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Chair

Ms. Marilyn Gladu

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): Good morning, colleagues. We're continuing our study on the economic security of women in Canada.

Today we have some excellent witnesses. From Pathways Health Centre for Children, we have Jenny Greensmith, the executive director, and Jennifer Howell, a parent adviser. By teleconference we have Alex Wilson, a professor at the University of Saskatchewan.

Welcome to our witnesses.

We'll start with Pathways Health Centre for Children for seven minutes, and then we'll go to Alex.

You may begin.

Ms. Jenny Greensmith (Executive Director, Pathways Health Centre for Children): Good morning, and thank you for the invitation to speak today.

Marilyn, it's especially good to see you.

My role this morning is simply to set the stage and give you the context for the family experiences that Jennifer will share with you.

Situated in the city of Sarnia in southwest Ontario, Pathways is a provider of children's rehab and other educational services and supports to about 2,400 children and their families. We've been helping families in our community for over 40 years. Our families are a mix of urban and rural, and from all socio-economic groupings. We have an indigenous urban population in Sarnia, and three first nations within Lambton County. Sarnia is gradually becoming more ethnically diverse, although it still lags behind major urban areas. The major wave of immigrants who stayed and prospered in the area came from Europe. Lambton College brings in students of all nationalities, but we find that for the most part they do not stay in the area once their studies are done. They tend to move to the larger urban areas, where jobs are more plentiful and there are larger populations with similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds for them to blend into.

We are aware of Pathways families from all of these various groupings who live in poverty and must miss scheduled assessments and therapy sessions because they need to get from one side of town to the other using our limited public transportation to access the social welfare they and their families must rely on. We are aware that indigenous families living in first nation communities lack the transportation to come to locations where we offer service. We're trying to address this within our limited resources, because we understand that we will be able to reach out to those families more easily in locations where they feel culturally safe. More than anything, we are aware that having a child with a disability takes its toll on the family unit and that the burden of care may fall on a single parent, very often the mother.

Sarnia-Lambton has been hard hit economically over a number of years, most especially recently with the slump in oil prices. Despite ongoing initiatives to diversify our economy, the big companies in what is known as “chemical valley” are still among our mainstay employers. Fast facts from the Sarnia-Lambton workforce development board tell us that in March 2017, Sarnia-Lambton had the highest unemployment rate, at 8%, in the Erie-St. Clair region, higher even than Windsor, at 6.5%. Board reports over the years have documented the low education of the Sarnia-Lambton population. Most jobs with good chances of employment require trades, college, or university training or education. Sarnia-Lambton needs more people with post-secondary education in diverse fields. The lack of up-to-date qualification and recent work experience presents a significant barrier for women who have taken time out of the workforce, often many years, to care for their children, youth, or adult children with disabilities. We would like to ask whether such women have ever been the focus of research as to their experience when they must try to re-enter the workforce.

Well, as I said at the beginning, my role is to set the stage for you to understand more about the experiences of a few local women and the impact of their situation on their economic status.

Over to you, Jen.

● (0850)

Ms. Jennifer Howell (Parent Advisor, Pathways Health Centre for Children): When asked to help with this topic, I looked back at my own life and the economic security of my own career.

When my husband and I were faced with the life-altering news that our son had autism, the demands were overwhelming from our appointments with developmental pediatricians, occupational therapists, speech therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, Autism Ontario, audiologists, and day care and school meetings. Phone calls from the day care and school requesting that I pick my child up were using up my sick days and vacation time. The demands and barriers of having a child with a disability fell heavily on my lap, as my husband's job had a higher salary.

I walked away from my career, benefits, and a pension. The financial burden quickly surfaced, as additional private support comes at a cost. Private speech and occupational therapy can cost anywhere from $100 to $150 per hour. Slowly we were going into debt.

When the position as parent adviser became available, I was able to make it work with its flexibility and decreased hours so I could still support my son. To have a job, a loving husband, and the support of my family makes me a minority in this situation.

I've also reached out to a parent who is a crisis caseworker at the Ontario Works department. She informed me of some barriers that she commonly sees for women who have a child with a disability. There are constant phone calls from the day care and school, demanding that the mother come to pick up her child. This creates overwhelming stress on the woman's job, and the end result is either that the mother is fired or needs to leave because the demands are too great.

If a mother seeks other employment, the job is lower paying with no benefits. The family is now living in poverty and the cycle begins. For example, transportation is a major barrier for a lot of these women as they may not have a vehicle, so taking public transportation is their only means. A child's appointment that would take one hour will now take three to four, which again adds the stress if the mother is working. Living conditions also dramatically change, as a mother and her family will need to reside in low-income housing. This presents new challenges and stresses on an already depleted mother.

For a woman to qualify for Ontario Works, her assets need to be below $2,500. A single parent with one child will receive under $1,000 a month to live on. Once a woman lives in poverty she is faced with additional barriers, which create new struggles that keep her in poverty. A lot of these women are not receiving the funding resources that could help them, or they do not have the strength or the energy to pursue them. Their focus is just to survive.

I've had the honour of hearing two client stories that I will share with you. The people's names have been changed to protect their privacy. Sara, the first mom, is a single mom with five children. One child was diagnosed with autism, and sensory processing and selective mutism disorder. Sara is divorced and receives no financial support from the father and no financial or emotional support from her family. Appointments and calls from the school demanding that her child be picked up put her in a stressful position with her employer. She lived in fear of being fired. Sara then took a pay cut and resorted to working straight midnights so she would be available for her child and the school. This took a toll on Sara and she ended up getting hurt on the job and receiving WSIB. Sara also had to drain her investments, like her RRSPs, as the financial needs were too great. She was receiving some financial support for her disabled son through special services at home, but the rest of her children were doing without. She is lost to what the future holds for her and her family.

Lori, the second mother, is a single mom with two children. Her one child was born legally blind and has cerebral palsy. Lori does not receive any financial support from the child's father and no financial or emotional support from her family. She truly feels alone. Lori was bombarded with doctors' appointments and had to take extended maternal leave to care for her son. When she returned to work, she was faced with the following barriers: her work hours, the demands of her child's needs, and the lack of flexibility at her job. Not wanting to resort to Ontario Works, Lori looked for employment elsewhere. Lori is presently employed as a PSW and works long hours to make ends meet. Her present job does give some flexibility, but her hours are unpredictable; and health care benefits, which are assessed every six months, rely on the amount of hours worked.

● (0855)

Lori shared with me that there have been times when she has worked 127 hours in two weeks, and other weeks less than 30. If her hours are less than 30, Lori and her family will not receive health care benefits for six months until they are reassessed again. No matter what the socio-economic status is of women with a child who has a disability, they all share a common theme, and that is that the security of their career is jeopardized. We live in a two-income based society. Without the proper financial and emotional support, these women fall through the cracks.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going now to Alex by teleconference from the University of Saskatchewan. You have seven minutes.

Dr. Alex Wilson (Professor, University of Saskatchewan, As an Individual): *Tanisi*. Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

The information that I'm providing and my statement are based on my own research, on research that others have conducted, on my observations of the experiences of friends, family, and community members, and on my own experiences as a two-spirit-identified Cree woman.

I'm from the Opaskwayak Cree nation, and that's where I'm talking to you from today. We're a community of about 5,700 people 500 kilometres north of Winnipeg. Of our membership, approximately one-third do not live on reserve but mostly in cities across Canada, but also elsewhere in the world.

I began by telling you where I'm from because it is important to note that Cree people have lived in this area for a long time. In fact, like all other indigenous communities in North America, we have lived continuously on our land longer than any other people on the planet, with the exception maybe of indigenous Australians. With that long connection to the land, we have an intimate and important understanding of and connection to the land that extends back tens of thousands of years.

For all those thousands of years, our community has not only survived, but thrived. Every person had importance within the community and familial life. Within a very, very short period of time, the last 200 years or so, all that changed. Of course, what I'm referring to is the process of colonization, or what others call the “founding” of Canada.

There are two stories, the story that I and other indigenous women know and the story that is presented to Canadians, or the story of Canada. We were asked to make a statement about poverty and the impacts on indigenous women. However, we cannot talk about poverty without acknowledging that poverty is a symptom or a result of an intersection of a host of factors such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and other forms of systemic oppression.

The lives of indigenous women have been regulated by policy since the founding of Canada. Every aspect of our lives has been regulated, such as what we eat, whom we are allowed to marry, where we live, what we are allowed to own, what we wear, and even who gets to use the term “Indian”, who gets to call themselves Indian. We know the effect of this regulation and of the intersections of multiple forms of oppression. The effect is evident in the many statistics that most of you already know or probably have some familiarity with, just like I know, when I take a taxi in Winnipeg, I will most likely have to pay up front, just like I continually have to worry about the safety of my nieces.

The effect of colonization is asymmetrical. Certain bodies are impacted in ways that others aren't, and those are the bodies of indigenous women, two-spirit, and trans indigenous people. The effect is institutionalized, and the effect has meant a disconnection from meaningful relationships, including to the land and water, which leads to destruction of land and water, to violence, the effect of the normalization of violence, and the internalization of violence.

It's meant that language has been lost or changed. It's meant that binary gender roles have been entrenched. It's meant that spirituality has now become a religion and institutionalized by schools, prisons, CFS, and the health care system. It's meant that certain world views have been privileged while others have been dismissed, in particular, the world views of indigenous women. This is the reality that we live with.

● (0900)

As all of you know, there are over 1,200 missing or murdered indigenous women in Canada. Seven out of 10 aboriginal girls will experience sexual abuse or violence in their lives. Aboriginal women are 3.5 times more likely to experience intimate partner violence. For indigenous queer youth, the suicide rates are unimaginable—10 times higher than any other group. For indigenous trans-identified youth, suicide rates are around 56%, which means that if you know any indigenous trans-identified youths, the chances are that they will have either thought about suicide or attempted suicide. We see trans-identified indigenous youth leaving school as early as the third grade. Think about that. Why would a third grader not feel safe in school?

We have states of emergency around suicide. Homelessness rates are increasing. These are all the effects of colonization. These are the facts of life for indigenous women in Canada. Whether we are Cree, Inuit, Anishinabe, Métis, Coast Salish, or from whatever nation, the effect is the same across the country. But there is nothing inherently wrong with indigenous women. If we just looked at the statistics, if we just looked at the way Canada presents indigenous women, people would think there is something inherently wrong with us, and it's quite amazing that we are still here today despite the intersection of all of these multiple forms of oppression.

I would say that there is nothing inherently wrong with indigenous women. There is something inherently wrong with Canada.

In conclusion, I urge you, as representatives of Canada, to seriously consider how poverty fits into the bigger picture of the story of Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you for your testimony.

We're going now to our first round of questioning. We'll begin with my colleague Monsieur Serré.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serré, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question will be for Ms. Greensmith and the next one will be for Ms. Wilson.

First, I want to thank you for your testimony this morning and for the preparation you put into explaining the services you provide.

Ms. Greensmith, through programs you are currently providing and are attempting to expand, you are trying to support first nations, but there are some difficulties in terms of transportation.

Have you looked to hire people from the aboriginal community who could provide services in first nations communities, near Sarnia?

● (0905)

[*English*]

You can respond in English.

Ms. Jenny Greensmith: Thank you for that.

That's a very good question. While I know that, on the Six Nations first nation closer to Brantford, they do have qualified individuals to provide pediatric rehab services, we are not in that situation yet. However, with the support of industry partners, we are beginning an initiative that will bring our therapists onto first nations to provide services in the way they would like them to be provided and, at the same time, support an indigenous worker as part of that team for them to be able to support families with therapy activities when we're not there.

We are beginning to grow that skill set on first nations.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

I'll go back to Ms. Wilson. But Ms. Howell, you mentioned families with disabilities, and we've heard previous testimony on the challenges. I want to ask if you have more specific recommendations to the federal government related to caregivers and looking at some of the recent announcements on the parental maternity leave on the EI system the government has announced. That's specific to the governments announcements, but are there other recommendations you would have for us federally?

Ms. Jennifer Howell: One of the first recommendations I have is based on information I received from a crisis caseworker at Ontario Works. When, let's say, a mother has a child with a disability and needs to resort to OW for support, the staff there has not been trained to help support this family as to what other financial resources are available for disabled children. It's about looking at these different agencies that a mother might be looking to for support, so that they are also trained to give the whole picture of what's available for these families.

Also, the tax credits do not work if a mother is not working, so perhaps a supplemental benefit would really help a lot of these families.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

Ms. Wilson, you very eloquently explained several issues related to many of the first nations and Inuit across Canada. We've heard testimony in other committees and here on that. I can't imagine the struggles and challenges you face daily. At the end of your testimony, you mentioned poverty. If we look at indigenous poverty, especially of women, what would you recommend that the federal government specifically look at to support indigenous women and get them out of poverty?

Dr. Alex Wilson: That's a huge question, with many different ways to respond. Fundamentally, we have to examine the relationship between Canada and indigenous women. For example, to go back to the treaties and the Indian Act, the Indian Act dictates every aspect of our life. It even dictates what kind of glasses I can pick when I go to an optometrist. We have to look at the regulations or policies that continually regulate our bodies, meaning the Indian Act and the treaties.

For me, health care is supposed to be a treaty right, yet I use my insurance from work because I know that if I need to have dental work done and I use my treaty rights to health care for dental care, the treatment is going to be substandard treatment because they allow only certain things to be done, etc. For people who are living well below the poverty level, it's impossible to get proper health care. That was brought up in the other presentation.

My main recommendation would be to go to the fundamental policies that are impacting indigenous women, such as the Indian Act and treaty rights. The truth and reconciliation framework provides some guidance around principles. There are calls to action, but in the introduction to the report there is a good section about rethinking the relationship between Canada and indigenous people.

● (0910)

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

I don't have time, but I would love to get your thoughts on whether we should make changes to the Indian Act or just get rid of it. You have 10 seconds to respond to that one.

Dr. Alex Wilson: Both.

Mr. Marc Serré: Okay, there you go.

The Chair: We'll go to my colleague Rachael Harder for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you very much, everyone, for being here. We appreciate your taking the time out of your day to share your thoughts with us.

I am going to start with Ms. Greensmith.

Both of you talked a bit about the impact that having a child with a disability has on a mother. Particularly, of course, it has a significant impact on a single mom, who doesn't have the support of a spouse or a partner in that relationship and in raising the child. I'm wondering if you can paint a bit more of a picture in terms of the direct impact this has on a mom. She is working; maybe she has spouse support, maybe not. She is also the primary caregiver to a child living with a disability, and she is trying to make life work.

What does that look like for a mom? What are some of the common challenges that are faced?

Ms. Jennifer Howell: Thank you for that question.

What I can provide from my level in the organization is that navigating the health care and social system is hard for anyone. I can tell you that in all seriousness.

We are currently rolling out a couple of initiatives within the province of Ontario, one to coordinate service planning for families with children with complex special needs and another to integrate rehab services. Throughout the engagement with families prior to and during the implementation of those initiatives, we have heard from families how confusing it is, how they don't know where to go, and my colleague Jenny referred to the Ontario Works caseworker, who was also using her own research to try to find out where to go.

If professionals don't know where to go, just think how much harder it is for the family. They land somewhere but they are always second-guessing if they got to the right place, was there someone else they could have accessed, was there something they could have done better for their child?

I think that's probably what I can share with you about what I know of the impacts. Maybe Jenny can contribute.

Ms. Jenny Greensmith: When it comes to the funding for families, number one is trying to have everybody on the same page so that information can be delivered. But even in some situations, it's too much for a parent. I've had some families that just can't manage.

When they do receive funding, there are a lot of barriers and stipulations around it, and then there's the paperwork. I'll give you a scenario for the latter. A portion of the form for a disability tax credit, for instance, needs to be filled out by a doctor. You have a family that's already strapped for income; they go to get this filled out and it can cost them anywhere from $50 to $100. I've had families walk away because they cannot afford it. Furthermore, with a lot of these funding papers, a family also needs to provide documentation from their doctor, from their developmental pediatrician, or a psychologist, and there's also a price tag attached to that, which is a barrier. I've had some families that can't afford the doctor's note, or for the doctor to fill it out. Then they come back and we have to look at third-party funding. That's a whole new step and a lot of families don't have the energy and give up, meaning they have no access to that funding.

There's the time consumed with appointments. A lot of the treatment will happen as a block, and the demands will be such that maybe a couple of times a week, or weekly, a mother or caregiver will need to devote that time to the child. If they are trying to balance their work and caring for their disabled child, something has to give.

● (0915)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

Ms. Wilson, we've talked a little about the Indian Act and the fact that some changes to it are needed, or maybe we should scrap it altogether. I'm wondering if you can elaborate a little on how we work together toward a more prosperous future for aboriginal women. What would that look like in a holistic Canadian approach?

Dr. Alex Wilson: To begin with, there has to be some kind of acknowledgement of the history that's happened. I know that sounds basic, but as an educator who teaches incoming first-year students and graduate students, you'd be surprised at how many 18- and 19-year-olds have no clue about the history of Canada in relation to indigenous peoples. They don't know about the residential school era. They don't know about the sixties scoop. They're continually getting fed stereotypes that they find on social media or even that they're taught in school.

Education, I think, is a foundational piece for awareness. Whether that's formal education through the K to 12 and the post-secondary system, or informal education through social movements or community organizations, I think there really needs to be a focus on that. That's the beginning, I would say.

The other thing is an acknowledgement that there is an imbalance in power. This is the committee on the status of women, where most of us are aware of the dynamics of domestic violence, for example, and that domestic violence is a gendered phenomenon whereby women are impacted in a different way from men. It's predominantly women who are the victims of domestic violence.

If you think of a violent relationship, there are two parties in it. Imagine saying to a couple, after a woman has experienced domestic violence, that they should get back together, get along, and move forward. A similar thing has happened with the relationship between indigenous peoples and Canada, the result of an unequal balance of power and the violence enacted on indigenous people, with indigenous women mostly feeling the effect of that.

So there has to be another acknowledgement that this unequal power relationship means that great care has to taken when making reparations around this relationship. I say so because telling two people just to get back together and start moving forward really undermines the self-worth of that person—or in this case of an entire group of people. They can be viewed as less than human, and that's certainly how we have been treated.

The Chair: We're going now to Ms. Malcolmson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Professor Wilson, I was ashamed to learn on Friday at a KAIROS blanket exercise for reconciliation on the Hill that indigenous people who earned a degree—to be a teacher, engineer, doctor, or whatever—were forced to give up their Indian status.

Everybody around the room is looking surprised by that, too. I had no idea. What a total calamity for the economy and discrimination. I'm embarrassed on behalf of the country, but I am embarrassed that as a legislator I didn't know that before. I'd like to hear your thoughts on that terrible story.

I have also been hearing from my colleague Romeo Saganash that this is still built into the Indian Act. Addressing that is part of the changes proposed in Bill S-3 to end gender-based discrimination, but we hear that the Liberal government is proposing to oppose the amendment regarding paragraph 6(1)(a), which would end that discrimination around employment and getting degrees, on the basis that more consultation is needed. Can you fill the committee in on that history, in your view?

● (0920)

Dr. Alex Wilson: The Indian Act dictates who can be Indian and who is not Indian. One of the criteria was that if you were enfranchised as a Canadian, you were no longer Indian. There were different ways of enfranchisement. One was that if you enlisted in the armed forces, and another was if you were a woman and you married a non-status person, then you would not become Indian.

So that's where a lot of the focus is in court right now—on women and their descendants who lost their status because of marrying out. I believe that as we speak, there's a committee meeting right now on this topic.

Moreover, if you received an education you were enfranchised or assimilated as a Canadian. I haven't seen anybody who actually lost their status because they got a bachelor's degree or a mainstream education, so I don't know of any cases in which that actually happened, even though that was written into the Indian Act.

One thing that did impact people, though, is funding. If you were a first nations person and went to university, by the treaties you were supposed to be provided with financial support for education. That was challenged in the 1960s. In fact, my dad was one of the first people to challenge it when he went to the University of Saskatchewan, because the rationale was given that, for people of the time, the average education would be a grade 8, so he had already exceeded the expectations for an Indian. They were able to successfully challenge that.

Post-secondary funding is still unequal and still not up to par with what it should be. In fact, there hadn't been a change in the funding structure since 1992. That creates an unequal dynamic around access to education.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: That then has attendant economic consequences.

Thank you, thank you for your work.

I'm going to turn to the witnesses from Pathways Health Centre for Children.

In committee last week, we heard from women who bravely came to testify about some of the very same effects you have described. They are parents just caught in a never-ending cycle of having to care for children who are very ill or are living with disabilities, and having to leave their work and falling into poverty.

This particular group, Parents jusqu'au bout, described providing 24-7 care. We also heard that in addition to the challenge of navigating the complex benefits system that you've described, that their children may become ineligible as they pass the age of 18. They also said that the women themselves don't make enough money to pay income tax, and so the federal tax rebates that were set up to support their families are actually irrelevant to them. The rebate is a non-offer.

Can you describe any recommendations you have the federal government to make changes so that we could better support parents caring for children with disabilities by their having access to stable benefits?

● (0925)

Ms. Jenny Greensmith: We did talk to each other about this before this morning. We are not necessarily an organization that has a lot to do with federal benefits, being funded provincially through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

As you say, tax rebates are fine if you pay tax. There is a gap between what children are eligible for now and what they're eligible for once they turn 18, 19, or 21, depending on what the cut-off is. It crosses social welfare. It crosses health. It crosses education. Parents often feel that this is a point where they need to pull back on their work hours. To be honest, they have respite when their children are in school all day. When their children leave school and are not intellectually able to participate in some of the college programs, there is little else. Often there is not enough money to keep that young adult stimulated and socially part of a group. Parents at that point may need to pull back on their work hours or simply decide that one parent—and very often there aren't two parents—will need to stay home with the young adult because they cannot be left home alone.

Perhaps we should address that, maybe with a supplementary benefit of some sort. Often these benefits are tied to the child, the young adult, the ODSP recipient. I don't know of anything that actually supports the woman who makes that choice—or who has to make that choice.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Jenny.

The Chair: Very good.

We'll go now to Ms. Damoff for seven minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thanks, all of you, for being here today.

I'm going to start with the ladies at Pathways.

You've talked a lot about the challenges that families face when they have children living with disabilities. You didn't talk at all about the young women living with disabilities and the challenges they face. I know that DAWN, the DisAbled Women's Network, says that women living with disabilities have a 75% unemployment rate.

I'm wondering if you could talk at all about the individuals themselves. In other work I've done, I've heard about teenage experiences in terms of preparing for the workplace. I see that you run a program for 19-plus young adults. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that.

Ms. Jenny Greensmith: Sure, and thank you for doing the research to discover our new lifelong learning program. That was in direct response to what families told us, to what young people told us, that "We want something to do that is not considered just being babysat, like day care, once we leave school." They obviously feel the worry, the concern. These young adults may have disabilities—cognitive disabilities, developmental disabilities—but that does not mean they do not worry about their situation or about their parents' situation.

We've had a great campaign running in the Sarnia-Lambton community, which I think has spread across the province, called "The Real People Campaign". It introduced families and their adult children who talked about the stresses and strains. Some of these families have actually had to drop their children off at emergency or at a community living day care simply because the family could not manage to look after that child anymore, or because the care they provide is beyond the resources of the family.

We do run a lot of programs for our youth and teens, preparing them for the transition to adulthood, preparing them for—

● (0930)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Is there anything the federal government can do to support you in that?

Also, I want to give a shout-out to Sarnia. The Ontario Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities has mentioned Sarnia as a leader in the province in terms of employment.

I've spoken to my colleague Marilyn Gladu about that, because you are recognized there as one of the leaders.

For young women who are living with disabilities, is there anything the federal government can do to support those opportunities to find paid employment?

Ms. Jenny Greensmith: I'm sure there is. In terms of what we call paid employment, I know that Sarnia has done well. Locally, we have a number of Tim Hortons—I hope it's okay to advertise—that do provide those opportunities. A number of businesses engage students over the summertime with the support of Community Living, and some of those businesses have been able to keep those individuals on.

We would like to see young women with disabilities have that full access to any type of employment that they are suited for, and not to be pigeonholed, perhaps, into cleaning jobs or other sorts of work like that.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Yes, or to be volunteering in a position where, if it were anyone else, they would be paid for that position.

Ms. Jenny Greensmith: You are very correct. At Pathways, however, we do encourage youth and teens to volunteer because that does give them the work experience, but we really hope that they won't end up volunteering as their job, because that's not fair.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'm going to turn to our other witnesses, but if you do think of any supports the federal government could provide for that, please do provide them to the committee.

Ms. Jenny Greensmith: We will.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Dr. Wilson, thank you for being with us as well. I don't have that much time left, but I did want to ask you briefly if you see the value in mentorship programs for young indigenous students who want to pursue post-secondary education. In my community of Oakville, Sheridan College has a centre for indigenous students. It's probably understaffed, but they have seen some success in providing that support. I'm wondering if you could speak to that a bit.

Dr. Alex Wilson: Yes, absolutely. I think any kind of support like that works—mentorship programs, transition-year programs—but again, we need a bigger overhaul, a big-picture overhaul, and these are solutions that will just chip away. They're not really going to cause a huge shift.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'm not trying to lead you here, but I am a little bit, because when I've spoken to the folks at the indigenous studies program at Sheridan College, they've said they get solely provincial funding.

Dr. Alex Wilson: Right, yes.

It would be fantastic if there were federal support for programming that is working, such as mentorship, but also for land-based programming, because that's another theme we're seeing now. People are really needing and wanting land-based education.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I only have about 20 seconds left, so I'll end it there. Thanks to all of you. If you think of anything afterwards, please don't hesitate to send it to the committee.

Dr. Alex Wilson: Thank you.

The Chair: Very good.

Thank you for the shout-out for Sarnia—Lambton. I also want to let you know that Bob Vansickle, from Community Living there, who is pioneering this program to get disabled people into the workforce and has been rolling it out globally, is going to be with us next week, so that will be fun.

We're going to go now to my colleague Ms. Vecchio for five minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much.

I really appreciate your coming and taking the time to speak to us.

I'll start with the Pathways Health Centre for Children. One thing I bring to this job is that I have worked for a former member of Parliament. His entire focus was on customer service. In the office, he really made us look at what was available. I'm wondering if you guys are aware of the canadabenefits.gc.ca website. I'll start with that simple question.

● (0935)

Ms. Jennifer Howell: No, I'm not. I'll be writing that down and looking into it.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes, please do.

The reason I ask is that I'm thinking that this is one of our biggest things. It's that we actually have programs and websites available depending on your age, your marital status, whether or not you have children, whether you're living with a mental disability, or if you want to go back to school. We have a variety of different programs. This is available and is specific to each and every province. You just plug in your province and plug in all the identifiers that you feel would be part of your profile. What I'm thinking is that you're on the ground and this website has been around for years. As a Canadian government, we obviously are not doing enough to make sure that people on the ground know about these sorts of things.

The point there is.... I just went to the website as we were talking, and looked at it in terms of a single woman with a disabled child and a variety of other things, such as wanting to go back to school, and as someone who was renting. There were 48 different sites that it sent me to. That said, if someone has a disabled child and is already having an issue, there are 48 websites they have to go to in order to do research. So what do you do on the ground when it comes to advocacy to help families out?

Ms. Jennifer Howell: I can speak to that. If I look back before I was working at Pathways and finding out that my child had autism and connecting with Autism Ontario, I remember someone coming and telling me that funding was available and then leaving. The forms are very detailed, and it takes a long time to fill them out. The chances of a mother filling those forms out are next to none.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: They don't have time, right?

Ms. Jennifer Howell: They don't have time, and they can't answer the questions so that someone can get a full picture of what their life is like. One of the things Pathways does to support families is to help them with the form for special services. The form can take up to two hours to fill out, so if we think a family has a good chance to qualify for support, we ask them what they think would work. We try to set up a meeting, we fix a place and time, and then we fill out the forms for them.

This way, they can sit back and we can talk to them and pull out the necessary information. We can accurately document what is happening in their lives and help to pull the information out. It's very hard for a parent to fill out some of these forms, especially the ones for special services at home, because it makes a parent feel that they're criticizing their child and their life, even though they're not. A lot of parents become very emotional, because they don't want anyone to think their child is a burden.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes.

Ms. Jennifer Howell: Being a parent, I can empathize with them and help them to get that form filled out. Then if they're denied, I can tell them I'm there for them and we're going to fight this together.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I totally agree with you. It's great to hear about the work you are doing, but we don't see that in all the communities. A lot of times you can walk into a social assistance program and they won't know what's available.

I always felt that we were pushing people from the federal to provincial level and back and forth. People who are living with issues wonder every day what this can of worms is going to look like. It's sometimes too much for some people, and we need to make sure we are advocating on behalf of the people who need help.

I really appreciate all the great work you are doing. It is wonderful to see that.

Ms. Jenny Greensmith: Could I leap in for a moment?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Please do.

Ms. Jenny Greensmith: It really depends on the family getting to the right person to help them. They need help over and above the time it takes to fill in these forms. One of the problems is the literacy level required by some of the forms. I know they are written in plain language, but they can be very hard to understand. The usual response is to tell them there's a website.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: It's too much.

Ms. Jenny Greensmith: I actually don't know whether all our families have access to the web. Some don't have email. Some would like us to text them because they can get free text packages.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Absolutely. Southwestern Ontario is one thing, but we have to take into consideration that fact that people living in remote areas do not have the same access. We have to take all these things into consideration.

I've been working with a lot of families who have children with FASD . Everybody talks about a wraparound approach, but nobody wants to connect one individual to the next, and I have sat in with families where we'll have—

● (0940)

The Chair: I'm sorry, but that's your time.

[*Translation*]

We will now go to Ms. Nassif and Mr. Fonseca, for five minutes.

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): I will give my speaking time to Mr. Fonseca.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Thank you.

[*English*]

I'd like to follow along the lines of Ms. Vecchio's questioning. She was talking about navigating the system and how difficult it is with all the barriers in place.

One of the things our Liberal government is proud of is getting rid of boutique tax credits. There were tax credits for sports. There were tax credits for all sorts of different things for families, but most families couldn't access those because their income was too low. They couldn't even put their kids in organized sports. What we did was take those funds and put them all into the Canada child benefit, making it tax free and providing as much money as we could to families with children, especially single moms. It raised 320,000 children out of poverty. That was a good initiative, and that is the type of approach we should take to bringing down those barriers.

I think of some of the other programs we have. I read an article recently in the *Toronto Star* or the *The Globe and Mail* about the registered disability savings plan. It allows you to have a registered account if you have a child with a disability—but it's so challenging. It was put in by the late Jim Flaherty, but almost nobody accesses it because it is so hard to do. You have to go through so much paperwork. You need accountants. This needs to be streamlined. It has to be made easier so families that really need it can access those things. I think this is the approach we need to take. Is that what you're thinking needs to be done?

Ms. Jennifer Howell: Yes. For instance, speaking about the registered disability savings plan, to access that, first of all, a family needs to have the disability tax credit. Now we're faced with the first barrier, which I mentioned earlier: the form needs to be filled out by a doctor, so there's a fee. For those families that can't afford that fee, then they're not eligible for the registered disability savings plan.

Then, if they do have it, one, a lot of the banks don't have the proper information about how to run a registered disability plan, and two, a lot of these families don't have the money to put in. One thing I do try to tell the families is that they might only be eligible for three years, because with the disability tax credit now, depending on the disability, they're strict with autism now. That family has to now reapply and pay another doctor to fill out that form.

Families have been told that you have to put money into the registered disability savings plan, but in fact you don't have to right away if you don't have the funds. But once they get that disability tax credit, they should try to connect, and I've tried to supply resources for them to get the accurate information. They should open the account, have it available, because three years from now, if their child does not qualify for the disability tax credit, no on can take away their registered disability savings plan. Again, that key piece is that families don't know, or financially they can't support.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: I'm thinking of another one, the Canada learning bond, which is available to those families with very low income. Again, the uptake is low. Families have a difficult time. There are a lot of barriers in place. They don't know how to navigate the system. Many of the programs that are being put in place are for those who really have the resources, the wherewithal, and the know-how; they are not who we're trying to help.

What would be the answer, the approach? Would government look to streamline those services to make them a lot easier? Would it be able to provide advocates to help navigate the system? How can we make it better, so that we do get the type of numbers that avail themselves of those programs?

Ms. Jenny Greensmith: From my perspective, leading an organization, I would say that I hear most often from families, “We don't know where to go. We need someone to help us.”

We don't necessarily have in our community that navigator person whom we could send them to. Perhaps that is an opportunity for the federal government. It doesn't have to sit at Pathways. It could sit anywhere in the community, as long as the community knows that this is the person to help those families, because whether it's websites or getting the message out, we never get the message out to all the people who need it.

● (0945)

The Chair: Very good.

Unfortunately, we're at the end of our time for today, so I want to thank all of our witnesses for the work you do, as well as your testimony. Certainly, what you said resonates with what we've heard previously, and we thank you for that.

We're going to suspend now briefly while we change the panels, and then we'll be back at it.

● (0945)

(Pause)

● (0945)

The Chair: All right, we're back with our second panel.

We've got Sheila Block from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, who's the senior economist there. We also have Grace-Edward Galabuzi, a professor in politics and public administration at Ryerson University.

I just want to remind you that their presentation was sent to you. It's a PowerPoint presentation, and it will be on your iPads if you're looking for that, so you might want to pull that up.

Folks, I'll give you seven minutes to give your opening comments. I might be lenient and give you a little bit more. You can begin.

Professor Grace-Edward Galabuzi (Professor, Politics and Public Administration, Ryerson University, As an Individual): Thank you very much. I'm glad to appear before the committee.

We are essentially going to review some of our research relating to disparities in the labour market that impact racialized populations, racialized women in particular, and the experience of discrimination in access to employment and employment itself.

Sheila will start with a presentation of some of our analyses, and then we will talk about some of the solutions that we believe can make a difference in those experiences.

● (0950)

Ms. Sheila Block (Senior Economist, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives): I'll just echo Grace-Edward by saying that we're very happy to be talking to you about this.

We're apologetic that, when we're looking at the national data, we are actually talking to you about data that is, in fact, 12 years old. We'll explain some of the reasons why that is the case.

In the study that will be the focus of most of what we will be talking about today, we used 2006 census data to really paint a picture of the labour market experience of racialized Canadians. We looked at a number of measures there to describe that.

What we found was that racialized Canadians are very willing to work. Both racialized men and women had higher labour force participation rates. If people are participating in the labour market, it either means they are employed or are actively looking for employment. Despite this willingness and eagerness to work, racialized Canadians had higher unemployment rates. In particular, racialized women had the highest unemployment rate of the four groups that we were looking at: 9.3%. We have to remember back to 2005. At that point, we were really in the midst of a boom in Canada. Still, racialized women had that higher unemployment rate.

We first looked at those broad aggregate numbers. What was the participation rate? What was the employment rate? What was the unemployment rate? Then we went in. We wanted to take a look at where racialized Canadians were working and how that differed from non-racialized Canadians. We were at a pretty high level of aggregation, but what it showed us was that there were some insights, even from this limited data. The first—which is very important, particularly 11 years later—was that there was an overrepresentation of racialized workers in private services. They were working as security guards, in janitorial services, in call services, etc.

That's the kind of work that is precarious. It is more likely to be at minimum wage, to have turnover and contracts, and to not have the kinds of supports and benefits found in what we describe as a more standard employment relationship. That is also the kind of work that has really expanded over the last ten years as we see more low-wage work and more precarious work.

We also saw at that time a concentration of both racialized men and women in manufacturing. We also know that industry has had a very tough time.

Something that I think is really important to note, particularly with regard to this group, is that there was an under-representation of racialized people in public administration. Public administration doesn't include health care or education. It really includes the people who are making policy and administering government programs. The lack of that perspective and voice in public administration is a concern for us.

With more direct regard to what I understand your committee is looking at, I will say that we also saw that the construction of gender differs between racialized and non-racialized women. You might ask what that means or how that plays itself out. What that really means is that racialized women are concentrated in different jobs and have different experiences, different concentrations of work. For example, racialized women were more likely to work in manufacturing and processing jobs than non-racialized women. Although both racialized and non-racialized women were under-represented in natural and applied sciences, racialized women were more likely to work in that field. Similarly, non-racialized women were more likely to work in education.

What this points out to us is the importance of really looking at women's experiences across the broad spectrum and not just looking at those averages. We have to disaggregate those experiences across a number of factors. We have to look at the experiences of indigenous women and racialized women. We also have to break apart those groupings of racialized women because we know that women from different racialized backgrounds have different experiences and different labour market experiences.

● (0955)

We looked at who is working and who isn't working, access to employment, and where people are working. At the bottom line, we indicate average employment incomes. What that showed us is that racialized women earned 55.6¢ for every dollar that non-racialized men made. When you do that comparison, you can also say that racialized women earned 88¢ for every dollar that non-racialized women earned and 71¢ for every dollar that racialized men earned. We see that the combination of gender and racialization really has complex and disadvantageous impacts on racialized women in the labour market.

We're uncomfortable talking about labour market racism or perhaps any racism in Canada. Therefore, when we look at that labour market experience, there is a temptation for us to say that for all non-indigenous Canadians, for everybody who immigrates to this country, they struggle a bit—either the first generation, or they struggle the first few years—and then it's a level playing field.

What we wanted to look at with this data was immigrants who were racialized or non racialized. We controlled for age. We had only 25- to 44-year-olds, the people in their peak earning years, and people with a university degree or certificate. What we found was that the immigration experience is very different if you're racialized or if you're non-racialized. That difference continues between racialized and non-racialized immigrants, through to the second generation and continues to the third generation. This is not a problem of recent immigrants. This is really a problem of racism in the labour market.

Having already looked at the labour market experience and the income experience, then we're really looking at the next issue. What is the impact of this labour market discrimination on families? We found that racialized Canadians had three times the poverty rate of non-racialized families. Again, this was during the boom years, and as opposed to a 6.4% poverty rate, it's a 20% poverty rate.

That data for the national picture was from 2005 and we wanted to update it and the analysis using the national household survey data. We set out to write a paper that would update that data to see what the experience was post-recession, what the impact was, and whether things were better or worse. Instead, we wound up writing a paper about the problems with the national household survey data because there were just too many problems with it reliability for us to draw conclusions. We were very happy and relieved that the census had been reinstated and that we can go back to that analysis.

Just to give you something that's a little more up to date, we are looking at some analysis using another Stats Canada source, which is the “Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics”, and that data is from 2011. If you have 12-year-old data, the data are only six years out of date. It reinforces that racialized women are concentrated in low-wage work and that a higher share of racialized workers are working for minimum wage. When you break it down by gender and by racialization, the highest share of workers at minimum-wage jobs are racialized women.

On on page 12 we looked at the share of employees who were 25 years of age and over and low-wage workers, those within $4 of making the minimum wage. We found, once again, that racialized women were the most likely to be working for those low-wage jobs and that racialized men were also very likely to be doing this.

● (1000)

We're going to move to what we want to leave you.

One of the things we want to say is that the availability of data is very crucial, because if you don't have the data you can't understand the problem and therefore give appropriate policy solutions. For example, we have a 10-year gap resulting from the national household survey, but until very recently we used to have annual data that had a variable describing racialization, so we could understand the labour market experience from year to year. I know you all have a lot of information. That was the “Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics”. When they switched to the “Canadian Income Survey”, they dropped the racialization variable. That is of extreme concern to us because it means that we are limited to an analysis every five years. As we and others have been urging StatsCan, we urge you to recommend that that survey be reinstated so that we can really understand what's happening in the labour market on a year-to-year basis.

While all three groups experience labour market discrimination, racialized women's experience differs from that of racialized men and non-racialized women. We really need to understand that through the data and really need policies that will address all of that complexity.

Now I'm going to pass to Professor Galabuzi.

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: I think essentially the argument we're making is that we've established through the analysis that all three groups experience significant vulnerabilities, but in particular racialized women. These vulnerabilities arise from both their racialized and gendered identities. It is essential for the federal government to regulate the labour market in such a way that it addresses the precarious nature of the work that is available to them.

In terms of that regulation, we're thinking about some changes in labour law or women's standards that would address the experience of those who are under federal jurisdiction, but also provide leadership for the jurisdictions of the provinces so they can address that experience too.

We recognize that there is employment equity legislation at the federal level. There have been ongoing discussions about making changes to the legislation that might strengthen the associated regulation and ensure greater access to employment and equitable employment for all three groups, but in particular racialized women. I should not only say racialized women, but also indigenous women.

Pay equity is another area where we believe that there is some scope for making the experience of racialized women much more equitable than it is today.

We believe that other dimensions of policy that relate to the experience of access to employment, like child care for instance, also represent an opportunity to address that disproportionate experience. We also believe that one of the challenges in the labour market today is the extent to which employers have disproportionate power in their relationship with their employees.

Part of that has to do with the level of unionization. Unionization is significant lower that it has been in the past, especially in some of the areas of jurisdiction outside the public service. We believe, both from the point of view of access to unionization for those workers who have the vulnerabilities, but also dealing with the responsibility of the federal government to meet its obligations under international treaty, that it is essential for us to look at how we can regularize unionization to make it easier for under-represented groups to unionize. The three groups that we're talking about are likely to be less unionized than other groups.

I want to echo what Sheila just said about the question of data collection. Precisely because of this vulnerability arising from intersectional impacts, how we collect data is really important to our having a better understanding of that experience. I think it's essential for us to disaggregate the data so that we have data that explains the experience of particular groups in the labour market. In this case, without this disaggregated data, there is no way we can understand the challenges that particular groups face in the labour market. That is last point I want to make, to really emphasize the question of data collection and this disaggregated data collection.

● (1005)

The Chair: Excellent.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

We will begin members' questions with Ms. Vandenbeld, for seven minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I want to thank you very much not only for coming today but also for the extensive work you've done. I had a chance to take a look at the report that was based on the 2006 data.

Just to clarify, you mentioned that the national household survey data, the more recent data, was not usable in this regard. Could you explain why?

Ms. Sheila Block: We set out to replicate this analysis with the national household survey data. The results that we got were inconsistent with other research and were very odd. We went back and forth with Statistics Canada, as we sometimes do on these occasions, to see if we were misunderstanding something and if there was something that we were missing. Then we wound up writing a paper that basically said what these problems were, how it was inconsistent with other analysis, and that we couldn't do that analysis for the 2011 data in that way.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Was it not to disaggregated? I noticed you mentioned that in the annual data they actually took the racialized category out, which is a little bit disturbing and certainly something the committee might want to recommend be addressed. But is that also part of the problem? Was there something that changed in the 2016 census?

Ms. Sheila Block: No, it wasn't a change in the questions. It was that it went from a census to a sample. We know that people who are more privileged are more likely to answer those voluntary surveys than people who are less privileged, who can have low incomes and be racialized. As a result, the sample size was skewed. You had a lower sample of the racialized cohorts, and as a result, the data that were available and the data that we had to analyze were inconsistent with the other research and had some surprising results. We then had conversations with the officials at Stats Canada, and because the national household survey was an experiment, where they tried to adjust the data and correct the data so that.... I'm using non-statistical terms, but they did some statistical corrections to try to correct for the methodology, and those—

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Just for clarification, and I apologize if I've misunderstood you, but the national household survey that you're talking about was the one that was done when the long-form census was cancelled. Is that right?

Ms. Sheila Block: Correct.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: So the 2016 data, which was the long-form census, is not available yet. Is that right?

Ms. Sheila Block: It's going to be available in October, and we're very much looking forward to having reliable data again, and we are finalizing our order to StatsCan.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you. That answers my question.

● (1010)

Ms. Sheila Block: Okay, I'm sorry about that.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I thought we were talking about the new long-form census. Okay, thank you very much.

I'm struck by what you say about the fact that when you control for age and immigration status, this gap is persisting even into the second and third generations. That means that racism is involved, that there is some form of prejudice and stereotyping that goes beyond some of these control groups. One of the things that the federal public service is piloting right now is name-blind hiring. Is that something you think would help in this regard?

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: That approach has been attempted in other jurisdictions—in Europe for sure, and in Britain. It corrects some of the function of racialization, but not all of it. I think the literature shows that perhaps the most effective way is to acknowledge that racialization has an impact, and address that directly through forms of affirmative action, so that there's a conscious decision around ensuring that the workplace is more representative, as opposed to assuming that the removal of identification leads to that representation.

I think the experience in Britain is that the removal of identification does not lead to representation per se, and that a more deliberate or more intentional approach is more effective in addressing questions of disparity and under-representation.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

For my final question, I'm looking at the statistics about occupation. One of the things that I'm noticing—and this is on page 11—is that in natural and applied sciences racialized men are at 22.5% and so are overrepresented, and that for racialized women the second-highest category is business, finance and administration. One of the things that we've been looking at in our committee is how to get more women into STEM professions, into business, into the professions that are primarily higher-income professions. I was a little bit surprised to see those statistics. Could you clarify that?

Ms. Sheila Block: Those are at a very high level of aggregation, so this isn't identifying the women who are engineers. In particular, in one of those categories you discussed, you could have a lot of clerical workers included in there. That's one of the limitations of this high level of aggregation.

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: All of our classifications are accounted for.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

When you're disaggregating the data and looking at gender and race, have you factored in racialized women with disabilities, racialized women who are LGBTQ, and a number of other intersecting identities in any of your studies?

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: Thus far, we have not. We've talked about the need to do that. It's a much more complex request of StatsCan, but we're looking forward to doing more of that analysis. I think we started the study at a fairly basic level in terms of intersection, which is race and gender. With the scope, there is a necessity for us to do that.

The argument we're making is that the more disaggregated data is available, the greater is our ability to do the analysis you are asking us to do.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: More data, of course. Thank you.

Finally, when we were looking at pay equity in the special committee on pay equity, we discussed how the formulas can be very complicated, even when you just look at gender. If you start looking at pay equity and factoring in other intersectional groups like race, it can be very difficult even to identify similar groups.

Do you have any recommendations on how one would be able to do that and not overburden the system with complexity?

Ms. Sheila Block: I think there are moments when it can be helpful to step back. Because racialized women work disproportionately for the minimum wage, if you increase that wage, they will be the major beneficiaries of that change. As Grace-Edward mentioned about affirmative action, if you take positive actions like that, focused on the bottom end of the labour market, they will have a disproportionate impact on that. If you look at broader policies that ask if the workforce reflects the available labour force, that is also important.

There are huge data limitations. Even if Statistics Canada collected every single data point we were interested in, and every variable, there would be limitations. I think when you look at policy, you have to look at how feasible it is, how tractable it is, and how we can move the ball forward.

● (1015)

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: I think it's important when we're dealing with issues of social justice that we not allow complexity to determine what we need to do to address experiences of injustice. I think we are at a level of sophistication right now with regard to pay equity systems that was not available to us 10 or 15 years ago.

I think we just need to do the same with regard to the other intersections, because they have an impact, not unlike gender, on pay equity.

The Chair: Very good.

Now we'll go to my colleague, Ms. Vecchio, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much.

To start, just for the record, can you give us your definition of “racialized”? What does that include, and what does it not include?

Ms. Sheila Block: My apologies, because we should probably have started with that.

The definition is based on what we have from Statistics Canada. What we have from Statistics Canada is a variable called “visible minority”, which is based on the federal employment equity legislation. I have a footnote here that will describe it.

Grace-Edward, can you say why we use “racialized” rather than “visible minority”, and then I'll say who's included?

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: Well, say who's included and then—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Sheila Block: The visible minority status is self-reported and refers to the visible minority group to which the respondent belongs. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as persons other than aboriginal people who are non-Caucasian in race, or non-white in colour. The census respondents are asked if this person is White, Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Japanese, Korean, or other, in which case they specify.

We built this analysis on that the question in the census.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Okay, thank you very much.

With that, I hear what you're talking about with the StatsCan information. Do we have anything to show the percentage of racialized women compared to non-racialized women? What is the ratio there?

Ms. Sheila Block: We based all of this analysis on the labour market share. While it's grown since then, as I say, this is based on—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Sorry, this is based on the labour market?

But do you have general population information on that?

Ms. Sheila Block: I have with me general populations from 2006. It's 16.2% of the total population in 2006.

Grace-Edward, do you have the 2011 numbers?

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: It is 19.2% in 2011.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: So 19.2% of the female population would be identified—

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: So 19.2% would be both men and women.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Okay. So we don't have that divided.

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: Consider that about 52% of that population.

Ms. Sheila Block: So call it about—

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: We can work out a number....

Ms. Sheila Block: It's "tenish".

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I think that's a really good thing for us to look at just so that we know what the picture is there. I just wanted to see that.

In your research, have you found concrete evidence that racialized women have the same experience and the same job descriptions as non-racialized women? Do they get paid less? If we're comparing at apples with apples, do we see that they get paid less?

Ms. Sheila Block: I think sometimes in these comparisons you compare people who are working full-time for a full year and add controls for some of those variables. I think when we think about the impact of racism, we have to really step back. It has an impact on the educational choices that people see as available to them, on their interaction with the state, and also on where they work, what kinds of career choices they have made and what other responsibilities they have.

● (1020)

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: The other analysis that is relevant here is understanding the specialization in the labour market context. It's in two forms. There is what is referred to as "statistical", which is what you're talking about, which is apples to apples. Then there is "systemic", which is what Sheila is talking about, at work. If you only look at the one definition or one understanding, you're not likely to see the full picture.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes. If everything were on a level playing field, which is what we have to work towards, would we still see this discrimination? If our racialized women had the opportunity, every chance, whether it was going through the STEM fields and full education, potential child care, would you still see this as a factor? Or wouldn't we have that information?

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: Other analysis, other research, for instance, has been done using surveys of people using almost identical resumés. In that case, when you control for gender, you get a three-to-one access to those jobs.

I think that gives us a sense of what's going on in the labour market in terms of access for women, for people who are equally qualified.

Ms. Sheila Block: Grace-Edward is talking about research around gender. There's something similar around racialization where identical resumés were sent to jobs, and people with white-sounding names were much more likely to get interviews than people who had.... I think there was a focus on Asian names, actually.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Absolutely. I think those are the things that we absolutely have to work on. For the people who are in that group, especially when we're looking at working for minimum wage, we see there is such a difference between those who are racialized compared to non-racialized.

Have you taken into consideration language barriers and education barriers? What kind of data comes in with that to show that these are the people working for minimum wage and these are some of the barriers we have to work on to be able to give them better opportunities?

Ms. Sheila Block: When you look at recent immigrants, you see that there is an even higher ratio than for racialized workers, but I think if you turn back to that slide that shows first, second, third, and higher-generation racialized immigrants, I think we're trying to point out that there is a thread that says that absolutely sometimes there are language barriers. Sometimes there are barriers about international credentials. There are all those issues and there is a great deal of policy that works toward that. But beyond and underneath that is the systemic racism that is happening in the labour market. That's really what our research works on. There is a lot of other valuable research that discusses those kinds of barriers and how you can get international credentials recognized, and what the appropriate language training programs are. Grace-Edward probably knows more about that than I do, but there's something under—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I know my time is up, so any additional information you could add would be absolutely fantastic. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Send it to the clerk.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

I now give the floor to Ms. Moore, for seven minutes.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Thank you.

I would like to know whether you have data on the differentiation between racialized women living in urban areas and those living in rural communities.

[*English*]

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: Well, we haven't done that analysis, but I think it's possible to do that analysis. We look at the census of metropolitan areas and we see the difference between urban and rural settings. You can do that. We don't have that at our fingertips right now.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: I think it would be useful to gather such data, since those are different areas of work and there is also often more of a community approach in rural areas. So a woman's or a man's network of contacts will be more extensive. It could be useful to have that data.

● (1025)

[*English*]

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: I'm taking notes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Do you have data on access to entrepreneurship? In my riding, there is a woman who recently won a prize for the business she started. When I travelled, especially in Africa, I saw a lot of women who had small local businesses while here, even though women are used to having their own business, manage their own affairs, they end up as employees after having been business owners. Do you have any data on that?

[*English*]

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: We don't have data on that. I should tell you that I just spent six months in Africa, and although African women are incredibly resourceful, they are some of the poorest women on earth, so it doesn't necessarily translate. The opportunity and the resourcefulness that come with entrepreneurship do not necessarily translate into the opportunities that people have either in the labour market or in the market broadly speaking.

I think it's important for us to both acknowledge those who are able to make it through and to talk about these questions at the level of scale. There are individuals who are able to embrace opportunity and use their entrepreneurial skills to do very well, but we are really operating at the level of aggregation here, so we're looking at a broader population rather than simply looking at individuals who may be very successful.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Okay.

Is the data compared, for example, with data on how the network of contacts is perceived? In other words, do women who are likely to get more precarious jobs tend to describe their network of contacts as weak? Is that information available?

[*English*]

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: There is some other data, not in our report, that addresses this question of what people now refer to as social capital. The literature shows that people with "contacts" are more likely to get employed than those with limited contacts. That has an impact on some immigrant cohorts.

Part of what is happening there is that it is those who have contacts who tend to find out about opportunities. I think what we're talking about in terms of regulation is to allow for an opening up, so that it isn't just the people who have contacts who get access to those opportunities, which means that we simply reproduce the labour market as it is today, but that we allow for people who may have skills but do not necessarily have those contacts to also have access. Word of mouth seems to be one of the most effective ways of employers recruiting, and word of mouth tends to be limited to networks.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Okay.

Basically, networking activities with various cultural communities and the business community can have positive impacts on wage increases and the number of employed women.

[*English*]

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: Yes, but I hope that all of us are familiar with the concept of an old boys' network and that there's a reason why that cohort—that village, that network—tends to have the highest levels of income and access to preferred jobs. Those networks are not easy to break into, and the question is whether, at a sort of regulatory level, we need to find some means by which we open up access to those opportunities so that they do not get stuck. The old boys' network process is very sticky. We need to open it up so that racialized women and other racialized populations can have access to the opportunities that get stuck in the old boys' networks.

● (1030)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: When it comes to job insecurity, is there any data on the situation of women before and after having children? Is it more difficult for women who left the workforce for a while to have children? Is it comparable to non-racialized women, or is there —

[*English*]

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: We have just come out of a five-year study looking at southern Ontario and at precarious employment in that area.

The data show that women, especially single women with children, are some of the most disadvantaged in terms of the proportion of that population engaged in precarious forms of work. Part of the reason we argue for a comprehensive child care system is that it might help address some of the disadvantages arising from that status.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: That's great. That's all for me.

The Chair: Mr. Serré, you have the floor for seven minutes.

No? In that case, Ms. Nassif, go ahead.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for their presentation.

I would like to begin by talking about my own experience as a first-generation immigrant who arrived in Canada with a nursing degree. After my triplets started school, I decided to go back to school. When I was getting my bachelor's degree, most of my colleagues were visible—or racial, as you say—minority women. I completed my bachelor's degree and then took a master's. Most of my classmates—about 75% of them—were visible minority women. In my first PhD course, we were four or five women, and all of us belonged to a visible minority.

So it is not a matter of language barriers or a lack of degrees. I was shocked to learn that, in 2011, 16.2% of Ontario's minimum wage employees were members of a visible minority. The situation does not only affect women; you said that both women and men were affected. As for the labour market, you mentioned that the unemployment rate in 2006 was really high, and that 9.3% of unemployed women belonged to a visible minority. So the unemployment rate is high, and the employment rate is too low.

Here is my question. According to you, what obstacles are visible minority Canadians, especially women, facing while trying to achieve greater economic security by entering the workforce? I am not talking only about women who have more of an opportunity to earn a degree, but also about those who are overqualified. Why do those obstacles exist?

[*English*]

Ms. Sheila Block: That's absolutely the question we're looking at here. It's when you are looking at people who have credentials who are facing this discrimination in the labour market. We're looking at systemic solutions. It's very important for those women who have had those opportunities, who are highly qualified or overqualified. We want to look at systemic solutions that have to do with affirmative action, employment equity, and other factors that have to do with recognition of international credentials as well.

We can look to the federal government and jurisdiction to provide leadership on this issue, push those policies further out into federally regulated labour markets, and raise the people at the top, the overqualified people. For those people who are at the bottom, what are the systemic issues we can address?

One of the things we haven't touched on as much is the fact that unionization very much reduces those pay gaps for racialized workers and women. Part of that has to do with the old boys' network that professor Galabuzi was referring to. When you have that transparency and a piece of paper where it's written that this is how much you earn if you're at this pay grade, it reduces a lot of those systemic discriminations. It doesn't reduce all of it, but makes big progress towards doing so.

● (1035)

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: I will just add that underlying all of this is the undervaluation of both international qualifications and experience, and the overvaluation of Canadian experience and qualifications. This is really what we're talking about. We're talking about racialization, the association between a particular value of the human capital of people who are quote-unquote “racialized”, regardless of what their qualifications are, whether those qualifications are international or Canadian. Again, there is literature that shows that there are differences.

We talked about this earlier. The differences in terms of access to employment as well as compensation between racialized and non-racialized immigrants. Even at that level, there are disparities between racialized and non-racialized immigrants that relate to the undervaluation of racialized human capital.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you.

I have another question.

In the study you carried out in 2011, titled *Canada's Colour Coded Labour Market: The gap for racialized workers*, you say that racial minority women are 48% more likely to be unemployed than men who do not belong to a visible minority. The study also shows that they earn 55.6% of the annual income that men who are not members of a racial minority earn. That's really shocking! What factors do you think contribute to that gap?

We are not talking about equivalencies for degrees from foreign countries. As I just said, those are women who were educated here, like myself. Many women who belong to a visible minority were educated here, at Canadian universities. They don't always have only one degree; they sometimes have two or three university degrees. That gap exists not only when it comes to getting a job or entering the workforce. There is also a wage gap that is completely shocking.

[*English*]

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: That's what I'm talking about in terms of this question. A key factor is the undervaluation of the human capital of racialized workers. When employers make decisions around whom they're going to hire and whom they're going to pay at what rate, they take into account who is in front of them. They tend to undervalue the human capital of racialized groups.

We've done research that shows that the proportion of Ph.D.'s among immigrants, who have qualities that are largely racialized, is actually higher than the proportion of those with Ph.D.'s among the rest of the Canadian population. However, that does not translate into equal access to opportunities, or even compensation.

The Chair: Very good.

Now we'll go for five minutes to my colleague Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

Can you help me out here? I'm just wondering if there are specific fields where you see more discrimination against racialized women than, let's say, other labour markets or professions.

Ms. Sheila Block: Again, because this data is at a higher level of aggregation, it doesn't have that detailed breakdown by occupation that would provide us with that kind of information. We stepped back and said that we would look at the combination of these factors: the interaction of racism and sexism that happens in the educational system, the impact of racism and sexism that happens in the labour market, and the unequal division of domestic labour in the household. You take all of these factors together and you ask what the outcome is. The outcome, as your colleague said, was that racialized women earn 55.6% of what non-racialized men earn. While what you're asking is an important question, the data that we're using doesn't have the answer to that.

● (1040)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

You also stated in your presentation that all three groups experience labour market discrimination, but that racialized women have a different experience from non-racialized women and racialized men. I'm wondering if you can break down some of the specifics around that in terms of what the exact difference is with regard to racialized women. I guess I'm asking for anecdotes rather than numbers. I think we've explored the numbers. What does it look like when a woman goes in for an interview or when she is employed within a workplace? What does that difference in discrimination look like?

Ms. Sheila Block: You're the qualitative person.

I will pass that to my qualitative research colleague.

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: I think I talked about this earlier on. The experience, particularly of immigrant women, most of whom are racialized, is that they have the responsibility for sexual reproduction in their home, so they have the responsibility of looking after the children. That has a very direct impact on their access to the labour market when opportunities arise.

In one of the studies we were doing over the last five years, we interviewed women who came here. In one case a woman had a master's degree and her husband had an undergraduate degree. They had to determine which of them would seek employment and which would be primarily responsible for sexual reproduction. What was interesting is that they were using temp agencies to get access to employment. Every morning they had to figure out who would go out and who would stay home. More often than not, the man went to work and the woman stayed at home.

The fact that women have what has been referred to as a “double shift”, a responsibility both in the labour market outside and at home, has a direct impact on their ability to earn. It also has a direct impact on their ability to utilize opportunities that may arise. That applies to all women, in some regard. This certainly applies to women who are working class, but the added factor here is the fact of racialization. They are existing at an intersection where the impact of racialization and gendered experience has a compounding effect on their ability to work, to have access to opportunities, as well as to earn.

Ms. Rachael Harder: What can employers do to make a difference?

Ms. Sheila Block: I think employers can examine their hiring policies, they have to engage in training their HR staff, and they have to make sure they are taking positive measures. The problem is that employers have a lot of things to do. They have a lot of obligations. Really, what would be most effective in making sure that this happens across the board and has a bigger impact would be to have a regulatory environment that requires employers to do that.

Prof. Grace-Edward Galabuzi: It allows for different employers to be subject to the same conditions, so that it is not just the conscientious employers who are doing this, but that all employers are held to the same standard.

I think the other thing to be said is that if employers who are operating in a sort of open environment, where the majority of the population is racialized, have 80% of their population drawn from non-racialized cohorts, you have to reflect on that. You're losing opportunity to get access to very talented people, a very talented cohort that exists out there, who could contribute to your workplace.

The Chair: Very good.

Unfortunately, that's the end of our time for today, so I want to thank our witnesses for your excellent work and your help with the session today.

For committee members, I just want to remind you that next week we'll be looking at the draft of the letter for Bill C-337. It will be sent out to you and you can take a look at that. We'll also have an opportunity to do committee business on Tuesday. There's an order in council appointment to discuss, the coordinator for Status of Women, and we have to decide whether we want to interview them or not.

We will see you next week. Have a great weekend.

The meeting is adjourned.