



Canadian Federation of University Women
Fédération Canadienne des Femmes Diplômées des Universités

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**Report to the Continuing Committee of Officials on Human Rights:
CFUW Comments on the United Nations' Committee on the Rights of the Child,
concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic report of Canada,
adopted by the Committee at its sixty-first session (17 September – 5 October 2012)**

Submitted by: The Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)

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About CFUW:

CFUW is a non-partisan, voluntary, self-funded organization of 9,000 women. These women are members of 110 CFUW Clubs located in every province across Canada. Since its founding in 1919, CFUW has been working to improve the status of women, and to promote human rights, public education, social justice, and peace. It holds special consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC) and belongs to the Education Committee of the Canadian Sub-Commission to UNESCO. CFUW is the largest of the 61 affiliates of the International Federation of University Women (IFUW). For more information visit www.cfuw.org

Introduction

1. CFUW would like to thank the Continuing Committee of Officials on Human Rights for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Third and Fourth Report on the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, as well as Canada's Initial Report on the *Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography*.

2. Since 1991, the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) has supported the ratification and full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Canada. CFUW believes firmly in the guiding principles of the Convention, which include: non-discrimination; adherence to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and the right to participate. CFUW therefore wishes to express its support for all the recommendations delivered to Canada on December 6, 2012 by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). As an organization that seeks to promote the equality of women and girls, CFUW is particularly concerned that all levels of government address those recommendations pertaining to girls, especially those that experience multiple forms of discrimination as a result of socio-economic status, disabilities, national origin, race, sexual orientation and others. CFUW also wishes to draw the Committee's attention to the interconnections between protecting the rights of women and those of children. As women continue to be the primary caregivers of children in Canadian society, the protection or violation of women's rights has a direct impact on children, and vice versa. CFUW believes that the rights of women and children should not be considered in isolation, but rather seen as mutually supporting and reinforcing each other.

Implementation of a Comprehensive Strategy

3. CFUW fully supports the CRC's recommendation that Canada should adopt a comprehensive, adequately resourced, and coordinated national strategy that provides an implementation framework for federal, provincial and territorial levels of government to establish priorities, targets and respective responsibilities to fulfil Canada's commitment to the Convention. To oversee the development and implementation of the strategy, the Government of Canada could strengthen the role of the Interdepartmental Working Group on the Rights of the Child. The National Plan of Action for Children, A Canada Fit for Children (2004) has set some excellent objectives; however, it is CFUW's view that the plan ought to be revisited in order to incorporate all of the CRC's recommendations particularly that clear priorities, targets, timelines, responsibilities, resource allocation and systematic monitoring are established.

Disaggregated Data Collection

4. CFUW also supports the CRC's recommendations pertaining to data collection. The collection of comprehensive data disaggregated by age, sex, geographical location, ethnicity, and socio-economic background, is essential to ensure that Canada can develop the most effective and efficient policies, programs and services for all of Canada's children, particularly those that are from marginalized communities, and in the most need of support to achieve their fullest potential. CFUW therefore urges the Government of Canada to begin working immediately with provincial and territorial governments to establish a comprehensive national data collection system on children.

Violence against Children, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

5. CFUW is also concerned by the lack of a comprehensive, coordinated, legislated and sufficiently funded national strategy or action plan to prevent and address all forms of violence against children, particularly girls. Girls, especially those who are indigenous, racialized, or living with a disability are disproportionately affected by sexual assault, exploitation and other forms of violence, including at the hands of caregivers and other responsible persons. Some essential statistics about violence against girls in Canada include:

- Girls are four times more likely to be sexually abused than boys; 75 percent of the time the abuse is perpetrated by a family member or friend.¹ The situation is worse for girls living with disabilities;²
- In New Brunswick and Quebec, 43 percent and 22 percent of teen girls respectively, experience dating violence;³

¹ Sinha, M. (2010). Police-reported Family Violence against Children and Youth, 2009, in Family Violence: A Statistical Profile, Statistics Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2012001/article/11643-eng.pdf> ; Mahoney, T. (2011). Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report – Women and the Criminal Justice System, Statistics Canada.

² Sullivan, P. and Knutson, J. (2000). Maltreatment and Disabilities: A Population-based Epidemiological Study, Child Abuse and Neglect 24, 10.

³ Institut de la statistique du Québec. (2002). L'enquête social et de santé auprès des enfants et des adolescents québécois.

- 17 percent of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls are under the age of 18, and a larger number are under 30;⁴
- 46 percent of high school girls in Ontario report being targets of unwanted sexual comments or advances;⁵
- 27 percent of Ontario girls in grades 9-11 had been pressured into unwanted sexual acts;⁶
- Research suggests that the majority of women involved in prostitution began between the ages of 16 and 20. Research demonstrates that a disproportionate number of these women were abused in their childhood.⁷

6. Additionally, the CRC's concluding observations do not address the fact that children experience violence that amounts to torture. The Canadian Centre for Child Protection published a study that revealed website images involving dehumanizing acts of (a) torture, bestiality and bondage, (b) necrophilia, degradation, children being urinated and defecated on, (c) weapons use, and (d) children forced to inflict sexualized harms against each other. Most of the images of victimization were of children less than eight years of age; 83% of the images were of girls. In 2006, an RCMP officer also noted that approximately 20% of the pedophilic sexualized violent images involved torture and that there was a demand for pedophilic torture images in Canada.⁸ Additional statistics on the prevalence of violence against children that amounts to torture are not available because torture in the private sphere is not criminalized as a specific offence in Canada, and Canada does not collect this data through any existing statistical tools.

7. Any strategy or action plan that is created to address violence against children must include provisions to address the legal, protective, investigative, reparative, supportive, rehabilitative and educational gaps that exist in terms of preventing and responding to the torture of children in Canada.

8. CFUW therefore urges the Government of Canada to create a comprehensive, coordinated and sufficiently funded strategy to address all forms of violence against children, including torture, prostitution and trafficking, and that seeks to address the disproportionate vulnerability of girls to violence, particularly those from marginalized communities, such as indigenous girls.

Harmful Practices based on Culture, Religion and Tradition

9. The concluding observations raise concerns over the lack of adequate protection for children, particularly girls, from harmful practices based on culture, religion and tradition; cited as an example is the continued practice of forced child marriage in some immigrant and religious communities. CFUW joins the CRC in urging all levels of government in Canada to take all necessary measures to protect children from harmful practices based on cultural, religion and

⁴ Native Women's Association of Canada. (2010). What Their Stories Tell Us: Research Findings from the Sisters in Spirit Initiative.

⁵ Wolfe, D., and Chiodo, D. (2008). Sexual Harassment and Related Behaviors Reported Among Youth from Grade 9 to Grade 11, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto.

⁶ Wolfe, D., and Chiodo, D. (2008).

⁷ Cool, J. (2004). Prostitution in Canada: An Overview. Library of Parliament. Retrieved from: <http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection-R/LoPBdP/PRB-e/PRB0443-e.pdf?>

⁸ Caswell, J., Keller, W., & Murphy, S. (Producers). (2006, July 26). Supervisor of RCMP child exploitation unit, Ottawa, Earla-Kim McColl speaking about child pornography [Television broadcast]. Atlantic Canada: CTV News.

tradition, including legislative measures and targeted improvement in investigation and law enforcement.

Mental Health

10. Supporting the mental health of Canada's children, and preventing mental illness, should be a priority of all levels of government. Much like physical health, the mental health of a societies' population is fundamental to establishing a sound foundation for Canadian's overall wellbeing and ensuring that people are able to reach their full potential; this not only reaps benefits for individuals, it benefits Canada's economy and society overall. Promoting mental health from a young age will therefore help create the best possible Canada. In addition to the recommendations contained in the CRC concluding observations, CFUW urges the Government of Canada to work with other levels of government to enact gender sensitive approaches to mental health for children. Girls, particularly teen girls, experience elevated rates of mental health concerns, self-harm and suicide.⁹

11. Canada has already made headway in addressing the above recommendations by creating the Mental Health Commission of Canada, which in turn released the Mental Health Strategy for Canada in 2012. Fully implementing the recommendations contained within the Mental Health Strategy will help address the concerns raised by the CRC and CFUW. We would particularly like to highlight priorities 1.2 and 4.5 and their related recommendations within the Mental Health Strategy, which respectively call for Canada to: *increase the capacity of families, caregivers, schools, post-secondary institutions and community organizations to promote the mental health of infants, children, and youth, prevent mental illness and suicide wherever possible, and intervene early when problems first emerge;*¹⁰ and *address the specific mental health needs related to gender and sexual orientation.*¹¹

Standard of Living/Poverty

12. CFUW also shares the CRC's concern that Canada lacks a comprehensive national strategy to address child poverty, despite Parliament's expressed commitment to tackle the issue on numerous occasions. It is well documented that child poverty has lasting impacts on people into their adulthood. Addressing the poverty of Canada's children is one of the best ways to counteract the marginalization of particular communities, and help families provide a strong foundation for their children to succeed in school and contribute positively to society. CFUW therefore urges the Government of Canada to implement the recommendations put forth by the CRC. The 2010 report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities entitled Federal Poverty Reduction Plan: Working in Partnership towards Reducing Poverty in Canada,¹² provides a roadmap for the Government of Canada to fulfill its international commitments to ensure adequate living

⁹ Girls Action Foundation. (2013). Backgrounder: Girls in Canada subject to dating violence, self-harm, low self-esteem, racial discrimination

¹⁰ Mental Health Commission of Canada (2012). Changing Directions, Changing Lives: the Mental Health Strategy for Canada. Pp.18-20. Retrieved from: <http://strategy.mentalhealthcommission.ca/pdf/strategy-text-en.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid. Pp.68-69.

¹² Hoepfner, C. (2010). Federal Poverty Reduction Plan: Working in Partnership Towards Reducing Poverty in Canada. Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. House of Commons Canada.

standards for all Canada's, but particularly children. CFUW therefore further urges the Government of Canada to fully implement the recommendations contained in that report.

Bullying in Schools

13. Ensuring safe learning environments for our children should be a top priority of governments in order to support their cognitive, emotional and physical development. In addition to those recommendations found in the CRC's concluding observations, CFUW urges all levels of government to work in collaboration with educators, parents and other stakeholders to develop strategies to address all aspects of bullying and cyber-bullying, particularly the sexist, racist, ablest, homophobic and trans-phobic manifestation/aspects. Ultimately, schools should foster learning environments where educators encourage children to understand, respect and promote one another's rights.

14. The recent and tragic suicide of 15 year-old Amanda Todd from British Columbia is just one example of the consequences of gender-based/sexualized cyber-bullying. Cases such as this point to the clear need to address bullying in gender specific ways. We know, for instance, that 46% of high school girls in Ontario report being targets of unwanted sexual comments or advances,¹³ and an alarming 27 percent of Ontario girls in grades 9-11 have been pressured into unwanted sexual acts.¹⁴ In addition, 13 percent of girls in Grade 10 report being bullied with racial overtones and 8% because of religious beliefs. Lesbian and bisexual youth are at even greater risk of being bullied.¹⁵

Early Childhood Education and Care

15. Research shows that early learning environments are very important to support the cognitive development of children, which have an impact on lifelong outcomes.¹⁶ CFUW is concerned about the development and safety of all children in care situations and therefore shares the CRC's concern about the lack of affordable, accessible, and uniform safe standards and training for early learning and child care across Canada. We urge the Government of Canada to collaborate with provincial, territorial and municipal levels of government to implement an adequately resourced, nationally regulated, universal early learning and child care program.

Implement Women's and Children's Rights in Conjunction

16. As the primary caregivers of children, women's social and economic status is directly linked to children's development and the protection of their rights. Research has shown that the resources put in the hands of women are more likely to be used to benefit children than those given to men.¹⁷ The economic inequality of women, particularly those of single parent households, is therefore detrimental to both women and their children.

¹³ Wolfe, D., and Chiodo, D. (2008).

¹⁴ Wolfe, D., and Chiodo, D. (2008). Sexual Harassment and Related Behaviors Reported Among Youth from Grade 9 to Grade 11, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto.

¹⁵ Girls Action Foundation. (2013).

¹⁶ Heckman, J. (2006). Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children. *Science*, Vol. 312 no. 5782 pp. 1900-1902.

¹⁷ UNFPA and UNICEF. (2011). Women's and Children's Rights: Making the Connections. Retrieved from: http://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Women_Children_Rights_UNFPA_UNICEF_final.pdf

Violence against women also has a damaging impact on children in households where this occurs. Witnessing the violence is traumatizing in itself, but children may also be subjected to the violence, and may experience resulting housing insecurity while women flee violence with their children. Gender based poverty and violence also put children at increased risk of entering the child welfare system, mental health concerns¹⁸, criminalization as youth and adults¹⁹, as well as others issues.

17. On the other side, protecting the rights of children – particularly girls – is the first step in promoting gender equality in adulthood. The stereotyping of gender roles and gender-based discrimination begins early in life. Efforts to promote gender equality must therefore start with girls by addressing gender roles in the household and in society at large.

18. The benefit of considering the rights of women and children together is that they can reinforce and mutually support each other.²⁰ CFUW therefore urges the Continuing Committee of Officials on Human Rights, and all levels of government, to consider and implement the recommendations from the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in conjunction with the recommendations of the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women presented to Canada in 2008.²¹

¹⁸ Leschied, A., Chiodo, D., Whitehead, P., and Hurley, D. (2003). The Association of Poverty with Child Welfare Service and Child and Family Clinical Outcomes. Retrieved from:
<http://www.edu.uwo.ca/cas/pdf/Child%20Poverty%20and%20Child%20Welfare%20Admissions%20Technical%20Report.pdf>

¹⁹ Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services. 2010. Review of the Roots of Youth Violence: Executive Summary. Retrieved from:
<http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthandthelaw/roots/what.aspx>

²⁰ UNFPA and UNICEF. (2011).

²¹ <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/602/42/PDF/N0860242.pdf?OpenElement>