
Canada's current poverty problem

Today, 4.9 million Canadians are living under the poverty line, but this situation is not a new problem (Canada Without Poverty, 2018). Social welfare and poverty have been an issue since the time of Feudalism (Hicks, 2014). This paper will address the past and current problems of poverty in Canada as well as the social welfare state. Also, it analyzes Universal Basic Income - a program which has the goal of providing people with enough money to meet their basic needs - as a solution to poverty which can be impacted by the use of social media.

Chapter two of Social Welfare in Canada identifies that the systemic problem of poverty in Canada can trace its roots to the feudal era in Britain. At this time, the lords allowed serfs to work on their land in exchange for food and shelter. However, this system was abolished due to a demand for wool. Instead, the lords only kept workers who were not "lazy". This left the others without work and thus without food and shelter. The Bubonic plague, also known as Black Death, then created a labour shortage, forcing the serfs to return to work. By the 16th century, the population was restored, but many were left in poverty due to a lack of jobs. In 1536, the British Poor Law was passed in an attempt to stop people from begging in the streets and forced them to find a job. Only those who were unable to work were provided with a document which allowed them to continue begging for money. This idea was continued in 1601 with the passing of the Elizabeth Poor Law, where deserving and undeserving poor were defined. The ideas of the Elizabeth Poor Law were brought to Canada during the Colonial Period. It was not until the Industrial Period and The Great Depression that the ideology surrounding poverty changed. People began to understand that poverty can be a result of economic and market-driven forces.

Overtime, the rates of poverty have declined, but it remains to be a problem in Canada. In a population of 36 million people, 1 in 7 people struggle to meet basic needs (Canada Without Poverty, 2018). Poverty can be defined as a lack of means to "achieve a minimal but sustainable standard of physical well-being" (Lammam and MacIntyre, 2016, p. 8). Further, the people who meet this definition are constantly changing. A student typically finds a better paying job after finishing school or someone who is laid off may find another job, though there are people who are perpetually in poverty. The people most at risk typically have a disability, are a single parent, lack a high school diploma, and/or someone who is a visible minority. These groups of people struggle to find employment due to stigmas surrounding their situations (Lammam & MacIntyre, 2016). Further, there is a correlation between health and poverty. Being in poverty puts a person at a greater risk for disease and illness. Moreover, people in poverty are more likely to die from illness because they do not have the resources to receive proper care (Raphael, 2002).

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One solution to Canada's current poverty problem is Universal Basic Income (UBI). UBI can be defined as a guaranteed minimum income that allows for basic needs to be met. Throughout history, there have been various UBI pilot projects in both Canada and the United States, which includes New Jersey, Seattle, North Carolina, Denver, and Gary (Forget et al, 2016). In 1974, a pilot project, named Mincome in Manitoba, was introduced in Canada. Hicks (2014) used the Mincome story to support the idea of General Annual Income, which was a program that would provide Canadians with 70% of the minimum income needed to alleviate poverty. However, this program was not introduced due to fears that people would not work and the idea of inflation. To address these concerns, Manitoba implemented the Mincome project by randomly choosing low income residents of Manitoba to receive a General Annual Income. Overall, the results of this study were not significant, but during this experiment, only one percent of the participants stopped working: many taking the opportunity to focus on their families. Moreover, in the city of Dauphin, people who did not meet the Mincome criteria were allowed to participate. In this city, there was a decrease in hospital and doctor visits and it was found that there was an increase in the percent of students completing high school (Hicks, 2014, p. 57). Other pilot projects found that UBI had indirect benefits as well. In North Carolina, it was found that test scores improved in the elementary schools and that there was a positive correlation between UBI and positive effects on birth weight (Forget et al, 2016).

Even though these past pilot projects were never fully integrated into the current welfare state, they provide examples of the pros and cons of a basic income system, which can be used to implement a better program. Even though the past pilot projects were not positively received, it is important to consider the changes that have occurred within society since these programs were implemented. Forget et al. (2016) emphasized these changes with the saying "this ain't our grandparents' labour market" (p. 11). What they mean is that there are now more acceptable ways to give back to the community. By implementing UBI, individuals have the choice to volunteer or care for their families, while building skills that will allow them to find better paying jobs in which they will enjoy. Another benefit of UBI is that it is a fixed amount of money every month, regardless of income (Forget et al., 2016). One of the problems with current welfare programs is that additional earnings come with a risk of losing one's welfare funding. For example, if someone has a job where they make \$1200 a month, they would no longer receive \$1000 from welfare, but due to taxes and the expense of traveling to work, this person has less than \$1000 at the end of the month. UBI does not come without concerns though. First, how will it be funded? There are two ways to fund UBI: cut other programs or increase taxes. However, people are unique, so cutting the different programs could put some in a worse situation. The funding of UBI leads to a concern about how much the program would cost, but if the people currently under the poverty line had an adequate amount of money, they could spend more, thus adding to the economy (Parijs, 2004)

Chapter 3 of Social Welfare in Canada highlights various political ideologies and their relation to

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social welfare. One ideology that relates to Universal Basic Income is a Social Democratic political ideology. The Social Democrats believe that social inequality is inefficient to society and that everyone should have an equal opportunity to succeed. Similar to the ideas of UBI, the Social Democrats supports universal programs and believe that the government should take responsibility for the poor (Hicks, 2014).

However, programs such as UBI are not widely known. One way to increase this awareness is through the use of social media, such as videos, is an easy way to provide an abundance of information quickly. With the emergence of online media, people are relying less on traditional news outlets and instead get much of their information online. One example of this is through Youtube videos. This became evident in our project, when we found a video that provided interesting ideas to guide our research for Universal Basic Income. The video also demonstrates how wide information can spread. The “Universal Basic Income Explained – Free Money for Everybody? UBI” video has had 2.3 million views since December 2017, which has also stimulated a conversation with 28,000 comments (Zurzgesagt, 2017). Therefore, social media allows for information to reach a larger audience, thus creating more awareness.

In conclusion, poverty remains a prominent problem in Canada. Although Canada has a current welfare program, there are issues that Universal Basic Income strives to fix. Further, UBI has had troubles in the past, but we believe that it could have a place in Today’s changing society. In addition, UBI - which fits into the Social Democratic political ideology - will use past mistakes to implement a program that will allow people to meet their basic needs. Moreover, social media has a positive impact in spreading information about UBI in a quick and easy way.

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