HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO • NUMBER 074 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, October 26, 2017

Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good morning. I call the meeting to order.

We're going to start today by continuing our study on the economic security of women in Canada.

I see we already have Sonya Howard here. Sonya is with the National Association of Friendship Centres. We'll also be joined by Pat Armstrong, who is the co-chair of the equity committee of the Canadian Association of University Teachers. She will be with us by videoconference today.

We will start today with Pat Armstrong. Pat, you have 10 minutes.

Dr. Pat Armstrong (Co-Chair, Equity Committee, Canadian Association of University Teachers): Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, an organization that represents 70,000 academics at 122 universities and colleges.

Women have made significant progress in entering and working in post-secondary education, as you know. This progress benefits us all. Government programs and legislation have been part of that progress.

In spite of this progress, however, women are more concentrated than men in lower ranks, are more likely to have part-time and casual employment, and often receive lower compensation than their male counterparts. Like many other women, they struggle to find and pay for child care, and those from indigenous and equity-seeking groups, as far as we know from the data available, have even less economic security in the academic world.

Today I will discuss three barriers to economic security in the academy as they affect women in post-secondary education specifically: casualization, child care, and discrimination,.

First is precarity. One out of every three university professors has temporary or part-time employment. It's estimated that two women for every man have contracts versus permanent employment. Casual employment now significantly outpaces full-time employment. The data we have indicate this disparity is even more pronounced for racialized women, women with disabilities, and indigenous women.

In addition to providing limited income, few benefits, and no job security, as well as all the negative health impacts that result from from precarity, casual employment makes it very difficult for these women to do the kind of research and writing that could lead to full-time employment in what has become a highly competitive job market as a result of both cutbacks in funding and new managerial strategies.

The federal government can address casualization in universities in a number of ways. First, it can increase transfers to post-secondary education. Federal government operating grants made up 80% of total university operating revenues in 1990. By 2014 it was less than 50%. These reductions have been a driver in the move to casual employment, and more funding, as well as more stable funding, could promote full-time hiring.

Second, the federal government can work with the provinces and territories to ensure protections through employment legislation for workers in precarious employment, including ladders to full-time employment. Such protections require monitoring and enforcement regimes to discourage employers from using temporary or part-time arrangements to undercut permanent full-time jobs or from unduly exploiting precarious workers.

Third, the federal government could use its significant procurement clout to require contractors accessing public money to demonstrate that they provide decent work.

Fourth, the federal government should assess all social programs to ensure that they support precarious workers. In the case of employment insurance, for example, because of the kinds of hours they work and the way those hours are counted, many part-time and contract academic workers are ineligible for benefits, even though they pay into the program.

Let me turn to our second barrier, lack of child care. Like women throughout Canada, women in academe desperately need a universal, accessible child care program, but the lack of such a program has a particular impact on them. The demands of academic work extend well beyond the classroom, and this is particularly the case for women who are in or seek leadership positions. Without reliable, affordable, full-time child care, academic women may turn down such work or even leave employment. Those with unpredictable part-time or contract work may turn down work because they cannot arrange child care or afford to do so when an offer turns up, especially as is often the case when the offer comes with conditions of beginning the work immediately or within a week.

The CAUT has welcomed the federal-provincial-territorial 10-year agreement on early learning and child care. It is an important step, but the agreement falls short of providing the affordable, flexible, high-quality, fully inclusive child care that allows women to participate equitably in the labour force.

● (1105)

Our third barrier relates to discrimination, the intersections of discrimination for many, and how the forms of discrimination affect women in terms of both compensation and professional advancement.

We are pleased to see that the government recognizes that pay equity is a human right that requires proactive legislation. We urge the government to proceed with such legislation and to use it as a means of ensuring those contracted for government work and government-funded research demonstrate they provide equitable compensation for all, including for those doing part-time and contract work.

We also recommend that the legislation take up the 2004 pay equity task force recommendation to look at the ways racialization, indigeneity, sexual orientation, and disability status affect earnings.

The federal government can also help address discrimination by strengthening the employment equity program, specifically in our case the federal contractors program. That program requires employers working with the federal government to tackle the systemic barriers to economic prosperity for aboriginal and equity-seeking Canadians. Changes to the federal contractors program made in 2013 raised the threshold for compliance with employment equity requirements by federal contractors from $200,000 to $1 million, which leaves out many.

We recommend the threshold be significantly lowered to ensure that those receiving federal funding be required to take action on employment equity and that the enforcement regime be strengthened.

The federal government can also help support women's career advancement by becoming a stronger partner in assuring equity and inclusion in research that is funded by the federal government. Women researchers receive fewer federal research dollars than their male counterparts, depriving the research community and Canadians as a whole of valuable perspectives, experiences, and knowledge.

The federal government needs to act on the recommendations of the advisory panel on federal support for fundamental science to increase Canada's investment in independent research via a federal funding increase of $1.3 billion for basic research, with better-balanced allocation across the three research-granting agencies. This is a gender issue because women disproportionately do research in the humanities and social sciences and in basic research, while the money disproportionately goes to the other sciences.

We thank the committee for taking on these important issues for women's economic security and look forward to your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Pat.

Now we're going to carry on with Sonya Howard from the National Association of Friendship Centres.

You have 10 minutes, Sonya.

Ms. Sonya Howard (Policy Officer, National Association of Friendship Centres): Madam Chair, distinguished members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, thank you very much for this opportunity to present to you on the economic security of women in Canada.

I wish to acknowledge the Algonquin Nation, whose traditional territory we are on today.

I'm a member of the self-governing Tsawwassen First Nation in British Columbia, just south of Vancouver, as well as policy officer here with the National Association of Friendship Centres. The NAFC's executive director, Erin Corston, sends her greetings.

Today I would like to share three things with you. One, I'd like to give you a very brief statistical overview of some of the experiences of indigenous women living in urban areas in Canada and an overview of the friendship centre movement.

Two, I'd like to share some concrete ways in which friendship centres—and the NAFC, to some extent—work towards economic security with and for urban indigenous women across Canada, as an example that the federal government might consider.

Three, time permitting, I'd like to share some targeted recommendations about how the federal government might leverage an organization like the friendship centre network to meet its aims around the economic security of women and, broadly, poverty reduction.

To start, indigenous women, as the committee members may be aware, make up more than half of Canada's total indigenous population. Further, more than half of those indigenous women live in urban areas, while about 36% live on reserves. That's according to StatsCan's national household survey data. Further, indigenous women were unemployed at nearly double the rate of non-indigenous women in 2011—again according to StatsCan—and 36% of indigenous women experience poverty in Canada, which is also over double the rate of non-indigenous women.

To address these and other disparities, friendship centres work to create economic opportunities for indigenous women in over 100 cities and towns across Canada. For over 60 years, friendship centres have been providing a broad continuum of holistic, client-focused, culturally appropriate, and complementary or linked supports on a status-blind basis to all indigenous peoples who walk through their doors. As Canada's original, community-driven, and reconciliation-based form of essentially urban indigenous strategy, the friendship centre network is, de facto, Canada's most significant off-reserve indigenous service delivery infrastructure.

To that point, with over 2.3 million client contacts nationwide annually, over 100 friendship centres in cities and towns across Canada delivered over 1,800 programs and services to Canada's—depending on which StatsCan data you look at and for what year—at least 780,000 urban indigenous people in 2014-2015. These programs and services work to try to address some of the barriers that Ms. Armstrong also mentioned as well, including day cares, access to housing, health clinics, emergency relief, mental health supports, employment and training supports, education supports, some targeted economic development activities, justice supports, language and culture, sports and recreation, and community wellness. That doesn't even include the elders programming and youth programming that a lot of friendship centres use on a holistic basis as well.

Further, a full 90% of the over 3,200 staff at friendship centres in 2014-2015 were women, which could potentially be one of the largest representations of indigenous women in urban area workplaces.

I've hinted that friendship centres work with and for the urban indigenous community, and the reason they're successful is that they use a culturally based, community-driven, holistic, wraparound, and complementary services approach. It's customized based on the needs presented by each client who walks in the door. Further, friendship centres offer services in a non-judgmental, culturally safe way, based on and incorporating the indigenous teachings of their respective regions. That non-judgmental, culturally safe space is very important, as it turns out.

● (1110)

Ensuring that indigenous women have access to the opportunities and means to take part in the economy starts from a place of health and wellness as an individual, a family, and as a community.

Further a healthy community is a violence-free community. That's why friendship centres like the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre in Halifax deliver a domestic violence support program in partnership with the province of Nova Scotia and community organizations. That's also why the NAFC originally developed a NewJourneys website. It's intended to be a secure website that people can log onto with a secure password. It presents an exhaustive list of services in urban areas to assist those indigenous people, including women, who may be choosing to move to urban areas or may be fleeing domestic violence.

Access to affordable and safe housing is another foundational area for supporting indigenous women's participation in the economy. To help indigenous people access affordable and safe housing in urban areas, for example, the Red Deer Native Friendship Society in Alberta is working with the United Way and the Province of Alberta to build the Asooahum Crossing cultural centre and affordable housing development, a 16-unit multiplex facility. In B.C. as well, the Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society is developing a 42-unit housing project with the Province of B.C. St. John's runs a 24/7 shelter, complete with phone, Internet access, and meals.

Recognizing as well that urban indigenous women face unique challenges taking part in the labour market, friendship centres also provide targeted employment and training programs. They served over 19,000 clients in 2014-2015. Further, and as Ms. Armstrong also hinted in mentioning the need for safe, affordable child care, friendship centres also house day cares, aboriginal head start programs, and CAPC, the community action program for children, as well as prenatal nutrition programs and other family programs to help indigenous women access affordable and reliable child care in urban areas.

I would suggest that there are many excellent examples of this in friendship centres across the country, but the Brandon Friendship Centre is one that I've had a chance to visit and see the two day cares they run, one by invitation of the province, as an example of the complementary services approach to employment and training and child care housed in the same area.

Examples of the other types of complementary services friendship centres provide are health service clinics like the Val-d'Or friendship centre's Minowé Clinic and a hostel for those flying in from northern Quebec for health services, as well as the Acocan health clinic in La Tuque.

Closing off these examples of the types of services that friendship centres provide are interim and emergency relief programs, whether it's clothing banks, transportation supports like bus tickets, weekly bread programs like at the Dauphin Friendship Centre in Manitoba or food boxes, food banks, community gardens, and nutrition programs. These are all very close to the client and very grassroots interventions, but they're all crucial when addressing barriers that indigenous women might face taking part in the economy in urban areas.

Central to the success of all these programs are partnerships with the federal government, the provincial government, local and municipal governments, community foundations such as United Way, and other service providers, because they recognize that there are many players in the indigenous services delivery space in urban areas.

This partnership-based approach, along with the suite of in-house wraparound services, contributes to friendship centres' success in working with and for urban indigenous women and economic security.

I would encourage you to take a look at the detailed recommendations in the NAFC's brief, but I would hope I could squeeze in four.

One, touching on Ms. Armstrong's points as well, is to consider ways to increase accessibility, qualifying for, and uptake of EI part 1 and part 2 employment benefits and support measures, perhaps doubling the window of time within which people can bank EI insurable hours, perhaps lowering the EI insurable hours requirement by at least 25% for groups like urban indigenous women.

Two, when renewing any federal indigenous program and funding streams that address economic opportunities or poverty across federal departments, consider taking into account evidence of where indigenous people live, because that's where the services need to be. If over 60% of Canada's indigenous people live in cities and towns, that should perhaps factor into any funding decisions that are made.

● (1115)

As well as respecting the Charter of Rights and Freedoms—

The Chair: Thank you, Sonya. You've used your time. I would recommend that everybody continue with this excellent brief.

Today as we continue, we'll be going into our round of questions, but I'd like to welcome Michael Levitt, who is here today, as well as Rachel Blaney.

We're going to start our rounds of questions, starting with seven minutes.

I'd like to start with Sean Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much.

We have only seven minutes, so I'd ask you to be concise.

Ms. Howard, I think you had one final recommendation you wanted to state. If you want to start by finishing that, that would be great.

Ms. Sonya Howard: Thank you.

Essentially, support the continuation of urban programming for indigenous peoples through friendship centres to facilitate indigenous women's equitable participation in the Canadian economy through this proven wraparound services model.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Excellent.

I'll begin my questions with Ms. Armstrong. Thank you very much for your helpful testimony.

Starting with the issue of child care, one of the things you talked about is the need to enhance access across Canada.

One of the things I struggle with is that a one-size-fits-all model can be difficult. I come from a rural community. Nova Scotia has, I think, 10 universities and many more colleges, often in small communities outside of Halifax. A federally funded, stand-alone service might be great in a lot of parts of the province, but in others, supporting service delivery that's already happening on the ground could be a more effective strategy.

I'm wondering if you have recommendations that would enhance access to child care in smaller communities where a stand-alone, big facility might not be the right answer.

● (1120)

Dr. Pat Armstrong: I don't think you need to have one-size-fits-all in order to say that we have universal accessible child care. We have universal accessible access to doctor and hospital care without having that uniform across the country, including in rural areas.

I think that small universities—many of which I have been to in the Maritimes—can have their own facilities even within the university, with funding through a federal program that sets standards as we do for health care, such as that they have to be, for example, accessible to all, and accessibility doesn't mean treating everyone the same. It could mean designing specific programs of the sort that we just heard about but that get funding for all children under a particular age or of a particular age.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Just to change subjects for a minute, you discussed the issue of discrimination in terms of where research dollars go. This is a very real and present problem.

I saw Minister Duncan took some steps to enhance equity and inclusion in research by requiring a gender diversity plan, essentially, for universities that would give them access to CRC positions. Is this a prudent approach, or are there other things we can be doing to further enhance gender equity in directing where our tri-agency research dollars go?

Dr. Pat Armstrong: I think there are very important recommendations in the task force report that address some of these issues. I've served on many committees, both in the Canadian Institutes for Health Research and in the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and training researchers' evaluators to think about equity is a good place to start.

For instance, if you sit on a committee and an application to look at homelessness comes up, I ask, “Where is the gender analysis? Where is the analysis in terms of equity-seeking groups?” and I am told, “Oh, well, it's just all men, isn't it?” Not only is it not all men, but not all men who live on the street are the same. We need training within those groups, but we also need a more equitable distribution of the money.

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council gets less than half of what NSERC or CIHI get, as a starting point.

Mr. Sean Fraser: On that issue, one of the things you hit on is that there is a need for a bit of a culture change and a change in the way people think.

Changing culture from Ottawa can be a very difficult thing in communities across Canada. I'm wondering if you think the right approach might be to find groups that could enter into partnerships with universities. My home university is St. F.X. in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. We have a wonderful women's resource centre in the same town. Would it be a prudent approach to say that there are people who are experts in this in the community, fund those women's centres, for example, to help work in partnership with universities and colleges to bring about this kind of cultural shift.

Dr. Pat Armstrong: I think it's important to encourage partnerships. Also, a number of CAUT reports as well as the task force suggest that we should be valuing research that is done with communities, as opposed to much more traditional kinds of academic research, and that we should be involving communities in research development as well.

I think there can be a risk, though, in requiring partnerships that mean that the partner has to put in money, because then you can only go to certain kinds of partners.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I'm curious, and perhaps I could ask Ms. Howard a question. You discussed that friendship centres are doing great work in communities now. We heard in some of our previous studies that some of the things we can do to screw things up is get too involved as the government when there's already good work happening on the ground. Sometimes giving people the resources they need and getting out of the way can be the best recipe for success.

One tool that we have through Status of Women Canada is calls for proposals that target different kinds of outcomes. Is this the most effective way to be delivering the kind of change that you envision to promote gender equity through friendship centres, or is there a better model that we can implement from the federal government's perspective?

● (1125)

Ms. Sonya Howard: What I've heard from various friendship centres across the country is that stability in program funding is the most helpful when considering community-driven research like the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network—and I should do a shout-out to that—as well as when considering the programs and services that are offered to women, to families, and economic, employment, and training programs.

Yes, of course, targeted calls for proposals are great. Should some organizations be facing challenges with core funding, however, it can be challenging to also then provide additional targeted responses to calls for proposals.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you. That's my time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move to Rachel Harder for her seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you very much for being with us today, both by video conference and here in person. We appreciate your time.

I'm going to direct my first question to Sonya.

Sonya, you draw a compelling case for the value that friendship centres have in our country and the way they empower women, so I really appreciated the picture you painted. One thing I noted in what you said was the idea that a federal policy should consider funding where indigenous people live rather than not. With that, you drew attention to the fact that many indigenous people live within urban centres.

I'm curious as to how you would see the funding rolling out into those areas then, specifically to indigenous people, if that's what you have in mind. What would that look like?

Ms. Sonya Howard: I will try to respect the time of the committee and keep it brief.

I should mention that of course we recognize the right of first nations and other indigenous organizations to provide services to those members as well, no matter where they live, and that the federal government should keep in mind that if there are certain outcomes that we're hoping to achieve together, let's be targeted in how we do that.

I think this is where a very diplomatic partnership approach is helpful. We also need to take a clear-eyed look at, I wouldn't say picking winners, but providing a framework that allows those who are most effective at delivering those services to access that funding to do that work.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Sorry, but that's still not clear for me. How would that work? How would you make the funding available and who would be able to apply for it?

Ms. Sonya Howard: I would suggest not small piecemeal calls for proposals, but perhaps larger calls for proposals. You could do that avenue and have the federal government issues those calls directly, or you could also leverage existing networks like the National Association of Friendship Centres, and friendship centres, and support that type of funding stream with some funding set aside, perhaps, for indigenous people living in urban areas.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay.

If the government were to do that, if they were to allocate more money to the urban centres, most of us understand we would have to live within a budget, and it's limited. There's a certain amount that has to be allocated. I would imagine, then, that this would mean that a certain portion of the same pot of money, if you will, would be allocated to, let's say, urban areas, and then another portion would be allocated to those living on reserves.

Would this not cause dissension within indigenous peoples' groups?

Ms. Sonya Howard: That's why a partnership approach, which is the space that friendship centres have operated in for over 60 years, is crucial. We recognize, of course, remoteness factors and factors related to specific and unique conditions faced by people living on reserve, which we're certainly not suggesting are not also important.

Ms. Rachael Harder: You mentioned that many of the people who are working within the friendship centre—I think you said the majority, even—are women, which is wonderful.

What are the friendship centres across Canada doing to empower other women to acquire employment outside of the friendship centres in the mainstream Canadian job market?

● (1130)

Ms. Sonya Howard: The answer is twofold. They gain that significant experience at the friendship centre, and to be blunt, we often hear of friendship centre staff being poached by the provincial government or by other governments because they've gained those baseline skills. That's one: they are hubs and incubators for those skills.

The second is the employment and training supports and those broader supports that aren't just focused on the friendship centre but help indigenous women gain job skills, gain work placements, and access affordable child care.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay.

Would you see value in a universal child care program overseen by the federal government?

Ms. Sonya Howard: As a broad question, yes, I would. In fact, the friendship centre movement is currently working closely with Employment and Social Development Canada on the indigenous early learning child care approach.

Ms. Rachael Harder: You would want to keep the ability, though, to make child care specific to indigenous women if you could, would you not?

Ms. Sonya Howard: Yes, and that's why we've been advocating that the aboriginal head start model is great. It's a half-day program, so it's not full day care, but the pillars of that work because there's flexibility. It can be responsive to local community needs and it can be responsive to culture. It incorporates culture and incorporates parents as well.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Armstrong.

You outlined the fact that many women within universities are there because of a contract, rather than because they've been granted permanent employment. I've heard this from others within my university, the University of Lethbridge, as well as other universities that I've engaged with in terms of a relationship or conversations with the presidents of those universities.

Why is that the case? Why do we see more women working within contracts than within permanent employment?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds to reply.

Dr. Pat Armstrong: There are many reasons. One of them is that they don't have adequate child care. Many women, because they lack alternative supports, especially in academia, get trapped in that contract work. That's one part.

The other part is that we simply don't have enough jobs in the areas where women have education, but also there are issues about hiring practices in terms of whether we recognize equity principles in hiring. It's not one factor, but many.

However, child care is important.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We're now going to move on to Rachel Blaney for her seven minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you.

I want to start with you, Pat.

A common and recurring theme throughout this study has been the need for a universal public child care program. It's sounds like it, but I want to make sure it's officially on the record that you support a national investment in child care.

Dr. Pat Armstrong: Yes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: One of the things we've heard here on both sides of the table is concern that if there is a national child care investment, it's going to have to be one size fits all. I want you to talk about whether you think that's true or if you think there would be more flexibility in that opportunity.

Dr. Pat Armstrong: There's no reason to think it has to be one size fits all. We do it in health care; we set up some standards and principles. That's what we can do, and then we can let particular communities, such as indigenous communities in urban and rural areas, or such as universities, set up the kinds of services they require in order to ensure that there's equitable access to good child care.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

Now I want to follow up with you around pay equity. Your submission to the committee raised the important gap in pay equity in academia. Can you tell us why we need proactive legislation this year, in 2017, and not just sometime down the road?

● (1135)

Dr. Pat Armstrong: There has been a persistent pay gap. This is one area in which I have worked for a long time and on which I have been an expert witness in various ways to show that the gap has not narrowed very much, and that sometimes when it has narrowed, it has narrowed only because men's income has gone down, as opposed to women's income improving.

We have to work on both fronts, I think: on equal pay for equal work, and equal pay for work of equal value. We know that a voluntary plan doesn't work. We've had legislation on those two issues for a very long time, and we still don't have equitable pay for women. We have to have some enforcement mechanisms, and not only enforcement mechanisms, but mechanisms that require people to go out—as we are doing in other equity-seeking programs—and say that you have to start looking at what happens in your labour force. Then you have to develop a plan to do something about it.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Your brief also recommended looking at the intersection of racialization, indigenous status, sexual orientation, and disability status, and the impacts of those. Does CAUT have numbers to share with us about how these things have impacted women's and equity-seeking groups' earnings?

Dr. Pat Armstrong: Sorry—what has impacted them?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: It's the intersection of racialization, disabilities, and people's indigenous status.

Dr. Pat Armstrong: My apologies. I didn't understand what the question was.

We're starting to get numbers. Statistics Canada cancelled the data collection that was useful to us in the past. It's going to start that survey again, which will help us a great deal. Some universities, like my own, have done an equity audit, which is a very useful audit. It looks at the equity-seeking groups—and now it's going to add LGBTQ groups to those—with regard to both support staff and academic staff. It looks at the eligible pool compared to the kinds of jobs that people have. I think, as we just saw this week in a study that came out, just doing that kind of work helps us move forward, because it shines a light on the inequities that result. We're just starting to get better data, I think, that helps us see more clearly where we need to move, just as we did on the CRC chairs. Those studies were also the basis for the movement on requiring CRC chairs to take other equity-seeking groups and indigenous people into account.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

Around EI, what are the tools that the government has at its disposal—things like employment insurance, for example—to lessen the detrimental impact of precarious work?

Dr. Pat Armstrong: As we heard from Ms. Howard as well, the 700 hours in high-employment areas like Ontario, for instance, would exclude a lot of part-time people. The other issue in the universities, related to this question of basing it on hours, is what hours get counted when you teach? If there are three lecture hours, for someone to go into that classroom for three hours takes an awful lot more hours before you go in, and the extent to which those hours are counted or not is a big issue in terms of qualifying for EI. If you're teaching a 12-week course and it is counted as only five hours or six hours per course, for instance, you're ineligible for EI as a result. We need to start developing, as was suggested by Ms. Howard, targeted EI for those kinds of precarious employment that are ineligible, even though they pay into EI.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, you have one minute left.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I have one question for you, Sonya. One of the things you talked about was the need for stable funding and how much of an impact that would have on the organizations. You also talked about stable funding for child care. Could you talk about how stable funding would support women in the economy?

● (1140)

Ms. Sonya Howard: That's a wonderfully broad question, so I'll do my best to focus it in less than a minute.

When it comes to women accessing services in cities and towns, particularly indigenous women, I can speak to the impacts that we've heard about and seen. When a specific project or program is offered and indigenous women hear about it, like the Pidaban program or the Odabi program at the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre, you may get a cohort of youth or young women coming into this employment and training program and having amazing results.

Then, how things operate in friendship centres is that someone might come in to use the health clinic and find out there's a literacy program. Then they find out that there's a food bank and then they find out.... It may not be an immediate direct door into the services that the individual actually needs at that point in time. If the Pidaban program didn't exist for another round, for example, that would be the direct impact: people wouldn't be getting the services.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was a great job.

We're going to now move on to you, Emmanuella Lambropoulos, and you can tell me how to properly say your name. I apologize.

You have seven minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you.

First, thank you to both witnesses for being here with us today. We really appreciate it. We're learning a lot of interesting things.

My first question is for Ms. Armstrong. I know that for women you are an advocate of universal child care. In what ways have you seen that there are differences between different regions? I know that in Quebec we do have a child care system for all kids in the province. Have you noticed a big difference between Quebec and the other provinces? I guess if there are differences between those, that would be a good example.

Dr. Pat Armstrong: The answer is yes. There's a study out of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that quite clearly demonstrates the difference in access to universal child care in Quebec, with its $7-a-day program, versus what happens in the rest of the country, or in Toronto where I am, where it can cost as much as $1,600 a month.

When I lived in Quebec and taught at a CEGEP before that program started, I took home $20 a week after I paid for my two kids to be in child care. It makes a huge difference.

Also, there are studies in Quebec, as I'm sure you're familiar with, that show women's employment increased significantly and poverty levels among women went down with the introduction of the form of universal child care that Quebec has.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Another question would be, among the other provinces and territories in the country, what other factors contribute to the differences in regions when it comes to pay equity or full-time employment?

Dr. Pat Armstrong: There have been a couple of studies indicating that there is a connection. In Alberta, for instance, there was a survey done that said 46% of the women who worked part-time worked part-time because they didn't have access to affordable child care, just as one example, and that's in a province that is quite wealthy.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I meant, were there other factors? Child care seems to be a factor, but what are other factors that make it different in other regions?

Dr. Pat Armstrong: What are other factors that make women's employment different in other regions? Well, there are the opportunities for employment, and I think the extent to which we have equity practices. Not all provinces, of course, have proactive pay equity legislation, for example. Not all provinces require the kind of employment equity audits we've seen. Not all provinces have the other kinds of supports that many women need, such as language training, for example—and that includes people who are going to university—or assistance in accreditation into a profession if you're an immigrant, for example.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

My next question is going to you, Ms. Howard. You said that 90% of the staff who work in these centres are women. How have you managed to employ 90% women in these centres? Is it because they're just more likely to apply?

● (1145)

Ms. Sonya Howard: There are a variety of factors, to some of which I can speak and for some of which I would encourage you to visit the local friendship centre in your riding or a neighbouring riding to see them in action. It could be—and I'm not saying these suggestions are the full explanation in each friendship centre—that the nature of the work is, as Ms. Armstrong mentioned, humanities and social sciences. These are very much the caring professions. There may be some natural inclinations that way—not necessarily, but it's one option.

Also, the work can be either full time or part time, sometimes, or it can be very much project-based. That can sometimes appeal to some women, depending on their family situation and depending on access to child care.

Also, it is very family-driven and community-driven. I'll try to give a short example. A woman came in whose child was in the head start program. She volunteered with the head start program in Dauphin, Manitoba. Then they were able to hire her in under the aboriginal head start program, and she was able to get her ECE or early childhood education certification over the course of working there. Those are some examples of how this operates.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Nice.

I was wondering whether you have any programs that are related to education. You mentioned a bunch of other ones, and I know that education is federal when it comes to reserves and to native peoples. I was wondering whether you had any programs to improve education among these children.

Ms. Sonya Howard: When we say education, we don't mean delivering education. What we mean is more a question of homework clubs and providing educational supports. Some friendship centres in some areas may have alternative high schools, and they may have direct relationships with the provincial government to run them, but I wouldn't say that it's across the board, because friendship centres seize opportunities where they can and when they can.

It's also based on identified community need. Some communities may not identify a need for that type of alternative aboriginal high school.

The Chair: Emmanuella, you have 30 seconds.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Most of these are in urban centres, you said, not in....

Ms. Sonya Howard: They're in smaller towns also. Some of our friendship centres make direct connections with first nations as well, because no matter where a first nations person lives, they need services.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent.

We're now going to begin our second round, with Martin Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate the witnesses' being here today and bringing forth the information and mentioning the things they're working with. One thing Sonya mentioned was friendship. I remember being at a meeting a year ago, hosted by a member from the Liberal Party in one of the two major cities in our province, at which we talked about partnerships. There was a lot of discussion about friendship centres and issues in this major city's urban areas. There was a city councillor there who offered a tremendous amount of resources and things the city could do, but there just was not a take-up from the city; they wanted to deal with the feds.

Being a former city councillor, I'm saying those are the guys on the ground. They are the guys who can make decisions and do things quicker. They refer sometimes here to the megalopolis of the federal government, because it's so hard to move things. In partnerships I would argue that the municipalities are much more flexible and willing to do things, so partner with them. I pleaded at that meeting, “Listen to the city councillor here; he's offering you things”, and there wasn't much uptake on it. I would encourage any urban groups to work with the municipalities. They're great partners and have much more flexibility to make decisions.

Could you give me one example from friendship centres—I know you mentioned many different things—of something that's really a success, a winner for you? Could you give me one example of something that has succeeded?

Ms. Sonya Howard: Do you mean in a particular program area, or just name any?

Mr. Martin Shields: You name it. You tell me.

Ms. Sonya Howard: I'll try to keep it very brief.

Based on the personal experience of seeing the Brandon Friendship Centre in action, not only do they run two aboriginal head start cohort programs on site, but they also manage the satellite site for Portage la Prairie Friendship Centre's aboriginal head start program. They also have one day care that they started on their own that is provincially regulated. They were also invited by the province to open a second day care to pilot a different type of day care layout, structure, and model. I'll try not to go too long into the reason that's so successful, but they incorporate elders through all of their programs.

I was at their day care grad ceremony, and here's the thing: it's the passion, it's the drive, and it's the flexibility as well, because they work very well with their surrounding partners. All friendship centres are doing good work, and those that are able to find unique ways of connecting with municipal partners are able to leverage those dollars as well. While I don't have specifics on Brandon's partnering with the municipality in that case, they certainly have strong relationships there. That impacts their ability to deliver programs and services like this child care, pre-natal-to-kindergarten approach.

● (1150)

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

Ms. Armstrong, I have 20 years as a casual instructor for a university in my background somewhere. As a casual, I stayed out of the politics a lot more than where you work.

One of the things you mention with regard to research is money being directed to specific areas. Do you have a reference for why money has been aimed historically in one particular segment of research versus another? Why has there not been more research money directed to social sciences? Why?

Dr. Pat Armstrong: I think one factor is the higher value we place on the so-called hard sciences versus the soft sciences. We attach more value to areas that can be what we think of as objectively measured than to those that can't, areas where we think it costs a lot more money to do the research because you're employing medical doctors, unlike doctors like me. They are more highly valued than people who do social work, for example.

I think there is a host of factors that contribute to this historical valuation, and I think, to go back to what I said earlier about training, we haven't had the same kind of training as those who are doing peer review.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go on to Marc Serré for five minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for your excellent presentations.

My first question is to Ms. Howard. In northern Ontario, the friendship centres do a fantastic job, as they do all across the country. I'm really impressed with the level of services for the amount of money that you receive and the challenges you have.

My first question is a bit of a different take from Mr. Shields', a different opinion. I know you work with municipalities, but as a former councillor myself, I know some of the municipalities don't necessarily work with you. Do you have a specific educational program to help municipalities, especially on the racism front? There are a lot of municipalities that still have racist views and some councillors, and I want to know if you have any specific programs to help municipalities and communities with racism.

Ms. Sonya Howard: Do we have a specific turnkey-ready program that we could hand to friendship centres or municipal councillors? The short answer is that I'm not aware of that. However, what do have, in the case of Quebec, is not one but two city mayor and friendship centre round tables—very successful—to talk about how they can build those relationships and how they can support service delivery for those who need it in the cities and towns there.

Val-d'Or is one of the drivers of that initiative. If we were to prepare a turnkey manual, for lack of a better term, for councillors, I would suggest that it could be modelled after Val-d'Or's. They actually do a whole week to end racism, I believe in March. They have a march to end racism. City councillors are very involved in that one, as far as I'm aware. The mayor takes part in that march. They also have a dinner where they bring together city councillors, the mayor, and local employment partners to foster that relationship and break down those barriers.

● (1155)

[*Translation*]

People from the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec, in Val d'Or, also talked about racism at the provincial commission on racism.

[*English*]

There are certainly some good examples there about how to start approaching that.

Mr. Marc Serré: Excellent. Thank you.

Ms. Armstrong, you indicated that there are three barriers, and you mentioned operating grants. Mr. Fraser talked about Minister Duncan's targeting approach, especially for getting women into either post-doctorates or the administration of universities. I want to get your thoughts on quotas. Targets don't seem to have worked for the past 20 to 30 years. Should we link federal funding for universities to jolt the system? In the last 20 years, universities haven't seemed to have gotten the message. Women still make up just 15% of administration. There's still a low percentage of women in post-doctoral and undergraduate studies.

What are your thoughts on putting in quotas, the way that some European countries have done, to really change the language and see if we could do better for women in universities and across the board?

The Chair: You have a little bit over a minute to answer.

Dr. Pat Armstrong: I think we need a host of affirmative action strategies in order to make a difference. Just as we do in pay, we need positive action. Some of those can be targeted at particular kinds of numbers, although, when we do numbers, they tend to be the maximum rather than the minimum that we want to do. Certainly that can be an important factor in moving in that direction.

In response to an earlier question about factors in hiring, I would have answered that “cluster hiring” is also starting to be encouraged as an affirmative action. If you are the only indigenous woman teaching at a university or in senior management, it can be very difficult to operate. You need more than one.

We do need some strategies, including quotas of various sorts, I think, to get more people from all of the equity-seeking groups. That way there's support for one another. It can be very lonely if you're the only one identified from a particular group.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

To Pat Armstrong from the Canadian Association of University Teachers and Sonya Howard from the National Association of Friendship Centres, thank you very for joining us today, ladies.

Before we adjourn, there is a short amount of business that I want to bring to your attention. The clerk has made a request for the departments to return to discuss this study. We're having a little bit of a pushback, because they have already appeared once. I want to hear from the committee on whether or not it's still an important thing for them to return.

Are there any comments? Should we be doing a straw poll on this? Would we like to see them return?

Go for it, Sean.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Sure, I'd be happy to have them back. I wouldn't mind getting through the other witnesses we have first—

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Sean Fraser: —just to say this is everything we've heard, and then have them encapsulate everything. I would be partial to having them, as long as it's not going to slow down our ability to get through this study in a timely way. I think that's fine.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Are there any other comments?

We will do our best to get them here. If not, we will continue to have this discussion.

Thank you very much for this meeting. The meeting is adjourned.