

## POVERTY

*"I was twelve years old and I was tired of being hungry, tired of having no clothes and stuff like that, so I just ran away from home."*

Despite decades of social welfare programs, the income gap and poverty rates remain stubbornly high in Canada and Saskatchewan. This is particularly true for women, children, seniors and Aboriginal people.

### YOUR CHANCES OF BEING POOR IN SASKATCHEWAN

**11.7%** FOR ALL **15.2%** IF YOU ARE A CHILD

**30.3%** IF YOU ARE A SINGLE WOMAN

**30.5%** IF YOU ARE A SENIOR

**33%** IF YOU ARE A FEMALE SENIOR

**52.4%** IF YOU ARE A SINGLE PARENT

**54%** IF YOU ARE ABORIGINAL

#### WHAT PEOPLE THINK

Saskatchewan is booming. New car sales, new houses and retail shopping have risen in recent years. People are growing wealthy.

#### THE REALITY

Since 1976 the top 20% of Saskatchewan income earners have gotten richer. The other 80% have seen their income stagnate or decline.

## SENIORS

Canada's senior citizens are becoming poorer at a rapid rate.

- Nationally, the poverty rate among seniors has doubled since 1998, from 5.9% to 12%.
- In Saskatchewan the rate has more than doubled during this time, from 4.5% to 13.5%.
- Single Saskatchewan seniors face a poverty rate of 30.5%.

## WOMEN

*"I figured that just selling my body was the easiest way – and it was, because there are a lot of perverts out there who like young girls."*

In recent decades the overall poverty rate among Saskatchewan women has declined, and at 10.9% now stands below the national average (13.6%). But this does not tell the story of all women. In Saskatchewan:

- The poverty rate for young single women has risen since 1998, from 26.8% to 30.3%.
- An astounding 33% of single senior women live in poverty, up from 10% in 1998.

## WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

The groups that have experienced increased poverty since 1998 are those who are more likely to rely on social programs. For example, 90% of Canada's poor seniors are dependent on government transfers for their income. In recent decades, governments have been guided by a philosophy called neo-liberalism. In a nutshell, the neo-liberal philosophy calls for reduced social spending, lower taxes and regulations for the business class, and increased spending on social controls like jails and police.

According to this philosophy, if you reduce social welfare, people will be forced to become more self-reliant and therefore wealthier. Obviously, this has not worked – statistics reveal that poverty has instead increased among the most vulnerable citizens.

## ALTERNATIVES AND ACTIONS

The Canadian government has resisted a UN recommendation to establish a national anti-poverty strategy, pointing out that provincial programs can do the job. Five provinces – Quebec, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Ontario – have created provincial poverty reduction plans. However, the results of these plans are unclear. In a world that increasingly benefits the wealthy and punishes the poor, it is difficult to create real change. This was a key concern of the Occupy Movement, which continues to seek not 'more of the same' welfare programs, but a fundamental re-thinking of the dominant economic philosophy of the past 30 years. Although social programs help alleviate the worst effects of poverty, it is more likely that lasting solutions will come not from social welfare bureaucrats, but from the streets.

## MORE INFORMATION

Information for this fact sheet came from *Poverty in Canada and Saskatchewan in 2011: No Closer to the Truth (Poverty Papers #4)* by Garson Hunter, published by the Social Policy Research Unit (SPR), University of Regina, 2011. The full paper is included in the **This Is Us** resource kit and is available online at [www.uregina.ca/spr](http://www.uregina.ca/spr)