

## Women and poverty

The majority of Canadian women, whatever their background, are vulnerable to becoming poor overnight, according to a report by the National Council on Welfare.

The report says women are financially vulnerable because most still believe that they will always have a father or husband on whom they can count.

In reality, one man in ten cannot support his family and almost three women in four find themselves alone some time in their adult lives.

The largest group of poor women in Canada are wives living in traditional two-partner households with inadequate family incomes, says the report.

The 51-page report, says 16 per cent of adult Canadian women are living in poverty. Married women have a much lower chance of being poor than do women who remain single or are separated, divorced, or widowed.

However, says the report, because more than 90 per cent of Canadian women marry, a small percentage of wives adds up to more people, making them the largest group (500,000) of the 1.22 million poor women in this country.

### Working wives

Although only 9 per cent of the two-partner families are shown in the council's report to have incomes below the poverty line, the figure would be 14 per cent if the wife did not work outside the home, according to the report.

A couple that may have relied on two incomes before the arrival of their first child will be living below the poverty line if the wife leaves work to care for the child and the husband is earning the minimum wage.

An important influence on the families is the employment status of the husband. Fewer than a third of low-income husbands are employed on a full-time, full-year basis, says the report. A further 20 per cent have occasional, part-time or seasonal employment that does not adequately support their families. Others are disabled or over the age of 65.

Increasingly, family incomes are the product of the work of both partners and it is when their combined efforts fail that couples find themselves poor. Largely because of the increased participation of married women in the labour force, the relative economic position of Canada's

middle- and low-income families has remained stable instead of getting worse in the past 25 years, the report notes.

In families in which the total income before the wife's earnings is under \$5,000, 67 per cent of married women hold paid jobs. In contrast 57 per cent of wives are in the labour force when their family income apart from their earnings is between \$15,000 and \$20,000 and only 46 per cent have jobs when that income is over \$25,000.

"One dangerous current myth," the council says, "is that the situation of women has greatly improved in the last few years and will continue to do so unassisted in the years to come."

### Situation unchanged

"In spite of the dramatic rise in the labour force participation of women in the last ten years, the proportion of

female workers occupying low-paying clerical and sales and service jobs has remained unchanged.

"Education statistics show a similar picture. Even though women's education level is higher, the vast majority continue to be streamed into traditional women's jobs," it says.

"Unless governments vigorously intervene to stop the damaging effects of sexual stereotyping in our schools and media, to reform family law to make the spouses more equal, to pursue employment policies aimed at advancing women's position in the labour market, to give more support to day care, other measures of assistance to parents and to improve income-security programs, there is no reason to believe future generations will be less vulnerable to poverty," the council said in a brief to Health and Welfare Minister David Crombie.

## Canadian destroyers take part in NATO exercises



Four Canadian Forces helicopter-equipped destroyers, an operational support ship and several anti-submarine patrol aircraft participated in Exercise Ocean Safari 79, a major NATO exercise which took place over the North Atlantic and the Norwegian Sea, September 24-October 5. The ships, part of Maritime Command's Fifth Destroyer Squadron, included HMCS Iroquois, Annapolis and Fraser, as well as HMCS Nipigon, which recently joined the Standing Naval Force Atlantic (shown in photo). A key part of the exercise was the passage of military supply and reinforcement shipping from North American ports, across the Atlantic to the Norwegian Sea in the face of "enemy" attacks from surface ships, submarines and aircraft. The shipping was protected by warships from several navies, as well as by aircraft operating from bases in Iceland, Norway and Britain. Belgium, Canada, West Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Britain, and the United States took part in the exercise with over 17,000 men, 70 ships and 200 aircraft.