Thinking about Marginalization

November 17, 2000 – Canada may rank first on the United Nations' Human Development Index, a fact that has received plenty of attention, but it also ranks 11th on the UN's poverty index.

"The difference between these two rankings," says Jane Jenson, Director of CPRN's Family Network, "reflects the depth and duration of poverty in the country, despite the aggregate well-being generated by economic growth."

In other words, "the best country in the world" is still capable of leaving out, or marginalizing, significant numbers of it citizens. They are, disproportionately, lone parents, persons with a disability, recent immigrants, or single persons aged 45-64.

The fact that poverty and marginalization tend to go together is just the beginning for understanding marginalization in all its complexity. Discrimination; racism; low social status resulting from unemployment; inadequate access to education, community institutions and supports, housing and a stable address, amongst other factors, all play a role in the persistent exclusion of the marginalized.

It is this "multi-dimensionality" of marginalization that makes it so resistant to the efforts of policymakers. It is also the reason why there are a variety of competing theoretical explanations for its existence, each with a different set of prescriptions for what can be done about it.

Last September, CPRN brought together policymakers, front-line workers, academics and others in the field for a workshop to explore alternate diagnoses of marginalization. The goal of the discussion was to begin to reconcile, to the extent possible, these different approaches and to identify promising directions for a policy agenda. The workshop sponsor was Human Resources Development Canada.

Jane Jenson prepared a background paper for the event: ***Thinking about Marginalization: What, Who and Why?*** You can read her full text by clicking here.

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