



# BOOK REVIEWS

## UNEQUAL FUTURES: THE LEGACIES OF CHILD POVERTY IN CANADA

Brigitte Kitchen *et al.* Toronto: The Child Poverty Action Group and the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto, 1991.

*By Nelly Tion*

*Unequal Futures* examines the structural sources that engender, maintain, and perpetuate child poverty in Canada—to the extent that one in every six children continues to be virtually condemned to poverty as a birth right. The book's analysis is based on the sources of the differences in access to social rewards and the extent of market and government engendered inequalities. The authors identify and analyze the federal government's supply-side policies, which have resulted in shifting the burden of taxation on to low and middle income individuals and families, in reducing social benefits, and in eroding the minimum wage—all factors contributing to the declining economic circumstances of middle and low income children and their families.

The effects of child poverty in pre-determining health, social functioning, educational and employment opportunities into adulthood are examined. An analysis of the disparities in life chances among Canadian children points out the fallacy of the widely accepted myth that equal opportunity can be promoted through education. Often seen as offering all children a chance to overcome the limitations of the poverty they were born into, publicly-funded education can actually serve to reproduce the disadvantage of poor

children. *Unequal Futures* argues that child and family poverty cannot be addressed through selective services and benefits directed at the poor. Recommendations include the entrenchment of an explicit constitutional commitment to the principle of financing a federal income security system for families with children, which would reflect a national commitment to the reduction of disparities.

The analysis of the nature and sources of child and family poverty includes an examination of gender-based issues. The authors note that the increase in the last decade of the number of female-led lone parent families has been widely associated with child poverty. Employment of both parents has become a necessity to maintain reasonable standards of living for a family. Mothers are forced to experience the contradiction of meeting this demand to maintain individual and family self-sufficiency, while facing disadvantages and inequities in the labour market. At the same time they still bear the major responsibility for child raising, a job not remunerated by direct earnings. Segregation into lower paying jobs, inadequate child care, non-payment or inadequate amounts of support by non-custodial parents, all contribute to making female-led lone parent families one of the highest risk groups for poverty. Statistics reveal that the child poverty rate is 25 per cent for families with mothers in full-time employment compared with a rate of 6.2 per cent when the father is employed full-time.

*Unequal Futures* is a detailed and well-developed argument for a renewed collective commitment to reducing child and family poverty through constitutional entrenchment of the principle of true equalization of opportunity for all children and their families.

A disappointing feature of the authors' analysis is the lack of any examination, or even substantive acknowledgment, of the compounded risks and disadvantages faced by children, women, and families whose barriers to accessing equal opportunities are made even more formidable because they are racial minorities, because of their immigration status, or because they are disabled. For example, statistics from the disabled community indicate that unemployment for women with disabilities reaches as high as 80 per cent. How disabled, racial minority, and Aboriginal women and their families experience poverty should at least have been part of the gender analysis of poverty.

Not addressing the discriminatory barriers faced by such minority groups gives rise to serious questions about the adequacy of the analysis underpinning *Unequal Futures*. Without a serious examination of the different faces and experiences of child and family poverty, and the sources of those different experiences, the validity of the prescriptions for change is also called into question.

## THE POLITICS OF BREASTFEEDING

Gabrielle Palmer. London: Pandora Press Issues in Women's Health Series, 1988.

*By Liz Philipose*

*The Politics of Breastfeeding* is a clear and comprehensive account of the ways in which women's "mammalian ability" to produce and dispense breastmilk has been replaced with the use of "prosthetic