

Policy Brief Re: Study on Economic Security on Women with Disabilities

Presented by: DisAbled Women's Network Canada (DAWN Canada)

Introduction:

The DisAbled Women's Network Canada (DAWN Canada) was founded in 1985 and is a bilingual, non-profit, feminist organization that is committed to ending isolation, removing barriers, promoting equality and establishing economic security of Canadian women with disabilities. DAWN Canada's mission is to create policies and mandates, do outreach and be a resource for women with disabilities. DAWN Canada is also committed to ending poverty, improving housing, making viable employment accessible and enhancing the quality of disabled women's lives. We are very thankful to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for allowing us the opportunity to participate in the collaboration of improving disabled Canadian women's lives in regards their economic security.

The presentation "Study on Economic Security on Women with Disabilities"¹ points out how disabled women contribute to the Canadian economy and clarifies their financial responsibilities and economic hardships. This policy brief on economic security is organized into five themes: economic contribution, workplace and volunteer participation, income protection, access to affordable housing and food resources and attitudinal barriers.

Theme 1: Economic Contribution

Women with disabilities are major financial contributors to the Canadian economy for purchasing goods and services. Women with disabilities are major economic drivers because these services they require generate employment, industry and retail in the following areas:

- Health services
- Disability supports
- Child care
- Transportation

Theme 2: Workplace Participation and Volunteer Participation

DAWN Canada would like to see improvement in the following areas if women with disabilities are to have equal participation in the Canadian workplace:

- Wage equity
- Meaningful employment opportunities

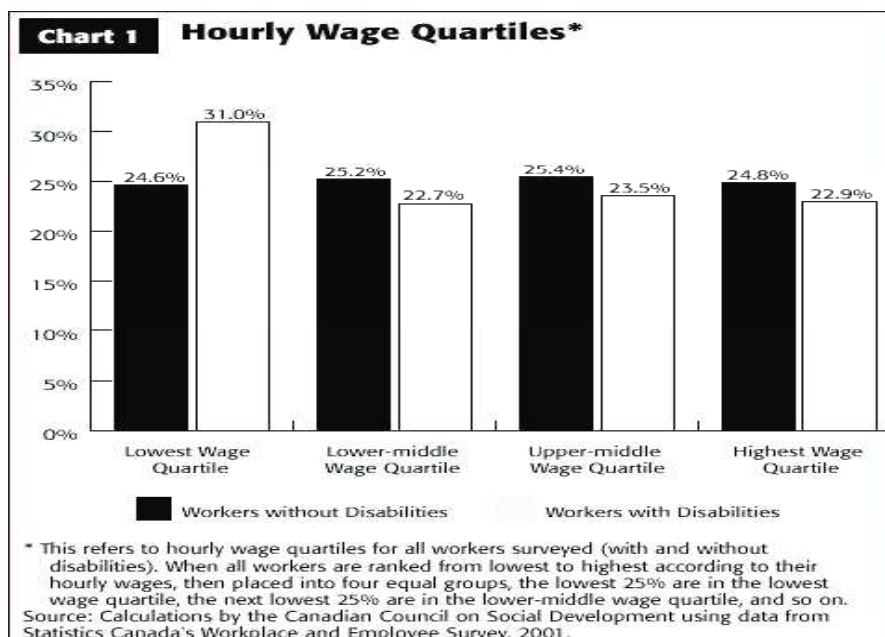
¹ Report presented by DAWN's Acting President Carmela Hutchinson and Executive Director Bonnie Brayton to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, May 3, 2007 in Ottawa, Canada

- Workplace accommodation
- Household accommodation
- Opportunities for skills training
- National daycare system

With the labour shortage in the country, businesses are turning to people with disabilities as possible answers to the labour shortage².

Wage Equity

Women with disabilities create job opportunities, but do not have wage equity in comparison to able bodied women. Calculations done by the Canadian Council on Social Development³ using data from the 2001 Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) conducted by Statistics Canada indicates that women with disabilities are contained to low wage positions and earn 1.9% less than able-bodied women in the highest wage quartiles. Asymmetrical wage relations must be eradicated as it is against the Employment Equity Act, part 1, employer obligations section 5 a,b⁴.



² Human Resources and Social Development Canada. 2006. Advancing the Inclusion of People with Disabilities 2006 – Chapter Three: Learning, Skills, and Employment” Available at:

<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/odi/documents/advancingInclusion06/introduction.shtml>

³ Canadian Council on Social Development Disability Information Sheet Number 16, 2004 Available at: <http://www.ccsd.ca/drip/research/drip16/index.htm>

⁴ Employment Equity Act. #1, Chapter 1995 c.44. Available at:

http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/showdoc/cs/E-5.401/bo-ga:s_3::bo-ga:s_4/20070518?command=searchadvanced&caller=AD&search_type=bool&shorttitle=employment%20equity&day=18&month=5&year=2007&search_domain=cs&showall=L&statuteyear=all&lengthannual=50&length=50&page=3

If Canada is to “build a strong economy”⁵ as per Advantage Canada, it must recognize the need to provide women with disabilities viable employment opportunities with equal pay. Employment opportunities for women with disabilities with pay equity will guarantee women with disabilities economic security and purchasing power. Therefore, wage and equitable employment opportunities will enhance the tax base while assisting in Canada’s labour shortage.

Meaningful employment opportunities

Women with disabilities need meaningful workplace and volunteer opportunities. Employment opportunities should take into account education and experience as a skill set. DAWN Canada asks that workplace and volunteer positions be personally and financially rewarding. Volunteers should have expenses reimbursed and disability accommodation is paramount. Meaningful employment should include the opportunity for promotions and advancement⁶. DAWN Canada would like to ensure economic security for women with disabilities by direct participation in the workforce.

Accessible and Accommodating Labour Sectors

DAWN Canada would like to create accessible and accommodating labour market participation. The workplace and volunteer sector must work towards accommodating their employees and volunteers in a plurality of ways such as:

- Allowing for flexible working arrangements (i.e. hours, location etc)⁷
- Creating a safe and ongoing dialogue between employer and worker/volunteer about disability supports in the workplace

Workplace and volunteer accommodation is crucial in establishing a non-discriminatory work environment. The Canadian Abilities Foundation (CAF) published findings that approximate “annual workplace accommodation costs...under \$1,500”⁸, which DAWN Canada believes is financially in reach for most employers. DAWN Canada is committed to educating the labour sector about how to accommodate women with disabilities in order to make the labour market a feasible opportunity.

⁵ Department of Finance Canada. November 2006. *Advantage Canada: Building a Strong Economy Summary*, available at: <http://www.fin.gc.ca/ec2006/plan/ecpame.html>

⁶ Canadian Council on Social Development Disability Information Sheet Number 16, 2004 Available at: <http://www.ccsd.ca/drip/research/drip16/index.htm>

⁷ Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) Information Disability Sheet: Number 18, 2005

Available online at: <http://www.ccsd.ca/drip/research/drip18/index.htm>

⁸ The Canadian Abilities Foundation (CAF). 2004. *Summary Report – Neglected or Hidden: Connecting Employers & People with Disabilities in Canada*. Available online at: http://enablelink.org/features/noh/noh_summary_en.html

Household Accommodation

DAWN Canada is committed to improving the lives of disabled women in the public and private sphere, which begins with the initiative to accommodate disabled women in the home. DAWN Canada recommends that:

- Accommodation support for disabled women must extend to the home⁹

Women with disabilities must be supported with accommodations in the home so that they are able to perform household duties.

Opportunities for Skills Advancement

DAWN Canada believes that economic security can occur if there is an investment in Canadian disabled women's lives in the following ways:

- The creation of entrepreneurial opportunities
- Technical Training programs¹⁰ that allow for new skills
- Access to Training programs for Employment Insurance (EI) qualifiers

DAWN Canada looks forward to Canada's commitment as per *Advantage Canada* about establishing "the right conditions for Canadians—and Canadian businesses and organizations—to thrive"¹¹. DAWN Canada is encouraged by Advantage Canada and feels that independent business opportunities and technical training will improve disabled women's employability skills.

National Daycare System

DAWN Canada has identified that a national daycare system will allow women with disabilities to access the workforce more easily. An improved childcare system in Canada that is accessible and affordable will allow disabled women to:

- Alleviate the feminization of poverty by allowing excess funds to go towards improved food resources and housing
- Increase their chances of stable employment
- Improve the social health determinants of disabled women and their children
- Must also be able to accommodate women with disabilities and any disabled children

⁹ Gail Fawcett. 2000. *Bringing Down the Barriers: The Labour Market and Women With Disabilities in Ontario*. CCSD: Ottawa, Available at:

<http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2000/wd/concl.htm>

¹⁰ Canadian Council on Social Development Disability Information Sheet Number 16, 2004 Available at: <http://www.ccsd.ca/drip/research/drip16/index.htm>

¹¹ Department of Finance Canada. November 2006. *Advantage Canada: Building a Strong Economy Summary*, Available at: <http://www.fin.gc.ca/ec2006/plan/ecpame.html>

Improved childcare in Canada will assist women with disabilities in becoming participants in the “economic, social, cultural and political life of communities”¹².

Theme 3: Income Protection

DAWN Canada recommends support and income protection for women with disabilities in the following ways:

- Income supports that protect women from poverty
- Flexibility to move between income programs and employment
- Separate income programs from disability-related supports and services¹³
- Employment Insurance (EI) qualification for entrepreneurs and the removal of EI eligibility restrictions for federally funded supported employment and supported entrepreneurship programs. It is vital to remove this barrier for women (and men) who might otherwise benefit from an upgrade of their skills in order to improve their employability.

Ensuring that women with disabilities are protected financially and have the flexibility to move between income-support programs will guarantee that women with disabilities and their dependents do not enter into poverty. Establishing income support and economic security is essential for women with disabilities because they are often the main source of economic support for their families¹⁴. Income support programs must also recognize the episodic nature¹⁵ of some illnesses/disabilities and have structures in place that can support women’s needs. DAWN Canada recognizes that income protection is necessary as a preventative measure to ensure that disabled women and the families many of them support are safeguarded from poverty and abuse.

Theme 4: Access to Affordable Housing and Food Resources

DAWN Canada extends the meaning of economic security to include:

- Quality, accessible and affordable housing
- Accessible, affordable housing must also be available to disabled women who have children

¹² Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. *September 2004. From Patchwork to Frame: A Child Care Strategy for Canada*. Ottawa, Available at: http://72.14.205.104/search?q=cache:WbJwXcjJsAMJ:www.childcareadvocacy.ca/resources/pdf/framework_cc.pdf+From+Patchwork+to+Framework&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=ca&client=firefox-a

¹³ Gail Fawcett. 2000. *Bringing Down the Barriers: The Labour Market and Women With Disabilities in Ontario*. CCSD: Ottawa, Available at: <http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2000/wd/concl.htm>

¹⁴ Statistics Canada. 1994. *Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics*.

¹⁵ Gail Fawcett. 2000. *Bringing Down the Barriers: The Labour Market and Women With Disabilities in Ontario*. CCSD: Ottawa, Available at: <http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2000/wd/section2.htm>

- Access to food

Quality housing and access to food guarantees disabled women and their children the basic social determinants of health, which are crucial for basic well-being in Canada.

Theme 5: Attitudinal Barriers

DAWN Canada would like to adopt the recommendations from Bringing Down the Barriers¹⁶ report, by ensuring that more employment opportunities for women with disabilities will exist if:

- Social attitudes about women with disabilities are improved
- Knowledge about women with disabilities is expanded
- There is a creation of support groups and forums for women with disabilities which will behave as an information resource for them
- Intersectionality lenses are applied to understanding the heterogeneous experience of disabilities

DAWN Canada recognizes that profound change can emanate from Canadian society if attitudes and an expanded analysis of oppression are applied to the creation of social and economic policies about women with disabilities.

Conclusion

DAWN Canada is grateful for the opportunity to participate and collaborate in change about disabled women's economic security. DAWN Canada believes that an improved quality of life for women with disabilities is necessary and should begin with the establishment of economic security by means of income protection, labour market participation, flexible work arrangements, a national daycare system, quality housing and access to food resources. DAWN Canada believes that the recommendations in this policy brief can improve disabled women's lives in Canada. DAWN Canada requests that you make use of our organization and call on our experience so that we can work together on creating equality for all Canadians.



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¹⁶ Ibid

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