

## **Gendering the Poverty Line (2004)**

### **Executive Summary**

- There is no official poverty line in Canada. However, several measures of low income published by the federal government are used as poverty lines by non-governmental organizations. CASW examines whether these measures reflect the needs and experiences of women.
- The rate and incidence of women's poverty in Canada depends upon which measure is used to calculate it. Each of the measures has strengths and weaknesses. For this reason, CASW recommends that multiple measures are better than one.
- Whatever measure of poverty is used, the incidence of poverty is greater for women than for men.
- Some poverty measures rely primarily upon a basket of goods (a so-called absolute approach). Some tie poverty to income distribution (a relative approach). A relative measure is more transparent in linking the poverty line to the general standard of living based on income distribution.
- Some countries (the United States) use a poverty line based on a basket measure. Others (the United Kingdom) use a relative measure. Canada uses both.
- Some measures of poverty have greater political currency than others in different jurisdictions in Canada. Given the multidimensionality of poverty, CASW supports those measures which are likely to lead to more support for those who need it.
- In Europe, new approaches are being developed to measure poverty. In addition to income based measures like those in Canada, there are measures based on perceived deprivation, relative deprivation and social indicators. It is time to incorporate some of these measures in this country.

- New measures need to be developed for women. The structural causes of women's poverty are different from those affecting men. They are grounded in differential relations of women and men to the family, the labour market and social benefits.
- One way to link poverty measures more closely to women's experiences is to make women, not the family or household, the unit of analysis.
- Another way is to develop gender sensitive social indicators related to education, health, employment, and family support. A multiple index of women's poverty can be developed.

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