use us — especially women from the Third World countries. We have no choice. Otherwise, if they don't like you anymore they can kick you out right away."**

## Conclusion

There are barriers to mothers and childcare workers participating in collective political action due to existing childcare policy and its ideological underpinnings. However, mothers and childcare workers clearly expressed a desire to understand more about why they are exploited and oppressed as women and mothers in a capitalist country. They spoke about their strong interest in transforming the current childcare system. They have very little to lose and a lot to gain by struggling for a quality, universal childcare system.

## c) Response and Resistance

### Individual responses

Working class women face hard living conditions and difficult decisions because of insufficient childcare policy. Yet, through their stories, women show spirit, commitment, and strength to make things work for themselves and their children. For example, women do whatever it takes to find some type of childcare. They find loopholes in order to qualify for subsidies. They share their strategies for negotiating the subsidy process with other mothers. They support their neighbors by doing childcare for each other, especially in case of emergencies.

**Darlene:** *"My son is 9 years old, and I have managed to create a very large and supportive network. It is because of my resourcefulness, not because of any help from the government that my child is well cared for."*

**Rosa:** *"I shared housing with other moms, and we'd have a lot of informal taking each other's kids. I guess that was my respite care. I never thought of it that way. But I didn't have to go to be assessed. "Oh you want a break here. Are you ok? Are you getting ready to kill them or something?" Some days, maybe yeah. That's when I trade off.."*

Women are working to educate themselves about their rights:

**Sarah:** *"The only way I've been able to get through is to resist. And to do what I've been told not to do which is to say, if you're going to try for custody, go try. Because I think that is the exact wrong advice. It is certainly not the advice of the fathers' rights movement to fathers. And they get custody 70% of the time. So we are giving each other the wrong advice. I've stood up to him and said no. I'm not doing it. I've had to educate myself. I could probably teach a course on family law now. I've had to go to as many advocacy organizations as I could find."*

**Gloria:** *"When I first started I would be hush, hush about things. I would read up a little bit on things and maybe bring it to the schools' attention. But because the school is run by parents, I'd always stop my tongue a little bit. Up until three years into the job, I realized that I shouldn't accept some of these things. For instance, I remember reading up on being paid for meetings because we have meetings once a month with an executive and another meeting with all the parents. I remember reading some sort of information that came from Childcare Inform. So I brought it to their attention. I just asked, "Are we entitled to this?" That's what I put on this form. The next month when we went to the meeting, I was attacked. I was attacked by the president, the vice-president and the whole executive. From then on I started standing up a little bit more for some of the rights that we deserved."*

### Collective action

Through sharing their stories and in discussions during this project, women began to see the commonalities of their situations and the need for collective action.

**Georgia:** *"It's good to hear other women's stories. Know that it is not your own fault but the system that is creating the problems... share and come together and build a common understanding."*

Many women began their participation in focus groups by stating they had never had any trouble with childcare. But, while answering questions and analyzing their situation with other women in the focus group, they saw that there were major challenges in their life connected to childcare. At the onset, many women placed

these childcare challenges in the realm of their own failings or merely their relationship with their social worker. This is why they originally believed they hadn't had any problems with childcare programs or policies.

Through the process of the project, women began to see that their experience was shared by many other working class women. Some women expressed that this was the first time they had thought about childcare in relation to society, rather than just themselves as mothers.

**Alexis:** *"If women were paid for their time to be with the kids, the economy wouldn't really support that. The unpaid work that we do keeps the economy alive. I am just*

**"It's good to hear other women's stories. Know that it is not your own fault but the system that is creating the problems... share and come together and build a common understanding."**



*starting to think more about this cause it's never really affected me before. So now it is more like I can see how it affects me in terms of being a mother."*

Others felt it was the first time they had met with an organization that was addressing their issues:

**Amanda:** *"I've always been concerned about these things because I've been going through it for so long, but I don't know what to do with my concerns. There's not a lot out there as a single mother in general where I can say oh I want to get involved I something like that. How do mothers get involved in political action? Before it even starts. How do I even know about a sit-in coming up?"*

By connecting their own experience to that of others, many women began to analyze that problems with childcare and related challenges were systemic, caused by the economic and political system.

**Georgia:** *"Because they're not going to just give it to us. They're not going to hand it over. They won't say, 'That's what you want? Ok, here. We'll lose our profit from immigration. We'll lose the money that we're making because women are doing all of this labour in the home themselves or it's all privatized with grandparents with women who are doing this work. So instead of getting it for free we'll implement a program that will cost us a lot of money.' They won't just give that to us. So our challenge is to build ourselves so that we're stronger to really push for that. How do we build? It's that education. Bringing more women in."*

**"I think the other big misconception is: mothers are just trying to survive, they don't have time for this. Well I know lots of mothers who have time for this. They are willing to make time for this."**

Because of the systemic nature of childcare policies and practices, women felt that individual resistance wasn't enough. They declared a need to come together and take collective action.

**Sarah:** *"I'm not interested in a therapy group, I want to organize something to help women. Let's sit and cry about it. Useful in a way. Helps you get the feeling out, but it changes nothing."*

**Georgia:** *"And taking that action together. That is so important."*

**Gina:** *"Doing it by yourself is really scary."*

**Andrea:** *"It should be everybody. Uncles, dads, grandparents should be doing something about trying to help us get childcare."*

They expressed the view that collective action is the only way to create real social and economic change. They also began to talk about what type of childcare would really benefit them as working class women.

**Donna:** *"When they talk about how they want to have choice in childcare, what that really means is tax cuts so that wealthier people - instead of paying taxes for public service - can decide to pay for private service. But that just means that other people don't get anything. That is why we have to argue for a universal childcare policy. When you have a subsidy program even people who aren't wealthy - like us - don't qualify for a childcare subsidy. It is easy for people to say I make \$2500 a month and I am paying half of it to childcare so why should that woman on income assistance get childcare when I am working and paying all this money."*

*So if it's not universal then it doesn't get the support. If it is just an income tested thing rather than a right. So we have to try to build solidarity with different groups of women."*

This emphasis on collective action also helped to strengthen Grassroots Women. Women participants, as well as the core group, increasingly grew to see Grassroots Women as an avenue to carry out collective action. They made suggestions and contributions to Grassroots Women's ongoing work in whatever manner was possible.

**Sarah:** *"I think the other big misconception is one I get told all the time: mothers are just trying to survive, they don't have time for this. Well I know lots of mothers who have time for this. They are willing to make time for this."*



# Universal childcare and genuine women's equality

**Sylvia:**

"Women are over-worked, unpaid, and exhausted. Our free labour is keeping this system going in so many ways. They think, 'Why pay for childcare when we can force women to provide it for free?'"

**Gina:**

"I think this government doesn't understand it's not women's fault that we're the ones who bear children. It's not women's fault that men have the capability to leave. And then remarkably, they also don't want to support abortion."

**W**hile universal childcare on its own cannot resolve the fundamental problems facing working class women in capitalist countries, childcare is an essential factor in our ability to reach our full collective potential in all spheres of life.

Women have long understood that their ability to achieve genuine equality is deeply affected by the expectations placed on them in the domestic sphere, including, of course, their role as caregivers to their own and others' children. At Grassroots Women, we know that the effect of these domestic expectations on women's liberation did not simply disappear as more and more women moved into paid work. Other more mainstream women's groups have preferred to keep their focus on the movement of women into the workforce, especially into professional careers that allow for a middle-class or upper-class lifestyle. However, by looking to our own experiences and the experiences of other working class women, we can see that not only do we experience exploitation in the workforce, but the burden of what is often called domestic (or reproductive) labour is still a reality for the vast majority of women. Therefore, we believe that an analysis of this reproductive labour with a particular focus on childcare is an essential part of our struggle for true liberation.

In order to engage in this kind of analysis, we believe that child care and other kinds of work that women have traditionally done in the home must be understood in terms of its function within the broader social, economic, and political context of capitalism and imperialist globalization. How is it that capitalists are able to profit from women's relationship to child care? What role does childcare play in the exploitation of working class people within the capitalist system? How is childcare related to the functioning of imperialism worldwide? Our examination of such questions sets this study apart from the majority of studies on childcare that do not link the issue of childcare to the root causes of women's exploitation and oppression.

Many studies of childcare policy do acknowledge the fact that women, by and large, bear the responsibility for providing and/or securing childcare. However, without an analysis of how child care policies help to sustain capitalist economies, such studies are only able to provide a superficial analysis of how access to childcare affects women's equality in general, and particularly working class women. In fact, many authors on childcare avoid the issue of women's rights and equality altogether, focusing instead on a de-politicized framework of children's rights and alleviating child poverty. Certainly, we do not deny that the issue of promoting child development by improving access to quality childcare is crucial. (For example, the section of this study entitled *The Prices We Pay* examines how accessing childcare is essential in advancing the rights of both



women and their children to develop fully as human beings). However, an understanding of the role of child care in promoting the development of women and children is meaningless if we do not question the political and economic structures in place that prevent us from actually achieving our vision of quality child care for all.

In order to understand why child care is an issue affecting the struggle for genuine women's equality, we have found it helpful to place child care within a broader concept of "reproductive labour." In using this term, we are following in a tradition of Marxist feminists who use it to describe the work involved not only in the biological reproduction of future workers through childbirth and child rearing, but also the domestic labour required in sustaining and preparing workers (including women themselves) for paid work. The concept of reproductive labour enables working class people to recognize the hypocrisy involved in capitalism's designation of paid work (commodity production) as the only significant "productive" labour. In fact reproductive labour does produce a commodity: labour power. All the work that women do to feed, clothe, transport, and generally allow for the recuperation from and preparation for work of both themselves and their family members (not to mention the labour of childbirth) is an indisputable precondition for productive work. Further, despite the unpaid status of all this reproductive labour, it indirectly produces surplus value.

The mystifying of reproductive labour is made possible, in part, by the artificial separation of the public and private spheres, a separation that has its roots in the isolation of individual families. Marxist feminists such as Marlene Dixon have argued that "the subjugation and oppression of women [under capitalism] can be traced to those factors which caused the communal kin group to be broken up and individual families separated out as isolated units, economically responsible for the maintenance of their members and for the rearing of new generations." (1978) With the rise of wage labour and commodity production, the nuclear family became separated from the

larger kin grouping and its role as a production unit, capable of producing many of the goods that it also consumed, was eliminated,

reducing the family to solely a consumer unit, using earned wages to secure necessary goods and services. Women's domestic work, based on a biologically-determined division of labour and which had previously been viewed as socially necessary, became a private service for the husband or family. The private, domestic sphere came to be viewed as merely peripheral to the public sphere where the "real" work of commodity production takes place. As a result, the wageless domestic labour that women do in the home became marginalized. However, this marginalization masks the fact that commodity production could not take

place at all were it not for the labour power reproduced by working class women.

The artificial division between the public sphere of productive work and the private, domestic context of reproductive work helps to keep women's exploitation under capitalism hidden and invisible. It also serves to make reproductive labour (including childcare) appear as a woman's individual responsibility, despite the inescapable importance of this work to the functioning of capitalist economies. Those who stand to gain from this exploitation use bourgeois morality to represent reproductive labour as a "natural" calling for women, further strengthening the idea that such labour is a woman's individual responsibility. The duplicity of this moralizing about the somehow innate predisposition of women toward domestic work is all the more stark when we

**The division between the public and the private keeps women's exploitation under capitalism hidden, appearing as a woman's individual responsibility, despite the importance of this work to capitalist economies.**

#### **Darlene**

"Women's work is not valued. They are able to make so much money on the backs of women, so why would they bother? Up until now, we have all managed. Not well, and not happy, and not a full quality of life."

#### **Sarah**

"Why would they provide us with a means to leave [the home]? And take away there \$10 billion in GDP in free labour. Why would capitalists do that? It is completely contrary to their [goals]."

consider how capitalism has always called on the most marginalized women to work for wages in some of the lowest paid, most dangerous, and most exploitative working conditions. In addition, working class women have long been expected to take on paid work that they do within the home, and the true importance of this work is overlooked because it is hidden in the private sphere. Although the majority of women have now entered the paid workforce outside the home, the artificial division between the public and the private spheres still serves to perpetuate women's exploitation. Prior to this phenomenon, the operations of capital benefited from a woman's reproductive labour within a private family both because she worked to prepare her husband for paid work and also because she raised children who were essential future workers. The discrepancy between the wage paid to a man and the profit extracted as a result of his labour, was even more enormous when the reproductive labour for the entire family required for this process is considered. While women now by and large earn their own wages, they still bear the bulk of unpaid reproductive labour within their families including domestic work, child-birth and childcare, and caring for family members who are ill. Mainstream feminist movements which have simplistically celebrated the movement of women into the workforce have failed to criticize the underlying inequity that is maintained through the exploitation of women's reproductive labour.

**The widespread entry of women into the workforce has introduced a contradiction within capitalism that is particularly sharp when considering child care.**

The widespread entry of women into the workforce has introduced a contradiction within capitalism that is particularly sharp when considering child care, a contradiction described by Ruth Abbott and A.K. Young: "To provide the services of childbirth and childrearing, women must withdraw from the labour force unless support services like child care are available. So mothers embody the battleground for the conflict between the contradictory requirements of capitalism to produce, using the paid labour of women in their childbearing years, and to reproduce, using their biological capabilities" (1989, 25). The longstanding "invisibility" of reproductive labour serves to further exploit women caught within this contradiction as they struggle to "make do" when it comes to child care. Young and Abbott confirm our findings in this study that the contribution of federal and provincial governments toward the overall national child care need in Canada has been negligible and those measures and funding supports that are in place are discriminatory in class terms since they clearly favour higher income earning families. The vast majority of childcare is provided informally, often for free by family members, and when it is paid for, it is paid for by parents despite the fact that it is employers who benefit disproportionately from the participation of women in the workforce. Yet, as more and more women enter the workforce, this informal childcare is increasingly harder to secure.

**Gloria:**

"Childcare has been something that you can always shove underneath the carpet. So why would they want to change it now? People have accepted it. And you make do. You find ways."

**Sylvia:**

"[Childcare is] totally under funded, inaccessible, and hurtful to our children. Working class kids are being left out in the cold! Talk about perpetuating class divisions! Mothers are working themselves sick to pay for inadequate care."

The increasing scarcity of informal childcare contributes to the particularly vulnerable position of women in the labour market. As we have seen from this study, paying full cost for quality childcare is completely out of reach for working class and marginalized women. However, in order to qualify for government childcare subsidies, women must remain at a very low income level. As a result, they are often forced to work under exploitative working conditions for very low wages. Yet whether women are receiving government childcare subsidies or not, the lack of working class women's access to reliable and affordable childcare severely limits their employment options, one reason that women are more likely to be found doing part-time, low-skilled, and low-paid work, particularly in the service sector. The exploitation of women workers within the service sector again draws on the notion that service work, a commodified ver-

sion of reproductive labour, comes "naturally" to women. For example, child care workers often encounter the idea that they merely "play" with children all day, an attitude that devalues the important work they do and drives their wages down by drawing on the notion that raising children comes effortlessly to women. In addition, domestic workers are in an especially compromised position since they do their paid work (which for most other workers takes place in the public sphere) in the hidden, private location of other people's homes.

The enormous expansion and commodification of the service sector within advanced capitalist nations such as Canada as well as the large scale entry of women workers into other sectors have made women's participation in the workforce central to the operations of capitalism. Yet despite the undeniable importance of women workers, our vulnerable position in the labour market (and within a patriarchal and sexist societal structure in general) serves to keep women's wages below those of men. Capitalists have long recognized the advantage of hiring women at lower wages, especially since the lack of wage parity also helps to put downward pressure on men's wages as job segregation declines. Employers have relied on the creativity and ingenuity of women who struggle to "make do" and to secure childcare that will allow them to work, even as they have also often used women's need for childcare in order to further exploit us. Understood in this light, the Canadian government's pattern of inactivity and disinterest in improving women's access to childcare is not simply an oversight. Rather, as Abbott points out, it is "functional to capital, which has benefited from a new labour supply while not supporting the burden of a socialized child-care system" (1989, 35).

### Division and inequality among women

Women can attest to the hypocrisies of the capitalist system by examining our own experiences. We see how on the one hand we are required to participate in the labour market (i.e., performing productive labour) while on the other, we are expected to continue to perform the invisible reproductive labour that the capitalist economy requires to reproduce the labour force.

Caught within this contradiction, without access to affordable childcare, we are forced to "make do" and turn to informal childcare options. This situation negatively impacts working class women's equality as we have no choice but to make extreme decisions when finding sources of childcare. We are forced to turn to affordable yet unregulated strategies that range from relying on the goodwill of friends and family to relying on unlicensed childcare facilities to not having any child care at all. All of these strategies result in women's precarious position in the labour force and contribute to their limited options as workers.

**The Canadian government's pattern of inactivity and disinterest in improving women's access to childcare is not simply an oversight.**

In order to resolve the contradiction between the need for workers in the productive sphere and the reproduction of labour power (which removes potential workers from the work force), capitalism has a number of options, including implementing a universal childcare program. However, to this point, the main way the Canadian State has resolved this contradiction is through relying on women to resolve their own childcare problems and through its domestic workers programs, namely the Live-in Caregiver Program.

As we saw in our discussion of domestic workers (in Canada under the LCP) as well as other child care workers, the reproductive labour of child care work, along with its low pay and poor

#### Sylvia:

"Women with nannies aren't more beautiful! They have time to relax and indulge themselves. They can import the cheap labour of women from the Third World to take their place in the home!"

#### Sylvia:

"Rich kids aren't 'naturally' smarter or more talented! Their parents have the time and resources to invest!"

working conditions, is by in large carried out by women, many of whom are from Third World countries and have few resources for child care themselves. The contradiction that arises when one group of women is able to access childcare via the exploitation of other women is particularly acute in the case of domestic workers because they are employed in a private environment – in the home of their employers – and thus are trapped between what is considered the private and public areas of work. This precarious middle ground between the private and public spheres leaves domestic workers particularly vulnerable to labour abuses and poor working conditions, as we have seen in the experiences of domestic workers.

This transfer of reproductive labour to working class women, particularly to those from the Third World, is connected to differential access to democratic rights for different groups of people as a result of work status, systemic racism, immigration status, etc. Therefore, it is also important to point out how the lack of universal childcare has led to divisions among women, allowing for greater freedoms and privileges for some women at the expense of others.

In order to understand why this division and inequality between women is happening, it is necessary to look at who benefits from this arrangement. Capitalist economies benefit from maintaining childcare work in the private sphere where the costs of reproductive labour are borne by Third World and working class women.

**The lack of universal childcare has led to divisions among women, allowing for greater freedoms and privileges for some women at the expense of others.**

### Conclusion

The persisting inequalities among women particularly when it comes to childcare demonstrate that women have not achieved equality merely by entering the "productive" labour force. The majority of women are still deeply exploited in the productive labour force as well as for their role in reproducing labour.

Therefore, we believe that as working class women, we should turn our attention towards the economic system that engendered and continues to benefit from these divisions. We must continue to point out that women will never achieve genuine liberation when their exploitation and oppression is transferred on to the backs of the more marginalized. We must continue to demystify our contribution to surplus value through our reproductive labour. As part of achieving our genuine liberation, we must call for an end to the LCP, and continue the struggle to bring child care work into the public sphere and achieve universal access to child care.

**Ivana:**

"The current system is set up to provide family care in the home, where there may be little or no training. It turns childcare into an unskilled profession with lower benefits and wages for women. This is the feminization of poverty."

**Ivana:**

"Poor working women and women on social assistance are facing barriers to accessing quality daycares. That should be a right for all women and not just those with wealth."

# Action and Demands

**A** fundamental part of the Participatory Action Research process is that participants develop and implement ideas for action for social transformation. Women participants developed both ideas for action and demands during the focus groups / interviews and follow-up activities. Consistent with the PAR methodology, a number of these activities were already started as part of this project. Along with other ideas for action, they will be continued by women in Grassroots Women even after the project has been completed.

## a) Action

### Organize

- ◆ Reach out to more marginalized women through women's groups, cultural centres, clinics, schools, training programs.
- ◆ Build stronger partnerships with health care workers, service providers and community development workers
- ◆ Have information booths at the malls, community centers, etc.
- ◆ Hold more group sessions with mothers
- ◆ Conduct an activity around the theme "Can you imagine what life would be like if we had universal childcare?"
- ◆ Hold a weekend workshop session out of town for moms and kids including follow up with moms about childcare campaign and focus group for the kids. Include a solidarity night with a children's performance about their experiences with childcare.
- ◆ Offer services to mothers such as help filling out childcare subsidy forms to provide support and increase awareness about Grassroots Women

### Educate

- ◆ Hold fun, educational sessions for moms and kids
- ◆ Provide write ups and materials to childcare centers
- ◆ Develop a popular education booklet based on *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*
- ◆ Offer workshops on how to be an effective advocate
- ◆ Raise public awareness about the need for universal childcare
- ◆ Find out about childcare models in other countries i.e. Cuba, countries in Europe, etc.
  - ◆ Continue to document women's stories
  - ◆ Hold sharings between working class moms and domestic workers

### Mobilize

- ◆ Include more music, more dance, more art, more diversity and creativity in all political activities
  - ◆ Bring Grassroots Women campaign for universal childcare to the National level
  - ◆ Hold annual Mother's Day Rallies and Marches to make the issue of child-

#### Georgia:

"But the more of us that come together and really say that childcare is a right - a women's right, a human right and it is something that should be a social responsibility - the stronger our voices are."

#### Nicole:

"I thought that since my kids are grown up, childcare is no longer my issue. But participating in this focus group has made me see that childcare is really everyone's issue."

care more visible

- ◆ Create a daycare model that meets the needs of the community including evening care
- ◆ Have a mother and child sit-in at our schools and work places
- ◆ Write a submission to the UN on childcare and women's equality
- ◆ Create a postcard campaign calling on the federal government to provide universal childcare
- ◆ File a complaint with the Privacy Commissioner about the requirement to show bank statements when applying for subsidy
- ◆ Hold a roundtable / forum to release *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. Invite government officials and the community so that policy makers will hear what women's experiences with childcare really are.
- ◆ Launch an affidavit campaign and / or charter challenge regarding human rights violations under existing childcare policy

**Gina:**

"When you are spending all of your energy and hours just to survive, the government thinks that you won't have time to protest. But the only time things have changed in the past is great rallies of women going, 'Screw this, no more!'"

**Georgia:**

"What has been won — subsidies or even pushing the government to talk about childcare — that's won because women have come together collectively and struggled for childcare. We have to mobilize women now!"

## b) Demands

Between a Rock and a Hard Place documents the myriad of ways working class women's genuine development and equality is impacted by current childcare policies and programs. At the federal levels, these policies and programs include Employment Insurance Maternity Benefits, the Childcare Expense Deduction, and the Canada Child Tax Benefit, as well as the Live-in Caregiver Program. Childcare policies, programs and spending are generally determined at the provincial levels. These provincial policies and programs include the demand side childcare subsidy system, the structure of funding for childcare centers, and childcare regulations. Furthermore, women's experiences with childcare is related to policies and programs in other spheres of life, such as Employment Standards, welfare, and immigration.

However, the overall context for understanding childcare policy in Canada is that there is a lack of a cohesive, national childcare program. Therefore, we recommend the following:

- 1) **The implementation of a sustainable, universal, national childcare program. Universal means that it is free; is accessible to all children (regardless of their mother's work, immigration, and education status); is a public, not-for-profit system; offers quality programs and curriculum; and, pays living wages and benefits to childcare workers.**

As part of the implementation of this universal childcare program, we call for:

- 2) **An immediate review of provincial and federal childcare policies.**
  - ◆ This review must include comprehensive consultation with women's groups, childcare advocacy groups, and other community based organizations particularly those representing the most marginalized of working class women: migrants, immigrants, refugees, and Indigenous people.
  - ◆ Funding and other resources need to be provided to community groups to continue documenting the experiences and analysis of those most affected by childcare policy and allow for their complete participation in the consultation.
- 3) **Recognition of the fact that universal childcare is a fundamental right for women. Without universal childcare, women are limited from participating in all spheres of life (economic, educational, social, cultural, and political). This stalls women's development and denies genuine equality. Therefore:**
  - ◆ Working class women must be able to participate in the planning, direction, and running generally of a national childcare program and specifically of childcare centers.
- 4) **Stop the privatization of national / provincial childcare program(s). Childcare is a fundamental right of women and children; it should not be a venue for profit making under the neo-liberal agenda of globalization.**
  - ◆ A national childcare program should be of high quality and accessible to working class women. Under privatized models of service delivery, quality is sacrificed for the sake of increasing profits and fees for users increase.
  - ◆ Childcare workers should be paid living wages and benefits. These are often the first things to be cut under privatized models of service delivery.



- 5) **Scrap the exploitative, racist, and anti-woman Live-in Caregiver Program(LCP).**
- ◆ The LCP is not an alternative to a universal childcare program. Equality for women must be advanced; yet, under the LCP, Third World women are relegated to domestic labour under conditions of modern-day slavery.
  - ◆ LCP workers must be allowed to enter Canada as skilled workers with permanent residency and allowed to live out of their employer's home.



# Glossary

**Canada Assistance Plan (CAP):** CAP ran from 1966 - 1996. It was an agreement between the federal and provincial / territorial governments that allowed for federal financial contributions of up to 50% for provinces for their social programs, including childcare. CAP stipulated that all people must qualify regardless of their length of residence in a particular province.

**Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB):** The CCTB is a federal government program launched in 1998. It is a monthly payment designed to support families with low and middle incomes. A supplement is also given to families if they are providing care for children under the age of 7 at home. Annually, as of 1998, a family with one child gets a basic benefit of \$1,020 and a supplement of \$605 for a total benefit of \$1,625 a year. However, this supplement is 'clawed back' from families on welfare.

**Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST):** The CHST replaced CAP in 1996. It is funding provided by the federal government to the provinces and territories for a portion of their expenses in healthcare, welfare, and post-secondary education. Critics of the CHST point out that it leaves the federal government with less ability to input into the development of social programs and there is no built in protection for social services during times of recession. While CAP said that federal funding for childcare could only be used for public or non-profit childcare, this changed under the CHST.

**Capitalism** is an economic and political system in which property, business, and industry are owned by private individuals. The rest of us survive by selling our labour power to owners for a wage. The value of products created and services rendered by workers far exceeds what is given to them in wages and benefits. The majority of value created goes to (owners) capitalists in the form of profits. The objective of capitalists is to maximize their profits. They do this by cutting costs including for labour and resources, and finding new markets to sell their products. Capitalism is a mode of production (which refers to the way production and distribution are organized). Feudalism and slavery are other modes of production.

**Childcare Expense Deduction:** This provides a deduction for income tax purposes from a parent's income of up to \$7000 for each child under seven. Eligible costs include fees paid for group or family daycare, nannies, or educational institutions providing childcare.

**Colonialism** is the process where powerful European nations expanded across the world in search of more minerals, resources, and materials to increase their profits. Indigenous populations were displaced and disrupted as European nations plundered and extracted their resources.

**Community Care Facility Act and the Child Care Licensing Regulations:** This is BC government legislation outlining regulations for licensed child care facilities. They must comply with regulations regarding: staff qualifications (aca-

demic, First Aid, medical clearance); staff-to-child ratios; criminal record checks; program activities (must be comprehensive and coordinated); space and equipment; and, nutrition, smoking, discipline and emergency procedures.

**Deregulation** is the removal or dismantling of measures or controls put in place in specific industries or areas. Deregulation includes the destruction or prevention of labour and environmental laws intended to check the damage done to people and the environment by capitalism's relentless search for profit. This is one of the three pillars of imperialist globalization or neo-liberalism.

**Exploitation** is the process by which owners (capitalists) make profit from the labour of workers.

**Family Childcare:** A family childcare home cares for babies and children on a daily basis. This kind of care is in the providers' home. There is License Not Required and Licensed Required Family Childcare. BC law says that caregivers who look after more than two children not related to them must have a licence. License Required Family Childcare can have up to 7 children and staff must have a first aid certificate.

**Flexibilization of labour** refers to the new ways that work is being organized and new types of employment schemes. It is a combination of new production technologies and 'human resource management techniques'- that is, how employers hire and fire workers. Two main types of flexibilization are contractualization (temporary and short term contracts) and casualization (part time, on-call work).

**Group Childcare:** This type of childcare is open year, for the full day. Programs are for children ranging from birth – 5 years old. Licensed child care programs must meet the requirements of the Community Care Facility Act and the Child Care Licensing Regulation. For example, for groups of children over 30 months, there must be at least 1 Early Childhood Educator and 2 assistants for 25 children.

**Imperialism** is the highest stage of capitalism and is the dominant political and economic system of our time. It means more monopolies, and increased economic domination by highly industrialized countries – which divide and redivide the world through economic, political and military means – to create spheres of influence to suit their own interests. Imperialism also means the coming together of big bankers and industrial capitalists. A casino economy evolves, as stocks and currency trading is primary. Imperialism also means the increasing polarization of wealth within and between countries.

**Imperialist globalization:** See *imperialism* Privatization, deregulation and liberalization are the policies currently being implemented under imperialist globalization.

**International Monetary Fund (IMF):** Created at Bretton Woods, the IMF reviews countries' economic policies and lends money to developing countries facing financial or debt crises. In order to get an IMF programme, a country must agree to implement policies to "structurally adjust" its economy. The IMF gives short term loans with high interest rates – like a credit card. Voting power is determined by financial contributions: therefore, the richest countries call the shots.

**Liberalization** is the elimination of anything perceived to be a barrier to trade and investment. These can include tariffs, subsidies and investment codes. This is one of the three pillars of imperialist globalization or neo-liberalism.

**Licensed Childcare:** See *regulated childcare*. Regulated childcare centres are required to comply with regulations in order to be licensed.

**Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP):** The LCP is a program of the federal government (Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Human Resources Development), which recruits domestic workers internationally to provide live-in childcare, elder care, or care for people with disabilities. Under the LCP, workers come to Canada under a temporary work permit. If workers are able to complete 24 months of work within a three year period, they can apply for permanent residency in Canada. 95% of those coming to Canada under this program come from the Philippines. Domestic worker and women's organizations label the LCP as "modern-day slavery".

**Low Income Cut Off line (LICO):** The LICO is the measure used by Statistics Canada to define what under income people are living in straitened circumstances. In effect, it is a poverty line. Statistics Canada measures the number of families in Canada who must spend at least 70% of their income on essentials with little money left for transportation, health, education, etc. These families are defined as living in poverty.

**NAFTA:** NAFTA is the North American Free Trade Agreement. It was signed by the Canada, Mexico and the United States in 1994. It promotes free trade by liberalizing trade between the three countries. Critics of NAFTA explain that it is marginalized communities and workers who pay the price of free trade.

**Neo-liberalism:** See *imperialist globalization*.

**Oppression** is systemic, institutional, and personal. Oppression ensures that one group in society (i.e. men) has power over another group (i.e. women).

**Out of school care:** This type of care is at or near a school for school-age children (5-12 years old). It can be before or after school and on holidays. This is licensed care under the Community Care Facility Act and the Child Care Licensing Regulation. For example, for children Grade 2 or higher, there must be 1 staff to 15 children.

**Overproduction:** With increased technology, massive amounts of goods and services are being produced. But, workers have less and less to live on, so we don't have the money to buy all that is being produced. Corporations cannot sell their goods; this is overproduction.

**Preschool** is less than three hours / day and is for children 2.5 – 5 years old. It can range from 2-5 days per week. It is licensed under the Community Care Facility Act and the Child Care Licensing Regulation. For example, there must be 1 Early Childhood Educator and 1 assistant for 20 children.

**Privatization** is the many ways that public ownership of resources (like water) and provision of services (like health care and education) are shifted to private, for-profit ownership. This is one of the three pillars of imperialist globalization or neo-liberalism.

**Productive labour** refers to all that labour that is engaged for the purpose of directly producing profit for capitalists.

**Regulated child care** includes group child care centres, family child care where more than two children are being cared for, out of school care, part-day nursery schools or preschools. Regulated childcare receives a license from the government for compliance with certain requirements such as ration of staff to children. They are inspected on an annual basis by licensing officers and health, safety and fire officials

**Reproductive Labour:** All the work involved in the biological reproduction of future workers and all the domestic labour required in sustaining and preparing workers for paid work. Reproductive labour is essential to capitalism. All the work that women do to bear and raise children, feed, clothe, transport, and generally allow for the recuperation from and preparation for work of both themselves and their family members is an indisputable precondition for preparing workers for the workforce.

**Subsidy:** The child care subsidy is a BC government program that states it is intended to help low- and moderate income families pay for child care. Subsidies can be put towards licensed or licensed-not-required childcare. In order to qualify for a full or partial subsidy, a parent must meet the income threshold and: be working; going to school / training program; actively looking for work; undergoing medical treatment; would like their child to attend preschool; or, have a child who requires extra support. Subsidy rates are based on the type of childcare, the net income of the family, and the number of people in the family.

**Systemic racism** refers to policies, laws, norms, and relationships in institutions and practices that systematically exploit and oppress people of colour. It is part of every aspect of our lives – social, cultural, political, and economic.

**Underdevelopment** refers to colonial and semi-colonial countries that are not allowed to develop the infrastructure and programs necessary for their own needs and development as a nation, but instead are opened up to foreign interests. Underdevelopment is the result of colonialism and is maintained through foreign loan programs, where nations borrow money needed to pay back prohibitive interest on original debts incurred due to the impact of colonization.

**Unlicensed Childcare:** See *unregulated childcare*. Unregulated care does not require a license.

**Unregulated child care** includes unregulated family child care (care for a limited group of children in the childcare workers home); a baby sitter or nanny hired to care for the child in the child's own home; some nursery schools/preschools; the federal government's Child Minding program for children whose parents are attending English or French as a Second Language training; and, recreational / community programs used by parents for child care.

**Universal childcare:** There are different understandings of what universal childcare means. Some groups believe that the model of childcare in Quebec is universal. In Quebec, childcare costs \$7 a day for any mother who can find space in group childcare or family childcare. For us at Grassroots Women, universal childcare means that it is free; is accessible to all children (regardless of their mother's work status / income level); offers quality programs and curriculum; and, pays living wages and benefits to childcare workers.

**World Bank (WB):** The WB was originally created in 1944. The WB gives more long term loans – like a financial institution. Its policies, projects and influence have a direct impact on the lives of millions of people in developing countries across the world. Bank policies and projects have been directly linked to poverty, environmental degradation and the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

**World Trade Organization (WTO):** WTO was created in 1995 at the Uruguay round of the GATT. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was first signed in 1947. The agreement was designed to provide an international forum that encouraged free trade between member states. The 146 member countries account for over 97% of world trade. The WTO is 'rules-based'; its rules are negotiated agreements.

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# Appendixes:

## Appendix 1:

### Focus Group Agenda:

- 1) Welcome
- 2) Background to Grassroots Women and Childcare Project
- 3) Round of Introductions (Name, number of children)
- 4) What are your experiences with childcare? This can be with any type of childcare (licensed, babysitting, extended family, etc) or the childcare that you provide as a worker.
 

*Prompting / follow-up questions include:*

  - a) Describe the types of childcare have you used.
  - b) Have you ever had difficulty finding childcare? What did you do?
  - c) How much does your childcare cost? How do you pay for it? Do you get a subsidy?
  - d) Has childcare impacted your education?
  - e) Has childcare impacted the type of work you do?
  - f) (Other questions from childcare questionnaire.)
- 5) You have talked about your own experience with childcare. In your opinion, how has the current childcare system impact the lives of working class women in general?
- 6) Why do you think Canada has not implemented a universal childcare program?
- 7) What kind of childcare program would you like to see in Canada?
- 8) Grassroots Women has a campaign calling for universal childcare. (Explain campaign.) What would you like to see as part of this campaign?
- 9) Thank you and explanation of follow-up activities.

**Appendix 2:**  
Questionnaire for mothers

**Appendix 3:**  
Questionnaire for childcare workers

**Appendix 4:**  
Brief submitted to Minister Ken Dryden, Minister of Social Development, March 2005

## Appendix 2:

### Questionnaire for Moms on Childcare

These questionnaires are part of Grassroots Women's work to understand how the childcare system impacts marginalized women and to help develop our campaign for a childcare system that works for marginalized and working class women. Your name and phone number on these questionnaires is confidential. We would like to be able to follow up with you about upcoming Grassroots Women activities and focus groups about childcare.

#### Basic information

Name

Phone number / other contact information

Age

Relationship / marital status

Area of residence

Source of income

Number and ages of children

#### Explain your family's childcare situation in terms of:

Current and previous childcare experiences

Type of care (group childcare – preschool, daycare, family daycare – and family or other arrangements)

Cost of care

Location

Type of program

#### Funding:

How do you pay for childcare?

Do you access government funding for childcare? Please describe

Is cost a barrier to quality childcare?

Would you have made different choices about childcare if cost wasn't a barrier?

Have you ever discontinued care because of cost?

What decisions have you made to save money on childcare?

How does the cost of childcare impact on your life?

#### Access / availability:

How did you find your current care provider?

Have you ever had difficulty finding a childcare space?

How long have you had to wait to get childcare?

How do you get your child to childcare? Has transportation impacted where you send your child?

Have you ever looked for childcare and it wasn't available? Please describe what you did.

Does your children have any special care needs? Has that impacted on your ability to find childcare?

**Programming:**

Describe a typical day in your child's care program.

Are you aware of any special goals/ philosophy of care?

If your child is in group care, what is the staffing situation?

What activities / learning are you happy / unhappy with?

What activities / parts of the program is your child happy / unhappy with?

**General thoughts:**

What do you think about the current childcare system?

Has the childcare system impacted your own education? Describe.

Has the childcare system impacted what type of work you do? Describe.

In your opinion, how has the current childcare system impacted your life and the lives of other marginalized and working class women?

Return to Grassroots Women at #304 – 207 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, BC, V6B 1H7.  
Telephone: (604) 682-4451

## Appendix 3:

### Questionnaire for childcare workers

This questionnaire is part of Grassroots Women's work to understand how the childcare system impacts marginalized women and to help develop our campaign for a childcare system that works for marginalized and working class women. Your name and phone number on these questionnaires is confidential. We would like to be able to follow up with you about upcoming Grassroots Women activities and focus groups about childcare.

#### Basic information

Name

Age

Phone number / other contact information

What type of care do you provide? (ex. preschool, daycare, family daycare, family, Live-in Caregiver Program, or other arrangements)

Do you work in a non-profit / for-profit setting?

Do you work in a privately owned or publicly owned / run childcare setting?

Why did you go into the childcare field?

How long have you been providing childcare?

How long do you expect to stay in the childcare field?

Do you have an ECE license or other training?

#### Working in the field:

What is your wage?

Do you have a benefit plan?

Are you unionized?

How does your pay compare with your living expenses?

What are your hours of work?

Do you work overtime? How often? Are you paid for your overtime work?

Aside from childcare, what other tasks do you perform as part of your job?

What is the ratio of childcare providers to children?

Do other staff have an ECE license?

What happens if you are sick?

Describe your relationship with the parents at your workplace. Are there challenges?

Has your workplace been affected by the current childcare system in Canada? Describe.

What are the greatest challenges you face in your job?

#### If you work in a childcare center:

Does your program have certain philosophy / goals?

What type of involvement do you have in setting the goals and direction of the program?

What aspects of the program are you happy / unhappy with?

Does your workplace have adequate funding to meet the needs of the staff, children and families you work with?

Are there enough childcare spaces for children in your community?

Do you and your co-workers have time and resources to plan and implement the program?  
Debrief from stressful situations?

Have you had to turn families away or take away spots because of inadequate funding?

Has your workplace been affected by current cuts to childcare (\$12.7 million in BC)?  
Describe.

### **General thoughts:**

How has the current childcare system impacted your life and the lives of other marginalized and working class women?

Why do you think Canada has not implemented a universal childcare program?

What kind of childcare program would you like to see in Canada?

Grassroots Women has a campaign calling for universal childcare? What would you like to see as part of this campaign?

Return to Grassroots Women at #304 – 207 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, BC, V6B 1H7.  
Telephone: (604) 682-4451.

## Appendix 4:

### Brief to Honorable Ken Dryden, Minister of Social Development

*Submitted by Grassroots Women, March 15, 2005*

#### **Profile of Grassroots Women**

Grassroots Women was formed in 1995 when the Philippine Women Centre of BC invited a group of working class women to come together to discuss their concrete experiences of displacement and forced migration, serving as cheap labour in the service sector and domestic work, and being burdened with increasing responsibility for their families when there is no national childcare program, health is being privatized, and housing is unaffordable.

These women formed Grassroots Women based on the belief that there was a need for a women's group that rooted the marginalization of women in the social, political, and economic reality of their lives. Founding members saw a need for a women's group to support the empowerment, development, and participation of marginalized women in advocating for their human rights and equality rights. They named the process of neo-liberal globalization as deepening the extreme exploitation and oppression of working class women, particularly migrant, immigrant, and Indigenous women.

Grassroots Women has developed into an organization whose objectives are to:

- (1) Deepen our understanding of neo-liberal globalization and its impacts on working class women;
- (2) Conduct public awareness and empowerment programs for working class women;
- (3) Build mutual support and sustained cooperation among diverse working class women; and,
- (4) Join in solidarity with women internationally.

Since 1995, a diverse group of women have joined our discussions, forums, workshops, marches, and conferences. Grassroots Women works with working class women coming from marginalized communities in Canada including but not limited to migrants, immigrants, refugees, lesbians, working class women, students, single mothers, and Indigenous women. Grassroots Women now has chapters in British Columbia and Manitoba.

#### **Preparation of this brief**

Grassroots Women has a long history of education and advocacy about childcare. It is an issue of primary concern to our membership because of the direct and daily impact childcare policy has on our lives.

This brief incorporates comments and experiences shared by our membership and contacts through our education and advocacy work. It also represents a synthesis of discussions of working class women during a series of focus groups and forums we have held in the preparation of a soon to be released Participatory Action Research project called *Between a rock and a hard place: examining how the lack of a universal childcare program impacts marginalized women's equality*.

#### **Our experiences**

Childcare is a women's issue and particularly an issue of working class women. Women are still primarily responsible for family and childcare in Canada. Yet women are increasingly found in the labour force. By the time their youngest child is 3-5 years old, 73.4% of Canadian women work in the public sphere. Women also account for 97% of the total people employed as "childcare workers" (babysitters, nannies, parent's helpers or childcare educators and assistants). Childcare is clearly tied to the federal government's stated commitment to women's equality.

Canada is one of the only industrialized countries that does not have a publicly provided child-

care program for all children. In the absence of a national program, the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) is Canada's de facto childcare program. Under the LCP, workers are recruited internationally to provide "live-in" care for children, the elderly, and the disabled. This privatized form of childcare may be an acceptable "package deal" for middle and upper middle class families. But this racist and anti-woman program does not address the needs of the majority of women for childcare and represent modern-day slavery for LCP workers.

## Childcare Challenges

### **Unaffordable:**

Women pay between 33-60% of their income on childcare. In BC, subsidies under the current system are denied to the vast majority of working class women. Those that do qualify are forced to go through invasive and humiliating procedures every 3 months to maintain their subsidy. Even with the subsidy, women are still left to shoulder hundreds of dollars in top-ups to meet current childcare fees.

### **Inaccessible:**

Currently, there are only 67,070 licensed childcare spaces in BC; yet, there are 653,191 children under 12 years old. Many women have shared that when searching for childcare they are put on three-year long waiting lists. There is a lack of childcare spaces in the communities where women live, particularly of infant / toddler spaces, Kindercare programs, and spots for children with disabilities.

### **Low / uneven quality:**

The lack of childcare spaces combined with the high cost of childcare means that many women are forced to accept childcare that does not meet their standards in terms of safety and a quality educational program. This has long-term impacts on already marginalized communities in Canada.

### **Childcare's impact on working class women's equality**

Because there is no universal childcare program, yet childcare is so essential to their lives, working class women have developed a complex of "make do" strategies. These include taking on part time work or work where they can bring their children; having extended family take care of their children; going without essentials; and / or, withdrawing from the workforce. These strategies – required under current childcare policy – lead to the isolation, stress, instability, poverty, and underdevelopment of women.

**Economically** childcare is one of women's three main monthly budget items (next to housing and food). Because of childcare, women are forced to take jobs – not based on considerations of pay, benefits, or possibility for advancement – that are close to childcare / home, allow them to bring their children (such as telephone solicitation and night janitorial work), and / or are under the table so that they do not lose their childcare subsidy. All of this cements women's economic marginalization.

Childcare workers are notoriously underpaid and overworked. Unpaid overtime is a reality of the job. Ironically, because of their economic situation, many childcare workers cannot afford childcare for their own children. The most marginalized of childcare workers are domestic workers under the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP). Women coming to Canada under the LCP, the majority of whom come from the Philippines, are basically working in conditions of modern-day slavery, working up to 24-hours per day for far below the minimum wage, vulnerable to all

physical, mental, and sexual abuse. After completing the LCP, these women remain segregated in low wage sectors. Furthermore, after years of experience of taking care of Canadian children, domestic workers struggle to even find work in childcare centers.

The lack of affordable and accessible childcare limits women's access to **education and comprehensive development**. In terms of accessing formal education, women struggle to find childcare that they can afford on student loans (which until January 2005 women were forced to cover childcare costs with the maximum student loans leaving them with tens of thousands of dollars worth of debt) and in the times they require. Without quality childcare, student mothers have to struggle with competing needs of their children and their course requirements. For example, having a sick child is not considered a reason to miss an exam. Many mothers have to wait to go back to school until their children have grown up. As well, without childcare, women are often isolated in their homes without access to other adults, intellectual stimulation, or even the time and energy to pursue their own development. Many workers under the LCP are teachers with formal education and many years of practical experience yet they are relegated under the LCP to household work; they are trapped and deskilled, particularly as they are not able to pursue further education.

**Socially**, the lack of childcare isolates women. They are more vulnerable to violence from partners as they have less access to support, few people will know what is happening within the home and they have great difficulty supporting their children on their own particularly without childcare.

Women's **health and well being** is also affected by childcare policy. They face a great deal of stress and instability never knowing the status of their childcare, particularly under the subsidy system. Some women are even driven to the point of emotional breakdowns due to the extreme difficulties of trying to support their family without adequate childcare. Childcare costs also force women to "go without" by settling for less nutritious food, lower quality housing, and no dental care. This negative affects their health and the health of their children. Childcare workers face stress to their health and well being due to the nature of the job (i.e. being exposed to numerous colds and flus), the high ratios of children to workers, a constant fear of layoff notices, and the lack of sick benefits available.

Because the lack of affordable and accessible childcare affects women's economic status, some mothers face so many daily struggles just to survive that they are effectively barred from participation in the **democratic process**. Without childcare, they are often not able to attend meetings, community events, or government consultations. As part of ensuring its commitment to having women access the public policy dialogue, the government needs to implement a universal childcare program.

### **Looking forward**

We are pleased to see that there are discussions on the table regarding a national childcare program. However, we are concerned that the proposed funding / program actually serves the interests and needs of migrant / immigrant / working class women.

Neither the announcement in 2003 of a "Multilateral Framework on Early Learning on Child Care" nor the February 2005 budget promises for childcare have resolved many of the childcare issues marginalized women are facing. Since the funding has not been tied to the implementation of a universal childcare program, so far the funds are merely being used to replace withdrawn provincial funds in BC.

As well, we are concerned that any universal childcare program that is developed must be



done explicitly within the public, not-for-profit sphere. Any opening of a national program in the for-profit sphere opens childcare up to local and foreign corporate interests under NAFTA / WTO. Privatized and for profit programs make their money off the backs of low waged workers, high parent fees, and low levels of resources. A national childcare program should serve the needs of women, their children, and their families.

**Our recommendations:**

- 1) Implement a universal, national day program that is both public and non-profit. Universality means that childcare is a free program that is not tied to women's economic, work, or education status.
- 2) Increase federal funding for childcare programs, childcare spaces, and wages and benefits of childcare workers.
- 3) Scrap the exploitative, anti-woman, and racist Live-in Caregiver Program.