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SOLE SUPPORT MOTHERS AND OPPORTUNITY PLANNING IN THE THOMSON REPORT

Felicite Stairs*

I. INTRODUCTION

In September, 1988, the Social Assistance Review Committee (hereinafter the Committee) chaired by George Thomson released its long-awaited report on social assistance in Ontario. The Report contains a number of recommendations which, if implemented, will significantly impact on all recipients. Even if only partially implemented, the entire Report remains an important document elucidating current ideologies of welfare and forecasting future developments. The analysis presented in this paper proceeds with

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1. I would like to thank the following people for their guidance, criticism and support during this project: Shelley Gavigan, Mary Jane Mossman, James Hathaway, David Draper and Ian Morrison.


2. Some recommendations have already been approved: see section on "Provincial response to the Report", Part III (2), infra. p. 183.


I take the view that ideology bears a relation to material reality, and that they are mutually influential. Dominant ideologies are those which appear non-ideological, "common sense", thus making it possible to gain the consent of the oppressed in their own oppression by making alternatives seem impossible, "against common sense".

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both these points in mind.4
The Report starts from the principle that:

"All people in Ontario are entitled to an equal assurance of life opportunities in a society that is based on fairness, shared responsibility, and personal dignity for all."5

It follows that:

"The objective for social assistance therefore must be to ensure that individuals are able to make the transition from dependence to autonomy, and from exclusion on the margins of society to integration within the mainstream of community life."6

The first operating principle of the Committee is that "all members of the community have a presumptive right to social assistance based on need". This signals a change not only in the creation of a right to social assistance, but also in mandating that the criterion of eligibility should be need, not some form of deservedness based on behaviour or status.7 Other important principles are those of "personal


5. Supra, note 1a at 8.

6. Ibid.

7. Eligibility under the extant system is theoretically based on need as well, but benefit levels are not; the two interact for unemployed employables who are not eligible for the higher-paying Family Benefits but only for General Welfare assistance. Another even more obvious example is sole support mothers, who must wait for 3 to 4 months after application before becoming eligible for Family Benefits, living for the duration on (lower) General Welfare assistance. The Report recommends that Family Benefits and General Welfare assistance be collapsed into one system, with all applicants in need eligible for the higher level of benefits.
development" (personal growth and integration into the community), and "personal responsibility" (individual choice, self-determination, and participation in community life). Support for family life, though conditioned by sensitivity to the safety of individual family members, is another operating principle.

One of the concerns of the Committee is the stigma attached to the receipt of social assistance. The Committee's insistence that social assistance is a "right" of those in need, rather than a privilege conferred on some through the generosity of the providers, is partly an attempt to reduce stigma. The Committee also recommends decreasing the number of categories of eligibility to three. This is in contrast to the current system which comprises 22 categories of persons eligible for benefits, thereby the "hierarchy of deservedness" will be reduced among recipients and in the eyes of the public.

A third method of reducing the stigma is to decrease the number of recipients of social assistance. The Committee recommends that income maintenance for disabled people be placed in a special program and administered separately. They also recommend the introduction of a Children's Benefit to meet the income needs of all children, and to be delivered through the tax system. With the needs of the elderly already met through pension schemes, social assistance recipients would be a residual category, made up of unemployed employables whose needs are not met through other income replacement schemes such as Unemployment Insurance, the temporary unemployables, and sole-support parents who choose to stay home with their children.

Numerous recommendations flesh out how the transitions from dependence to autonomy and from margin to mainstream of society are to be achieved. A major theme running through the Report is that social assistance recipients want to and should be encouraged to re-enter the labour force. To facilitate this, the Report recommends a reduction of work disincentives currently in the system, the provision of support services and the implementation of opportunity planning. Opportunity


10. Ibid. at 115ff.

11. Ibid. at 121.
planning encompasses a potentially wide-ranging set of activities designed to help recipients gain skills and to plan and achieve employment or other goals to promote integration into the community.

For some recipients, specifically those seen as unemployed employables whose needs are not being met by other income replacement schemes, benefits would be conditional on participation in the opportunity planning process: Recommendation 79. For others, opportunity planning would be available but not a condition of eligibility. This latter group includes the temporarily unemployable, the disabled and sole support “parents”: Recommendation 78.

Opportunity planning raises some important issues for all social assistance recipients: the spectre of state coercion, the morality of “training programs” which benefit business at the expense of recipients and workers, and the legitimation of the view that inadequacies in the labour supply, rather than a lack of commitment to full and well-paid employment, create poverty.

This paper is concerned with the special concerns of sole support mothers with respect to the recommendations on opportunity planning. Although other groups of recipients may be more drastically affected by the proposed eligibility requirements than sole support mothers, at least in the short term, sole support mothers merit a separate analysis for several reasons: the numbers affected, their special problems as single mothers, their historical position and last, but perhaps most importantly, their invisibility in the Report. Each of these concerns makes sole support mothers especially vulnerable in terms of the Report’s recommendations.

The sheer numbers on the caseload reflect the more general phenomenon of the feminization of poverty. In 1984, 11.4 per cent of all families in Ontario were below the low-income cut-off points deter-

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11a Report, supra, note 1a at 235.
11b Ibid. at 234.
13. For an analysis of the impact of the entire package of recommendations on women, see K. Thompson-Harry, “SARC - Passport to Poverty or Escape from Poverty?”, forthcoming in C.J.W.L.
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mined by Statistics Canada, to be “poor”. Fifty-eight per cent of all single-mother-led families with children under 16 were poor in the same year by the same definition. This is in part a function of single parenthood (54 per cent of all single-parent-led families were poor), but single parenthood itself is gendered (in 88 per cent of the single parent families, the single parents were women). The chance of being poor as a single mother is thus greater than one in two.

Approximately one-third of all single mothers rely on Family Benefits at any given time. Single mothers constitute 30 per cent of all social assistance recipients (General Welfare and Family Benefits combined caseload), and 48 per cent of the Family Benefits caseload. Seventy per cent of all families on social assistance are headed by single mothers. In addition, the number of single-mother-led families increased by 40 per cent between 1976 and 1984, with a proportional increase in the Family Benefits caseload. In contrast, the proportion of Family Benefits recipients who are single fathers has been estimated at less than 1 per cent. Thus recommendations affecting sole support parents in reality affect sole support mothers.

In addition, given the transitory nature of assistance for most recipients, the proportion of single mothers directly affected by social assistance policies is very high. The number of mothers indirectly affected, that is, who wish to leave abusive or otherwise destructive

17. Evans, supra, note 15 at 9.
18. Report, supra, note 1a at 32.
20. Leighton, supra, note 4 at 334.
21. Evans, supra, note 15 at 6: Between 1975-84, 39-43 per cent of the caseload either entered or exited the system per year. Approximately 25 per cent left the caseload within 1 year of entrance, but the majority left within 3 years: ibid. at 11.
relationships but do not see the social assistance system as able to meet their needs, can only be estimated.22

The highly gendered nature of the category reflects the role of women in families and the ideologies of motherhood extant in our society. This in turn demands that this role be taken into account when determining welfare policies, a factor not applicable or necessary to an analysis of the effects of such policies on other recipients. Factors which must be considered include: the availability of child care, limitations placed on the kind of work possible because of childcare responsibilities and because of still heavily gendered labour market conditions, the cost of the 'double day' to working mothers, and the heavy and often conflicting demands of trying to be a 'good mother'. Failure to see the issue as gendered and different from other recipients has led to solutions which treat sole support mothers as 'men with a disability'. In the Report, the aggregation of sole support mothers, the temporarily (medically) unemployable and the disabled in Recommendation 78 is noteworthy in this respect.22a

Under the Family Benefits Act, sole support mothers who qualify financially are unconditionally eligible for social assistance, as long as they have dependent children living at home.23 Recommendation 78 appears to maintain this position, but read in light of the rest of the Report, it is a 'soft' recommendation. It may apply only to mothers of 'young' children, with 'young' undefined and highly manipulable. It is also subject to reconsideration if and when the children's benefit comes into effect. If my analysis is correct, this indicates a serious loss of control for sole support mothers over whether, and to what extent, to stay home or to enter the labour market.

By failing to take into account the work that women do outside the labour force, and by emphasising the value of paid employment, the Report may also represent an important ideological erosion in the historical position of sole support mothers as 'deserving poor', whose 'right' to social assistance is unquestioned by all but a few. This erosion again reduces choice by making the decision to stay home less socially acceptable, tainted by images of 'welfare bum'.

22. For an analysis of the accessibility of benefits and benefit levels in encouraging/discouraging women from leaving abusive relationships or entering the labour market under poor labour market conditions see Abramowitz, supra, note 4 at 36, and Barrett, supra, note 3 at 233.

22a Report, supra, note 1a.

23. R.R.O. 1980, Reg. 318, as am. O. Reg. 49/88, s. 2(7).
Sole support mothers are visible in the Report as social assistance recipients and potential workers, but not as mothers. At first glance, this is a trivial distinction, as their perceived needs as recipients/workers include services such as daycare. However, this gives rise to a ‘model’ of sole support mothers which implies that sole support mothers + daycare = unattached recipient, when a more realistic model is sole support mothers + daycare = unattached recipient + full-time parenting and other household responsibilities. This has several effects.

By ignoring the last part of the equation, sole support parents provided with daycare who still cannot succeed in the workforce, because of the restrictions placed on potential jobs, or because their physical or mental health deteriorates, can be seen as ‘inadequate’ in their own and others’ eyes. If all they can achieve after opportunity planning and daycare is provided is a low-paying, part-time, insecure job, then that is their fault. Their ‘failure’ can be personalized and individualized, with the result that there is nothing that the state or politics can do about it.

This is not to deny that there are other mothers who are coping with the ‘double day’. It is instead a recognition that they do so at a cost that unattached recipients do not have to pay, a cost that not all women can or are prepared to pay.

Sole support mothers share with other recipients the problem that what is often lacking is not ‘opportunities’, but adequate jobs. In addition, they face, along with unattached women recipients, a poorly paid segregated job market. However, the concept of opportunity planning itself is designed on a ‘male’ model of self-reliance and autonomy, with no room for the reality that for many women, childrearing by definition means having your individualistic opportunities curtailed. If ‘opportunity planning’ is to be meaningful for women, it must be designed with these realities in mind.

As a feminist, I feel a constant tension in writing about this problem between future objectives and current realities – between my position that non-dependence for women in our society is to be found in the transformed work place, and my belief that for many women this ideal is currently impossible, given the lack of socialized support services and the unequal conditions of the labour market for women. While I

cannot attempt to wholly resolve this conflict here, my views require me to support the Committee's efforts to provide training, support services and reduced work disincentives for those women who choose to enter the paid work force. However, because the Committee has power only in the area of social assistance, it seems equally necessary to accept the limitations of the current support systems such as daycare, rather than assume that other government bodies will immediately implement policies complementary to the Report's recommendations.

Above all, I remain firmly committed to the notion that women must have the final decision, as far as that is possible, in how to live their lives and raise their families. The Report promises that 'choices' for sole support mothers will be enlarged, not contracted. This paper will examine the likelihood of that promise being fulfilled.

II. OPPORTUNITY PLANNING AND SOLE SUPPORT MOTHERS

1. HIERARCHIES OF DESERVEDNESS

Historically, social welfare programs have divided recipients into two groups, those perceived as 'deserving' and those perceived as 'undeserving'. The composition of each category is historically and contextually determined. Mossman and MacLean claim that those seen as the 'deserving' poor in Ontario social assistance schemes have been workers, who, through no fault of their own, are out of work. That they are 'deserving' is proven by the more generous benefits and less invasive conditions of entitlement provided by Unemployment Insurance and other work-related benefits. In their analysis, the deserving poor fit a 'male breadwinner' model, and tend to be men. The 'undeserving poor' fit a 'male pauper' model, with more moralistic conditions of entitlement and less generous benefits under social assistance. Women are classified as deserving or undeserving according to the status of their spouses, if they have one. Sole support mothers fall...


26. Mossman & Maclean, ibid.; Wilson, supra, note 4 at 100.
by default into the 'undeserving male pauper' category.\textsuperscript{27}

This model may be descriptive of the differences in stigma between contributory schemes such as Unemployment Insurance and noncontributory social assistance programs, though this is not necessarily manifested in higher benefit levels or less invasive conditions.\textsuperscript{28} However, within social assistance programs there is also a hierarchy of deservedness, reflected in differing levels of benefits among the 22 categories of eligibility (only partially related to need) and conditions of eligibility.\textsuperscript{29} The disabled, the elderly, the medically unemployable and sole support mothers traditionally have belonged to the 'more deserving' group: those who should not be expected to support themselves. Able bodied people, historically men, who are out of work and not or no longer eligible for contributory insurance benefits, comprise the 'less deserving' group.\textsuperscript{30}

Although the \textit{Report} recommends basing the amount of benefits purely on need and not on a hierarchy of deservedness, the hierarchy remains in the retention of groups differing in the conditions of eligibility. For the 'more deserving' poor, opportunity planning is not mandatory, with the implication that these recipients have valid reasons, outside their control, for being on social assistance. For the 'less deserving', refusal to participate in opportunity planning may mean a loss of benefits.\textsuperscript{31}

As the categorization of a group as more or less deserving is socially determined, it is axiomatic that a group may be reclassified as social conditions and ideologies of poverty change. Groups are seen to be more or less deserving based on their ability to support themselves. In

\textsuperscript{27} Mossman \& MacLean, \textit{supra}, note 25 at 97.

\textsuperscript{28} Many recipients of Worker's Compensation must supplement their partial pensions with General Welfare. Told they can work by the Worker's Compensation Board and must work by General Welfare, but partially disabled, often older and often with specialized skills or no skills, they are arguably in the same position as other unemployed employable recipients, except they may have less of a chance of ever getting off benefits.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Report}, \textit{supra}, note 1a at 145.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.} at 145.

\textsuperscript{31} This is similar to the "workhouse test" of the Poor Laws: these people are only on assistance because they don't want to work; to prove they really want to, and really need our help, they will be willing to enter the workhouse (or opportunity planning): Irving, \textit{supra}, note 25 at 6.
a society dominated by the work ethic and the belief that anyone who really wants to get a job can if they try hard enough, it is clear that able-bodied men are less deserving. It is also clear that some people are too old, too sick, or too disabled to work in the marketplace.

The reasons that sole support mothers have traditionally been considered more deserving, that is, the construction of, and value placed on, their role as mothers, do not fit into either of these categories. Therefore as the position and role of women in society change, it may be expected that their place in the hierarchy of deservedness may also change. By retaining unconditional eligibility for sole support mothers in Recommendation 78, the Report implies that their place has not changed. It is therefore important to examine whether the rest of the Report bears this out.

2. JUSTIFICATION FOR DESERVEDNESS

The first Ontario legislation providing public assistance for sole-support mothers was passed in 1920, as the Mother's Allowance Act.32 There were several motivations behind the legislation. As urbanization progressed, with a concomitant reliance on a pay packet and the threat of destitution when it was removed, women and children came to be seen as victims of war, illness and industrial accidents.33 There was also increasing dissatisfaction with the expense and quality of care in custodial institutions for children.34 As early as 1900, the Ontario Superintendent of Neglected and Dependent Children noted that neglect leading to wardship could be prevented if necessity didn’t force women to go to work, that is, if they could devote all their time and attention to training their children.35 With a declining birth rate and the effects of war and the flu epidemic of 1919, there was concern over the reproduction, morality and health of future generations. Increasing immigration also produced a racist concern to encourage Canadian born and raised children.36

32. Report, supra, note 1a at 72.

33. Social Assistance Review Committee, "A Reader on Social Assistance in Ontario" (February, 1987) at 25.


35. Dr. Cliff Williams, quoted in Social Assistance Review Committee, supra, note 33 at 25.
These concerns played themselves out in the conditions of eligibility for the allowance. Recipients not only had to be in need, but also deemed capable of providing a 'suitable home.'\(^{37}\) They had to be British subjects, with a minimum of three years residence in Canada and two years in Ontario. Only widows, or wives of men in insane asylums or who were permanently and totally disabled were eligible. In 1921, the legislation was extended to include women who were deserted, and who had not heard from their husbands for at least 5 years.\(^{38}\) The legislation was extended over the years to reduce the length of time of desertion necessary and the numbers of children. Divorced women were not included until 1955, and unwed mothers not until 1957.\(^{39}\)

Along with the allowance came home supervision of the recipient families. The justification for this, as well as for the allowance, was that 'the mother is the guardian of the future citizen of the state and, as such, ought to be supported.'\(^{40}\) The mother was, in essence, an applicant for the job of guardian of future citizens, and thus had to measure up to government standards.\(^{41}\)

Even apart from the moral strictures placed on mothers by the 'suitable home' requirements, the early legislation cannot be interpreted as inherently pro-woman. Strong-Boag makes the point that women were deserving of recognition only inasmuch as they were mothers, not because they were in need in their own right. The early switch from the language of 'pension' to that of 'allowance', in her view, reflects that the money was for children's needs.\(^{42}\) Recipients may not have shared this view, but the Commission which ad-

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37. That is, to be without a husband through no fault of her own. The language of suitability did not disappear until 1966, and then was replaced by the sexual policing inherent in the "spouse-in-the-house" rule. See Leighton, supra, note 4 for further development of this theme.

38. Irving, supra, note 25 at 16.

39. Leighton, supra, note 4 at 331.

40. Dr. Cliff Williams, supra, note 33 at 27.

41. Strong-Boag, supra, note 34 at 25.

42. Ibid. at 31.
ministered the allowance apparently did:

"By the majority of the beneficiaries, the allowance is felt to be a reward for service, not a form of relief. This feeling is fostered by the Commission in insisting on the mother's responsibility to the state in bringing up its citizens."43

The allowance was never meant to replace paid employment, but was to be supplemented by part-time work or work that could be done at home, without interfering with her 'real' work of raising her children.44

Through the development of the Mother's Allowance in Ontario the state began to express a vested interest in 'its' children. It gave mothers an allowance to bring up its children, much as a husband would if he were present. In return, the mother was expected to be morally suitable for the job entrusted, to accept the help of the state in setting standards for how the child should be brought up, and to take her responsibility to the state seriously. Conversely, it was recognized that the moral guardianship inherent in mothering was best done by the mother at home, on a full-time basis.

3. THE 'JOB' OF 'MOTHERING' IN THE THOMSON REPORT

The Report's conclusion that sole-support mothers should be retained in the deserving category is not supported by clear language reflective of the value and role of mothering. In the three places in the Report where the issue is addressed, the language is that of choice and, implicitly, privacy:

"Social assistance policy must respect and support the family's ability and right to make decisions...inadequate assistance rates force parents into the workforce when they would rather stay at home; disincentives such as inadequate childcare keep many parents at home when they'd rather work.45

[O]ur opposition to conditions for sole-support parents stems from our belief that parents, not the state, should be making parenting decisions.46

43. Chairman Bryce of the Mothers' Allowance Commission, quoted in Williams, Social Assistance Review Committee, supra, note 33 at 27.

44. Ibid.

45. Report, supra, note 1a at 20.
We also believe that sole-support parents must have the option of staying at home to raise their children if they so choose.\textsuperscript{47}

Why parents should have this choice is unclear. The language of 'moral guardians of future citizens' has disappeared and is replaced by a generalized recognition that parenting is 'vitaly demanding and important work'\textsuperscript{48}, and 'every bit as important and useful a contribution as participation in paid employment'.\textsuperscript{49} Why it is important is never addressed.

Although there is no limitation in the Recommendation, the importance of choice is limited to mothers of 'young' children in several places in the Report, with 'young' undefined: "[W]e believe sole support parents of young children should be able to stay at home if they so choose".\textsuperscript{50} Possible definitions of 'young' are discussed below in the section on other jurisdictions.

4. THE VALUE OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE THOMSON REPORT

In contrast to the paucity of language about mothering, there is much on the value of employment:

"A primary objective...should be to provide the greatest possible opportunity...to contribute fully to the life of his or her community. One of the most important ways individuals contribute to the collective good is through work. Employment, therefore, is a key element in the transition from dependence on social assistance to self-reliance and community integration."\textsuperscript{51}

A job is not only the most important form of income security, but it also "serves as one of the principal ways in which individuals define themselves in relation to the rest of society".\textsuperscript{52} Read in this light, the Committee's objective of "integration within the mainstream of com-

\textsuperscript{46} Report, supra, note 1a at 232.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid. at 339.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. at 20. The same theme is evident at 233.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid. at 339.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. at 233. See also 339.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. at 89.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. at 266. See also M.A. Glendon, The New Family and the New Property (London: Butterworths, 1981), who suggests that family ties are eroding while employment ties (and identities) are increasing.
munity life"; and its operating principles stressing "integration into the community" and "participation in the community" indicate that its vision of society involves employment for everyone.

Supporting this view is the Report's discussion on the institution of a Guaranteed Annual Income. A Guaranteed Annual Income was recommended by a number of groups in submissions to the Committee, including the Sole Support Parents Advisory Group. The Committee rejected the idea for a number of reasons, although agreeing with the objectives of the scheme. Its major reservation was that putting money into a GAI would deflect attention away from jobs, contrary to the 'crucial' role that employment plays in the recommendations.

5. MOTHERHOOD: CHILD CARE RESPONSIBILITIES AS A DISABILITY

There is a broad and general recognition that child care responsibilities and the current lack of day care are serious barriers to full integration within the community. The equation of child care responsibilities with disability is most explicit in the discussion of making entitlement conditional:

"For those who do not have child care responsibilities or disabilities with which to contend, it...seems reasonable to impose expectations that are no different than those we place on members of society as a whole."

The 'choice' to be given is not an encouragement to stay home, as in the early years of Mothers' Allowance, but rather is "to place them in

53. Report, supra, note 1a at 8.
54. Ibid. at 15.
55. Ibid. at 16.
56. Ibid. at 102.
58. Report, supra, note 1a at 104.
59. Ibid. at 257, 262, 318, for example.
60. Ibid. at 230.
the same position as other non-social assistance individuals or couples who feel financial pressure to supplement a modest income".61 In other words, children are a handicap to sole-support parents, and assistance should be given to place sole-support parents on the same footing as other individuals in our society.

Support for the family is a fundamental theme throughout the Report, stemming from Operating Principle 7, Respect for the Family.61a One of the ways in which the Committee envisions supporting the family is through the adaptation of workplaces to accommodate workers' child care responsibilities, including more provisions for unpaid leave, benefits for part-time workers, flexible work schedules, and child care.62 All these suggestions are, however, clearly predicated on sole support mothers moving into the work force.

6. A ‘SOFT’ RECOMMENDATION

The first Operating Principle in the Report suggests that eligibility should be based solely on need.62a It would therefore seem that the recommendation to make eligibility for sole-support mothers unconditional falls more in line with the spirit of the Report than the recommendation to make it conditional for unemployed employable persons. The Committee states that for most recipients, conditional entitlement is not necessary, because most recipients will do whatever they can to get themselves back into the workforce. Conditions are only necessary for those “most at risk of exclusion and long-term dependence”.63 It also accepts the argument that conditions are necessary for public support, given the public's propensity to think all recipients are abusers of the system.64

In light of this, and considering that sole support mothers are one of the groups most at risk of long-term dependence,65 the reasons given

61. Report, supra, note 1a at 233.
61a Ibid. at 19.
62. Ibid. at 92.
62a Ibid. at 11.
63. Ibid. at 230.
64. Ibid. at 228.
65. Although the majority of recipients move off the caseloads within 3 years, those who stay on the caseload for longer periods have a slower "exit rate": proportionally fewer move off every year. Evans, supra, note 15 at 11, 15.
for making opportunity planning for sole-support mothers voluntary indicate that the non-mandatory nature of the recommendation may be at risk, if not currently then in the foreseeable future.

The first reason is based on research from the United States, which shows that voluntary programs for this group of recipients are as successful as mandatory ones.66 Also, from the public hearings, the Committee concluded that the majority of recipients want to be free of social assistance, and would take any opportunity to become so. Therefore, it is “unnecessary to compel” them.67 However, the Report also suggests that the issue should be monitored over time, and progress of recipients compared with those in jurisdictions in which programs are mandatory.68 In addition, every recipient who does not participate in opportunity planning should have their file reviewed every two years, to catch long-term dependence before it starts.69

The second reason is the concern for the possible impact on children of imposing sanctions on the parent, and of increased stigma.70 It is recommended that the issue be reconsidered when a Children’s Benefit is in place: “[T]he effect of conditional entitlement to social assistance on their parents might be very different in that kind of system”.71

The third reason relates to the parent, rather than the state, making decisions regarding parenting methods, discussed above in the section on the ‘job’ of ‘mothering’ in the Report.

Given my view that the Committee does not value mothering or understand the choices involved, the two remaining reasons for unconditionality are 1) that it is not necessary, but a close watch will be kept in case it becomes necessary, and 2) the logistics of sanctioning the parents without making the children suffer. If this last problem can be solved, through the introduction of the Children’s Benefit

67. Ibid.
68. Ibid. at 234.
69. Ibid. at 340, Recommendation 125.
70. Ibid. at 232.
71. Ibid. at 234.
and/or the monitoring of the use of benefits by some third party to ensure that the children are provided for;\textsuperscript{72} it is not unthinkable that a legislature less committed to respect for individuals than the Committee could easily determine that a mandatory program is necessary. Having a framework of mandatory programs already in place will make it even easier.

III. THE FUTURE OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE CRISIS IN THE WELFARE STATE AND CASELOAD PROFILE

To evaluate the possible future of the Recommendations in the Report, it is necessary to examine the overall conditions of fiscal restraint operative in Ontario and Canada at the present time. The Recommendations call for an annual increase in spending of $400 million in the first year, with further increases to follow as more of the Recommendations are implemented.\textsuperscript{73} Moreover, because social assistance funding is shared among the federal, provincial and municipal governments, implementation of the Recommendations requires cooperation and commitment from all levels of governments.

In recent years, growing welfare spending in Canada has confronted the serious obstacles of declining rates of economic growth and profitability of private enterprise, rising unemployment, and increasing disintegration of conventional two-parent families, precipitating a crisis in the welfare state beginning in 1975.\textsuperscript{74} The Family Benefits caseload increased by approximately 175 per cent over the period from 1969 through 1987. The General Welfare caseload increased by 180 per cent during the same period.\textsuperscript{75} Single parent families have been the fastest growing part of the Family Benefits caseload, increasing from

\begin{itemize}
  \item[72.] The GAIN program in place in California, which has a mandatory program for sole-support mothers with children 6 years old and over, provides that the income maintenance worker can control the finances of a mother reluctant to participate in the program. See Report, supra, note 1a at 207. This raises the spectre of children being found "in need of financial protection", and the possibility of a significant increase in state intervention in low-income family life.
  \item[73.] Implementation is planned in 5 stages: see Chapter 11, Report, supra, note 1a, for stages and estimated costing.
  \item[75.] Report, supra, note 1a at 35.
\end{itemize}
33 per cent in 1969 to 41 per cent of the cases in 1987. This is in part due to the fact that, while the Ontario population increased by 11 per cent, the number of sole support mothers increased by 40 per cent between 1975 and 1984. The unemployment rate for single mothers also increased during the same period.

Along with the increase in the number of cases has come a trend towards longer periods on social assistance due to higher unemployment levels, the expansion of part-time work with low wages and no benefits, and rising shelter costs. There is also a higher rate of return to Family Benefits for single mothers than for other groups on social assistance, which appears to be increasing.

In response to the growing crisis, Canada did not initially adopt the full-scale frontal attack on the welfare state which occurred in the United States and in Great Britain. Rather, an attempt was made to hold down social expenditures through 'rationalization'. In particular, the major cost-sharing program between the federal and provincial governments, the Canada Assistance Plan, has remained virtually unchanged between 1984 and 1989 when measured in constant dollars. Through a series of complicated tax reforms and partial indexing of federal benefits, the federal government has decreased spending without making any major changes in the programs themselves. The recent budget, however, announced major changes to the Unemployment Insurance plan and a reduction in payments to cost-sharing programs. The federal government also announced that it

76. Report, supra, note 1a at 37.
77. Evans, supra, note 15 at 4.
78. Ibid. at 5.
79. Ibid. at 13.
80. Ibid. at 17.
82. National Council of Welfare, Social Spending and the Next Budget April 1989, Figure I.
83. Ibid. at 4-5.
84. M. Valpy, "The withering trend of the welfare state", The [Toronto] Globe and
will not proceed with a plan to create 200,000 child care spaces. These recent developments suggest a revised strategy of dismantlement, not just 'rationalization'.

On the provincial level, while there was a 17.3 per cent increase in social expenditures in Ontario during the period from 1975 to 1983, the total number of beneficiaries of the system increased by 71.2 per cent. Within Canada, Ontario fell from seventh place in per capita provincial spending in 1975, to ninth place in 1983. The replacement of the longstanding Conservative government by the Liberal party in 1985 brought no significant increase in money allocated to social assistance. Even though recipients were living on benefits that were barely one-half of the poverty level, another four years passed before any major changes were announced.

2. PROVINCIAL RESPONSE TO THE THOMSON REPORT

With the 1989 provincial budget, the Ministry announced it was allocating $415 million to implement the first stage of the Report. The reforms included $54 million for a new Supports to Employment Program (hereinafter STEP), a seven part program to reduce work disincentives, effective in October, 1989. Most significantly for this paper, the Ministry sees STEP as "consistent with the principles of the Social Assistance Review Committee and provid[ing] a more specific employment-focused approach to the SARC 'opportunity planning' concept".

Other reforms announced were the rationalization and increase of both shelter subsidies and children's benefits, and a 6 per cent increase in all benefits as of January 1990.

86. Moscovitch, supra, note 74 at 384.
87. Mishra, supra, note 81 at 342.
88. Report, supra, note 1a at 80, Table 9.
90. Ministry of Community and Social Services, Details of Changes to Ontario's Social Assistance Programs (May 18, 1989) at 6. The Ministry has recently indicated that the term "opportunity planning" will not be used at all, though something "like it" will be implemented: Ian Morrison, personal comment.
It is significant, of course, that the provincial government has shown a willingness to spend money on reforms, but how it has chosen to implement the Recommendations is equally significant. The increase in benefits through the improved shelter subsidy and children’s benefits will aid many recipients, but still leave them well below the poverty line. The potentially broad ‘opportunity planning’ program, which in the Report was to be tailor-made for all recipients, with a focus on community integration, has been translated into a more ‘employment-focused approach’. Moreover, future developments are clearly dependent on the willingness of the federal and municipal governments to cooperate, including allocating more money at the provincial government’s behest.

Diana Ralph has convincingly illustrated that the compromises the Committee made in the name of political expediency in fact fall under a pro-business model of welfare. One of the benefits to business is flooding the labour market with recipients forced to find ‘opportunities’. In the current economic and political climate, therefore, it is likely that welfare reform measures designed to move recipients off the welfare rolls and into the workforce will be received best.

3. EXISTING PROGRAMS FOR SOLE SUPPORT MOTHERS

(a) Other Jurisdictions
An examination of comparable legislation in other jurisdictions makes plausible the prospect of imposing work requirements for sole support mothers, even those with small children. Within Canada, only five

91. Ralph, supra, note 12 at 13, Table I.

92. See H. Beatty, “Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements: Their Impact on Social Policy and Current Prospects for Reform” (1987) 3 J. Law and Social Policy 36; see also the Report, supra, note 1a at c.8, c.10 and 516-7 on some of the complications of cost-sharing programs at the municipal level, reforms, e.g. raising benefit levels of General Welfare recipients to those of Family Benefits recipients, requires locating extra funds from already-stretched tax bases.

93. Ralph, supra, note 12 at 11-17.

provinces have no work/training requirement for sole support mothers on social assistance: Ontario, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Manitoba. Quebec is the only province which stipulates that mothers with children over six years old, but not those with children under this age, are deemed employable. Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia all have some form of work requirement for mothers with children under age six.

Many American states operating under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (hereinafter AFDC) program have had work requirements for sole support mothers for a number of years. Indeed, Gueron has identified the incentive to work as a central concern of the AFDC program. In the 1960's and 1970's, AFDC caseloads increased dramatically, as did the percentage of recipients who were divorced or never-married women. Employment rates among women also increased, causing many people to reconsider the appropriateness and equity of supporting welfare mothers to stay at home. Welfare mothers were also seen as a group for whom long term dependence on assistance was a problem.

Gueron outlines the advantages of a bargain (conditional entitlement) approach to welfare. As she explains, this approach reinforces the alignment of AFDC with prevailing values, particularly the work ethic, and improves the employability of welfare recipients, increasing 'human capital'. It also provides social benefits by producing useful public service and reducing welfare rolls are also reduced, as some individuals leave the rolls and others never apply. It also has psychological benefits in the increased dignity of recipients, and greater public support. The language of these arguments is startlingly similar to that in the Report, except that Gueron uses it with explicit reference to sole support mothers, while the Committee excludes sole support mothers.

96. Ibid. at 106.
97. Gueron, supra, note 66 at 14.
98. Ibid. at 14.
99. Ibid. at 15.
100. Ibid. at 16.
101. The Committee cited Gueron in numerous places, though not in the section on the value of conditional eligibility.
mothers from the 'bargain'. Partly because of the lack of available childcare, most programs developed under AFDC were in fact not obligatory.

Evans and McIntyre have identified similar pushes toward work incentive programs for sole support mothers in Canada: fiscal restraint, the increase in the number of sole support mothers, increased labour force participation of women and the changing structure of the labour market, with more jobs available for women. In Canada a further incentive is provided through the federal-provincial financial relationship, specifically, the availability of Manpower Training money, including Unemployment Insurance after completion of a program.102

(b) Success of Current Programs
Gueron's study looked at programs in five states, varying in types of opportunities available and whether program participation was required or merely encouraged. In four out of five of the states, there were employment gains for AFDC women involved in the program, with rates of employment 15 months later of between 55 and 61 per cent. More women worked, and more had full-time jobs, compared to those who had not participated in the program. Programs were most effective for women without previous labour market experience, and of limited value for women with previous experience.

Employment rates, excluding West Virginia, increased between 3 and 9 per cent. The fifth state, West Virginia, showed no difference between those participating and those not. This points up the importance of the demand for labour in the equation: the failure in West Virginia was ascribed to the extremely depressed economy.103 Overall figures show that while the number of AFDC mothers looking for work increased from 5.6 per cent in 1961 to 13.8 per cent in 1975 to 40 per cent in 1986, the actual rate of employment dropped from 16.1 per cent in 1971 to 5.8 per cent in 1986.104 Thus, women were being encouraged or required to look for work without regard for the fact that no work was available.

The savings in welfare expenditures in Gueron's study amounted to 8 per cent. Gueron concluded that the programs were cost-effective, but

102. Evans & McIntyre, supra, note 95 at 103-104.
103. Gueron, supra, note 66 at 21.
104. Abramowitz, supra, note 4 at 356.
the earnings increases of between $110 and $560 per year meant that the programs would not move a substantial number of women out of poverty.105

In Ontario, Employment Support Initiatives programs specifically designed for sole support mothers do not significantly change the employment profile of this recipient group, and do not necessarily result in secure or well-paying jobs.106 Evans and McIntyre suggest there are two assumptions underlying work incentive programs for sole support mothers, neither of which can be supported. First, it is assumed that social assistance recipients are part of the 'non-working' poor, when in fact patterns of employment of working mothers as a group, entering and exiting the labour force at frequent intervals, do not differ from that of social assistance recipients. Second, it is assumed that jobs which permit long-term independence from social assistance are available, rather than the low-paying occupationally-segregated jobs which actually exist. They also do not see an improvement in the labour market for women in the foreseeable future.107 They suggest that a responsible social assistance policy at the present time should be directed toward a reforming of the labour market, rather than a reforming of the labour supply.108

105. Gueron, supra, note 66 at 23.
106. Evans & McIntyre, supra, note 95 at 112. A study reviewed by the Committee, however, showed some differences between Employment Support Initiatives (ESI) participants and non-participants, particularly in the likelihood of being on social assistance at the end of a year, and in the probability of being in school. There were no differences in employment rates or wages for full-time workers. Significant factors associated with ESI participation were higher levels of education, fewer children at home, and low unemployment rates in their area. See Report, supra, note 1a at 313. A study which controlled for these variables would have been more informative, and answered the criticism that candidates chosen to participate in programs are screened for success.
108. Evans & McIntyre, supra, note 95 at 119. They point out that both manpower and social assistance programs are both directed toward the supply of labour, rather than at the source of the demand. They suggest that reform efforts should be aimed at, for example, job security measures and effective joint employer-employee labour force planning. Promotion of full employment would also fit in their reform program.
4. THE LIMITATIONS OF CHILD CARE

"We remain convinced that our recommendations regarding social assistance will be of limited value...unless tied to and harmonized with reforms that extend well beyond the provision of adequate income support." 109

The provision of high quality, flexible and affordable day care is a prerequisite to the success of opportunity planning for sole support mothers. The Committee clearly recognizes this factor, and in Recommendation 116 states that "[s]ole support parents receiving social assistance who participate in activities designed to increase their capacity for self-reliance should be guaranteed access to subsidized child care". 110 It is important to note that this does not say that all sole support parents who wish to participate in programs will receive child care, but is limited to those who actually participate. There is no positive duty in the government to provide child care for women who require it, even those who wish to take part in opportunity planning.

Recommendations 107 and 109 also deal with child care. Recommendation 107 suggests that the province and school boards 'should consider' the expansion of pre-school educational programs. 111 Recommendation 109 also recommends the expansion of in-school child care, aimed at children of adolescent mothers completing high school. 111a The fact that neither the Committee nor the social assistance legislation it recommends has any authority over the actions of school boards renders these recommendations somewhat flaccid.

Recommendation 95 states that child care should be treated as a work-related expense, deductible from the benefit cheque, for recipients entering the work force. 112 This recommendation is slated for implementation in October 1989 as part of the Support to Employment Plan. No decision has yet been made on how much will be deductible,


110. Ibid. at 318.

111. This recommendation was not made with child care directly in mind, but rather to give "disadvantaged" children a better chance at success in school, along the lines of the American Head Start program. See discussion in the Report, ibid. at 304-5. However, if instituted, it would obviously have an affect on availability of child care.


112. Ibid. at 279.
but the Ministry has used the figure of $500 maximum per month. Licensed daycare in Metropolitan Toronto currently costs, on average per month, $625 for infant care, and $420 for older children. Even if a sole support parent with one older child may use the entire deduction, more than one child at this rate makes the cost of daycare prohibitive. There are currently 4500 persons on the waiting list for subsidized daycare. Moreover, the list is growing at a rate of 500 per month, with a turnover time of well over a year. Unless actual costs are deductible, and the benefit is extended to parents who have left social assistance, this deduction may amount to very little in practical terms.

5. OPPORTUNITY PLANNING AS ‘QUASI-MANDATORY’

The language of the Report makes it clear that the goal for all recipients is to place them back in the work force, where they will no longer need social assistance. The ‘choice’ of full-time parenting for sole support mothers is a limited one. It will be limited by the definition of ‘young’ children set out in whatever legislation results. It is also limited by the external pressures applied: the ‘choice’ is to participate in opportunity planning, in the mainstream ‘community’ under the Committee’s terms, to be rewarded with child care and extra benefits, or to be invisible at best, further stigmatized at worst. This is not, in my view, a real ‘choice’.

The limiting factors in enacting legislation making opportunity planning mandatory for this group of recipients appear to be logistical: the political and practical difficulty of punishing mothers for non-participation without harming the children; and the (current) political and practical difficulties of ensuring adequate daycare. These

113. Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services [hereinafter MCSS], “Fact sheet on the implementation of social assistance reform”.

114. Sue Colley, Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care, personal comment, June 29, 1989.

115. The calculations in Table 2 of MCSS, supra, note 90, use an example of a single mother with 2 children with a maximum deduction of $500 for child care.

116. Sue Colley, supra, note 114.

117. Sue Colley, thinks that very few people will actually be affected by the deduction, that is, will be earning little enough to stay on social assistance and yet need full-time daycare.

problems are more easily surmounted for mothers with children in school: day care is not such a crucial issue, especially if the mother works part-time, and the children can more easily be monitored for neglect in cases where the family's money has been reduced as punishment. Many jurisdictions have work requirements for women with school-age children, increasing political acceptability, and decreasing the appropriateness, in the public's eye, of supporting women with children of this age. It is not at all unlikely then, that mothers with school-age children may be redefined as fully 'employable'. Mothers with children younger than school age appear to be 'safe', but only because the government is not making great strides towards the provision of day care.

IV. REALITIES: WOMEN'S UNPAID WORK AND 'CHOICE'

Because work incentive programs bring into question the legitimacy of women staying at home to raise their families, it is important to examine what it is that women do at home. What is it that is so "vitaly important and demanding"? Has it changed sufficiently to justify a change in eligibility status for those who do it?

Work done in the home by women has been broken down into four categories: housework, childcare, tension management, and sexual relationships. Although housework has been changed over the years by the introduction of labour-saving devices, there is not much indication that labour-saving devices actually save time. Also, sole support mothers on social assistance do not have the same access to labour-saving devices as women with higher incomes; neither do they have the same access to the commoditization of services which upper income women do (sending laundry out, domestic help, restaurant meals). When a woman adds paid employment to her family responsibilities, her housework responsibilities are not eradicated: it is her

119. Evans & MacIntyre, supra, note 95 at 118. See also Abramowitz, supra, note 4 at 366: "A contract suggesting that everyone should contribute to society implies that welfare mothers are not already doing so."


121. Eichler, ibid. at 171; Armstrong & Armstrong, ibid. at 84; M. Margolis, Mothers and Such (Berkeley: University of California, 1984) at 166ff.
leisure time which disappears.\textsuperscript{122}

The time spent on caring for children has increased historically.\textsuperscript{123} The time spent in direct care is short, averaging 1.3 hours for women who are at home full-time, and half that for women in paid employment. The big time factor comes in the additional housework necessary, and this increases with the number of children.\textsuperscript{124} The availability of day care does not affect the time needed for laundry, cooking, cleaning and so on.

Child care has become increasingly professionalized in recent years, but this has resulted in fact in a greater burden on mothers, rather than the relief supposed. Along with professionalization comes standards set by prescriptive manuals, day care centres or schools, regarding appropriate dress and behaviour.\textsuperscript{125} One of the most important tasks of mothers in the home is their expected, though invisible, support of the educational system.\textsuperscript{126} Again, these tasks do not diminish when a mother enters the workforce. She adds them to her other responsibilities.

Tension management in a single parent family lies entirely in the hands of the single parent. Although the potential tension between parents over differing views of child rearing, housekeeping standards and so on, may be reduced, the relationships between parent and child are intensified. Studies have shown that the more intense a relationship, the more explosive it is potentially, and therefore the greater work necessary in managing the tension.\textsuperscript{127}

The work of sexual relationships may be reduced in a single parent family, or, if she has a partner who is not her child's father, the work of arranging it and keeping conflict between partner and children at a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{123} Armstrong & Armstrong, \textit{ibid.} at 96.
\bibitem{124} \textit{Ibid.} at 94.
\bibitem{125} Eichler, \textit{supra}, note 120 at 174-5, 182.
\bibitem{126} D. Smith, "Women's Inequality and the Family" in A. Moscovitch & G. Drover, eds., \textit{Inequality: Essays on the Political Economy of Social Welfare} (Toronto: University of Toronto) 156 at 172.
\bibitem{127} Eichler, \textit{supra}, note 120 at 182.
\end{thebibliography}
minimum may in fact be increased. The fall-out from 'man-in-the-house' rules\textsuperscript{128} means that managing a sexual relationship for a recipient sole-support parent may be very great indeed.

That all these components of women's work are necessary to one degree or another in every family is obvious. Even if standards are lowered, or affordable market replacements can be found, a certain amount remains inescapable. That these activities are 'work' has always been less obvious. This is partly because they do not fit traditional definitions of 'work': they are not paid for, there is almost no supervision, they do not have traditional hiring and firing rules, and the worker cannot 'quit' on the same terms as traditional workers. However, they involve a great deal of the worker's time; they can be broken down into discrete tasks and valued by comparing these tasks to jobs done in the labour market; and they are responsibilities which the worker does not have the option of shirking without grave consequences, especially for poor women. The fact that women's unpaid work is devalued in our society, and almost invisible in the \textit{Report}, has almost nothing to do with the reality of that work.

For some women, the choice to be a full-time parent is in fact a necessity. For many women, including some immigrant women and other women from traditional backgrounds, the mother's place is in the

\textsuperscript{128} In order to be eligible for Family Benefits as a sole support parent, the applicant must be living "as a single person", not with her "spouse". Prior to the 1987 amendments, any man with whom a sole support mother was cohabiting, regardless of the type or duration of the relationship, was considered a "spouse", and benefits were denied on the basis that the applicant was not living as a single person. This caused a lot of stress to the woman, either because she was forced to conceal an existing relationship, or had difficulty forming relationships because of the economic burden placed on her and her potential partner. In 1987 the Regulation (R.R.O. 1980, Reg. 318 as am. O. Reg. 49/88) was amended to coincide with the \textit{Family Law Act}, 1986, S.O. 1986, c. 4, which does not presume a relationship of economic dependence until either a child is born or the couple has been together for three years. Although an improvement, the new Regulation simply delays the stress on the relationship. An additional stress is that many men realize that, under this system, their families are better off without them.
home\textsuperscript{129}; to demand otherwise is to set up an irresolvable conflict where she either loses her benefits or she loses her sense of worth as a mother.\textsuperscript{130}

For others, being forced into the work force increases the probability that they will not be able to provide a good home, and their children will grow up troubled and/or be apprehended by the Children's Aid Society.\textsuperscript{131} The Committee may be uncertain as to the value of parental care, but the Mother's Action Group, a group of welfare mothers active in the early 1980's on the issue of reclassifying sole-support mothers as employables, is very clear:

"Aren't we working towards the future? Aren't our children the citizens of tomorrow? Doesn't the government care whether our children grow up to be emotionally and physically healthy and stable?\textsuperscript{132}

[W]e think the 'people who pay the bills' would much rather have children cared for than to see them running in the streets while their mothers search for non-existent jobs. We think they would

\textsuperscript{129} There are many immigrant women for whom staying at home is not part of their tradition, or who have never been given a chance to make this choice, for example, West Indian women who are brought to this country to care for white people's children, leaving their own children at home, and Chinese immigrant women (T. Adilman, "A Preliminary Sketch of Chinese Women and Work in British Columbia 1858-1950" from B.K. Latham & R. Z. Pazdro, eds., \textit{Not Just Pin Money} (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984) in S.A.M. Gavigan, ed., \textit{Intensive Programme in Poverty Law at Parkdale Community Legal Services} Vol. II (North York: Osgoode Hall Law School, 1988) at 283. Black women and women of colour in the United States also do not fall into this paradigm, as their value as paid workers has generally meant that the "mother in the home" ideology has not been applied to them: B. Hooks, \textit{Ain't I a Woman} (Boston: South End, 1981) at 82-3. This has played itself out in racist welfare policies, where non-white women were deemed "employable" in situations where white women were deemed "unemployable" because of their child care responsibilities: Abramowitz, \textit{supra}, note 4 at 318-9. The discussion herein is limited to women who are in Canada with their families.


\textsuperscript{131} Mother's Action Group, \textit{Protecting Our Own} (Toronto: April,1982) at 8-12; Mother's Action Group, \textit{Telling It Like It Is} (Toronto, May 1983) at 4. Also two-thirds of all children who go into care are from single-parent families: Mother's Action Group (1983), \textit{ibid.} at 2.

\textsuperscript{132} Mother's Action Group (1983), \textit{ibid.} at 2.
rather invest in Ontario’s future – its children – than force mothers out of the home.”  

The Mother’s Action Group also brings to the fore the relationship between child abuse and the added stress on mothers, and possibility of breakdown, of being forced into the workforce.  

Children cannot be seen as simply a disability that can be corrected even through adequate child care. The job of mothering continues when paid work is finished, with the added burden for sole-support parents of doing it without the support of another parent.  

V. IMPLEMENTING THE THOMSON REPORT IN THE INTERESTS OF WOMEN

Direct reshaping of society, in terms of restructuring the labour force and childcare and housework roles within it, is outside the mandate of the Report. However, the central thesis of this paper, the valorization of motherhood in the Report, raises an important concern for feminists with regard to the reinforcement of women’s traditional role as caregivers. The role of caregiver has been used historically to strengthen women’s dependence on men/the state and limit our choices in the work force. The original legislation, while allowing women to stay at home, also regulated women’s lives, and supported the notion that women ‘ought to’ stay at home, and ‘ought not’ to be taken seriously as workers. Demanding that women be valued as caregivers may therefore be used to justify women’s continued oppression.

In my view, we must deal with women’s reality as we find it, while attempting to protect against women being locked into dependence through the caregiving role. While we work for a society which shares the costs of social reproduction among all its members, where people are paid for the work that they do, we must demand that women be allowed to define their experiences, and the choices and opportunities they see resulting from those experiences. We must, at the same time

133. Mother’s Action Group (1983), supra, note 131 at 3.


135. Advisory Group of Sole Support Parents, supra, note 57 at 18. The solution of part-time work is only partial, and may bring more disadvantages than gains, given the types of part-time jobs available, the low wages, job insecurity and lack of benefits which these jobs bring, keeping women trapped in poverty.
Sole Support Mothers

as we resist coercion, demand that women be supported in their attempts to move off social assistance, and that their experiences define what sort of support is necessary and available.

Within the limited context of the Report, several points demand attention. First and foremost is the matter of choice.136 The unconditional eligibility of all mothers of dependent, including school-age children must be maintained. Women must not be forced into a workforce where there are no jobs, or, perhaps worse, jobs which are unduly arduous, boring and underpaid. Women must no longer be forced to accept the blame, and stigma, of a system designed to fail at least some of its participants.

In a positive light, choice can be seen as a step towards self-reliance, fully compatible with the spirit of the Report. Choice is empowering, in and of itself.137 The ability to decide what is best for oneself and one's children, and to act on that decision, is liberating in the classical liberal sense of the word. It is also an experience which is often outside the experience of many women, whose reality tends to be that of reaction to someone else's decision rather than action itself.138

To protect this choice, mothering must be revalued through an examination of women's experience of it, as work. We must not acquiesce in the suggestion that mothers must work outside the home to contribute to or participate in society, which suggests that they are not already doing so. The fact that some women's lives allow them to combine paid work and family responsibilities must not be allowed to determine that all women must, especially as the cost to women of this dual role is vast and frequently unrecognized. It must be recognized that caregiving is a full-time job for many women, particularly those without adequate support systems, and this is true whether or not the children are of school age. Each woman must be allowed to decide whether and on what terms to enter the work force, given that she is the only 'expert' on her life.


137. Whether or not women currently ever have real choice is arguable, as those with power define the choices which are available to be made: Eisenstein, "The State, the Patriarchal Family, and Working Mothers" in I. Diamond, ed., Families, Politics and Public Policy (New York: Longman, 1983) 41 at 44. However, being able to choose at all offers more control than no choice.

Protecting choice goes beyond just keeping the wording of Recommendation 78 as it stands. It means providing an adequate income which reflects the work done, and allows women to raise their children with dignity. The reforms approved to date fall far short of allowing this to happen. Lobbying for immediate and substantial benefit increases is therefore imperative.

Choice also means providing real opportunities. One danger with unconditional entitlement for sole support mothers is that resources will be channeled into recipients for whom entitlement is conditional, thus trapping women in the home when their choice is otherwise. Making opportunity planning non-mandatory increases the likelihood that, if funds are limited, this group will be excluded from participation in opportunity planning. Similar results have occurred in the United States, where resources have been poured into programs for unemployed fathers in the AFDC program to the exclusion of women in the same program.139 Opportunity planning is not a right under the program;140 the bargain between the state and the recipient is strongly lop-sided. We must be careful that, in trying to protect sole support mothers from the encroachments of the state, we do not forget that sometimes it is necessary to insist that the state act.141 Denying opportunity planning to those who want it only contributes to further forced dependence on the state, and further marginalization and exclusion of women in society.

The concept of 'opportunities' must be interpreted to include women's realities, not just men's. For many women, the possibility of participating in, or being trained for, underpaid, boring and devalued work is an 'opportunity' they will choose to forego in light of their other

139. Abramowitz, supra, note 4 at 341; Rochman, supra, note 12.

140. Social Assistance Review Committee Chair George Thomson at Interclinic SARC Conference, September 1988. It is only a "right" insofar as the government cannot deny benefits to a recipient with conditional eligibility unless there is an opportunity planning program available in which s/he is refusing to participate. If there is no money available, or the government does not choose to allocate funds to opportunity planning, recipients cannot demand that programs be made available.

responsibilities. Participating in activities which are meaningful and relate to their lives, such as a daycare or food cooperative, or other community organizing, may enhance self-esteem and hone skills for some women.\textsuperscript{142} The \textit{Report} itself suggests the possibility of similar non-traditional 'opportunities'; we must ensure that they are possible, encouraged, funded, and valued.

For other women, being encouraged to participate in traditionally male job training will open up choices. In addition, the decision of whether to go back to school must be made by women themselves, on the same basis as every other student, not on the basis of whether the worker thinks she will succeed or not.\textsuperscript{143} All these things are possible in the spirit of the \textit{Report}; we must make sure they are implemented, so that opportunity planning does not end with the STEP program's employment focus.

The attempt to make visible the 'important and vitally demanding' activity of caregiving in this paper is not only important with respect to enlarging women's choices, but also as an attempt to legitimate the role itself within society. As long as mothers are treated as 'men with a disability' in public policies, we will not be able to create a truly interdependent society\textsuperscript{144}, where caregiving takes place at a community level, and women are not punished for bearing children. Similarly, we will be limited in our ability to transform workplaces to reflect women's needs and values. These changes, and the actualization of men sharing in caregiving and maintenance activities, depend on women's unpaid labour being seen as real, and valuable, both by the \textit{Report} and by governments responsible for implementing effective social assistance for the 21st century.


\textsuperscript{143} "Streaming" is a common complaint among recipients trying to enter programs: workers decide whether a candidate is eligible, which helps to keep success rates of programs "high".

\textsuperscript{144} McIntosh, supra, note 141.