



Including Low-Income Women with Children: Program and Policy Directions May 30, 2008

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Practice, Power, Politics

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Centering Myself in the Research



“If you did not have shoes to wear to school, you were poor.”

Centering Myself in the Research



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Women and Poverty

“If you did not have shoes to wear to school, you were poor.”

- Statistics Canada defines a set of income cut-offs below which people may be said to live in “straitened circumstances”.

These cut-offs are treated as poverty lines.



Including Low Income Women with Children: Program and Policy Directions Research Report 2007

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- Funded by the Winnipeg Foundation
- Published by Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence

Research Team



Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence

Established in 1996 with a mandate that covers both
Manitoba and Saskatchewan

- Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert
- Research, Policy, Communication
- Driven by community issues
- Issues and health of women who are often overlooked, in four main areas:
 - ✓ Aboriginal women's health
 - ✓ Rural women's health
 - ✓ Women, health and poverty
 - ✓ Gender in health planning

Multi sectoral, multi disciplinary projects of research, policy advice and communications

- True consultation & community involvement - research that is by and for the women concerned
- Implications for health planning and policy at all levels



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pour LA SANTÉ DES FEMMES



Presentation Outline

- Literature Summary
- Qualitative Methodology
- Demographics
- Findings and Policy Implications
- Recommendations for Action
- Knowledge Transfer
- Comments/Questions



Literature Summary

- This study adds to existing qualitative literature on the experiences of low-income women with children by elucidating both the perspectives of women participants and the service providers at Family Resource Centres (FRCs).
- It is unique in that it provides the perspectives of FRC service providers.



Qualitative Methodology

- Research was conducted at 2 rural and 2 urban Family Resource Centres
 - Andrews Street Family Centre, William Whyte Community, Winnipeg
 - Wolseley Family Place, West Broadway Community, Winnipeg
 - Anna's House, Steinbach
 - Mrs. Lucci's, Lac Du Bonnet
- Recruitment was by poster and focus groups organized by a point person in each FRC.
- An honorarium was provided to participants and community representatives.
- A light meal was provided and childcare.
- Informed consent was obtained.



Qualitative Methodology

- Data was collected from demographic forms and focus group interviews (using a semi-structured interview guide) with 56 low-income women with children and 29 family resource centre service providers
- Audio taped interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist.
- Findings were grouped into six themes that emerged from the data
- A community advisory group was established to guide research process. Women participants were part of this team
- Findings were shared with the participants and providers for their feedback by meetings held at each participating FRC and chaired by members of the research team. Action steps were explored.



Qualitative Methodology

- A draft of the report was sent out to the research team, other key academic, and community researchers, and to the executive directors and community representatives from the family resource centres for feedback before it was submitted for publication.
- Trustworthiness of the results ensured by attention to credibility, transferability, and authenticity.
- Ethics approval granted by the University of Manitoba Education/Nursing Ethics Review Board.

Demographics

Table 1: Community Population Characteristics
(2001 Census of Population – Statistics Canada)

	West Broadway	William Whyte	City of Winnipeg	Steinbach	Lac Du Bonnet
Income < \$20,000	42.5% 92% of centre users*	50.4%	20.8%	47%	11.3%
Without high school diploma	30% 70% of centre users*	56.5%	28.2%	35%	45%
Single parent families	43% 80% of centre users**	32.6%	18.5%	10%	<1%

* WFP 2004-05 Annual Report

**as reported by Executive Director

Demographics

Table 2: LIWC Focus Group Participants

FRC	Number of Participants	Age: Range/Average	Marital Status	Number of Children: Range/Average	Level of Education	Employment/Family Support
Andrews Street Family Centre	15	20-45 years (Average: 34)	M/CL *: 3 S **: 12	1-7 (Average: 4)	< Gr 12: 11 Gr 12: 1 Gr 12 +: 3	2 – employed (many part time) Income < \$1000 per month
Wolseley Family Place	15	20-63 years (Average: 35)	M/CL: 4 S: 11	1-6 (Average: 3)	< Gr 12: 10 Gr 12: 0 Gr 12 +: 4 (14 responses)	9 - employed (many part time) Income < \$1000 per month
Mrs. Lucci's	10	18-47 years (Average: 30)	M/CL: 0 S: 10	1-4 (Average: 2)	< Gr 12: 2 Gr 12: 4 Gr 12 +: 3 (9 responses)	7 - employed or dependent on family support
Anna's House	8	20-44 years (Average: 32)	M/CL: 4 S: 4	1-10 (Average: 3)	< Gr 12: 2 Gr 12: 2 Gr 12 +: 3 (7 responses)	4 - employed or dependent on family support
Anna's House: (German Group)	8	22-37 years (Average: 28)	M/CL: 8 S: 0	1-10 (Average: 4)	< Gr 12: 1 Gr 12: 6 Gr 12 +: 1	8 - employed or dependent on family support


*M/CL – Married or Common Law

**S – Single (single, widowed, separated or divorced)

Demographics


Table 3: Provider Focus Group Participants

FRC	Number of Participants	Former Clients	w/ Post Secondary Education
Andrews Street Family Centre	10	9	4
Woseley Family Place	10	5	6
Mrs. Lucci's	5	2	4
Anna's House	4	0	2

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Findings and Policy Implications – Key Themes

- A Safe and Nurturing Place to Go
- Housing
- Childcare
- Food Security
- Education
- Access to Programs and Services



A Safe and Nurturing Place to Go - Findings

- Family Resource Centres
 - staff is non-judgmental and respectful
 - practical classes (ie. parenting classes)
 - programs for children
 - food and clothing programs
 - a place to learn about resources
 - building support networks
- Staff and centre are assets to community.




“It’s really just the sense of community that you find here (at the FRC); the moms really become their own supports.”

- participant

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A Safe and Nurturing Place to Go - Policy Implications

- FRCs are providing valuable services in their community. Funding needs to be reliable and increased for new community based programs
- FRCs operate on participatory approaches to program development. Government agencies could learn from their insights
- FRCs are valuable community partners for government organizations and build community capacity



Housing - Findings

- Affordable and safe housing was one of the most critical elements for women to feel personally safe and to feel that their children would be safe and well cared for
- Budgets would only allow for substandard housing.
- Need for more subsidized housing
- Women need to have affordable places to live in safe neighbourhoods with good play areas for their children
- Need to be able to develop connections and a good knowledge of the community to be safe




“You should have seen the houses I had to live in; ants biting my babies; ants crawling in our beds; mice running over, because I get \$310 for rent.”

- participant




Housing - Policy Implications

- More subsidized and collective housing is needed
- Housing policies need to consider the unique needs of women (safety is a main concern)
- Public housing needs to be of consistently good quality
- Community and neighborhood resources are important aspects of housing policy



Childcare - Findings

- Felt trapped and isolated because of their childcare responsibilities
- Many did not have a person or affordable source of childcare that they could count on
- Trust was a big issue in determining whether to use childcare
 - “Trust, women need to trust the places they go for help.” - participant*
- Without childcare – daily tasks were challenging and looking for work or maintaining employment was impossible



Childcare - Findings

“I wish there was a daycare in this building, somewhere you can drop your kids off for two hours when you are grocery shopping.”

– participant

“There is a huge waiting list for subsidized daycare.”

– participant



Childcare - Policy Implications

- Childcare needs to be reliable, affordable, high quality and accessible
- Subsidy system does not reach all low income women, additional surcharges are costly
- There is a shortage of licensed day care spaces
- Location and hours of availability are also important to accommodate 'off hours' work schedules
- Women need to be able to trust the childcare that is available
- Consider a national program of universal care



Food Security - Findings

- Expressed feelings of inadequacy because they didn't have enough money to provide basic necessities for their families
- Food sources did not provide good, healthy food
- While limited access to food banks was identified as a problem, service providers noted that this was a bigger structural problem and that government needs to consider food security in social assistance programs
- Lack of food is a result of lack of money




“Society is okay with poverty, with a social system that leaves people behind, relying on foodbanks and social structures like assistance, child and family services.”

- participant




Food Security - Policy Implications

- Charitable emergency food organizations like Winnipeg Harvest should not bear primary responsibility for supplying low-income families with food
- Food banks can be hard to get to – they may not be available in rural areas
- Some women would be willing to volunteer or do work in exchange for better access to food. Consider the possibilities of these programs



Education - Findings

- More rural than urban participants had completed their grade 12
- All women identified education as valuable to getting better jobs and earning a higher income
- Childcare, transportation and other special needs are identified as barriers to obtaining further education and training



“They don’t need resume writing, they need to get their children’s lives balanced; they need to have their personal health taken care of; and then they will have the capability of presenting themselves well in a interview.”

- participant

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Education - Policy Implications

- Education is a key issue for exiting poverty
- Support services like transportation and childcare are necessary for women to take advantage of available programs
- Tuition assistance with a broader range of programs would be helpful
- Partnerships with FRCs may improve the accessibility of education programs

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Access to Programs and Services - Findings

- Interactions with social service providers are negative and stigmatizing
- Transportation and phone are vital to contacting or getting to programs and services
- Isolation and lack of services in community (especially in rural areas)
- Not knowing about benefits or resources available to them is a major concern.




“There is such a false negative stigma about people on social assistance, oh they don’t want to work. They’re lazy”

- participant

“Sometimes it seems like the systems are set up to perpetuate people to stay within the system but just to find better ways to negotiate through it”

- participant




Access to Programs and Services- Policy Implications

- Better coordination and integration of programs and services in accessible locations
- Trusting and respectful relationships between service providers and service users is an important aspect of access
- Transportation and phone services are an integral component to accessing services.
- Service provision should be straightforward, easy to understand and comprehensive
- Collaborative approaches to program and service planning is critical to improving accessibility



Recommendations for Action

- Improving Programs and Services
 - program development, service delivery
- Strengthening Public Resources
 - new programs, more funding
- Increasing Public Awareness
 - shifting perceptions about poverty, about raising children
- Building Partnerships
 - including low-income women with children and community partners



Community Health Nurses Advocate for Societal Change in Support of Health for All (CHNAC, 2003)

- Develop strong working relationships with marginalized service users.
- Facilitate dialogue for social justice between multiple stakeholders.



Knowledge Transfer

- Including Low-Income Women with Children: Program and Policy Directions Report Launch Wednesday September 12, 2007 at Crossways-in-Common, Winnipeg Manitoba

“Here we are...again.”

- Media Interviews
- Notes for Policy Makers and Program Planners – Based on the project “Including Low-Income Women with Children: Program and Policy Directions”
- A booklet for women, their families, community workers and volunteers.
- Letters sent to policy makers by FRC Executive Directors.



Meetings with Government





Knowledge Transfer

- Meeting with government representatives
- Meeting with Honorable Dr. J. Gerrard
- Publishing a summary of the report in Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba, Inc. Newsletter
- Bright Beginnings North Eastman Parent-Child Coalition 6th Annual Forum
- Nursing Research Seminar Series, Faculty of Nursing, University of Manitoba
- 2nd National Community Health Nurses Conference



Thank you for this opportunity to meet and share our findings. The report and accompanying documents are available at www.pwhce.ca

Your comments and questions are welcome.

Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life . . .

-Nelson Mandela