



POLICY GUIDE

Women and Unpaid Work

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At Issue ...

There is no universally accepted definition of unpaid work but, for the purposes of this policy discussion, the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women defines it as any work that women do in homes, communities, and workplaces that contributes to those environments and the people within them but which does not result in financial remuneration. We know that all Islanders do a great deal of work for which they are not paid. But, we also know that women do a disproportionate amount of that unpaid work and, in the process, they experience immediate and long-term impacts on their well-being, their financial security, and their status in society.

We also lack universally accepted ways to measure and value unpaid work but, without such measuring and valuing, governments, including our provincial one, continue to use incomplete information when making fiscal and policy decisions. While Islanders know full well that the economy would collapse without their unpaid labour, our provincial government uses budgetary processes that are driven by assumptions that work means paid work only and that cash is the only means of assigning value. Thus, we end up with policies and programs that might work in that theoretical, cash-only world but which do not serve everyone well in the real world.

In the real world, women subsidize the Island economy. They make up half the paid labour force, but are still doing most of the household management and caregiving. At the same time, they make at least an equal contribution to community work and there is no telling what they are contributing to the lives of their friends and neighbours. In their paid workplaces, they find that jobs that have been traditionally dubbed “women’s work” are assigned a lower market value than “men’s work” which could require equivalent levels of training and skill. And, when government cuts services or the economy shrinks, women shoulder most of the responsibility for the tasks that get downloaded to households and the voluntary sector.

There is no need to attach a monetary value to all the work that women do, but there is a need to acknowledge their work and to value it. Right now, with strong international and national efforts working towards that goal, we must examine what needs to change in our own province so that women will cease to suffer for taking on unpaid responsibilities and that all Islanders will benefit from appropriate policy-making.

Here on Prince Edward Island ...

Overall, the issue of unpaid work on PEI has received very little study or consideration but we do know a few things. Women's participation in the province's paid economy changed rapidly over a short period of time. In 1961, women constituted one quarter of the paid labour force. Thirty years later, they made up half of that labour force. Right now, Statistics Canada reports that, at 87%, Island women have the highest labour force participation rate in Canada.

Most of the paid and unpaid workforce is concentrated in tourism, farming, and fishing. As in the household, women's work in these sectors is largely unpaid, diminished as part of their husband's or father's occupation. Although vital, women's contributions to these endeavours are often invisible and are usually provided without assurance of financial security.

Two changes in federal policy have helped women move towards economic security. In the late 1980's, they were included in the employment insurance program as harvesters of fishing resources. In 1991, the Agriculture Census allowed farmers to report more than one operator per farm. These are two important steps and there are still many more inequities to overcome. Tourism operators, fishing women, and farm women struggle with recognizing their contributions themselves, often devaluing their work by calling it "helping out" or "running errands." Some women, most notably single mothers, are actually criticized for taking on the work of mothering their children and managing their homes.

Across Canada ...

Statistics Canada reports that women do two-thirds of the 2.5 billion hours of unpaid work performed in Canada annually. And, depending on how it is measured, that work is worth between \$235 billion and \$374 billion annually. Given these numbers, it was about time when, in 1996, the *Census of Population Questionnaire* included three questions on unpaid work. There were some problems with the questions. They were narrow in scope and, in comparison to questions about paid work, they were presented in a marginal fashion as add-ons. Overall, though, the *Census* was a breakthrough and it did provide some valuable information. The results clearly showed that women perform significantly more unpaid work in all three categories. And, that is true even if the woman is a full-time income earner like her male partner. Hopefully, more work will be done to ensure that future *Census* questionnaires are more comprehensive and less biased.

At the grassroots level, Canadian women have worked hard on this issue. They have pointed out that caregivers, mostly women, suffer various forms of economic discrimination. When preparing tax returns, they find that a spousal deduction is less than a full personal deduction and that mothers who care for their own children cannot claim child care expense deductions. Unable to contribute to registered retirement savings or pensions under the Canada Pension Plan, unpaid caregivers worry about spending their retirement in poverty. New mothers who are self-employed or seasonally employed or who are unpaid caregivers find that they are likely ineligible for maternity benefits through the Employment Insurance Program. And, all mothers see that the Child Tax Benefit is based on family income, not individual income. Such measures make assumptions about women's dependency and also foster a continued dependency.

Our Analysis ...

Unpaid work does not devalue women. Women are devalued when their work is discounted.

(Evelyn Drescher
Mothers Are Women)

To address the issue of unpaid work on Prince Edward Island, four major changes are required. We need to: 1) Name the issue and fully understand it. 2) Include consideration of women's unpaid work in economic and policy decision-making. 3) Divide work between women and men in an equitable fashion. 4) Provide tangible social and economic recognition of women's unpaid work. As a policy maker and employer, government can take leadership in making these changes.

Women's unpaid contributions have always been invisible and not considered in economic and social policy. As a society, we first must recognize that women are doing the bulk of the work and are not being financially rewarded for doing so. In fact, they are often penalized.

Many groups who work towards social justice point out that traditional measures do not accurately reflect total economic activity. For example, here on Prince Edward Island, we measure our economy's health using traditional economic models like the Gross Domestic Product, assuming that market activity is the only productive work and that all growth is good. More realistic models, such as the Genuine Progress Indicator, measure all production modes and assess growth opportunities relative to social and environmental impacts.

This is the kind of information, along with a gender analysis, that is required in order to make accurate fiscal and policy decisions. Such decisions may still work against women's well-being but, at least, those impacts would be explicitly stated. For example, over the past number of years, government fiscal policy reduced the length of hospital stays. That major change was implemented without formally acknowledging that it was Island women who would be taking on most of that caregiving responsibility. Nor was there any assessment of the impact on women or the supports that they would require. It was as if the caregiving work would simply disappear. As such, the budgetary and policy process was incomplete and women were left to absorb the increased demands on their time, skills, and energy as best they could.

It is time to learn about this issue. The provincial government can contribute to that effort by sponsoring relevant research on women's contributions and their needs. For the most accurate results, such research needs to be women-led, fully participatory, and community-based.

It is also time to act on this issue. The Province of PEI could serve as a model employer, working to ensure that it accommodates women's unpaid responsibilities, that it values and welcomes women's experiences and skills developed outside the workplace, that it pays women fairly, and does not penalize women workers who must leave the workplace to bear children. At the same time, the Province of PEI needs to provide incentives to private employers to implement their own family friendly policies and it needs to work with the federal government to address the numerous economic disparities that result from the devaluation of women's unpaid work.

Our Recommendations ...

The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women recommends that the Province of Prince Edward Island take these actions:

To help the public understand the issue and to encourage women to value what they do:

- Sponsor a provincial public education and awareness campaign on unpaid work.

To produce budget and policy decisions that include consideration of unpaid contributions:

- Commit to a budget development process that uses real costs and benefits, not just cash transactions, and analyzes the differing impacts of budget decisions on women and men.
- Commit to a policy development process that analyzes the real impacts of policy change on women and men.

To learn about the impact of unpaid work on Island women:

- Conduct a participatory study on the impact of reductions in budgets and services associated with the Department of Health and Social Services on women's workloads, well-being, and financial security.
- Conduct a participatory study that measures and analyzes contributions being made by Island women to the province's three main industries - tourism, farming, and fishing.

To provide leadership as an employer of women:

- Conduct a gender analysis of all workplace policies with the provincial civil service and make changes that will accommodate women's unpaid responsibilities.
- Expand current employment equity policies within the provincial civil service to include appropriate skills assessment, women-specific training, employment strategies, and top-up payments for those who take maternity and parental leave.
- Provide incentives to the Island's private employers so they will develop their own employment equity policies.

To influence change at the federal level:

- Advocate for measures such as fairer taxation; allow unpaid workers to contribute to the Canada Pension Plan; modify the Census to get a full picture of all work in Canada; adopt complete economic measures such as the Genuine Progress Indicator; include unpaid work in Labour Force Surveys; modify maternity and parental benefits to make them more available to all Canadians; and provide universally-funded child care.

Imagine asking an Island woman that old question, “What do you do?” Unless she works in a standard, paid employment situation, she will likely say, “Nothing.” But, if you ask the question in another way, “What things do you do during the day?”, the answers are very different. In the spring of 2002, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women conducted several workshops on the issue of women and unpaid work. Called *When Women Count*, these workshops were designed by a grassroots advocacy organization called *Mothers Are Women* to help women name and value the work that they do and to think about what needs to change. The Island workshops were eye-openers for the participants and for the Advisory Council. When pressed to name the things that they do, participants were astounded to learn that, in a typical day, they perform dozens of vital tasks that require considerable skill, ingenuity, and energy. “I do all that?” was the amazed response from women who could not believe the number and complexity of the tasks as they were laid out to them on a piece of chart paper. You could feel a shift in perception happening in the room.

After women acknowledged everything that they do, their minds turned to the question of why they had assumed that, if they weren't in paid employment, their work didn't count. They quickly concluded that their belief had come from years of being told subtly and not-so-subtly that they were simply doing what they were supposed to do. That, as women, they should gladly take on the work associated with the care of children and the home, along with community and neighbourly responsibilities. After all, it's women's work, isn't it? Wait a minute, they said, I am also doing other work - paid work. Why am I expected to do both? There's something wrong with the way we are doing things, they concluded, and things need to change.

That's where the Advisory Council on the Status of Women comes into the picture. As advocates for women's equality, we must raise the issue of unpaid work. Unless and until we acknowledge the reality that women are doing double duty and respond accordingly, it will be impossible for women to achieve real equality in our society. Women themselves need to value what they do and demand their fair share of reward for their work. Men need to re-examine their contributions to work, home, and community. Governments need to use their communications, budgetary, and policy-making power to achieve equity between genders.

How can we continue to ignore this issue and still expect to achieve equality? It is impossible. One participant wrote, "I think that PEI has a long way to go to appreciate the role of the family in the workplace and the role women play in the day-to-day running of the world." The Advisory Council on the Status of Women hopes to move that effort along by presenting information and policy recommendations that address the inequities associated with unpaid work.

“Women could achieve economic equality in one generation if they stopped having children and replicated the work patterns of men. But the equality would last only one generation and then it’s over!” (Sheila Regahar: *Economic Gender Equality Indicators*, 1998)

FACT: UNPAID WORK IS WORTH A LOT TO THE CANADIAN ECONOMY.

- Depending upon how it was measured, the value of household work performed annually in Canada ranged from \$210.8 billion to \$318.8 billion in 1992. (*Value of Household Work in Canada*, Statistics Canada, 1994)
- Those figures mean that the value of housework fell anywhere between 30.6% and 46.6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the main instrument used to measure the strength of the economy and which completely ignores household work. (*Value of Household Work in Canada*, Statistics Canada, 1994)
- The total amount of unpaid work done in Canada is equivalent to 12.8 million full-time, full-year jobs. (Statistics Canada, 1995)

FACT: CANADIAN WOMEN DO MOST OF THE UNPAID WORK.

- Women do two-thirds of the 2.5 billion hours of unpaid work performed in Canada annually. (Statistics Canada, *Canadian Social Trends*, 1996)
- In terms of time, women carry out 65.6% of all household work. On average, women spend 4.5 hours per day on unpaid household work, compared to 2.6 for men. (*Status of Women Canada - Toward a Framework for Evaluating the Policy Implications of Unpaid Work*, 1995)
- Women’s share of unpaid work has declined very little since 1961 despite the near doubling of their participation rate in the paid labour force. (*It’s About Time - Unpaid Work and the 1996 Census* - Carol Lees, 1995)
- Women, on average, spent 78% more time in 1992 on unpaid work than men did (91,482 hours/year, compared with 831 hours). (Statistics Canada, *Canadian Social Trends*, 1996)
- Women spend about twice as much time caring for elderly relatives as men do. In one study, women giving care to older family members missed an average of 35 hours of work per year - nearly one full week. (*Women’s Work - A Report by the Canadian Labour Congress*, 1997)
- Among households in Canada, 92% of women reported spending time doing unpaid housework or home maintenance in the week preceding the Census, compared to 85% of men. (*Census of Canada*, Statistics Canada, 1996)

- In addition to engaging in unpaid work in somewhat higher proportions, women typically devoted longer hours to these various activities. For example, 25% of women reported that they spent 30 hours or more doing housework or home maintenance while 8% of men reported that they spent 30 hours or more. (*Census of Canada, Statistics Canada, 1996*)

FACT: EVEN IN THE PAID WORKFORCE, WOMEN'S WORK IS NOT BEING VALUED EQUALLY.

- Using a conventional analysis, it was found that Canadian women who worked full-time in 1995 earned, on average, 73 cents for every dollar earned by men. (*Economic Gender Equality Indicators, 1998*)
- Using another approach - including all women and men in prime earning years of 18 - 64 the difference in earnings is 52 cents on the dollar. (*Economic Gender Equality Indicators, 1998*)
- In 1996, Canada had the second highest level of low-paid employment for women among industrialized nations, next to Japan. (*Economic Gender Equality Indicators, 1998*)

FACT: WOMEN USUALLY HAVE TO BALANCE DEMANDS BETWEEN THEIR PAID AND UNPAID WORK.

- In 1995, women working full-time lost 7 days on average to attend to personal or family responsibilities, compared to about one day for men. (*Women's Work - A Report by the Canadian Labour Congress, 1997*)
- Using Statistics Canada's 30-hour definition for full-time work, most Canadian women work part-time in the paid labour force and full-time in the unpaid. (Statistics Canada, 1992)

FACT: IN ORDER TO MEET THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS AND DEPENDANTS, WOMEN MUST OFTEN MAKE DECISIONS THAT REDUCE THEIR ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL EARNINGS, INCOME, AND SECURITY.

- 60% of part-time workers are women. (*Economic Gender Equality Indicators, 1998*)
- Three out of five female single parents live in poverty. (*Economic Gender Equality Indicators, 1998*)
- 56% of unattached women over the age of 65 live in poverty. (*Economic Gender Equality Indicators, 1998*)

What do you mean by unpaid work?

When we talk about unpaid work, we are referring to the many things that women do at home and in the community. At home, women manage the household, do hands-on tasks that are vital to everyone's survival, and do the bulk of the caregiving. Caregiving, especially the work involved in bearing and nurturing children, is a constant responsibility, requiring a non-stop physical and emotional commitment from women. Along with their at-home responsibilities, women do formal volunteer work in community-based organizations, government institutions, and faith communities. And, they provide countless hours of informal work as supportive friends, neighbours, and citizens. Work is work is work. It occurs any time that they expend their energy whether or not they receive payment in return.

Are you saying that people should get paid for everything that they do?

Not necessarily. Assigning a monetary value to everything that people do is an impractical solution that is not viable in our current market-driven economy. However, it is important to value everything that people do. For years, women have had to be content with being praised for their tireless efforts on everyone else's behalf. But, praise will not support women throughout their retirement. What needs to change is that we must acknowledge that, yes, women do this work and, no, they do not receive cash for it. Then, we need to ask ourselves the question, given that reality, what can we do to equalize things for women?

A case currently being considered by the Federal Court of Canada illustrates how our society could work towards equity through appropriate policy development. In that case, Kelly Lesiuk, a mother of two young children who worked part-time in order to meet her caregiving responsibilities, is challenging the fairness of the *Employment Insurance Act* because it requires her to accumulate the same number of hours as a male worker who does not have her at-home responsibilities. As well, she points out that the eligibility requirements are more stringent for part-time workers and 70% of those workers are women. The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) is intervening in the case and they suggest that the federal government should consider the reality that women have extra responsibilities when they are determining eligibility for benefits. That way, society could give tangible support to women's employment realities and women would not have to bear the entire financial burden themselves.

Why do you consider unpaid work a women's equality issue? Don't men do unpaid work too?

Yes, of course, men do work for which they are not paid. But, typically, they don't do it as frequently as women and they generally don't experience the financial hardships felt by women as they try to balance their commitment to the paid workforce with their at-home responsibilities.

Women are more likely to do unpaid, at-home chores and to provide care to children, people with disabilities, and seniors. Therefore, women, in general, do not have similar opportunities to generate income, to contribute to retirement savings, and to be eligible for employment-related benefits. This inequity has a negative impact on women's financial wellbeing throughout their working years and on their financial security during their retirement years. If you want to understand why gender inequities persist, start by examining the impact of unpaid work on women's lives. It costs women a lot to make the choice - voluntarily or otherwise - to do work for which no cash value has been assigned.

This is more than a financial issue, though. The lack of value for women's contributions pervades our society. How are women supposed to feel their own worth when their work is not acknowledged, let alone respected or rewarded?

Why do women want unpaid work to be measured?

If something is invisible, it cannot be understood or valued. Accurate measurement will help address inequities and will illuminate the policy development process.

For example, right now, through measures such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), we get regular reports on how the economy is doing. These reports, though, do not reflect the whole picture. Here on Prince Edward Island, women make contributions to our three main industries - tourism, farming, and fishing - that are never measured. In a family-run tourist operation, for example, the woman may do cleaning, accounting, and maintenance work for which she is not paid. In difficult years, the woman's outside income may be what sustains many farming businesses. And, in fishing households, women may put in unpaid hours as they maintain accounts, prepare meals, and purchase equipment. When we get reports on these sectors, we only learn about the results of cash transactions. That approach ignores women's contributions and, at the same time, provides inaccurate information about the state of the economy. Thus, the inequitable situation is allowed to continue and government continues to set economic and social policy using incomplete information.

How would measuring unpaid work affect policy development?

If we considered unpaid work, we would learn for the first time what it really takes to make our society work. We would not be making decisions within the framework of a fictitious, cash-only world. One would hope that making decisions based on a complete picture would result in a more balanced and appropriate social and economic policy. For example, when health systems made budget cuts in the early 1990s, patients began to be released into home and community care in greater numbers and with more severe health issues. Governments began balancing their

books, satisfied that they had met their financial crisis in an appropriate way. There was little or no consideration of who was picking up the burden of care. That fell primarily to women. Caregiving responsibilities have immediate and long-term emotional, physical, social, and financial impacts. The costs may have been removed from public accounts but they remain with women.

Are there any other reasons why measurement is important?

Over the years, the lack of measuring and valuing of women's work has resulted in various forms of economic injustice. For example, in divorce situations, if a woman has been a stay-at-home worker, the spousal support that she receives in no way reflects her economic contribution to the household. And, in personal injury suits, women who work at home do not receive fair settlements. The attitude that women's unpaid work is worthless pervades our society and emerges in numerous ways that cause women hardship and distress.

What sort of measurement makes sense?

In 1995, the World Conference on Women in Beijing, accepted a means of measurement called a time-use survey. In such a survey, women list a task and the time it takes to complete the task whether the task was paid or unpaid. The neat thing about this approach is that tasks done simultaneously get measured individually, something that is important for women who, as a survival measure, tend to do a number of tasks at the same time. What a breakthrough in thinking! Traditional measures turn women into men and pay no attention to what really happens in women's lives. Now, the question is, will any government actually utilize these time-use surveys in their policy-making processes?

How can a dollar value be assigned to unpaid work?

The two main ways that have been used to put a value on unpaid work are:

- 1) Third person criterion or replacement cost - What would it cost to pay a third person or a replacement to do the work being completed by the unwaged worker?
- 2) Opportunity cost - What is the cost of the lost paid work opportunities unavailable to the unwaged worker because of her responsibilities plus the cost of her unwaged work?

Each approach has certain limitations. For example, the replacement costs typically assigned to women's work reflect current market value, not real value, and, so, are quite low. These calculations are a beginning step to understanding the economic value of women's work with much more work to be done.

What kind of questions are asked on the *Census* about unpaid work?

Canada has been an international leader in the measuring of unpaid work. After years of grassroots advocacy, the 1996 *Census* contained the first questions regarding time spent on unpaid work. These three questions, which appeared again on the 2001 *Census*, asked about time spent in the past week doing unpaid household work and home maintenance, time spent on unpaid child care, and time spent on care and assistance to seniors. The questions did not include volunteer work and that is an important omission. Statistics Canada estimates that volunteer work in Canada amounts to the equivalent of 615,000 full-time jobs. The questions are also presented in what some unpaid work activists call a “marginal” fashion - as stand-alone questions separate and apart from questions regarding paid work. And, there were no questions about unpaid work done in the paid workplace such as unpaid overtime. Overall, though, even with these limitations, the *Census* questions began the process of making women’s unwaged work visible and, therefore, unavoidable. The 1996 *Census* results showed that women performed significantly more unpaid work in all categories. This is valuable information. Next month, Statistics Canada will release the results of the 2001 *Census* questions on unpaid work and we look forward to seeing that information.

Are you saying that there is a bias for paid work compared to unpaid work?

Definitely. You need only look at government-sponsored employment programs for single mothers to detect this bias. Women are put through a cycle of training and work placements designed to meet the goal of obtaining full-time paid employment. The single mother may share that goal or she may believe that the work that she is doing in the home is valuable in itself. Regardless, in order to survive financially, she must participate in these endeavours and leave the care of her children to others.

What are some of the issues surrounding the measuring and valuing of unpaid work?

One big issue is the “love” factor. A lot of women say that they do the work they do because they love their families, their communities, and humanity, in general. Some may resist the idea of putting a dollar value on work that is driven by personal values of caring and concern. The two aspects are not incompatible, though. Many paid workers perform their jobs out of concern for others. And, women themselves are deserving of the comfort and security which they seek to provide to others.

What is the link between the market economy and unpaid work?

The market economy - those activities reported through means such as the Gross Domestic Product - could not exist without the informal economy of unpaid work. Selma Jones,

Coordinator for the International Women Count Network says, “They don’t count women’s work but they count on it.” What if women stopped working for a day? Things would fall apart. Think about the work that women do in the home. It is far more essential to everyday survival than anything that may happen in the office of a highly paid CEO - usually a male!

Women are participating in both economies at the same time. Changes in one economy affects the other. For example, in times of recession, when a full-time employee loses her paid employment, she must work harder at home to produce the goods and services she might previously have paid for with her salary. She will do her own child care, do more home cooking, and perhaps increase her involvement in community work to compensate for government cutbacks. Or, having a woman working in the home may be the reason why a male partner can meet the overtime or travel demands of his paid workplace. Women have been described as the “shock absorbers” for the formal economy. They provide the cushion needed to ride through times of crisis. Yet, they are unrecognized and unrewarded for that role.

Does the involvement of women in unpaid work affect their paid work?

Undoubtedly and in many different ways. First, it is important to note that work traditionally dubbed as “women’s work” is not typically well paid or highly respected. Think about child care workers, human service workers, personal care attendants, and cleaners. Their low pay and status reflect the view that such jobs require little skill, talent, or energy. In fact, these are essential jobs requiring considerable ability and stamina. Second, the skills that women develop in their unpaid work receive no recognition or merit in the paid workplace. So what if a woman can run a household, care for children, and do a dozen other things at the same time? What does that have to do with being an effective manager? That kind of attitude means that, in order to “succeed” in the workplace, on top of their many other responsibilities, women will likely have to take additional workplace-sanctioned training in order to have their skills recognized. Third, while on the job, their family responsibilities continue. Who is likely to stay home with a sick child? Who is likely to take an elderly parent to a doctor’s appointment? These tasks typically fall to women. If women are working in an environment that ignores these realities, then she will experience difficulty in managing her workload and meeting expectations. Fourth, to be involved in the paid labour force, women have to pay for child care. This affects their ability to engage in work in the first place and affects their net earnings. Fifth, in female-dominated professions, unpaid overtime is a regular part of the work experience. For example, child care workers on PEI are typically not paid for planning time or meetings. And, finally, a lot of women try to balance their responsibilities by working part-time or being self-employed. These more tenuous work arrangements can result in fewer benefits and decreased income. The links between paid and unpaid work are numerous and undeniable.

Is it the government's role to make these changes?

It is the government's role to acknowledge this reality, to learn about it, to make appropriate accommodations for women's unpaid responsibilities, to create policy that reflects real life situations, and to share resources accordingly.

It is everyone's role to take a look at their expectations, assumptions, and biases and to change their practices accordingly. Will women start saying no to the myriad of societal expectations? Will men start saying yes to the things that have traditionally fallen on women's shoulders? After all, child bearing and breastfeeding are the only biologically determined "women's work." Any other division of labour must be the result of falling into old gender roles and accepting the values associated with those roles.

What is the situation here on Prince Edward Island?

The issue of unpaid work is particularly acute here on PEI. About 20% more Island women participate in the paid labour force than the national average. Most of the Island's part-time workers are women. We have a tradition of family-run enterprises where the woman may or may not be receiving financial compensation for her work. Many women work in seasonal jobs requiring long, unpredictable hours that are difficult to balance with home and family responsibilities. Women receiving social assistance are being moved into low-paying service jobs. All these things are happening but nobody knows what they mean for women's wellbeing and status. The Island economy is operating in a gender-blind manner that does not account for what women are doing and does not analyze immediate and long-term impacts.

What would the future look like if we valued unpaid work?

We would be looking at a whole new type of society - one that is respectful of everyone's contributions and treats all people fairly. We would look at our lives with much wider eyes. Right now, we see things through the filter of our paid work. That is, apparently, what gives our lives value and meaning when, in fact, our lives are so much richer and more varied than that. Women themselves would value what they do and assert their right to their share of society's benefits. Evelyn Drescher from the grass roots organization "Mothers are Women" sums it up this way: "Keeping unpaid work uncounted is a form of slavery. Until we are all free, none of us are free."

For over twenty-five years, Beverley Smith has sought to have Canada re-examine how it treats homemakers who do traditional unpaid labour. She believes that the country's tax policy is unfair and must be changed to give women better career choices and choices in child care style. Among numerous other efforts, she has levied an official complaint with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and requested the Attorney General of Canada to refer to the Supreme Court to hear questions of law concerning the value of caregiving in Canada.

She argues that the present laws fail to recognize all roles of women - new and traditional, paid and unpaid - with equal dignity. These laws do not regard the homemaker as a "working," contributing member of society and, in fact, encourage women to leave homemaking, thus showing a bias towards one type of lifestyle.

International charters signed by Canada have already made commitments to value all work women do. Ms. Smith and thousands of other advocates are only pressing to have these charters respected. They are not against formal child care or against women working outside the home. They simply want the federal government to celebrate and recognize all the work that women do without bias.

The specific points being raised about federal legislation are as follows:

- Under the *Income Tax Act* the spousal deduction is less than a full personal deduction
- The child care expense deduction under the *Income Tax Act* is restricted to receipted daycare or nanny care and excludes recognition of costs of other forms of care of children
- Unpaid caregivers are ineligible to contribute to their own registered retirement savings or pensions under the Canada Pension Plan
- New mothers who are self-employed, employers or unpaid caregivers are ineligible for maternity benefits under the *Employment Insurance Act*
- Unpaid caregivers in the home are excluded from parental benefits under the *Employment Insurance Act*
- The child tax benefit is based on family income, not individual income assuming a dependency and depriving the unpaid caregiver of financial autonomy or dignity

Advocates argue that caregiving has always been an overwhelmingly female role and the failure to recognize its value makes women poor. At issue is the definition of "work" and whether unpaid caregiving is of value to our country. For Ms. Smith and others, it has been a huge piece of work in itself to communicate this message over the last quarter century.

1971

A Statistics Canada report estimates that household work represents 41% of Canada's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

1978

Statistics Canada publishes a study of the approaches to valuing unpaid work in monetary terms, entitled *Estimating the Value of Unpaid Work in Canada*.

1981

Statistics Canada conducts the first national study of time-use as a pilot study.

1985

Statistics Canada publishes its second set of estimates of the value of non-market activities in the home, entitled *The Value of Household Work in Canada, 1981*.

1986

Statistics Canada conducts its first time-use survey as part of the General Social Survey program. Other General Social Surveys that provide data on unpaid work include the Family History Survey (1990) and the Health and Social Support module (1985).

1988

Marilyn Waring publishes *If Women Counted, A New Feminist Economics*, which makes the case for a re-evaluation of the economic contributions of household work and volunteer work by women.

1990

Commonwealth ministers responsible for Women's Affairs agree to fully recognize the paid and unpaid contribution of women and to promote their equitable share in the rewards and benefits accruing to the economy.

1993

The first Canadian organized International Conference on the Measurement and Valuation of Unpaid Work is held thanks to co-convenors, Status of Women Canada (SWC) and Statistics Canada. In addition to helping organize the conference, the federal government provided funding for Canadian women's groups to participate.

1993

In December, Statistics Canada releases a report entitled *Dual Earners: Who's Responsible for Housework?* which concludes that although housework is usually shared more equitably as women's education level and earning power grow, women perform the majority of housework (65.9%), especially as the number of children increases, regardless of their working status.

1994

Statistics Canada publishes its fourth study on the value of household work, *The Value of Household Work in Canada*, 1992. The value of household work is estimated at between \$210.8 billion and \$318.8 billion, depending upon the method used.

1995

The UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing calls for national and international statistical organizations to measure unpaid work and reflect its value in satellite accounts to the GDP. This represents a 20-year long, grass-roots movement that involved more than 1,200 non-government organizations led by the International Women Count Network, which includes Canadian members.

The UN Human Development Report announces that women's unpaid work and undervalued work is worth \$11 trillion annually worldwide. It says that three-fourths of men's work is in paid market activities compared with only one-third of women's work.

Statistics Canada releases *Household's Unpaid Work: Measurement and Valuation*, an in-depth report on the measurement and valuation of unpaid work in Canada, along with revised estimates for 1961-1992 and examination of changes in household's unpaid work over time.

1996

The first Canadian Census to collect data on unpaid work focuses on dependent care as a critical and urgent unpaid work issue of public policy interest. It confirms the patterns of time-use surveys and will enable further analysis of paid and unpaid work patterns for different population groups across the country. Inclusion of these types of questions in the Census is the result of much hard work and commitment on the part of grass-roots, Canadian women's organizations.

Statistics Canada releases *The Statistics Canada Total Work Accounts System* which includes a wide-ranging survey of possible field of application of a Total Works Account System concept and data relevant to researchers and public policy people.

1997

A coalition of women's groups led by Mothers are Women holds a policy symposium on unpaid work.

Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Status of Women release Economic Gender Equality Indicators. Unpaid work is central to the development of 'work' indicators.

1998

The federal budget includes a tax credit for unpaid work by caregivers.

(Adapted from *Canadian Women - Making an Impact*, Status of Women, Canada, 1998)