



Research Update

Presented by the Edmonton Social Planning Council

April 2016



Inside This Update:

“Aboriginal Seniors’ Housing in Edmonton” reviewed by
Jennifer Taylor

3-4

**“Better is Always Possible: A Federal Plan to Tackle Poverty
and Inequality”** reviewed by Lexia Simmons

5-6

**“Framing the New Inequality: The Politics of Income
Redistribution in Canada”** reviewed by Jamil Harvich

7-8

“Trends in Income Inequality in Canada and Elsewhere”
reviewed by Emily Speur

9-10

“Aboriginal Seniors’ Housing in Edmonton” by John Douglas Crookshanks (Homeward Trust Edmonton, November 2015)

Reviewed by Jennifer Taylor

John Douglas Crookshanks aims to address the issue of Aboriginal seniors’ housing now to “prepare governments to deal with a shortage of adequate spaces and appropriate housing supports down the road” (Crookshanks, 2015, p. 6). This report is relevant for policy makers, community planners, social service workers, volunteers, and academics.

In 2011, Aboriginal seniors made up about 10 percent of the Aboriginal population in Edmonton. In comparison, non-Aboriginal seniors made up 23 percent of the non-Aboriginal population. According to the Government of Canada, of the Aboriginal seniors in Edmonton in 2011, 570 seniors were living in housing deemed unsuitable (Crookshanks, 2015, p. 13-15).

In his study, Crookshanks found that 60 percent of the Aboriginal senior research participants were renting, and that 40 percent had children living with them. Key factors of importance were identified in participant discussions, including the participant's ability to house their extended family for cultural and/or financial reasons. While this factor was identified as vital for disseminating culture to younger generations of Aboriginal peoples, Crookshanks (2015) notes that it is “at odds with the ideas and rules of the mainstream housing sector” (p. 14).

Aboriginal seniors raised several issues of concern in their housing situation, including facing discrimination and even eviction from landlords if they help house members of their family. Participants expressed frustration at the lack of housing available for them, but spoke about a desire to help each other, and to enlist Aboriginal youth as advocates (Crookshanks, 2015, p. 14-15).

The alienation Aboriginal seniors face is significant because they are marginalized by both mainstream systems of power as well as from within younger Aboriginal populations. Crookshanks (2015) argues that such factors result in “a breakdown of Aboriginal communities and organizations and it weakens seniors’ voices” (p.16).

In conclusion, Crookshanks (2015) recommends that Aboriginal communities, across all demographics, be consulted and included in the design of Aboriginal housing and programs; that Aboriginal seniors be given a choice in the type of housing suitable to their unique situations, such as rentals or cooperative housing; and that housing be affordable, safe, and close to services for Aboriginal seniors. It is also imperative that Aboriginal seniors’ housing accepts Aboriginal culture, is not racist or discriminatory, and accommodates children. Finally, Crookshanks emphasizes that service providers must be cognizant of the availability and accessibility

of services, especially given the unique intersection of age and race for Aboriginal seniors.

In terms of his methodology and process for participant selection, Crookshanks stands as a positive example of how Aboriginal seniors' housing services should operate: inclusively. His inclusive approach is evident from the participant selection process and the supports he provided participants to ensure their circumstances would not mitigate participation. Crookshanks (2015)

incorporated the voices and experiences of Aboriginal seniors living in Edmonton by creating an inclusive "space for more traditional speaking narratives, unstructured by researcher intervention and questioning, so that participants' speaking time was not fragmented" (p. 8). Such practices suggest that Crookshanks identified and accounted for most, if not all, possible barriers to participation, thus ensuring a diverse group for the study.

Publication source:

<http://homewardtrust.ca/images/resources/2015-11-24-17-17Aboriginal%20Seniors%20Housing%20in%20Edmonton.pdf>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:



Jennifer Taylor completed her Bachelor of Arts in Human Geography. She hopes to complete a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Alberta where she currently works.

Connect to Jennifer! Email jtaylor@ualberta.ca

“Better is Always Possible: A Federal Plan to Tackle Poverty and Inequality” by Seth Klein and Armine Yalnizyan (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, February 2016)

Reviewed by Lexia Simmons

Seth Klein and Armine Yalnizyan are the authors of “Better is Always Possible: A Federal Plan to Tackle Poverty and Inequality.” The article finds a home under two main projects, the “Alternative Federal Budget” and “Growing Gap,” which are compilations of articles that strive to present a policy alternative to issues facing society and takes an in-depth and sustained look at income inequality. The primary goal of the paper is to propose the terms of a comprehensive federal poverty reduction plan to complement the chapter on poverty and inequality that is presented in the 2016 Alternative Federal Budget. Policy makers would be the best audience for this article, due to the presentation of alternative views and strategies.

Klein and Yalnizyan present a comprehensive federal poverty reduction plan. They begin by arguing that inequality and poverty are not inevitable facts of life, and taxation is the best plan to tackle this problem. The authors support this claim by pointing to other countries who have successfully tackled inequality and poverty, as well as Canada’s own active attempt at tackling poverty among the elderly in the 1960’s.

Klein and Yalnizyan argue that inequality and poverty cannot be alleviated solely through a

bottom-up approach, noting that job growth has done little to decrease inequality. This leaves available only a top-down solution, and creates an argument for taxation as the best means to tackle such inequities. The authors provide further support for their argument by claiming that closing the inequality gap and bringing people over the poverty line would be less expensive than fighting the ongoing consequences of these two problems.

After Klein and Yalnizyan successfully argue for taxation as the primary method of fighting inequality, they move to a focus on Canadian politics and policies. Primarily, they focus on the Liberal Party’s commitment to fighting inequality through the “Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy.” While the author’s praise the Liberal plan, they also critique the strategy for not going far enough, including for ignoring social programs, pre-distribution of income, new spending, and social housing.

The article also analyzes problematic policies that are currently in place which contribute to the deterioration of the social safety net. From there, an analysis of the effects of inequality and poverty, including food insecurity and homelessness, is given. The authors argue for an alternative set of metrics to measure poverty, since the standard one

has not been re-based since 1992. They also note the high levels of poverty amongst vulnerable minority populations, including indigenous people, immigrants, senior women, and single parents, among others. The authors conclude by providing recommendations to government on the adoption of indicators, targets, and timelines, as well as actions on critical policy areas. They also develop a five-point plan that they argue the government should use to adopt a comprehensive strategy to tackle the growing income gap in Canada.

The article presents a very compelling argument with very large numbers such as “income of about 60% of earners is less than \$45,000” and “34% of people in Canada paid no income taxes because their incomes were too low” (Klein and Yalnizyan, 2016, p. 7).

However, the authors do not break these statistics down based on demographics. For instance, how many of that 60 percent of earners are high school or university students working part-time jobs? The article provides a very broad overarching picture, however, it fails to break the numbers down far enough to give a complete picture.

The authors also struggle to identify causes of inequality. They identify social aspects very vaguely as major contributors to this problem, but substantial evidence to demonstrate how these factors contribute to poverty and inequality are missing. Moreover, while the authors utilize credible sources, they provide only a single interpretation of the statistics cited. Finally, the article does not present or challenge other points of views on this topic, leaving the reader with a sense of an incomplete story.

Publication source: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/better-always-possible>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:



Lexia Simmons completed her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science at Mount Allison University. She is currently in Edmonton, completing courses at the University of Alberta and volunteering for several organizations. She is also working at the YMCA.

Connect to Lexia on LinkedIn! Click here →  .

“Framing the New Inequality: The Politics of Income Redistribution in Canada” by Keith Banting and John Myles (Institute for Research on Public Policy, May 2015)

Reviewed by Jamil Harvich

This article describes the nature of contemporary redistributive politics in Canada, and explains why the debate on income inequality and redistribution has remained fairly stagnant in recent decades. Keith Banting and John Myles explain why a “reframing” of our current understanding of inequality trends would help create meaningful change. The authors also emphasize the importance of electoral politics in developing this new framework.

Between the 1980's and 1990's, Canada saw dramatic reductions in the gap between rich and poor. However, between mid-1990 and mid-2000 the redistribution debate drifted from the spotlight, and the promising trends seen earlier began to move in the opposite direction. For instance, Canada became a world leader in what is called the “99/1 phenomena,” with income growth disproportionately increasing amongst the top one percent of Canadians (Banting & Myles, 2015, p. 1).

The above factors, along with the occupy movements of 2011, have brought the inequality debate back on the public radar. As a result, income redistribution became a focal point in the 2015 federal election debates. The language used by party leaders, however, rarely centered directly on inequality and

issues of poverty, but instead was replaced with vague discussions of ‘helping families’ or ‘the middle-class’ (Banting & Myles, 2015, p. 1).

Banting and Myles argue that while all party leaders presented their redistributive policies in similar terms, the application of such policies would bring about drastically different outcomes. In fact, they note that all three parties use very different definitions when it comes to Canada’s inequality problem. This difference shows that a new “framework” must be created and issues of modern-day inequality need to be redefined before any effective change can be achieved (Banting & Myles, 2015, pp. 2 - 4).

Differences in opinion surrounding the income-inequality debate are partly a result of different interpretations of economic data. For instance, data from Statistics Canada's Survey on Consumer Finances (SCF) and the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) show that inequality has risen since 1980 and social welfare programs have been unable to compensate. This data also shows that inequality has leveled off since the 2000s (Banting & Myles, 2015, pp. 4 - 6).

It can be argued, however, that the above data fails to capture income changes for the top 10 percent of the population. If taxation

data is used instead, results show that a majority of the income gained between 1982 and 2010 has gone to the top ten percent. At the other end of the income spectrum, the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) and Low Income Measure (LIM) show that income for the poor has not worsened in the past decades, and may have even improved slightly. In terms of the middle-class, arguments can be made that income has not grown much for this population, and that new stresses are emerging for the lower-middle class (Banting & Myles, 2015, p. 6).

The new inequality seems to be one of growing wealth for those in the top income bracket, while middle-class and poor incomes remain stagnant. Banting and Myles argue that political parties will play a key role in how modern-day inequality is solved, with middle-class voters playing an important role in their choice of party and therefore policy (2015, pp. 12 - 15). Additionally, how these

issues will be addressed in the coming years relies on coalition building at the federal level. The Prime Minister has many barriers to overcome in this regard, however, since the provinces have heavy control over social welfare and economic policy (Banting & Myles, 2015, pp. 15 - 20).

“Reframing the New Inequality” provides an important perspective on income redistribution in Canada. By describing how the factors and theories surrounding the issue have changed throughout the years, Banting and Myles have put forth a convincing argument as to why policy must adapt to the changing trends of inequality. Although the article uses some examples of economic data analysis to make its point, the overall language used is not too technical and would be an informative read for anyone with an interest in Canadian public policy.

Publication source: <http://irpp.org/research-studies/aots5-banting-myles/>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:



Jamil Harvich is currently a Mapping/GIS technician at WSP Canada.

Connect to Jamil on LinkedIn! Click here → 

“Trends in Income Inequality in Canada and Elsewhere” by Andrew Heisz (Institute for Research on Public Policy, September 2015)

Reviewed by Emily Speur

In this article Andrew Heisz examines income inequality with three main purposes. First, to give an in depth examination of income inequality by presenting recent trends in Canada and abroad. Second, to observe how several factors can influence income, and therefore lead to income inequality. Third, to present the changes of income distribution over time – or what Heisz refers to as ‘income mobility.’

Heisz begins his discussion of income inequality by analyzing recent trends in Canada and elsewhere. He indicates that in recent years income inequality has increased in Canada and abroad. Evidence of this is shown using information from sources such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), who published a report comparing income trends between 1985 and 2008. The OECD demonstrated that there was an increase in inequality in Canada and other OECD countries, but that there existed noticeable differences when comparing these nations. For instance, in the United States and the United Kingdom income inequality was greater than in Sweden and Finland (Heisz, 2015, p.82).

To measure inequality in his examples, Heisz uses the Gini coefficient. The coefficient has a range between 0 and 1. If a nation is ranked

at 0 it indicates absolute equality, or that everyone has equal income. If it is ranked at 1 it indicates absolute inequality, or that one member of the population is earning all of the country’s income (Heisz, 2015, p.78).

Several factors can have an influence on income and lead to imbalances, and Heisz looks at a few of these factors in his research. One factor mentioned is age. For example, in Canada the earnings of older and younger workers were analyzed over a span of three decades starting in the early 1980’s. It was found that between 1998 and 2011 young men and women saw a faster increase in their earnings than older men and women. In the case of earning increases for younger men, one key reason was “changes in unionization, industry and occupation [which] accounted for a substantial portion (60 percent) of the difference in wage growth over the period, as these factors began to shift in favour of younger men” (Heisz, 2015, p.93).

Heisz concludes with an examination of income mobility. Income mobility studies are ones that follow the income of a group of individuals to determine whether their earnings remain fixed or change over time. In a study conducted between 2002 and 2007, it was found that a third of individuals were able to exit a state of low income within a

year. Heisz believes that this statistic is significant, because it reveals that greater income equality can be reached in the near future (Heisz, 2015, p.95).

Although there are many statistics and facts put forward about income inequality in “Trends in Income Inequality in Canada and Elsewhere,” there are no concrete examples of solutions given that could help with this issue. There are also no case studies

presented, which could make this paper more appealing to a wider audience. Case studies would allow readers to connect Heisz’s statistics to real situations, which would make his research more compelling. Given the mathematical and statistical nature of this paper, it would be the most interesting to academics who specialize in statistics or economics.

Publication source: <http://irpp.org/research-studies/aots5-heisz/>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:



Emily Speur is a recent Political Science graduate from the University of Alberta. She is currently involved in several advocacy projects within her community.

Connect to Emily! Email emilyann@ualberta.ca

“

Through our social policy research and advocacy efforts, we hope to create a healthy, just and inclusive community.

-The Edmonton Social Planning Council

”

ABOUT

OUR STAFF: THE EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL:

Susan Morrissey, Executive Director

John Kolkman, Research Coordinator

Jihan Sharifi, Research Officer

Rebecca Fletcher, Communications Officer

Stephanie Haar, Executive Assistant

The ESPC is an independent, non-profit, charitable organization. Our Focus is social research, particularly in the areas of low income and poverty.

We are dedicated to encouraging the adoption of equitable social policy, supporting the work of other organizations who are striving to improve the lives of Edmontonians, and educating the public regarding the social issues that impact them on a daily basis.

THE RESEARCH UPDATE:

The Edmonton Social Planning Council, in collaboration with our volunteers, strive to provide stakeholders and community members with up-to-date reviews on recently published social research reports.

Interested in volunteering? Email researchofficer@edmontonsocialplanning.ca