

PEI Women in Poverty: Obstacles to Obtaining and Maintaining Employment

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### **Abstract**

In 2011, the PEI provincial government asked PEI Islanders what they thought should be done to reduce poverty in PEI, which resulted in a follow-up plan. The goal of this plan, called the Social Action Plan to Reduce Poverty (SAPRP), is to support those in poverty enough so that they may become self-sufficient and stay out of poverty. One essential aspect of an individual's ability to become self-sufficient is employment; thus helping Islanders to obtain and maintain employment is key to reducing poverty in PEI. The issue of employability is not simple, as is acknowledged by the SAPRP's discussion of vulnerable groups in PEI, such as women, people with disabilities, and recent immigrants. Although SAPRP acknowledges that some groups are more vulnerable than others when it comes to poverty, it fails to take into account the ways in which such vulnerable groups experience poverty and employment barriers differently than other populations. This paper explores six Island women's experiences of employment barriers in their own words, taken from interviews that were part of a series of liberation psychology workshops for an ongoing participatory action research project with Women's Network PEI. These interviews were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis methods, from the standpoint of feminist psychology, which emphasizes that women's experience has long been underrepresented in research. Major themes generated from the participants' interviews include: society's unrealistic standards for employment, various forms of oppression experienced by vulnerable women, the role strain of motherhood, and personal struggles. These themes as well as the literature on vulnerable populations and employability are used to make some recommendations for the provincial government's poverty eradication strategy and shed some light on the unique experiences and life circumstances of PEI women living in poverty.

### PEI Women in Poverty: Obstacles to Obtaining and Maintaining Employment

The romantic idealization of capitalism paints a pretty picture of western culture running on a system that innately rewards those who work hard and punishes those who are just too lazy to work for a living. If I placed a pot of gold, or paper bills, better yet, at the end of a long raceway and said that the first to cross the finish line gets the pot, this would be fair; of the runners, the one who worked the hardest would rightfully receive the reward. However, this is based on the assumption that all the competitors began the race at the same starting point, with no interference from each other or from outside the race. However, let us stop to think about such “outside” forces that could affect the outcome of this hypothetical race. A factor such as the shoes a runner is wearing can significantly affect the speed at which she runs, and not everybody can afford to buy the best running shoes. This is not where the problem ends; what about the influence of nutrition on body composition and energy? If a child is born into a poor family, chances are she is being raised primarily on frozen or packaged foods, which are drastically cheaper than fresh produce, and of course less nutritious. Further yet, what about the millions of people who are born with physical disabilities? Chances are the girl in the wheelchair will not stand much of a chance when the race track climbs up rocky slopes against the others whose parents bought them the best running shoes, the high fibre and protein foods for energy and building muscle mass, and training camp over the summer. At this point, that pot of gold is becoming bleaker and bleaker in the eyes of some of our runners.

Many of us know that, in life, no two people start out on equal playing ground. Everyone is limited by a unique set of factors that are her or his life circumstances, many of which are by no means the choosing of the individual. That is why I am writing this thesis right now, the daughter of two educated, White, upper-middle class parents as opposed to, say, a Black woman

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working for pennies a week on a coffee bean plantation in Zimbabwe who was orphaned as a child because her parents died of malnutrition and chronic illness. Yet, studies show that significant numbers of people continue to blame the poor for their own poverty (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). This attitude that opportunity for wealth lies equally before all who are willing to work for it can be traced back to Protestant ideals of work and divine recompense (MacDonald, 1971). The province of Prince Edward Island's history and culture of Christianity and Protestantism could likely have an influence on the attitudes of its residents towards the poor.

Of course, not everybody attributes the causes of poverty similarly, and researchers have conducted studies to gain an understanding of attribution patterns in different demographic populations. For example, MacDonald (1971) described two such types of attribution patterns: those who subscribe to a "social responsibility" tend to blame the poor for their own poverty, and also tend towards a Protestant Ethic and conformity to social norms while those with a "personal conscience" perspective tend to blame societal structures for poverty and be more rebellious in general (p. 443). Not surprisingly, those who value political and socioeconomic conservatism are more likely to blame the poor for their own poverty than are those who associate with a liberal political standpoint (Zucker & Weiner, 1993, p. 926).

The phenomenon of blaming victims for their own misfortunes is so common in our culture that psychologists have been developing theories to explain its existence as early as or before World War Two, when millions of people were deemed worthy of torture and death because of their inferior biological and or socioeconomic standing (Lerner & Miller, 1978). The predominant theory, named the Just World Hypothesis, states that people have a need to believe that the world they live in is a just one in which people ultimately get what they deserve, in this

life (p. 1030). Studies have shown this phenomenon in experimental situations as silly as a participant being told that another participant has won a cash prize at random, and then the participant concludes that the prize winner must have somehow worked harder if she/he was more attractive than the others who entered the contest of chance (Lerner, 1965, p. 360). Such attributions can lead to internalized beliefs that not only does a person's hard work pay off, but his or her physical attractiveness makes him or her more deserving of good fortune than an individual who is considered less physically attractive. It is equally important to note that some more recent studies have actually found the general population's attitude toward the poor to be relatively positive (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). However, even in this exemplary study, the stereotypes of the poor were significantly less positive than of the middle class, such as that the former are lazier, less practical with spending, more inclined to use drugs and alcohol, have looser morals, and less likely to attempt to "improve" themselves than the latter (p. 218).

Such stigmatization of the poor is problematic on a number of levels. First, attitudes have been found to be related to behavior (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). The poor are affected by the larger population's attitudes toward them in terms of how the larger population votes in political elections, which is apparent in the historical success of the Conservative Party of Canada over the NDP, the latter of which is more concerned with social equality and creating changes that will assist the poor than the former. Attitudes will also likely affect people's willingness to fight for better welfare programs, support the poor, and help to end poverty (Cozzarelli, C., Wilkinson, A. V., & Tagler, M. J., 2001, p. 208).

Blaming the poor for their own poverty also negatively affects the poor by means of silencing. For example, Bettelheim (1943) found that prisoners in German-occupied concentration camps would often blame themselves for their own fate. Similarly, several studies

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have found that victims of various diseases, or parents' whose children have terminal illnesses, will often use self-blame in order to reduce their own anxiety (Lerner, M., & Miller, D., 1978, p. 1043). This is problematic because, if the poor are to blame themselves for inevitable inequalities of society, they will likely accept that all is as it should be rather than fight for change and move toward greater fairness in society. Instead of believing that society and political policies are what needs changing, they will believe that they themselves are what need changing; since they have been victimized by society's structural inequalities, this will not lead to the changes that need to be made in order to make a difference.

### **Feminist Psychology**

Feminist psychology is not so much a branch of psychology as it is a perspective on psychology. Feminist psychology is interested in the unique experiences of women as well as the shared experiences of women and men. One of the most important aspects of feminist psychology is the fact that it recognizes the ways in which women's gender roles create systems of discrimination and limitations for women in our culture. Many people fail to see such discrimination because of its relative subtlety in contrast to how society "used to be". It is a shared conception that women's lives have been improving over recent decades and blatant, hostile sexism is no longer as common as it was in the past (Matlin, 2012). However, there are structures in society today which keep women from reaching their full potential and oftentimes put limits on their lives which men do not have.

Feminism is defined as the principle that values women's experiences and ideas and the belief that women and men should be completely equally socially, economically, and legally (Matlin, 2012, p. 5). There has been, in general, a lot of stigma around the term "feminism", and many people mistake it for meaning a person who hates men (p. 6). However, this is not a

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criteria for feminism at all, as the definition provided above makes clear. Rather, feminism and feminist psychology usually takes interest in studying women and women's experiences simply because the vast majority of research up to present has been conducted on men (p. 10), and now it is time to include women in research. However, feminist psychology has expanded its boundaries a lot since it gained influence in the 1970's. Whereas feminist psychology used to focus almost solely on white, young adult women and the issues faced by them, it has expanded to realize the unique experiences of women of colour, women with disabilities, elderly women, young children, homosexual and bisexual women, immigrant women, the poor, and transgendered individuals (Matlin, 2012).

Because women have been so invisible in psychology literature in the past, feminist psychology is a very useful tool to help us gain an understanding of the ways in which women experience life differently because of their assigned gender roles. Using this tool, we can learn about the systems of oppression that continue to exist against women in our society, and hopefully develop solutions to such oppressions.

### **Societal Factors that Contribute to Poverty**

The literature on the ways in which poverty is created and maintained by societal and cultural inequalities is endless. The cause of poverty is not itself, nor should it be seen as a linear set of causes ( $A + B = \text{Poverty}$ ). Rather, the cause of poverty should be seen as an interdependent network of factors that are intricately woven together. So interdependent are some of these factors that some cannot be separated from others. A common term that has been used to describe this process is "intersectionality" (Hankivsky & Christoffersen, 2008), the interaction of two or more variables that work together to keep the poor, poor. Let us take gender for one example. For decades, feminist scholars have been researching the ways in which sexism has

kept women out of positions of power in our society; however, it is only relatively recently that feminism expanded to include the interlocking oppressions of women of colour (Matlin, 2012, p. 10-11). Other factors that intersect with sexism include, classism, a bias toward people of differing socioeconomic classes, ableism, a bias toward those with physical and psychological disabilities, heterosexism, a bias based on sexual orientation, and ageism, a bias against people of differing ages (Matlin, 2012, p. 5). Since an individual usually belongs to a number of these groups at the same time, it is vitally important to understand the ways in which such intersectionalities operate to create combined oppressions, so that we can discover the most effective ways of addressing the barriers to employment that these vulnerable groups experience.

**Gender.** Gender is well documented as an antecedent of various types of oppression in our society. Poverty and limited access to employment is prevalent for women all across the globe, because of the world's predominantly patriarchal structure which allows men greater decision-making rights as well as access to political power, food, land, and leisure time whereas women have had the bulk of unpaid household chores and / or farming labour (Sen, 2010; Johnsson-Latham, 2010). This kind of system inevitably places women in a position of powerlessness – powerlessness to change or take control of their own lives and powerlessness to strive for change in society, while giving men the ability to do all of these things.

Although the percentage of women employed has increased over the last several decades, statistics show that women predominantly, the world over, occupy the lowest-paying jobs (Matlin, 2012, p. 225). Such jobs often involve work which is physically or morally degrading, forcing these women to work an unhealthy number of hours each day or in settings that have a number of safety hazards; such working conditions take place in “sweat shops”, which are common not only in developing countries but also in North America and the United States in



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particular (p. 226). Women who work in sweatshops are likely to be immigrants, and are also likely to be physically and or emotionally abused by their employers.

In Western culture, there are several inequities that play against women in terms of education and employment. Take TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) for example, the current financial assistance program for mothers in the United States. Although TANF assists mothers who are deemed by the state “desperate” enough, the majority of these women are still living under the poverty line after they have maxed out their TANF payments. Additionally, mothers who live on TANF are discouraged from pursuing education beyond high school, and education level is the strongest predictor of a woman’s employment status (Matlin, 2012, p. 212). Statistics Canada (2011) supports this; in 2010, the average annual income for Canadians with less than a high-school diploma was \$23,739, whereas the rate was \$31,082 for those with a high school diploma or equivalent, and \$64,144 for those with a university level bachelor degree or higher. The literature has supported this as well; for example, Vaughn and Boston (2010) found in their study that a bachelor’s degree or higher increased the chance that women would achieve successful employment outcomes (p. 37).

Pay disparities between men and women is another factor that works against women in the workplace. This refers to the widespread phenomenon of men, on average, making more money per hour than women doing exactly the same work. In 2010, the United States Senate proposed a new bill, the Paycheck Fairness Act, which had the ability to help end the discrepancy between men and women’s average income. However, that same year, it was voted out and thus never implemented (Lefton, 2010). In Canada, pay gaps by sex remain in every age level and at every level of education (Statistics Canada, 2011). For example, the average annual income for those who hadn’t completed high school in 2011 was \$28,615 for men and \$18,852

for women. The equivalent for Canadians who held a university level bachelor degree or higher was for \$78,321 men and \$51,298 for women. The gap remains strong even when the population is controlled for only those who work full time, full year, the annual income of all such Canadian women was \$51,356 and \$67,613 for such Canadian men. This is concerning, especially for women who never finished high school and are trying to raise children, because they are more likely to be working for insufficient income than their male counterparts, even when they work the same number of hours as men.

There is also discrimination against women in hiring patterns. A classic study by Rhea Steinpreis et al (1999) had psychology professor's read a fake resume and decide whether or not they would hire the fictional person, if given the chance. All the resumes were identical except for the name of the candidate – either a male's name or a female's name. Half of the professors were given the resume with a female's name and half were given the identical resume with the male's name. Of those who thought the candidate was female, 45% said that they would hire her and of those who thought the candidate was male, 75% said that they would hire him, and the male and female professors were equally likely to show this pattern of discrimination.

Another major problem for women and employment is that unpaid work often goes unnoticed, and unappreciated in our culture. By unpaid work I refer to housework and childcare, both of which women spend more time doing, on average, than men. Studies have shown that men often feel entitled to not do their fair share of the housework in heterosexual couplings, even when both partners work the same number of paid hours per week (Matlin, 2012, p. 234). This can be traced back to the traditional gender role assigned to women as homemakers and primary caregivers of children, which clashes with the increasing need and desire for women to engage in paid, full-time work. Similarly, a study on role strain showed significant consequences for

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mothers who worked full time. According to Judith Gerson (1985), most of the research has focussed solely on the negative outcomes of women working both outside the home for pay or studying and unpaid at home as mothers. The goal of her own research was to investigate, in a quantitative study, the positive outcomes of multiple roles on women who were both students and mothers. She found that the mothers who were also students reported significantly higher levels of stress than the stay-at-home mothers, but that they also reported significantly greater levels of gratification from their roles than did the stay-at-home mothers. Gerson used the reported scale numbers of positives and subtracted the negatives to create a “net gratification” mean for each group and found that the student mothers had significantly higher overall “net gratification” from their multiple roles than did stay-at-home mothers with their uniform roles. The implications of this study are interesting, because it is clear that encouraging women to participate in education and the workforce could improve their life satisfaction, but there is a drawback, because multiple roles also cause strain. The women whose primary role was stay-at-home mother got more gratification out of volunteer, religious, or sports activities than did the student mothers. Therefore it is vitally important that when encouraging women to attend school and participate in the workforce that the other roles in life are also taken into account, such as volunteer involvement, familial obligations, and of course, motherhood, including the number of and age of their children (Gerson, 1985).

Now that we have explored some of the ways in which women face discrimination in gaining work and in the workplace itself, let us move on to the ways in which gender interacts, or intersects, with other aspects of a human being’s identity to create barriers to his or her own employment and, thus, susceptibility to living in poverty.

**Health Problems.** As mentioned before, gender often intersects with other factors to further intensify the cycle of oppression and poverty. For example, Hankivsky and Christoffersen (2008) explain how there has been research into the inequalities of health problems between men and women, but very little into the ways in which women of colour experience additional disadvantages in terms of physical health and limitations to health care (p. 273). Physical health, of course, being a key factor of employment and employability itself. According to another study, women with health problems were significantly less likely to be employed than women without – illnesses including arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, asthma, bronchitis, osteoporosis, cancer, depression, anxiety, other psychiatric conditions, chronic fatigue syndrome, and even back pain (Pit & Byles, 2012, p. 277). This study shows a particularly interesting relationship between gender and age, since the study was conducted on older women who are more likely to be living with such chronic illnesses than their younger counterparts. It is apparent that employment options become less abundant for women as they age, a bleak picture for those working in low-paying jobs who cannot afford to retire early. This is especially problematic for women, since it is widely known that women are more likely to suffer from chronic illnesses than are men, and that because women's life expectancy is longer than that of men, they are also likely to be living with such chronic illnesses for a significant portion of their lives (Matlin, 2012, p. 355).

**Physical Disabilities.** Able-bodiedness is another factor which can stand in the way of employment, and it is a factor which men and women often experience differently. Physical disabilities often brand and individual with the label of “unattractive”, and women are under greater pressure in our culture to be physically attractive than are men. Consequently, women with disabilities are much more likely to live alone than women without disabilities (Matlin,

2012). Women with disabilities are less likely than women without disabilities to hold a bachelor's degree (15% and 33%, respectively), have a much higher rate of unemployment than those without disabilities, and earn approximately 60% to 78% of what men with disabilities earn, and are unlikely to receive enough benefits and bonuses to retire in old age (Matlin, p. 368).

**Psychological & Psychiatric Health Problems.** A study on the role of specifically psychological disabilities (Vaughn & Boston, 2010) in the unemployment risk for women who have received TANF cited that not only are women with psychological disabilities more likely to be unemployed than men with psychological disabilities, but also that the most common barriers between women in poverty and attaining employment are lack of transportation, lack of education, difficulty finding child care, previous unemployment, and mental health problems. Other predictors of unemployment for women in poverty, include age, race, coping strategies, social support systems, gender, living arrangements, job interview skills, severity of a mental illness, and substance abuse. Both the physically and psychologically disabled are at higher risk for unemployment than the general population, the unemployment rate for each being 67% and 85% respectively (p. 28). For example, a woman who has a history of being unemployed and or having poor quality jobs could become at greater risk of depressive symptoms, one of the most consistent risk factors of unemployment itself (p. 29). More specifically, women suffer income loss during bouts of depression. Another topic that is vitally important is self-esteem, which is necessary to take on the challenges of employment (Jayakody and Stauffer, 2010; as cited by Vaughn & Boston, 2010, p. 29) What Vaughn and Boston found in their own sample was that women who suffered with schizophrenia and or depression, had less than a high school

education, and had been previously unemployed were significantly associated with unemployment:

Depression lowers the probability a woman is employed by almost 30% [28]. As type of psychiatric disability appeared to be associated with negative employment outcomes, mental health problems continue to pose a significant obstacle to achieving a successful employment outcome (White, 2004). Overall, mood disorders are often associated with absence from work, having a negative impact on employment [13]. (33)

Furthermore, this study found that long-term social assistance funding could act as a disincentive to employment in some cases (Vaughn & Boston, 2010, p. 33). However, this is not to say that women should not be given financial assistance at all, because it has also been shown that financial assistance helped the women in this study to afford daily living expenses so that they could pursue employment. The problem with jobs that require previous job experience is that they do not offer women a chance to get established in the workforce, which is the troubling aspect of the statistics on previous job experience and unemployment. They also found that public services such as mental health counselling, transportation services, job training / on-the-job assistance and job placement programs improved the employment outcomes of the women in the study (p. 32).

The way that people attribute job loss can be important in maintaining the proper motivation and self esteem required to fill the role of employee, as has been shown in several studies. It has been found by Candido and Romney (1990), Janssen et al., (2006) and Kaney and Bentall (1992; 1989) that people who suffer with depression and low self esteem (Chandler, Lee, & Pengilly, 1997; and Winefield et al.) are more likely to internalize the reasons for their own job loss than the general population. A study conducted with a Vancouver and Montreal sample

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found that the women with psychological disabilities were 7 times more likely than men with psychological disabilities to internalize the reasons for job loss, albeit in a sheltered workshop setting (as cited by Lanctot, Bergeron-Brossard, Sanquirgo, & Corbiere, 2013).

**Abusive Relationships.** The literature shows the relationship between unemployment and intimate partner abuse. In a secondary quantitative analysis of a survey conducted from 1994-1996 of Violence and Threats of Violence Against Women and Men in the United States, a number of statistically significant relationships were found among variables such as poverty, employment status, alcohol consumption, and intimate partner abuse (Zavala & Spohn, 2010). They found that educational level was negatively related to emotional abuse, which is concerning for women living in poverty; They also found that women who live in poverty and who are unemployed and in a relationship with a partner who is also unemployed are more likely to experience emotional abuse in their relationships than couples in which either of the partners work. Women in status reversal relationships experience more abuse than those in dual-earner partnerships. However, women in dual earning partnerships do not experience more abuse than those in traditional partnerships. Also, the frequency and quantity of the male partner's drinking is positively related to emotional abuse but the female partner's drinking did not seem to have any effect on the abuse. The implications of this study are that increasing poor women's participation in education and the workforce could serve as a buffer to emotional abuse, which in turn could have a positive effect on a woman's employability. Not enough attention has been paid to emotional abuse, and its significance is often overlooked in the face of physical abuse. But they only found it in conjunction with the economic side, that is, in the case of a one-income partnership as opposed to a dual earning partnership (Zavala & Spohn, 2010). Although this research is valuable, it has some problematic aspects; primarily, the formation of theories around

the challenge of masculinity can be interpreted as blaming the woman for the abuse she is experiencing; “Go to work and you’ll be abused” is as dangerous as coaching women on what they can do to reduce their chances of getting sexually assaulted.

### **Poverty on PEI.**

Current statistics on poverty rates in PEI tend to be misleading. This is because different criteria of poverty have been used in different official documents. For example, the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) defines poverty as when an individual or a family must spend 20% more of their income on basic necessities, such as food, clothes, and housing, than is average for their community, taking into account the number of people in their household (PEI Provincial Government, 2011). Since the average Canadian spends about 35% of his or her income on basic necessities, this means that one must be spending at least 55% of their income on basic needs in order to be considered living in poverty. This is a very narrow definition of poverty for some families because it does not consider, for example transportation needs, which is a reality for many islanders and especially those who live in rural communities who must commute to work every day, or the costs of sending children to school, such as school supplies and extra fees for participation in extra-curricular activities, field trips, or class projects. Another more recent measure of poverty is the Market Basket Measure (MBM), which goes further than the LICO to add to the “basic necessities” of living: nutritious food supply, transportation, and several other context-specific costs of living. Since the MBM takes these extra factors into account, it is sensitive to the economic differences between living in urban spaces and rural spaces, and thus puts PEI’s rate of poverty at a significantly higher level than does the LICO, particularly for the rural population. According to LICO, PEI’s poverty rate is 4.8%, the lowest in Canada, but when we use MBM, the figure moves up to nearly 9%. Also, the official poverty rate of PEI does not



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take into account the fact that 13% of Islanders live on minimum wage or up to 10% above minimum wage (MacQuarrie, 2013).

In a response to this, the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women (ACSW) (2012) made a strong case for the need to look at more than just basic necessities in the fight against poverty. They argued that life should permit more than just scraping by day to day, but rather that: “People must be able to participate, socialize, and be active in the community. They need transportation and resources to participate” (p. 2). As human beings, we are able to do far more with our lives than just survive, and poverty deprives individuals and families of the right to partake in enriching, meaningful, and educational experiences. The PEI ACSW proposed many poverty-reduction strategies to the PEI government, including the need to actually talk to the poor about their personal experiences of poverty. They emphasize the need to allow the poor to make experienced suggestions of the best ways in which to eliminate the issue of poverty and to take seriously the very real consequences of the stigma and marginalization of poverty on individuals, families, and the economy at large. Likewise, a definition of poverty needs to include, as well as the ability to keep people alive, the ability to enjoy life.

**Vulnerable Populations.** Like the aforementioned research, PEI sees a great deal of intersectionality in terms of those who are most likely to be in poverty. For example, gender and “singleism” come together to put single parent families at a particularly high rate of poverty on PEI, which are led by women 82% of the time (PEI Provincial Government, 2011, p. 13). In 2006, there were 6,390 single-parent families in PEI and 5,260 of them were led by women. Whereas the percentage of couple-based low-income households stood at 3% in 2009, that of single-based households was closer to 20%. The fact that women working full-time earn an average of 82% of what men earn in PEI does not help. This is a case in which coupled women

automatically have an advantage over single women, because systems of money and power are geared toward couples rather than singles, and how men have an advantage over women because men not assigned the gender role of primary caregiver in our culture. Even when men head single-parent families, 11% of such families live under the LICO whereas 24% of female-led single parent families live under LICO (PEI Provincial Government, 2011, p. 13).

In addition to single-parent (and particularly single-mother led) families, other populations that account for the majority of poverty in PEI also includes single individuals aged 45-64. (PEI Provincial Government, 2011). As the PEI ACSW (2012) states: “There are single adults struggling to stay afloat in a two-income world. This plays out in terms of people’s health and wellness, and ability to live safely and comfortably” (p. 7). This puts many specific populations at risk, including students living alone on student loans or on minimum wage jobs, youth who have left home due to abusive family situations and are living on welfare or minimum wage, and older adults who have been widowed or are leaving an abusive relationship. These groups have been particularly neglected by social assistance programs, which are in general geared toward families with children. This is apparent in the fact that affordable housing is so much more difficult for singles to find than for couples or families. (PEI ACSW, 2012, p. 8).

In 2006, 16.3% of Islanders reported being disabled, and there has an upward trend in this percentage in recent years (PEI Provincial Government, 2011, p. 14). Disabilities includes mental and physical disabilities, both of which account for close to half of the disabled population, and developmental issues accounts for the remainder of the total. Those with disabilities, (keep in mind from the previous discussion on persons with disabilities and love relationships) are at risk of a double disadvantage because they are more likely than those without disabilities to be living alone. Additionally, people with disabilities are often excluded

from several employment opportunities due to their disability, and thus their options for career paths are narrowed. Also, people with disabilities must often face the extra burdens and costs of finding special housing to suit their disabilities, attending schools that allow such accommodations as wheel-chair access, sign-language interpreters, and so on, as well as possible extra medications that people without disabilities may not have to pay for. According to the PEI Provincial government (2011), the average income for Islanders with disabilities is below the overall PEI average, although this document does not specify how much below, and shows a continuous downward trend (p. 14).

Aboriginal Islanders face unique issues due to the politics surrounding Indian status (PEI Provincial Government, 2011). For the purposes of this paper, we will define Aboriginal identity as those who report themselves as Aboriginal, whether or not they hold a Registered Indian status. On average, Aboriginals in PEI have lower incomes than to the overall population (p. 16). Interestingly enough, this gap is smaller in PEI than for the overall Canadian average, probably because of the overall lower income of PEI than of the other Canadian provinces. One factor that places Aboriginal Islanders who live on Lennox at a disadvantage is the fact that there is no high school on Lennox Island. Lennox islander youths attending school must commute off the reservation in order to finish grade twelve, an experience which can lead to a loss of connection with their aboriginal culture and heritage as well as social exclusion and bullying in their new schools.

Newcomers have lower income levels than the overall Canadian average all across our country, particularly those who come to Canada in the “refugee” category of immigration (PEI Provincial Government, 2011, p. 17). Although PEI statistics show a fairly positive view of newcomers in terms of average income, this statistic is misleading; it does not take into account

the income bracket in which newcomers were in before they came to Canada. Newcomers who immigrate from countries in which English is the primary language tend to do quite well when immigrating to North America; however, those who do not immigrate from such countries often struggle with learning English. Also, many skilled and highly educated newcomers who practiced high-paying professions in their home countries come here to find that their credentials do not count and that they must either start from scratch or take additional training before they can practice their profession, a process which can be extremely expensive (Matlin, 2012, p. 211). Therefore, even though many newcomers may find work when they immigrate to PEI, the work they find is often not the kind in which they are skilled, and this can lead to a loss of dignity and lower standard of living than they had before immigrating.

### **Obstacles to Employment for PEI Women**

**Demographics.** What are some of the obstacles that stand in the way of PEI women and gaining employment and keeping employment? First, let us look at some statistics on Island women, who make up 51.7% of PEI's population, and less than 50% of the total population under twenty years of age (Interministerial Women's Secretariat, 2010, p. 9). The median age of Islander women is 41.6 years and 27.1 for the Aboriginal population of PEI (p. 10). In 2006, 85.7.1% of Island women spoke only English while 14.2% spoke both French and English, and only and only 0.03% spoke only French. Unfortunately for Aboriginal women in PEI, Islander Aboriginal Women are less likely than Aboriginal across Canada to speak a native Aboriginal language (p. 11). The Aboriginal population of Island women is 1.4% and immigrant status, which has also been established as a risk factor for unemployment, was identified as belonging to 3.6% of all Island women in 2006 (p. 12). Also, 16.3% of Island women are sixty-five years or older (p. 13), which is a significant chunk of the population at risk of ageism as well as extra

costs of medications and chronic illnesses that often come in old age. Women with disabilities also makes up a significant portion of the Island's women, 17.7%, a population which is also at risk of being unemployed or working at minimum wage (Interministerial Women's Secretariat, 2010, p. 13)

**Types of Employment and Pay Gaps.** In 2006, 64.3% of females were employed, in contrast to 72.6% of Island males (Interministerial Women's Secretariat, 2010, p. 35). Also, women's average work week is less than that of men, standing at 36.5 hours and 45.5 hours, respectively. This means that women are overrepresented in part time work; indeed, 64.2% of Islanders who worked part time were women in 2005. The unemployment rate for women in 2008 was 9.5%. Women are found most often working in business, health, and administrative companies, social sciences, education, government service, and religious organizations and in turn are least often employed in farming, fishing, trapping, and hunting. Interestingly, women are also less likely than men to be self-employed in PEI. Also, women who work full time earn an average of \$34,553 annually whereas men earn an average of \$42,225 in PEI (p. 36). Island women work an average of 39.2 weeks every year, and women who are working part time are at a disadvantage because they work longer weeks and earn a lower income than their male counterparts who also work part time (Interministerial Women's Secretariat, 2010, p. 37).

According to Statistics Canada, pay gaps across Canada reduce significantly when unionization is taken into account (2010). Therefore, women working in unionized jobs are protected from such threats as the disposable employee model and given rights to sick time, vacation, and pay rises. However, this is not a reality for many women who are working in minimum wage jobs or working part time, in which cases these rights and privileges will not be given to such Island women.

Consistent with the literature discussed before, Island women spend more time doing unpaid work than do Island men, such as housework, caring for children without pay, and caring for other adults or seniors. Perhaps this could be related to the fact that Island women, on average, lose more days to work and disability than do island men. In fact: “54.9% of females spend between 5 and 29 hours a week doing unpaid housework while 61% of males do less than 14 hours a week” (Interministerial Women’s Secretariat, 2010, p. 18). Clearly, women are expected to give up more of their off-work time to chores more than men, which interferes with the amount of time and energy women can devote to work and finding work.

Another interesting statistic on Island women and home ownerships shows that women pay the rent/mortgage, property taxes, and such extra costs as electricity and water in 38% of PEI households; yet women who pay these costs are less often the owners of their home than are men who pay the same costs (Interministerial Women’s Secretariat, 2010, p. 19).

**Abuse and Violence.** Unfortunately, violence and abuse are things predominantly experienced by women in PEI, as opposed to men. According to Victim Services, a free service offered by the PEI government that helps abuse and crime victims, women accounted for 81% of abuse victims and 74.6% of sexual assault victims referred in 2008-2009 (Interministerial Women’s Secretariat, 2010, p. 66). For perspective on how common abuse cases are in PEI, in 2008-2009, there were 863 new referrals to Victim Services. Also, the most common form of wife abuse cases has a common-law husband as the perpetrator, with husband in close second, and ex-boyfriend in third (p. 67). Women fleeing abusive situations and relationships often have to worry about the welfare of their children, as the majority of women who received support from Outreach Services in 2009 were living with their children (p. 72). Women who have been the victims of abuse face all kinds of additional obstacles to finding employment, ranging from

issues such as dealing with psychological distress to financial abuse of a partner or ex-partner, or fighting for custody of children in cases where women are attempting to flee from their abusive situations. It must also be kept in mind that these statistics can only account for reported cases; there are likely many more cases of violence and abuse that go unreported.

Fortunately, PEI has some services in place for women who have been or are being abused. The Victims of Family Violence Act: “addresses the need for victims to stay in their own homes, provides an additional remedy to supplement the Criminal Code, and enables the justice system to provide a more effective and timely response” (Interministerial Women’s Secretariat, 2010, p. 68). Anderson House provides a temporary shelter for women and children who flee abusive households as well as an emergency helpline which is available 24/7. PEI Family outreach programs work to reach victims in need of information and support about violence (p. 70).

**Education.** As we established earlier, the higher a woman’s educational level, the greater her opportunities for employment and above-minimum wage salaries are (Matlin, 2012). Thus it is somewhat concerning that, in PEI, females are more likely than males to have a high school or college diploma as well as a university degree. In contrast, Island men are more likely to have a trade certificate than are Island women (Interministerial Women’s Secretariat, 2010, p. 20). This is concerning because despite the fact that women have a higher average level of education than men, as previously mentioned, there are more men participating in the workforce than there are women. In 2006, 23.1% of Island women between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five held a high school diploma or an equivalent as their highest level of education. The similar figure for Aboriginal women in PEI was 28.6% (p. 24). In contrast, 15.8% of Island women had a university degree, certificate, or diploma, compared to 12% of Aboriginal Island women (p.

25). Evidently, education could be a barrier to employment for Aboriginal women particularly. Also, it should be noted that women account for 66.6% of all part-time students at the University of Prince Edward Island (p. 29). This could be problematic because when students have to study part time, it takes them longer to finish their program, a factor which post-graduate schools and employers do not look as favorably upon as a swift, four-year graduation.

### **Attempting to Fight Poverty**

The solution to the problem of poverty is not so simple, as the PEI government has realized in its plans to reduce poverty in the province. After all, there is more to the issue of employment than just getting a job. As we have seen, issues surrounding employment involve being able to maintain a job, make enough money in that job to do more with one's life than merely survive, and find jobs with enough hours which are also flexible enough to take into consideration women's need for childcare. This is no easy task.

**PEI Provincial Government.** In recent years, the PEI government has outlined several step-by-step financial plans to eradicate and or reduce poverty in the province by helping the poor to become self-sufficient and move out of poverty. In 2011, a discussion paper released which proposed a number of plausible solutions to the problem of poverty, one of the most important relating to education. Since most jobs require at least grade 12 in our society (PEI Provincial Government, 2011, p. 29), one particular plan to do this was by improving educational opportunities for the poor by opening two new preschool centres by the year 2013 and investing more funds into the Child Care Subsidy Program in order to make it more accessible to the poor. The rationale was that early learning will benefit the children by providing an enriching environment at a young age and benefit the parents by providing good-quality childcare for “consistent” prices (p. 28). This document made it clear that the PEI is happy with its current



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performance in terms of the public's access to post secondary education, including the current financial aid to students from low and moderate income families in the form of student loans, which have relatively low rates of interest and do not have to be paid until after completion of the educational program (PEI Provincial Government, 2011, p. 30).

**PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women (ACSW).** There were many responses to this discussion paper, one of which came from the PEI ACSW. The ACSW praised the discussion paper on some of its suggestions, including the plan to increase investment in early learning / child care programs and elementary schools in order to make them more affordable and better quality. They also praised the plan to make housing more affordable for the poor as well as home care for seniors (PEI ACSW, 2012, p. 5). Although the ACSW admits that the recent raises in minimum wage are a step in the right direction, they also argue that due to PEI's loss of population (to those moving out of the province) and rapidly rising costs of everything from food to fuel, the raises in wages have not yet reached an acceptable level. Aside from this, there is a serious lack of jobs on PEI, and unless there are more jobs to be had, people will continue to move away in search of work, deepening PEI's economic problems (p. 6).

In criticism of the PEI government's discussion paper, the PEI ACSW argued that the government needs to collaborate with community-based organizations, such as the ACSW itself, and listen to and take seriously the advice of Islanders who are currently living in poverty (PEI ACSW, 2012). The ACSW criticized the government's discussion paper for being written in too cryptic language and only providing a French translation in a brief summary of the document, claiming that this writing style makes the details of the plans to fight poverty inaccessible to Francophones and those with low literacy levels (PEI ACSW, 2012, p. 2)

The ACSW also criticize the fact that the discussion paper itself admits that the Market Basket Measure (MBM) is a very context-sensitive and therefore more accurate measure of poverty on PEI, yet settle instead on using the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) underestimates the severity of poverty on PEI. Another issue with using the LICO as the criteria for poverty is that, as mentioned earlier, it assumes that moving out of poverty means simply being able to keep oneself alive; it does not take into account the need for people to participate in the community and enjoy their lives (PEI ACSW, 2012, p. 3)

Another important point the ACSW make in their criticism is that the government's discussion paper treats poverty as though it is experienced the same by all populations. Rather, the ACSW argues, the lived experiences of women in poverty differ significantly from the lived experiences of men in poverty, because of the gender roles assigned to each by our culture, which in turn is different from how other vulnerable groups experience poverty, such as immigrants, people with disabilities, and those who live in rural communities. (PEI ACSW, 2012, p. 3). The ACSW makes a strong case for the unique challenges that women in poverty face in PEI, including the fact that although women account for half of the Island's total workforce, they continue to be overrepresented in part-time work, which is often because of having children or elderly relatives to care for. They also address the issue of the pay gap between men and women who work full time year-round in PEI as well as the pay gap between mother-headed single parent families and father single-parent families, the fact that the vulnerable group of senior Islanders is overrepresented by women due to the longer average lifespan of women, as well as the fact that women are most often the parent in single-parent families, which have the highest rate of poverty of any group on PEI (PEI ACSW, p. 4).

The ACSW go on to make important criticisms of the ineffectiveness of various social assistance and income support programs, especially for women. They argue that current social assistance incomes are simply not enough to live on, pointing out that, statistically speaking, a single person makes about 44% of the MBM criteria for low income. They also bring to attention the pronounced struggling of people with disabilities in PEI, who live in a staggering 65% of households that receive social services support (PEI ACSW, 2012, p. 10).

Another serious problem is the red tape that many mothers face when attempting to return to school or further their education:

Social Assistance does not help people get off social assistance. For example, a parent who want to go back to school with children in day care. She is on social assistance and gets some child support. Social Services cuts her off when she goes to school. She gets a student loan – but it won't pay rent, food, or transportation. How long can she go to school before the money runs out? (PEI ACSW, 2012, p.10).

There is also a serious problem, the ACSW argues, with delays in the processing of federal Employment Insurance claims (PEI ACSW, 2012, p. 11). Islanders who live in poverty live paycheque to paycheque, and any delay in payment is likely to strip these individuals and families of that week's expenses such as food, and making them late in paying rent and other bills. Instead, the ACSW suggests a guaranteed annual income, which will aid Islanders in poverty with a liveable annual income rather than unreliable weekly or monthly payments that are subject to change and delays (p. 22).

Although PEI seems to be good in terms of providing temporary, emergency solutions, says the ACSW, they need to focus more on long-term solutions, changes that will break the cycle of poverty and help people to get out of poverty and stay out of poverty. Things such as

transportation are key in the prevention of poverty, especially for women who live far from their places of work. A vehicle is not considered necessary, according to the LICO measure of poverty, and so many Islander women are driving old, unsafe cars to and from work, getting delayed because of break-downs and stalling (PEI ACSW, 2012, p. 12). Providing safe and affordable public transportation to women all over the province will allow women greater opportunities for employment and protect against the social exclusion of not being able to attend social and cultural events. There is also a lack of funds for educating children with special needs as well as adult learners, which needs to be addressed. More attention needs to be paid to women's safety in housing – providing affordable housing that is secure and safe – as well as the workplace as well, wherein women are more likely than men to face violence and sexual harassment. In order to truly battle poverty, the government must look at ways in which they can support all Islanders, including those in the vulnerable groups who, in turn, are the most likely to live in poverty (PEI ACSW, 2012, p. 13).

Other suggestions that ACSW makes to the PEI government include to providing greater access to mental health and addictions services, as well as women's health organizations. While mental health accounts for a mere 1.6% of the Health PEI budget, it affects approximately one fifth of the total population; living in poverty is so stressful a situation that mental health is a serious issue for the poor, and especially for women, who are twice as likely to suffer with depression and anxiety disorders than men (PEI ACSW, 2012, p. 16). Also important is the fact that women in PEI are deprived of an abortion clinic, and must travel to Halifax or Fredericton as the nearest means of aborting, which requires a means of transportation, a \$45 toll for crossing the Confederation Bridge, and money for gas as well as possible accommodations. It also requires taking one or more days off work, which is not an option for many women living in

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poverty (PEI ACSW, 2012, p. 17). Also, there needs to be more affordable access to the justice system for families and especially women, who account for the majority of referrals to Victims Services. Since women have lower incomes on average, something needs to be done to give women fair access to the legal system when they need help. It is incredibly difficult for a woman to leave an abusive partner when she is already living in poverty, and especially when she is also trying to protect her children, because she is faced with a choice to leave and go even further into poverty or stay and continue to be abused (PEI ACSW, 2012, p. 18).

**Further Government Implementation.** The PEI provincial government followed up on the discussion paper to fight poverty the following year, after claiming to have taken the advice of fellow islanders, with an official step-by-step course of action. According to this Social Action Plan to Reduce Poverty (2012), the PEI government has two goals: the first being “to support people to move out of poverty by strengthening their educational and economic opportunities and their participation in the labour force” and their second “to protect and enhance the standard of living and quality of life for those unable to participate in the labour force for whatever reason” (PEI Provincial Government, 2012, p. 2). Islanders asked the government for the following in order to reach these two goals: better access to affordable housing, a better Social Assistance program, a continuation of improving services for people with disabilities, continuation of the investments in early learning programs, an improvement in literacy and support for adult learning, training and work, a further increase in minimum wage that better reflects the increases in costs of living, a change in tax policies to help the poor, improved access to prescription medications, better mental health and addictions services, and better family support in justice services (p. 3).

In response to these requests, the PEI government announced a three-year (for now) budget plan that will involve increasing government spending over those three years. Promises include greater government spending in housing, including 340 new affordable units which are created through the government's collaboration with non-profit and private sectors, as well as refurbishing old units to create a better quality of life for the residents. Although it is mentioned that the government recognizes the problem of homelessness, it is not clear exactly what the plans are to assist the homeless (PEI Provincial Government, 2012, p. 5). The government has also promised to cut heating costs in low income homes, increased financial support for the Salvation Army, support for families who need to renovate their homes in order to avoid having to relocate, opening two more early learning centres for preschool children, and increased spending on the Seniors' Home Repair Program (PEI Provincial Government, 2012).

Other less helpful promises made include things that the government plans to "consider" or "look into" within the next three years. These include the consideration of increased food support (in the second year of the plan only), looking for solutions to the problem of Islanders having to exhaust their savings in order to be eligible for Social Assistance, working with the Disability Action Council to address the many problems faced by Islanders with disabilities, look into improving mental health and affordable prescription medications, and, in the third year of the plan of action, the government will assess the need to increase the income threshold to qualify for the Child Subsidy Program (PEI Provincial Government, 2012).

Income support is not really considered in this document, as the government primarily writes about how much Social Assistance programs and other income supports have improved over the last several years. As for employment support, the government claims that it is doing great in this area, since minimum wage has increased from \$7.50 (per hour) in 2007 to \$10

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today, which is “similar to surrounding provinces”. This last claim seems slightly elusive; rather, it should include a comparison by providing actual numbers.

### **Moving Forward**

Now comes the most important question of all: what can be done to help people get and stay out of poverty? After reviewing the literature as well as various government and community-based documents on poverty reduction strategies, it is apparent that one of the most important ways to fight poverty is to strike at the issues surrounding employment. Since employment is an issue experienced differently by different groups, and since women are particularly vulnerable to aspects of employment such as part-time work and pay gaps, I will focus on women only, for the purposes of this study. In the spirit of the PEI ACSW, the best way to learn how to solve a problem is to ask the people who are actually living that problem. In order to know what is keeping many women in PEI from attaining and keeping healthy, sufficient employment, it is essential that we ask them. The goal of this paper is to explore, through a secondary analysis of data, the issues that six PEI women in poverty are experiencing, including the obstacles they face when trying to attain healthy, sufficient employment, from a qualitative and feminist approach to research. From there, perhaps conclusions can be drawn from the data and some helpful suggestions developed to assist the fight against poverty in PEI.

### **Methods**

#### **Participants**

The participants of this study were not chosen for the specific research question at hand because this is a secondary analysis of data. The participants of the original study were recruited by the Women’s Network of PEI for their Paths to Prosperity project, with the help of several other liberation and advocacy organizations such as the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of

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Women, PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada, Cooper Institute, PEI People First, John Howard Society, Adventure Group, ALERT, Society St. Vincent de Paul, Actions Femmes ÎPÉ, Disability Action Council, PEI Senior Citizens' Federation, Native Council of PEI, Anderson House, Income Support, Dept Community Services & Seniors, Open Door Ministries, Provincial Correction Centre, PEI Council of People with Disabilities, and Murphy's Center. Of all the participants involved, six were chosen for analysis of this study based on the relevance to the research question at hand; they talked in their interviews substantially about trouble gaining employment and the ways in which external forces inhibit their access to jobs. These six participants, who will be referred to throughout this paper by their participant number (ex: P2) in the original study, range in age from twenty-six to sixty-one years old and varied in ethnic background. Only one of the women in this study claimed not to be a Canadian citizen but rather a permanent resident and a recent immigrant. All six women in this study share the commonality of living with less than \$32,000 a year and subsequently report having difficulty maintaining a liveable income. Four of the participants are currently raising children with this low income situation. P3's children are preschool age, P4's children are in elementary school, P7's children are independent adults, one a grandmother herself, and P5 and P9 have children in high school. It must also be mentioned that P2 is living with a physical disability, which has not been specified for this study, and is currently living in special housing to accommodate her needs and low income. The reason why such demographic information is included in this study is because such categories or labels to which people belong greatly affects their lived experience of oppression, such as barriers to attaining healthy, sufficient employment.



## **Procedure**

**Interview Process.** The data used for this study included an approximately one-hour, semi-structured interview with each participant. The interview question guide is included in Appendix 1 of this paper. Questions were asked regarding the participant's childhood experiences, how well off their guardians were, their adulthood experiences with education, employment, and health, and some of the strengths and hopes they have for the future in terms of poverty eradication on PEI.

**Selecting the Research Process.** Because the scope of the interviews was so broad in range, the first step of choosing which research process to use was creating a "thought map" of the main ideas gathered from the interviews, including common as well as idiosyncratic topics. The four main themes drawn out on this map were then supplemented by examples and quotes from the text, indicating where different themes overlapped with each other. It was at this point that I chose my research topic and formulated the question I wished to ask in this paper: What are the personal and societal constructs that create barriers between PEI women in poverty and sufficient employment to meet their basic needs? Not only did this research question pertain to my own interests as a researcher, but it seemed appropriate and in tune with the aims and motivations for the original project of Paths to Prosperity, which was to create ways for women to move out of poverty.

**Analysis.** The nature of the research question lead to the choice to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the method of qualitative analysis for this study. IPA is appropriate for this study because, first of all, semi-structured interviews provide a framework in which answers are provided to the specific questions and the research interest of the study at hand, taking a more critical-realist approach to research, as opposed to a more relativist approach

which would require a much more open-ended method of data collection. The semi-structured interview gives the participant enough freedom to talk about what she feels is important, as opposed to only what the researcher feels is important. IPA is also the best choice for this study because it allows, unlike grounded theory research, for the researcher to engage with the data and use her/his own insights into the analysis; since this is a secondary analysis of existing data and the participants were not interviewed to answer my exact research question, it makes for a more useful research project to be able to interact with the data of this study in such a way. Thus, the purpose of this study is not to generate a new theory, as grounded theory requires seeking additional cases to do this. Lastly, IPA is appropriate because the study is built on the assumption that each woman experiences barriers to employment individually due to her unique life circumstances. IPA works first with the narrative of a single participant to understand her experience before moving on to the next and therefore it is epistemologically aligned with the study of psychology and experiences of women in poverty. Although the participants in the study may have commonalities, each of these women has a complex living situation, and getting at the lived experience of the individual is the specialty of IPA.

The first step in the data analysis process was transcribing each original interview from audio to written text. Four, I transcribed myself and the other two were already transcribed and I read through them. The style of transcription was Corporate Verbatim (Franklin-Square, 2014), meaning that “um”s, “uh”s, noise words, false starts, nervous stammering, giggles and external sounds were recorded along with the bulk speech if they were considered important to the meaning of what was being said. However, volume of speech was only noted if the participant spoke too quietly to be understood and recorded at any point during the interview. During this

stage of data collection, I became familiar with the financial and employment situations of the participants, getting an idea for commonalities and idiosyncrasies among the participants.

The second step in the analytical process was coding the data, which was done verbatim for each participant, and every word in all transcripts was coded. Therefore, codes did not always follow complete sentences or paragraphs. Some codes included many sentences or paragraphs as well as sentence fragments and patches of paragraphs. The probe questions asked by the interviewer were included into the codes of the participant's response rather than their own, separate codes in order to give context to those coded responses. Much of the transcription had multiple codes, so individual lines or paragraphs were not limited to one code alone. It must be noted that although all of the interviews were coded, not all of the codes were considered relevant to the study at hand, and such codes are not included in the results section of this report. The software used for this coding process was QSR NVivo10, which can be used very effectively and efficiently to conduct IPA research by creating separate files for each participant and then creating codes which can be unique to a participant but also used across participants where there is similarity, thus allowing for an individual set of themes.

The third stage in the analytical process of this study was grouping the relevant codes of each interview into clusters of themes for each interview. Each cluster represents a barrier that a participant is experiencing to attain healthy and sufficient employment, and each of these clusters is made up of with themes, which all fall under the title of that cluster. The next step was taking the clusters from each interview and combining them with the clusters of all the other interviews to create a list of "master themes". The master themes are essentially overhead titles to those clusters that were most prevalent among the themes of the six participants, and each master theme includes several subthemes which are the themes from the individual transcripts. Finally,

it must be noted that themes from the individual theme charts that were unique to a single participant were not excluded from the master theme list – they were included as subthemes of the master themes to which they fell under because although idiosyncratic, they are meaningful. All master themes and subthemes will be discussed at length in the results section.

The final stage in this research project was analyzing the data for connections among the themes and subthemes. This step in the process also involves connecting the findings of this study back to the existing literature and drawing conclusions about consistencies as well as inconsistencies between this research project and existing literature.

### **Results and Discussion**

Below is a chart indicating the four master themes, or types of barriers that the six participants of this study experience to attaining healthy, sufficient employment, as well as the subthemes, or more specific barriers under each master theme. The rightmost column shows which participant(s) each subtheme is relevant to. It should be noted that the reason such themes as those that only apply to one or two participants are included here because they are considered as analytically important as those which apply to all participants. However, the former will not be discussed at as much length as the latter, simply because there is more data and variety with which to discuss the latter. However, IPA assumes that we must start with each individual experience of a phenomenon before we move on to compare and contrast them with that of others. This way, unique experiences will not fall through the cracks of larger-scale comparisons.

*Table 1 – Master Themes*

<b>Master Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Participants</b>
1. Societal Standards of Employment	Educational Level	P2, P3, P7,
	Unhealthy / Demeaning Work Conditions	P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9
	Underemployment and Low Pay	P3, P4, P7, P9
	Expectation to Volunteer	P9
2. Oppression	Hospitalization	P2, P5
	Growing up in Poverty	P3, P5, P7
	Childhood Abuse	P3, P5, P7
	Intimate Partner Abuse	P2, P3, P4, P5, P7 P9
	Social Assistance	P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9
	Immigrant Status	P4
	Sexist Attitudes	P9
	3. Motherhood	Having Children
Unplanned Pregnancy		P2, P3, P5, P7
Children with Behavioural Problems		P5
Having Children Taken Away		P2, P3
4. Personal Challenges	Psychological Difficulties	P2, P3, P4, P5, P7
	Physical Disabilities	P2
	Addictions	P3, P5, P7
	Language Barriers	P4

**Theme One: Societal Standards of Employment**

**Educational Requirements.** The standards that our society sets to gaining and maintaining employment on the Island is experienced in a variety of ways by all six participants in this study. For example, it is difficult or impossible to find work when one does not have “enough” education: “I know it’s hard for people if you don’t have grade twelve, you can forget about getting work” (P2). Indeed, even most minimum wage jobs require a grade twelve education in PEI (PEI Provincial Government, 2011, p. 29), which is a standard inaccessible to women such as P2. Three of the six women in this study do not have grade twelve, although all were either already working towards a GED or planning to do so in the near future. According to P7, high school material can be very difficult and challenging, especially when one has been out of school for several years:

And I, I wrote it [GED exam]. It took, I don't know, I don't know how many times I had to write it, but I finally passed Social Studies and Science, which were hard.

And math. Thank you. And the math, I'm only like 10 points away. You need 450, I have 440. In math.

In a study of women living in Baltimore who had dropped out of high school and returned to obtain a GED, Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, (2004) argued that the increasing number of people returning to get GEDs is not only a symbol of the rising credentials of employment, but also of the ineffectiveness of high school (p. 1197). They argue that many of their participants preferred the GED program because it does not take as long to complete, is not as prone to the social isolation and bullying experienced in high school, and does not force students to take courses that are irrelevant to the rest of their lives. They also found that the

participants who scored high on motivational drive measures were the least likely in their study to drop out of the GED program (p. 1198).

More research on this topic will help us to understand what needs to be done to help women who return to get a GED thrive upon returning to such an educational setting. One of the questions asked of the participants in this study was “How do you learn best?” (Appendix 1); P2 said she learned well by instruction while P3 preferred to learn in a group setting with hands-on training. Evidently, women’s strengths and learning styles may vary widely and this must be taken into consideration when development tutoring and other educational programs for returning students.

**Unhealthy and Uncomfortable Working Conditions.** Four of the women in our study discussed working in unhealthy conditions: P4 described a situation in which she was asked to dress another woman in pantyhose, which made her feel uncomfortable:

P: Last night they ask of me, a lady she wants me to wear her socks. I don’t know how to do. I tried with her, she said ‘no, I don’t like, this is not nice, I don’t’, because I don’t know how to do even, you know?

I: Oh, pantyhose?

P: Yeah.

I: Like, like the stretchy nylon things. Yeah. [Laughs]

P: [Laughs] I never tried. Zellers was with me you know, they was doing that, not me, I just get all that. Oh, I’m so shy. I never tried that in my life, you know?

It is not surprising that performing such tasks would not only feel uncomfortable, but also terribly unfair to a woman who had spent ten years of her life practicing as a private doctor.

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Similarly, P5 described how she was forced to quit her job at a printing company because of an injury she received due to the heavy labour involved with that job:

P:But I can't do it no more. Cause I hurt my back.

I:Oh no. This is a physical job or?

P:Oh, way physical [half-laugh] Lifting paper and.

I:[Oh] Ok.

P:Um so I worked in the field in the States for and I graduated. I worked at a Girl Guide, Girl Scout camp the first summer after I graduated and then I went to a printing company. A big printing company. And um was there for three years. I guess. Took a, took a piece of skin off my finger, went down four layers, I caught it in a machine.

Which life is fairer, or preferable; living in poverty and having all day to spend with one's children, or living in slightly less poverty and having to spend the work day away from one's children, doing things that harm her body and her emotional health? P9 described a situation in which her job cleaning bathrooms was harming her physically:

P: I was so desperate I did a cleaning job, and there's not, not, I'm just, make it clear that there's nothing wrong with doing cleaning. But I went with this cleaning job and it was so bad that she would not allow us to use gloves to clean toilets because it would slow us down. Then we'd have to clean toilets with just our hands and a rag, it was just awful. And, oh my goodness sometimes I'd clean sixteen toilets in a day, it was just unbelievable. And in the end I couldn't pull up my bed sheets up, like I couldn't pull them up.

I: Cause your hands were so sore?

P: And I think it was the chemical stuff I was getting sick.



Clearly some companies are not sensitive to the needs of their employees. It seems as though employment facilities which utilize a disposable employee mentality cannot appreciate the diversity of their employees because this model is geared only towards one goal: how to make more money for the company. Some research has shown that there is actually an economic benefit for companies if they make working conditions enjoyable for their staff, recognize the fact that each worker is an individual with unique skills and talents, and allow workers to use those skills rather than letting them go to waste (Harville, 2001). In his review, Harville contrasts two companies, one a car manufacturing facility that uses a person-centred model of employment with a printing company that uses the traditional employee as disposable model and points out how the former has reached its economic goals of producing affordable vehicles while lowering company costs, employee satisfaction, and having employees who perform excellent teamwork, whereas the latter has reported unreached economic goals, high employee stress rates, and higher than average employee turnover (p. 728). Therefore, it could be helpful not only to workers, but to businesses as well, for the PEI government to consider the person-centred approach to employment and business in its poverty eradication strategy.

Such unacceptable working conditions as those mentioned above can be attributed to the disposable employee model, which have been described as “a strategic combination of policies that guarantees short-term employment among the bottom 80-90% of a company” (Popular Resistance, 2014). Jobs which are not protected by a union are disposable, which allows the employer to hire and let go whenever she / he pleases or make unreasonable demands of employees. Such unreasonable demands include assigning an unpredictable schedule every week, shift work that forces workers to switch constantly between night and day shifts, asking workers to come in on a “need be” basis, resulting in unpredictable pay from week to week,

giving raises that do not reflect the rising costs of living (Popular Resistance, 2014). This kind of system is designed to keep employees in the position of powerlessness because the threat of being let go puts a bar on employees' willingness to complain or demand fairer working conditions. Also, it implies the attitude that because such jobs are part-time or seasonal, one should not expect to make enough to live on and therefore should be looking for other jobs to supplement income. Also, companies that operate under this system create an attitude that such jobs are not "real jobs" that are protected by a union so that employees will be more likely to accept injuries and unreasonable demands, and when an employee is trying to juggle multiple part-time jobs at the same time, they may not have time or energy to pursue fair treatment in their jobs (Popular Resistance, 2014). These tactics take pressure off the company and places it on the shoulders of the employee instead. Working in such jobs could undoubtedly cause emotional distress, such as how P3 described a job experience that made unrealistic demands of her and, as she claimed, undermined her sense of self-esteem and competence:

I, from the [hotel], um, right then and they were like you had a week and you had to do like eight rooms each day, just the way they did it. And they'd think like 'oh do everything'. And then the next week you had fifteen rooms. So and that's how fast it was. So I'm just like, just got bombarded I guess.

P2 believed that she was not given sufficient training and time to learn the tasks required for her job. Subsequently, she was let go for not calling in when she was sick for one shift:

P: Yeah. Yeah it was stated in the booklet. And it's almost automatic fire if you don't show up for your shift and if you don't call.

I: So did you not call because you didn't want to work there anymore?

P: Oh no, I did.

I: Oh you did call?

P: No, no, I didn't call but uh, um, my phone went dead and I had to charge it and it didn't get charged in time for turn it back on before. And where I was staying didn't have a phone.

I: Right.

P: Yeah. It was my fault.

I: Well, relatively speaking, if you don't have a phone, I mean, you know, you can see how that's,

P: Yeah but I could have went to a store and used a phone.

This example illustrates very well how an employee in this situation becomes an object for corporate benefit rather than a living person with needs, responsibilities, or ambitions. P3's employer never considered the fact that she was raising two young children at the time or that because she was living with low income, she did not have the luxury of a landline with which to call in sick. She was expected to go out of home and walk to the nearest public telephone, while being sick. However, unfortunately, since women who live in poverty are the least likely group to have more than a high school diploma, these are the only kinds of jobs available to them (Matlin, 2012).

Unfortunately there is not a lot of research on the disposable employee model itself. However, research that has been conducted on transnational "sweatshops" have shown that such employment facilities utilize similar principals but to much worse extremes. For example, Ngai (2005) revealed the stories of women in China employed in inhumane conditions such working fifteen hours a day for an income below the poverty line, and the women are aware of how they are viewed by their employers: "In the eyes of the managers, workers are merely stuff that can be

thrown away at will” (p. 183). This is strikingly consistent with the attitude of the employers who some of the women in our study have worked for, because it stresses the phenomenon of viewing human beings as a means to an end.

**Underemployment.** Related to this discussion is the problem of lacking hours. P3 described an instance in which she was promised more hours than she was actually given:

P: Um, I left, well, the cooking job I left which was just like, August. I left that because um, like they promised me like, full hours and I only got like 30-hours, three weeks and it went down. And at the last I had four hours, once a week. It's not a lot. So I'm like, it's not worth it.

I: Yeah. Now if you work four hours, well, does it, does it help you at all to work four hours? Or does that only penalize you? In terms of overall income.

P: Um there's, um, no, if you work more than, if you work, I think you're allowed to make a hundred and some dollars a month with the,

I: With social assistance or EI?

P: Social assistance.

I: Okay.

P: Without them docking you. And four hours, like each week, but it wasn't just like the four hours. It was like, if you like 'oh, I'll call you whenever I need you'. Like it wasn't like you know said 'ok well Wednesday you come in from like, 2-close'.

I: So why were they even holding onto you for four hours?

P: Just I was like the prep cook for when somebody else couldn't get there at the last minute. But yeah he hired me on at first and I was there like, it was just, like an hour here, two hours there and then he'd get me to go to his house and clean.

This is another example of the disposable employee model at work. The employer only wanted P2 around when he needed her, as opposed to when was appropriate timing for her. In this case, P3 was not given the flexibility required to arrange babysitting or daycare for her two children whenever she was called in to work on a "last minute" notice.

**Inappropriate Working Hours and Pay.** P4 explained how her part time job stuck her with both insufficient and inappropriate work hours for her life situation:

I go back home, like 7:30 or 8 o'clock, I just sleep up to twelve, so like three or two hours, three or four, because like I should get up and do, make the food for the kids, do laundry, a lot of stuff like that, so it's very very tired for me. I'm so tired. And just ten dollars before taxes. See. So nothing at all.

This brings us to our next topic, which is the fact that the women in this study have found that the jobs available to them do not pay enough to live and raise children on, assuming that living is more than just meeting basic survival needs, as was discussed earlier. As P7 explained:

I: Yeah. So if you were to try live on your full-time job um it, what would that be like?

P: I wouldn't be able to do it.

I: Yeah. You couldn't pay your rent or-

P: I probably could pay the rent. Um I definitely wouldn't be able to get cable, which I don't have. And I wouldn't be able to smoke or drink, which is good probably [half-laughs] But there are people that are making minimum wage that do

drink and smoke. I don't know how they do it. And yeah. Well you, you could live but there is no, there'd just be money for rent and your, like I drive a car. And thank God I have no problems with my car. Um just gas and insurance... but as far as um my, when you're living like this, um I have Native Council, not Native Council, Indian Affairs covers my, like if I have dental. And they'll cover some medication. Thank, I just thank God for that because I would never, you know. My teeth'd be falling out before I could get them fixed. In order to spend that kind of money. And medication, you, if you had an illness you wouldn't be able to, what would you do?[half-laughs] Live in your car? [half-laughs]

P9 explained how being on social assistance had been for her and her family, in some ways, more beneficial than working at minimum wage:

It was so bad I didn't have money for milk, and I was absolutely had nothing else to sell. I didn't know what, what to do. I literally didn't know what to do. And there're things like, I was excited about Salvation Army, they had their, their fuel cause we were getting down and empty. But in order to get that you had to be there in person. So that would've meant I had to take a day off work at this cleaning job and that wasn't gonna happen. This is what I mean where practical things, we think oh, well, you know, uh you could get that and get half a tank of fuel or whatever. But if you're working, what do you do? Miss a day's work? What're you gonna do then? You get the fuel but you don't have money for the gas to go to work the next day... You know that, and that's the things we're really so, when we're on social services it was like oh my goodness, this is so, it was a relief! But I can remember they said something, I had to find a place to live I think it was – 703 – it was a weird number.

703 for all of us with heat and lights. Rent, heat, and lights, which, I don't know where you'd find that in PEI for a family of three. I don't know.

which is consistent with a study by Vaughn and Boston, who found that social assistance can in some cases be a disincentive to finding employment (2010, p. 33). In P9's case, this was because of the negative experiences she had with paid work.

**Pressure to Volunteer.** Although volunteer jobs can be a fun and rewarding way for people to do the things they want to do, they can also become a burden. P9 explained how she felt pressure from her church to volunteer:

P: But I work hours and hours of overtime with no pay. And and, mm – uh, it's, it's certainly encouraged we'll say.

I: To work without getting paid for what you're working?

P: Yeah. My, the minister gives me work at an hour and a half after I'm supposed to be gone.

These standards are not realistic for some people, particularly women living in poverty, trying to raise children on minimum wage or social assistance. It seems that P9 is experiencing role strain between her role as a single mother and her role as a good Christian. Expectations to volunteer can become oppressive to women who are already struggling to get by because they place demands for more time and energy that these women may not have available. P4 found a way to incorporate volunteer work with spending time with her children by volunteering at her children's school:

And I started to work volunteer just to be beside my kids. So uh, I just serving them breakfast there and they need, it's multi-culture rule, sometime they ask for any help.

However, not every woman living in poverty has this option, and it is important not to assume that what works for one woman in one situation will work for another woman in another situation.

It is evident from this review of the challenges facing PEI women in poverty today that some of the important factors that we need to focus on, in the fight against poverty, include education, employment conditions, and combating common stereotypes that harm women. As we reviewed earlier, the PEI government has indicated that they will tackle the issue of education. However, it seems that they will need to do more than encourage women to get educated; they will need to explore the ways in which women's struggles are unique and provide access to education that does not interfere with the social assistance that women are receiving. Women and particularly mothers need to be able to have a liveable income for themselves and their children, while they go to school, and up until they are able to get careers which pay enough to do more with their lives than just survive. Also, it is vitally important that stereotypes of students as young adults be challenged; it should never be "too late" for a woman to return to school, whether that schooling be high school or post-secondary. Since education and curriculums change every year, it is also important that returning students have access to tutoring programs which will help them to refamiliarize themselves with and understand difficult or new concepts in various subjects. It would also be beneficial for the government to look at the ways in which nonunionized jobs are mentally and physically harmful, and find ways to get these employees protected from such oppression. As Statistics Canada has shown, unionization significantly improves women's chances for liveable income brackets (2010). Women who work, no matter what the job is, should not have to be subjected to conditions which dehumanize and objectify them; this creates little incentive to work and participate in society. Rather, it serves as a means



to further isolate those in poverty, implying to society that those in poverty are supposed to work in such conditions.

### **Theme Two: Oppression**

**Hospitalization.** Oppression comes from many different sources. For the purposes of this study, “oppression” is defined as being controlled unjustly by forces in a way that makes one incapable of changing her situation. One example of oppression that came out in our study was P2 and Five’s experiences of being hospitalized against their will for long periods of time. P2 described an instance while she was hospitalized in which she had refused to go to work at the rehabilitation centre for one day, and how her doctor in the institution punished her for it:

But anyway, I refused to go down there one day. So [doctor name] says, ‘I’ll fix her’. He put me, locked me up again for three days and two nights. Uh, to make me learn a lesson, made me more angry and irritable.

Evidently, P2 did not find this method of “correction” to help foster her sense of independence, assertiveness, emotional stability, and satisfaction with her life, characteristics which Astin and Lindholm (2001), Betz (1994), and Eccles, (1994) have found to be positively related to women’s aspirations to gain careers in prestigious careers [prestigious referring specifically to those jobs which require post-secondary training] (as cited by Matlin, 2012, p. 131). Similarly, P5 explained how she was hospitalized and labelled with psychological disorders:

Eighteen months of a lot of hard, hard work. Um and then, in order to even fit in the program, I'm sure you've probably heard about it, but in order to fit in the program you have to have a title. So not only did I have bipolar diagnosis slash depression, I had um, what's that called? Pers-borderline personality disorder. So not a... when I

first found out about the borderline personality stuff I'm like, I'm not taking that cause I don't need, I'm don't want another title. Uh I don't need another thing on my shoulders to carry, you know. I'm a recovering alcoholic, I've got bipolar now and now I've got borderline. Woo-hoo.[half-laughs].

Rather than encouraging self-confidence, competence, and work skills, these institutions which forced these two women into hospitalization and plastered them with unwanted labels have shown Participants Two and Five that they are ill, dependent, incapable of functioning in society, and in need of medical intervention.

**Growing up in Poverty.** As the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women has pointed out, poverty isolates women from their communities by means of depriving them of the resources, such as transportation, to participate in community activities (2012). For example, women whose parents cannot afford to send them to post-secondary institutions must find ways to support themselves financially if they wish to become educated; this is problematic because statistics have shown that high education is the greatest predictor of women's employment (PEI Provincial Government, 2011; Matlin, 2012, p. 210). This disadvantage effects children whose parents cannot afford to enroll them in extra-curricular activities such as sports teams are not given the same opportunities to be a part of the community that children of wealthy parents are given. For example, Brown (2001) pointed out that the experiences of teens who work for pay during their high school years differ depending on whether they come from wealthy or poor families (as cited by Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004, p. 1182). High-schoolers who come from wealthy families are more likely to have part-time work than those who come from poorer families, which may be due to poorer families' needs to have their children around the house to help out with errands and childcare. However, when high-schoolers are employed, they are more

likely to work “high intensity” hours, or 20 and above hours per week. This is indicative of the need to work rather than the desire to work for those who come from poorer families, whereas those who come from comfortable financial situations can choose how many hours per week they wish to work and spend their earned money on luxury items, such as entertainment and clothing. Those who come from poorer families may have to use their earnings toward supporting their families instead (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004).

Three of the women in this study grew up in poverty, an experience which P5 never intended to repeat in her adult life:

I never wanted to be like her [my mother] but I'm on assistance and I I watched her reach for one program and then reach for another program and reach for another program. All for one thing. Um kinda like Christmas time used to be um you know she'd get from this group and then she'd get from this group and then kinda make Christmas her Christmases, I guess. I, I, you know, for a long time I thought that was her way of expressing her love for us and everything until I started my poet's, writing and I realized it was just a it was just materialistic crap.[half-laugh] It wasn't, it was just fake and it was kinda phoney, I mean. So um I never wanted to be like her but in some ways I am because, you know, I'm on assistance and um. Never wanted to be but that's just kinda how it happened.

**Childhood Abuse.** Equally important with one's financial situation in childhood, many individuals who grow up in poverty also experience emotional, physical, and or sexual abuse in childhood, a factor which has also been shown as a risk factor for unemployment as well as minimum-wage employment (Tanaka et al., 2011). In another study, Habetha, Bleich, Weidenhammer, and Fegert (2012) proposed a monetary cost of the abuse, neglect, and sexual

abuse of children on Canadian society by taking into consideration expenses of the legal system, social services, education, health, employment, and emotional costs on top of unemployment, which according to this calculation, accounts for 72% of this combined cost (p. 6). Three of the participants in our study reported growing up in abusive households; P3 explained her own abusive experiences of being placed into foster care with her grandparents:

I: Yeah. So how old were you when you went into foster care?

P: Uh, two months the first time. And then we moved to my grandparents' house and she ended up like hitting us all the time.

I: Your grandmother?

P: Yeah. And locking us outside.

Sexual abuse is related to employment and income levels as well, as Tanaka, et al. (2011) found in their study that the female participants who reported having experienced sexual abuse as children, such as being subjected to inappropriate sexual remarks, touching, or rape, made an average of 10.7% less than the participants who reported never experiencing sexual abuse (p. 837). Interestingly, the perceived effect of such abuse is important in employment outcomes as well, since they also found that those participants who reported the sexual abuse they experienced had an effect on their life made 25% less than those who did not experience sexual abuse (p. 838). P7 described her growing up situation in which she was physically and sexually abused:

P: I, my father was very, he's a pedophile, but-

I: [None] So he sexually assaulted you?

P: All the kids. But I never thought the boys were assaulted, I thought it was just girls.

I: But he assaulted your brothers as well?

P: Yeah.

P7 and her siblings were also forced to witness the abuse that their father inflicted on their mother:

One time I, I actually thought she was. But I can't, I said, I was the first one to get up in the morning and I came downstairs, the lights were all on, the door was wide open. But the night before, you know, we heard the fighting and everything, so I was-. Yeah. So I crept down, I was only about, would've been about 9 that I remember, and I was looking around the corner, just to make sure he wasn't there. So I looked around the corner, everything was broken glass, there was like pop cap covers, mirror covers, ashtrays, they were everywhere. And I went in, I'd seen her laying in the living room so I went in [sigh], checked up on her on the floor and tried, I was like, Mom? Mom? And she, I couldn't, couldn't hear nothing. I was like sure she was dead. Like cause she wasn't breathing, I couldn't hear nothing. And so I just tried to pull her hair cause her hair was like all like down here. And I tried to move her hair but it was so full of blood that it was like sticky and hard to move. I was there, MOM! And she was, Ughhh. Like that, right. So I ran upstairs and I got my older brother, he was, might been about 14, and I told him, Get up and come get Mom cause she, I thought she was dead. He's there, [name 2]! Get out of my room [laughs]! I was there, Come on! You gotta get up! Really, [name 4], you have to get up! Yeah. So it was a lot of that growing up.

P5 described how she was beaten and nearly murdered by her mother in childhood:

Um I hated, I hated my mother when I sobered up. I hated her! Because she beat the crap out of me, she tried to stab me. Um and one time one of her boyfriends, she said I'm gonna kill you, little bastard! And [half-laughs] I never remembered this sort of stuff til I sobered up, I kid you not. And she said you, I'm gonna kill you, little bastard! And I was kinda stuck in a little corner in my bedroom, I couldn't get around her. She was a big lady. I couldn't get around her. And she lunged with a knife and her boyfriend, at the time, grabbed her hand and took the knife out of her hand. But she would've stabbed me [half-laughs] I would've been dead too then, you know. Um but I hated her for all that stuff. I hated her for picking me up and throwing me in cold showers and bouncing me off bathroom tiles and um. And so, that's why I drank right? I mean I started drinking when I was 10.

Evidently, the issue of women's poverty cannot be fully solved until the very real problem of child abuse is also addressed. In addition, research has found that women who are choosing and preparing themselves for their selected careers are far more likely to succeed in relatively high-paying careers if they have a supportive family (Betz, 2008). Similarly, Flores and O'Brien (2002) found that Mexican American adolescent women were significantly more likely to aspire to prestigious, high-paying jobs that have been traditionally male-dominated, such as electronic equipment repairer, police officer, and mechanical engineer, if they had parental support for such choices (p. 18). Unfortunately for Participants Three, Five, and Seven, such supportive environments did not exist when they were in the stages of aspiring to careers, and all three of these women reported having poor relationships with their parents in adulthood as well. In an ideal world, all women would have the same opportunities and supportive

environments from childhood, but until the issue of child abuse is addressed, this ideal will remain just that.

**Intimate Partner Abuse.** In addition to the three participants dealing with the traumatizing effects of being abused as children, all six of the women in our study have also had to cope with having a heterosexual abusive intimate partner in their adult lives. As the literature shows, women involved with abusive intimate partners are more likely to have lower education and be living in poverty than women who are not being abused by their partners (Zavala & Spohn, 2010). P2 explained how she found the strength to leave her abusive husband after he struck her once. P3 described how her intimate partner abused her both verbally and physically by being controlling of her social life:

I: Did he ever hurt you physically? Or,

P: Yep.

I: And probably verbally too?

P: Yep.

I: Yeah. So, did you,

P: I gave up all my friends for him and he cheated on my anyway, so,

I: What does that mean you gave up all your friends?

P: He wouldn't let me talk to anybody.

I: Oh okay so he controlled your life... So he, he was trying ostracize, or isolate you.

P: Yep. Yeah he used to climb in my balcony and everything.

I: He used to what?

P: Climb in my balcony, my windows and everything to make sure I was home and not with anybody.

As Zavala and Spohn (2010) argued in their study, far more attention has been paid in psychological research to physical forms of abuse than to emotional abuse, which they argue ought to be further investigated. Abuse takes many different forms, including neglect which is an experience that P4 described regarding her ex husband and his refusal to emotionally or financially support their children:

I: Yeah so is your ex spouse not entitled or obligated to support you in any way?

P: It should be but eh, this is another problem, he said I don't need your kids anymore. Your kids, you know, like I made them myself.

I: So he can do that?

P: Uh yeah in [country of origin] the man can do whatever he wants, and he already married another woman right now so he has a life, so this is something also hurt my kids so I am trying as I said in the meeting to just be, uh, involved my kids.

Roudsari, Leahy, and Walters (2009) found that alcohol consumption of both the perpetrator and the victim is strongly related to reported rates of verbal and emotional abuse in college student couples. Consistently, P5 gave a vivid example of living with a husband who exacerbated her own alcoholism, raped her, and did not allow her to have her own career:

If, [name 3] and I were having a disagreement, he'd sit and throw a double-shot of whiskey in front of me and um.

...



He'd go to the bar and and he'd come back home and have his, pardon the way I talk about this cause [sigh], you know, have his way and leave me, my legs, my legs and everything all bruised.

...

P: [name 3] believed I belonged at home.

I: Oh! I thought you weren't allowed to work because of some immigration-

P: [No] [No] It was [name 3]. You belong at home.

Unfortunately, leaving an abusive situation often leads to even more financial trouble for women, which is indicative in the statistics of those who call Victims Services for help, the vast majority of who are women (Interministerial Women's Secretariat, 2010, p. 66). P9 described how difficult it was, financially and emotionally, for her to leave her abusive ex husband:

Even things like half the pension which I was entitled to, he didn't think I deserved it, and then, you either fight with the lawyer at a thousand dollars a week or you give him what he wants. And even in, then you'd give him what he wants, and then he'd leave and then he'd come back and he'd want something else. It was all about power and control. So anyway, um, that brought us to where we were here, he even had something in the thing I can only be so many kilometers out of the city or I have to compensate him, there's just nothing I wouldn't, my main goal was to do the best I could to protect the children. That was, that was my main thing.

Furthermore, the abuse by no means has to stop after a separation has occurred, as P9 explained:

And he'd, he'd stalk us outside. He'd be outside the house and then he'd be, he'd show up and he seemed to know our every move. He still knows what we do. And he still stalks the girls in that he insists and it's in our agreement that he's privy to

our house records, their school things and I have no problem with him knowing how they do at school and different things like that. But, he's a sick enough nature he takes and he twists what's perfectly innocent into something not so nice. So, um, say in band, they were gonna go to Dairy Queen and have ice cream, he would be privy to that, you know the sort of intimate emails you'd get from the teachers that come and go. He gets them, and he knows what they do, so he doesn't see them but he shows up at those small events and, and the girls are terrified.

It is critical that women who suffer psychological distress from such experiences have access to support and mental health services to help them work through the consequences of such violent experiences as childhood abuse, sexual assault, emotional abuse, and financial abuse. While psychological distress can take away from job performance, it has also been demonstrated that job loss can result in psychological distress (Olesen et al., 2013). This is concerning, considering part-time work is often disposable, as mentioned earlier, and employees can be let go at any time. Therefore it seems like a worthy investment to improve access to public mental health services, as Islanders have requested of the PEI Provincial Government (2012, p. 3).

**Immigrant Status and Discrimination.** The situation of P4 was unique in the way that she immigrated with her two children to Canada after separating from her husband, but also because she grew up in a very wealthy family. One could ask why she would not ask her family for financial assistance in paying for her medical exams here in Canada, but P4 said to this:

I don't [want] anybody to interfere in my life anymore, you know. I want to be responsible and I want my kids when they grow up to feel like I did a lot for them, nobody else.

Not every woman is willing to give up her independence and ask for financial assistance from her family. Not only this, but not every woman has a peaceful relationship with her family, and not every family is willing to give financial support to these women without requiring something in return.

P4 also reported feeling that she and her children had been discriminated against because of her immigration status:

Parent here speaking a lot of in front of the kids, so they came to school and they hate immigrant because they feel like oh you are taking my mom money or my parent money, because you take social assistance, and I never had any social assistance.

The attitude that immigrants take jobs away from locals is consistent with the work of Deaux (2006), who found that immigrants often find themselves in a hostile environment when they excel in the economy of their new home how they are blamed or labelled lazy if they do not. Also, stereotypes that locals hold against visible minorities can create anxiety and result in hindered performance in social and academic situations for immigrants (Matlin, 2012).

Another major issue for P4 was the way in which social assistance discriminated against her. P4 was currently unemployed and receiving child-tax benefit. However, her rent money was coming out of that, which she claimed was 25% of that child-tax benefit. Upon moving to Canada, she was required to sign a contract that would not allow her to apply for any social assistance besides the child-tax benefit:

P: I phoned them I tried with them you already came with your money, and I signed a paper I will never have any social assistance.

I: Is that forever. Is that, I mean, is there not an end point for that?

P: Uh they told,

I: Say you're here and you're an old, old woman, you're 70, are you not allowed,

P: Uh three years.

I: Oh.

P: They told me after three years but even when I, I went and I complained to the director of the social assistance, they said you can come but we will give you a job, not money. But the problem about this job, all PEI will know that the social assistance will give me this job. So like charity. So while I'm working all people know, oh this job for the social assistance and I don't like. So when I said the charity, this will be like in secret, they can give me like any job opportunity but don't say this is from the social assistance.

Also, she was not eligible for EI because she had not yet worked enough hours, even though she had applied for over forty jobs since moving to Canada. As we have established already, social assistance as it currently stands is enough to live on and arguably enough to survive (PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 2012, p. 3), and evidently there are some immigrant women who are not entitled, legally speaking, to even this income.

P4 also reported feeling as though she were being bullied in the workplace, primarily by her coworkers:

And even some of my supervisors they are like, it's not just theirs. Like at the end they give me like orders and, you know, some people, um, like they wanted to tell me like indirect message 'see, we are on the top now of you'. And a lot of, eh, a lot of [name]? It's like we are like two teams. Eh, some young and some old. And I

should do 90% of the work. They want to sit only. And they are asking me to do, to do, it's too hard for me.

This is consistent with the work of Fassinger (2002) who found that women are more likely than men to experience negative interactions in the workplace and that women of colour are especially likely to face social exclusion and lack mentorship at work (as cited by Matlin, 2012, p. 221). Workplace bullying is no light matter; for example, a literature review by Hutchinson et al. (2013) on registered nurses found that such nurses who experienced violence, bullying, and aggression in the workplace suffered a significant decrease in their emotional well-being, motivation, job performance, job satisfaction, and sense of social identity. In order to create safe and healthy work environments for Islanders, employers must ensure that there is somewhere for employees to go for help if they are being bullied without fear of ridicule or reprimand.

**Immigration and Credentials.** P4 completed all the schooling and training necessary to become a doctor in her country of origin and practiced as a doctor for ten years before moving to Canada. However, upon moving to Canada, she found that the college of doctor licensing body refused to let her practice unless she paid ten thousand dollars to have her credentials “checked” by the licensing body and another three thousand to take the required exams to receive a Canadian license. P4 was unable to afford the costs of becoming a licensed doctor in Canada. This is consistent with other research on Canadian immigrants, and a useful term for this practice of devaluing immigrants’ skills and credentials by the host country is “skill discounting” (Esses, Dietz, & Bhardwaj, 2006). Immigrants who have experienced skill discounting are less likely to integrate successfully and happily into Canadian society (as cited by Sinacore, Mikhail,

Kassan, & Lerner, 2009, p. 159). In her own words, P9 felt like nobody had been honest with her from the start about how the medical system works in Canada:

P: So they told me you are not allowed to practice so I started to think about I applied for the Medical Council of Canada first, and I sent my documents and they said they will send back to [country of origin] to see if it is already true or it's fake. And they ask me to pay money, like a fee, for stuff like that. And uh, nothing here. I should go to Halifax or Montreal. No medicine here in PEI.

I: Really.

P: No, nothing at all. No books, nothing. Yeah, so I paid 10 thousand for the medical council of Canada because he will send the medical papers to [country of origin] and I should pay to go to [country of origin] and I should pay to come back to here. And after that they sent it to Philadelphia for, uh, ECMFG, like physician credential of Canada, after that it will come back to here, it's a very long process.

I: So, eventually? Are you confident that you will be allowed to practice as a physician?

P: No, after I did that they told me it's not a guarantee, you, you should have job offer first. After I paid ten thousand. So I said, ugh, how come you told me now? The problem here, nobody tell you, tells you the truth from the start. And when I ask, oh it's still too early, later we'll tell you. You know? I didn't meet anybody to say, oh see, we have a set, and it is one, two, three, four, and it's not a guarantee, so I will never do that. I will never pay ten thousand, and I have no money at all right now. The other ten thousand I was paying the rent, food, electricity, for internet. Then I lost everything, no more money. I, eh, I was living in a hotel, so I have no

money today. I put an ad on Kajiji, I uh, a single mom with two kids, I like, eh to have any apartment but please four hundred or less, because only my income right now, child tax benefit it is 500 for the two kids. So I said I can pay for the rent and for the food I can go to food bank, I have no choice.

**Sexism and Powerlessness.** P9 also found herself thrown into a negative situation of unhealthy working conditions and a barely liveable income after having lived fairly comfortably for most of her life. This particular passage brings home the ways in which she saw that male privilege can financially victimize women like herself:

And um, it's about power and control. He vowed he'd bankrupt me and he did. I didn't fall for bankruptcy but the next thing is called a proposal and he wouldn't settle, so I couldn't sell our properties and then I couldn't repair them and then the pipes burst and then the furnace burst and then I was trying to handle everything. My mother was dying, I came down with double pneumonia, he was, he was taking me to court. I can't tell you how many times we went to what I call small court where you are in the chambers with the judge, I can't. Ten, fifteen times? I don't know. It took five years to get a separation agreement out of him, and, he represented himself for years, that's a new battleground when one represents himself and they call up your lawyer and hear them out. Your lawyer is required by law to interact with him. You know, they're protecting their end as well. Thousands and thousands of dollars every week. Every bit of pension I had lost, and he um, and I did everything not to battle him.

This is consistent with feminist research on public attitudes toward women and how characteristics of power and aggression have been predominantly associated with men (Schmid

Mast, 2005, p. 921). In this way, P9 was feeling powerless in her own life, and instilling women in poverty with feelings of powerlessness will perpetuate and strengthen the cycle of oppression.

P9 found similar media messages being advertized on the internet:

P: You know, you try not to let on cause you have to, you, you're coached not to let on, and I believe women are, are, sent a myth on that. Cause I looked up uh, support groups for women online. And it was, you know, be kind to your ex, and, and all the good stuff, you know, try and encourage a relationship between the children and live the other parent. All the good, nice stuff that you would hope. I found a site for men, and it was, you wanna get this and this is what you do: you, you say you want the kids half time, you know c-share. You do this, you do that, it was like a how-to-get-what-you-want. And you could, just reading it, it was scary reading it cause you could feel the negative, you could feel the power and control.

I: So you see a lot of structural inequities in our culture.

P: Absolutely. And I was told and I'm glad that they told me, they said it's um, the pendulum is switched, and um it's a man's world when it comes to divorce. And you know, if a guy doesn't have no intension of having the kids, my ex couldn't have the kids for an hour or two. Um, you go after the kids full time so it doesn't cost you any money. You don't have to give any support payments.

After reviewing the data of this section, it seems crucial to scrutinize the various forms of oppression that exist in our society when attempting to eradicate poverty. When planning out how to help the poor to get out and stay out of poverty, we must understand how experiences such as being hospitalized against one's will do not help fostering the personal qualities which



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are associated with sufficient employment, or of how immigrant women face added burdens of racism and prejudice as well as red tape concerning their credentials.

### **Theme Three: Motherhood**

**Single Parenthood.** This section is not to be taken as an argument for “women can’t be mothers and work at the same time”, because the literature has found that women can indeed do this, and that in many cases this arrangement improves the mental health of both the children and the parents (Matlin, 2012, p. 341). However, research has also found that employed mothers who work in low-paying, heavily laborious, and unrewarding jobs are likely to experience role strain (Lundberg-Love & Faulkner, 2008). Five of our six participants were either currently or had raised two or more children on either social assistance or minimum wage employment. In addition, four of these women were raising their children as single parents, so there was no help for them from a partner, in terms of childcare, income, or housework. The ways in which motherhood can interfere with finding employment or going to school to become qualified for employment are endless, and can be as simple as needing an adult to be there to supervise the children while the mother goes to work. P3 found a way to make this work for the time that she was spending in interviews for this project. However, not every woman has the luxury of a family member who can afford the time to watch her children while she goes to work. P4 had a similar situation in which she worked a night shift while her mother, who was visiting at her home for a limited time, stayed with the children overnight:

I: Um, so it’s, you, it’s just you’re living with just your children now? There’s no other adults?

P: Uh, my mom but she will go back on eh, February. She just came to visit me.

I: Ok, so mother visits,

P: Yeah just to visit. So maybe on February I will not be able to have my job because it's night shift.

Something as simple as the time required for being a parent can put strain on one's role as an employee (Gerson, 1985). P3 made a plan to finish high school after her youngest child would enter kindergarten the following year, simply so that she would have the time to study. Similarly, P4 has found that because her children were abandoned by their father and bullied at school, she needed to be there for them even more:

P: Yeah every time they came back we just watch a movie together, have a walk together, eat together. I don't like to let them, uh, a lot of time alone. Because now they feel that I am the only person for them. Before if I wanted to go anywhere they started to cry, we scared about you, if you die, what we gonna do? You are the only one. I said you have your grand mom, your uncle, 'no no no just only you'.

Three of our participants reported that at least one of her children was unplanned. However, all but one participant reported wanting to keep those unplanned children. Unplanned pregnancies can be problematic. For example, a study by Bouchard (2005) found that couples who were carrying unplanned pregnancies to term were associated with negative environments, such as anxiety, high stress levels, and depression in the mothers as well as negative relationships with their male partners, low education level, and low income.

Although the subject of abortions and the lack of access that PEI women have to this procedure has not been revealed as a major obstacle for employment for the women in this study, it's significance should not be overlooked, and more research needs to be done on this topic (MacQuarrie, 2012). P5 reported becoming pregnant while taking birth control medication, and that she felt obligated to raise her child even though it was not her choice to have one:

I: Did you wanna be pregnant or?

P: No.

I: Ok

P: I would've rather waited a while cause [name 3] weren't even married a year before, we just found out in September I was gonna have a have a baby and we weren't even married a year when I found out

P5 claimed that at times the responsibility of parenthood was too much for her to handle: Oh my God I get tired of being the parent. [half-laughs] I'd be lying if I didn't say, yeah. You know, even today, I got a 15 year-old passed out twice on me last night in the middle of the night. And so I gotta take her to the doctor this afternoon.

**Children with Special Needs.** In addition, one of P5's children had behaviour problems as well as a learning disability:

P: She was just diagnosed with uh Austic Spectrum [half-laughs]...She was hyperactive, Oh my God she was hyperactive!

I: [Oh ok]. [Mhmm.] [laughs] Now you understand why [half-laughs]

P: Oh my gosh. [half-laughs] Unreal. No fair. Child's house. No fair. And then the 15 year-old di- is um struggling to get through school.

I: [Yeah][Wow] Ok so you're hoping that she'll-

P: She's gonna she's gonna get um privately tested in [sighs] in January. Her father's paying for it. [half-laughs] All the frigging time. Um so we'll see where she's at, she's in Grade 11 but she's only reading, she's reading at a Grade 4 level and can't write. She's basically illiterate. Mhmm.

I:[Mhmm][Yeah][Wow] So she definitely needs lots of supports to help her to figure out what she could-

P:[Yeah] And I get tired of it. To be honest with you.

P4 also had to deal with a child who exhibited behavioural problems at school, due to the bullying:

P: [Laughs] yeah. And my little one started to be very aggressive at school. And she wants to like strangulate her friend. And they called me at school, I went, we went to Dr. [name] psychiatrist, uh, she had anxiety depression from a lot of abuse here in Canada.

Money and energy that could have been going into a career and training for a career was instead being spent on the medical needs of P5's children, partially because of the financial abuse of her ex husband, who refused to monetarily support their children:

P:[Well] She has, she had a concussion in the summer last year. And so then she suffered from post- post-concussion syndrome. And so she's still having headaches and so they think that's post-concussion but I think it's migraines. Cause, I mean this last headache she had, she couldn't even stand the light. That's a migraine. Um so they sent her to the paediatrician and I saw the paediatrician and the paediatrician said, No, it's post-concussion still. I'm like, it's a lon-, it's almost a year later. And she has these big knots in the back of her head and and anyway. Um they want her to have massage therapy but I can't afford massage therapy [sigh] At 47 bucks a shot, 47.25, to be exact.

I:[Mhmm][Oh][Right][Oh][Yeah, yeah][Mhmm] Yeah and you're not eligible for her to be covered.

P:It wouldn't be covered. It's not covered out of government. It's considered, it's not a necessity.

I:Yeah, yeah.

P:She's having physio and that's out of her father's insurance because they can bill directly to his insurance company. But massage therapist though, you pay up front.

I: And be reimbursed but you have to pay out pay out front.

P:[Yeah] Yeah. And I'm not about to pay and then give him the receipts and then let him claim it. Noooo! Don't think so.

I:[No] And he won't pay out front then?

P:No, no. He's a horrible father.

Similarly, P4 found herself having to support her children's heightened emotional needs:

Yeah, they started to be good. Before they had bad mark, last year, and eh, my kids started to get up, walk while they are sleeping or speak, this is from stress. But now they started to feel good. I don't like to lose my kids, but you know like, different life for them, to be very very high and now, oh, I don't know how to walk. I can't walk on the street. I said this is not work, this is nice walk, you have a lot of trees...

Because they already uh, feel bad about their dad, even sometimes when they see any movie and a lot of kids around the family mom and dad watching TV, they started you know to running some tears. But they started to hiding from me, but I see. So they feel bad about they don't have dad, but they don't like to tell me because they love me so much, so they don't like to put like more on my shoulder.

Mothers who are experiencing role strain due to working in low-paying, unrewarding jobs face extra difficulties if they have children with behavioural problems. This problem may be

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exacerbated by the fact that women with a low education level are more likely to have children with psychological and behavioural problems (Matlin, 2012) and perhaps the two connections are mutually interconnected if we consider the impacts of poverty on development.

**Abusive Fathers.** Raising children can be more than just a stressful experience when one's partner is not only failing to help with the responsibilities of parenting, but is also abusing her and their children. P9 found herself trapped in a marriage with a husband whose behaviour was dangerous to both her and her children:

He certainly took liberties and he was uh, physically rough with them. Absolutely mentally abusive. Absolute terrifying them. Um, you know I could leave him alone with the kids, couldn't do it, and um, physically bruising them up and the whole thing, but he worked in the system, he worked in the government and he, he warned me for years nobody would believe me,

In addition, P9 found that she was being sent conflicting messages about her responsibility as a mother in the situation of fleeing an abusive situation:

I was coached that I had to leave. If I didn't leave, I was putting the girls in jeopardy [Social Services] could come and take the girls. You know. Because I wasn't protecting them. Soon as I walked out the doors the best interest of the children was to see both parents.

This is an excellent example of our culture's stereotype of the ideal mother role – nurturing and selfless – with ease and happiness (Matlin, 2012, p. 331). However, as the women in our study have shown, every woman is different in terms of her own parenting style. How much physical and emotional energy a woman can give depends on her own individuality as well as her unique circumstances. The women in our study have a lot on their plates, including the

monumental responsibilities that come with being parents. In addition, the PEI ACSWs (2012) emphasis on creating spaces and settings for women in poverty to discuss their life struggles could be useful for poor mothers and poor women in general. Research has shown that making a narrative of one's own life story and expressing it to others, including the experiences of birthing and mothering, aids women in forming and strengthening their identities and giving order and meaning to their lives (Hayden, Singer, & Chrisler, 2006).

**Having Children Taken Away.** Another debilitating experience of oppression that Participants Two and Three have been through is having their children taken away against their will. For P2, this was a permanent arrangement for which she never forgave the court:

I: And they, had you sign papers? Did you know what papers you were signing?

P: I knew, at that time, when [doctor name] said it was the best thing.

I: So they decided for you.

P: Yep. And they had their court order before I even signed the paper. They never discussed it with me.

P2 was never given an option to be a mother, to raise her own children. P3 had the experience of having her children taken away as well, although was able to get them back after completing the programs which Child and Family Services demanded of her. She described the pain she experienced at having her children taken from her:

P: Um, I just shut everybody out of my life. Deleted everyone from my phone. Just, sat at my house.

I: You really,

P: Yeah it shook me up. So that's one of the things that I didn't want my kids to have to go through.

I: And there they were going through it.

P: Yep.

And although P3 claimed that she did not see this course of action from Child and Family Services as fair, she used the experience to make some positive changes in her life, such as becoming sober and getting out of an abusive intimate relationship – another portrait of the strength these women have shown in the face of oppressive circumstances. However, it might be an effective strategy in the fight against poverty to work with women in poverty instead of against them; in other words, in order to help women gain the characteristics associated with higher-paying careers, it seems as though stripping these women of their dignity even more than the circumstance of poverty already has may not be as helpful a strategy as working with women to help them gain independence, assertiveness, emotional stability, and life satisfaction. For example, Yanar, Budworth, and Latham (2009) conducted a study in which they took a marginalized group of Turkish women over forty years old through a training course, helping to boost these women's self-confidence by teaching them to change their negative self-talk into positive self-talk. They found that the women who took the training sessions were significantly more likely to actively seek employment, secure a job within six months, and be satisfied with the jobs they found one year later than those who did not take the training course (p. 596). It may be useful for institutions to work on boosting women's self-confidence rather than tearing it down if they want women to become meaningfully employed.

#### **Theme Four: Personal Struggles**

**Psychological and Emotional Distress.** The fourth and final category of obstacles found to finding healthy, sufficient employment was personal barriers, or obstacles that come from within a person. It must be made very clear that this group of barriers is not meant to place blame



on the participants, or PEI women, for their own lack of employment. On the contrary, the personal barriers that the women in our study have been experiencing are the result of unfortunate life circumstances, past and present, and they vary greatly from individual to individual. These personal barriers that stand in the way of women finding healthy and sufficient employment include a variety of sources, one of the most important being emotional and psychological disturbances. Five out of our six participants reported struggling with emotional and or psychological problems, the most often reported being depression and anxiety. P2 described the emotional impacts of living on ten thousand dollars a year and being physically disabled:

P: Uh, but, the day is long, because there's nothing for us to do. We go to a library and read or go online, talk to people and that, but, it's not, it's not what I call I life. You know, there's nothing else for people, especially who are disabled, can't do anything... Um, then if you don't want to drive yourself crazy you've gotta get out of the apartment. So, I just go out and just – I go to [mental health support centre]... and, if it wasn't for them, I'd be in hospital. Um, there's almost –

I: With what?

P: Mental problems.

The literature suggests that men and women experience the repercussions of psychological disabilities differently, especially in the realm of employment. For example, Ferri and Gregg (1998) have argued that disabilities is a feminist issue, because women with both psychological and physical disabilities have been largely ignored in the literature (as cited by Smith, 2007, p. 128), and women with such disabilities are oppressed in terms of educational opportunities, access to rehabilitation and vocational programs, attaining careers, financial status,

and social networks. Self esteem, as we established earlier, is an important aspect of employability, something that P2 struggles with:

P: I don't wanna live like, the rest of my family, I like, I don't know. I wanna be able to look in the mirror and be proud of myself.

I: Can you do that now?

P: No.

I: No.

P: One day.

I: So, when you look in the mirror, what do you, what do you think of yourself?

P: Um, that I can do better.

P4 found herself struggling with both anxiety and depression since moving to Canada:

So I started, I started to have an anxiety depression. And I start, oh what about my kids? I will go through like depression, take a lot of medicine, I will lose my life, my kids have nobody, they started to cry, oh why are you so sick? I felt very bad. I say no, I will get rid of my anxiety depression, I will never take any medicine, I will, uh, try harder to have anything here this is my rights, I will never give up.

This passage is another example of the strength that women can have in the face of negative and unjust life situations. P5 described how she struggled with gaining a sense of competence and independence in herself and how it interfered with her functioning as an adult:

Well I was wicked codependent on [daughter's name]. And I'm wicked codependent on on, not wanting to hurt people, um in the sense of codependency that way. It's what other people think and not what I feel. I let other people dictate how I'm gonna feel and and um and I didn't think I was codependent last year...

Like, what do you think, [daughter's name], I should do about this? You know, kinda sorta making her a parent instead of me making the decisions. and how do you think this is going to work? And then, when I do something, and her and [name 9] don't approve it's like should've asked them first! Should've asked them first. And I feel really sad cause I, maybe I made the wrong choice and they make me feel really bad if I do something that, that don't approve, they don't approve of. So it's, and I rely on them a lot, you know. Last week [name 9] got the groceries [sigh] so. You know, I'm the parent, I shouldn't be relying on my children for that kinda stuff.

In addition, Participants Five and Seven reported having had suicidal thoughts and behaviour:

And, you know, many, many a time in my walk, I've been suicidal. Many times.

And, if not for the kids, I'd probably be dead (P5)

...

I'm just glad that I never, I mean, when I was 11 I tried to commit suicide in the foster home. And I tried to commit suicide another time. I can't remember. But I, I'm so grateful it never happened cause uh I think of everything I could've missed. I tried to commit suicide when I left my kids (P7)

These findings are concerning, as research shows that disability and gender remain the highest predictors of unemployment, such as was found in a study by Smith (2007). Smith defines “disabled” as being: “unable to participate in activities (such as employment) due to impairment of body function and structure, or a disruption in the interaction with environment and personal factors are not able to experience optimal health in the broadest sense” (p. 127). In

her study of disabled men and women, Smith found that disability status and gender were the biggest predictors of unemployment, and that unemployment rates have not changed since 2002 (p. 133). Smith argues that this could be related to heightened levels of discrimination that people with disabilities face in the workplace and discrimination in hiring patterns, and 28% of her participants claimed they had been refused a job promotion due to their disabilities.

**Physical Disabilities.** As we established earlier, the literature has shown that people with disabilities are at a heightened risk for under and unemployment (PEI Provincial Government, 2011; PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 2012; and Matlin, 2012). Not only are disabled women more likely to be turned down for jobs they are eligible for, but their disabilities can physically reduce the range of tasks they are able to perform, depending on the nature of the disability. P2 perceived her physical disability as having limited her own career options: “But, trying to get a job, especially if you’re disabled, uh, is next to impossible”. Even something as simple as getting into a building proved difficult for P2, as she explains how the ramps are generally built for wheelchairs instead of the scooter that she used to get around:

Um, in order for me to get around, I have a scooter it’s just parked out there. I know that there’s a ramp, I tried to get up but it’s too long the machine, it’s more or less made for wheelchairs that ramp.

This is consistent with the work of Chouinard, (2010) who found that Canadian women with disabilities wanted poverty-reduction programs to look not to the individual for “improvement”, but rather to sociopolitical systems that create barriers to employment for the disabled. These women listed, as the most important of such barriers, inaccessible or unaffordable transportation, discrimination in hiring caused by negative attitudes toward the disabled, lack of affordable and or accessible housing, lack of access to education and job

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training, sexism in society, inappropriate hours that work opportunities offer, inaccessibility to job sites, discrimination against those who have not had enough prior job experience, lack of disability advocacy in the workplace, and the physical aspects of the disabilities themselves. Therefore, it is good that the PEI government is investing in affordable housing for the disabled, it would be useful to also raise awareness of the issues of attitudes toward and discrimination against people with disabilities. This in turn could reduce the internalization of blame for disabled people who have trouble finding work.

**Language Barriers.** P4 was unique in this sample for being the only participant who spoke English as a second language. She explains how this language barrier has gotten in the way of attaining a job that she wanted:

I applied for one year education program here as professional, to be a teacher, they told me no, you are international, your English it's not perfect to study education. I said how come because you don't know how to write. You should write an essay... I said but I already studied 7 years with English and it's not a big deal. I will study one year and maybe I will sign any paper, I will never get any graduation except I pass. Just to help me I can't wait without anything.

A study conducted by Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassan, and Lerner (2009) found that Jewish immigrants to Canada encountered similar difficulties as P4, including not being able to obtain employment in the same fields as those they trained in their home countries, resulting in living in a much lower socio-economic bracket than before they immigrated. One participant, for example, complained of the unreasonably high prices to have one's credentials checked and translated into English (p. 166). Additionally, all the participants of their study reported facing discrimination because English was their second language and believed the linguistic

expectations of Canada are too high, including the demand for foreigners to reduce their accents when speaking English or French (p. 166). In turn, these unrealistic expectations made the participants feel like Canadians looked down on them or questioned their intellectual abilities (Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassan, and Lerner, 2009). Consequently, it would be helpful for poverty eradication strategies in PEI to invest in immigrants' access to affordable English tutoring as well as education them ahead of time about the cost of becoming qualified for various jobs.

**Addictions and Substance Abuse.** The last topic we will discuss is the role of addictions and substance abuse in terms of employability. Three of the women in our study had struggled with addictions, all three with alcohol and one with other illicit drugs. P5 described how her abusive intimate partner exacerbated her drinking problem and how she managed to hide this struggle from others:

Oh yeah, we'd have fights and he'd just put out put out um a double in front of me and expect me to drink it and tell me he wanted things the way it used to be and and uh. So every time I tried to sober up that's what I'd get from him and and I lived with his abuse too so um. The alcohol was just part of our our way of surviving but masking too. And the house used to be spotless. You couldn't, you could never put a put a coat on a chair. Like you could literally spit off- eat off my floors because that was my way of hiding my drinking and so um.

P7 explained how her alcoholism came in the way of work and motherhood:

Um I couldn't even, I'd tee-in but I, I couldn't even work. Like I was, I was dependent on alcohol. It was bad. And I could barely get up in the morning with the kids and uh.

A study of Taiwanese youth came to the conclusion that substance use is more likely when employment is unrewarding with a heavy workload (Chen et al. 2006, p. 277). The results of this study were Correlational, which implies that the relationship between job satisfaction and drug use could be mutual. This is concerning since our participants have reported such negative feedback about their own careers as well as problems with substance abuse. It is also possible that these variables are connected with other forms of oppression, such as childhood abuse, intimate partner abuse, and growing up in poverty.

Healing from one addiction or substance abuse problem can be difficult, but many people struggle with two or more such problems at the same time. For example, during a period of healing and sobering up, P7 explained how she became addicted to gambling, and how it had similar negative effects on her life to alcoholism and cigarette smoking:

I got off the alcohol, got off the ciges- cigarettes. No I wasn't, I was smoking then. [sigh] But I got into gambling and I was like, Oh you stupid idiot! You just spent the last friggin money on frickin machines, you know, cursing myself. And I thought, What the heck am I doing?

P3 explained how her drinking resulted in social services taking her children away temporarily:

Um, actually when I said that uh, the kids were at their grandparents', that's why, because that one night that uh he wanted to drink so we had a couple of drinks and then we started wrestling then the cops, or the neighbor from upstairs or downstairs called the cops saying there was domestic violence which there was when we were wrestling. But uh, because we were both drinking they took the kids, on me. I blamed him but it's my fault too.

For all the destructive effects of substance abuse and addictions, all three of these women have reported sobering up, or healing from their addiction problems, a feat which shows once again the incredible strength of women who are faced with insurmountable odds. The journey to sobriety is no easy one. P7 explained how her detoxification program did not address the roots of her addiction problems, namely the physical and sexual abuse she experienced as a child:

When I was in detox I was just to help my drinking, to help me stop drinking. Not depend but not so much of the sexual abuse came up. Yeah. I couldn't really talk about it. Like I- when I first went to detox, you have to get up and say your name, you know, and. And I couldn't even get up there and say my name's [name 2], I'm an alcoholic. I'd say, My name's [name 2] and I'd bawl. I'd have to sit down, I couldn't finish it. And then, another time, I, I was there and they asked me to do a prayer, one of the prayers, and I could not. [half-laughs] It took a while to, quite a few years, to actually.

P7 struggled for many years to become sober:

I said I had to really look at myself and said what am I actually waiting for, like in my life? What's [sigh] if I continue to drink like this, what're, what's gonna happen next? Like. I get in, I just, I was starting to work, I was starting to feel better like not drinking every day. And I was starting to buy nice clothes and, you know, I said, you know, I'm just starting. What do I wanna do? So I decided. He [current romantic partner] was worth it. My kids. You know, sober up for my kids.

P3 became sober in order to get her children back from Social Services:

P: Put me in the drunk tank and then,

I: How much control did you have over what you wanted?



P: I did what they told me too.

I: Cause this is how to get the kids back.

P: Yep.

I: Okay. All right. Do you think you'd have done it if it weren't for the kids?

P: Uh, to myself I don't think that I had, a problem. Because like normal, well, for one thing, I normally don't drink when I'm around my kids. Like even if they were in bed or not.

Evidently, addictions and substance abuse can be devastating to women in poverty.

Furthermore, since drug use, including alcohol consumption, has been linked with previously established risk factors to employment, including intimate partner abuse (Roudsari, Leahy, & Walters, 2009; and Zavala & Spohn, 2010), healing from these addictions is essential in becoming healthy, independent, and employable. Therefore it seems wise that Islanders have requested the government improve funding for and access to addictions and detox services in PEI. After reviewing the section of this report on substance abuse and addictions, it is apparent that such programs need to be designed in a way that will encourage inclusivity of the diverse community of women on PEI and thus encourage them to share their stories with others and ultimately encourage healing.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The strengths of this study include the values of qualitative research and IPA – an in-depth, rich account of individual life stories and struggles and the opinions on poverty of those in poverty themselves. As opposed to quantitative research, we need not limit the participants to the one-word-answer questions we wish to ask, but allow them to explain in their own words what they believe is important to the research question at hand. Also, it is important to add to literature

that is PEI-specific; because each place has a uniqueness and culture of its own, it is valuable to research populations in the spaces where we live if we wish to learn what we can do to help. On the other hand, one important weakness of this study is the small sample size. It is difficult to generalize the accounts of six PEI women to the greater population of women in poverty. Also, as with all IPA research, there is space to question the choice of categories and which themes go in which categories. For example, one might argue that a person who is unable to use her hand to turn a standard doorknob is not being limited by her disability, but rather by society's standard of doorknobs that need to be turned in such a way. In this case, disabilities could go under the category of oppression, or societal standards, rather than personal struggles.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude this paper, an interpretative phenomenological analysis of six PEI women found that some of the major barriers to finding and maintaining healthy, sufficient employment for women in poverty are the relatively high standards that employers and businesses hold for job positions, various oppressions in society that keep the cycle of poverty going rather than help the poor get and stay out of poverty, the burdens and responsibilities of single parenthood, and the personal struggles that each individual woman experiences along her life journey. It is apparent that while the PEI government is attempting to make positive changes that will help to eradicate poverty, they will need help from other communal groups such as the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of women and Women's Network to continuously update the state of poverty, gain feedback as to whether or not specific policies are or are not working, and come up with new ideas based on what Islanders in poverty themselves are experiencing. Research is a helpful tool, and especially qualitative research in this case, because it allows us to get into the world of the individual, ask her what her experiences are without turning her into a number, and

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appreciate the individual circumstances she lives in every day without placing blind blame. Such research can be used to create conditions for change based on lived experiences.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Conversation Guide

Appendix 2: Supplemental Quotes

Appendix 3: Individual Theme Charts

**Appendix 1: Conversation Guide**

**Thank you for agreeing to participate in our project. One of the things we want to do is to get a sense of how your growing up years and your adult life have been, especially experiences you think have contributed to your life now with having low income.**

- 1) In thinking about your growing up years, what do you think is important for me to know?**
  - a. Family income indicators? Own house? Parental employment**
  - b. Family relationship dynamics?**
  - c. School experiences**
  - d. Other important experiences?**
- 2) In thinking about your adult years, what has been important?**
  - a. Educational attainment**
  - b. Employment**
  - c. Health**
  - d. Relationships**
  - e. Other?**
- 3) What are some of the strengths you have developed?**
  - a. Hopes for the future**
  - b. Thoughts about this project?**
- 4) Anything else we should talk about that is important for me to know for this project?**

## Appendix 2: Supplemental Quotes

\* This is where you would take subsets of the interview that correspond to that theme. It is a more expanded data set for readers to review.

### Theme One – Societal Standards of Employment Educational Level

#### *P2*

“And uh, I know it’s hard for people if you don’t have grade twelve, you can forget about getting work.”

P: I have grade eight.

I: Grade eight.

P: And then after I went to town to live, I decided, I got to do something with my life. So I went to, let me see, I went to night classes.

I: Okay.

P: And I had my grade eleven through that. And now I’m in the process of trying to get my grade twelve. Just something to say I graduated.

P: Yeah. Uh – this is two-twelve? I’m hoping by two-fourteen. I’m hoping. But I don’t have a memory like I used to. Math was always my difficulty.

I: Is that right.

P: Oh it’s difficult. Yeah.

“Yeah. I, I took a course writing stories for children I wanted to do something with my life that when I do pass on it would leave a legacy. Um, and then practum people to know what it was like when I was that age. And um, it’s hard, but um I’d love to be working.”

“On the [GED] application they asked what grade I was looking for. And I didn’t want, I told them I didn’t want to be selfish so I asked for grade ten. So I got my grade ten, but uh, and I went, I continued adult education at night, and [school name]. [Name] was the teacher back then. So, but now I’m still, I have, this is my, I wanna finish this. You know, it’s something I set out to do and I’m gonna finish it.”

I: How do you learn best?

P: Um, with someone... Uh, instruction. Always liked that... Uh, experience is a great teacher... Uh, I have a hard time as I’ve gotten older – to absorb everything.

#### *P3*

I: Okay. So did you finish high school? Or,

P: No.

I: No. So you did grade 11?

P: Well, not quite.

I: Not quite?

P: I have like the first semester.

I: Okay. Alright. And so, uh, you, would that, were you pregnant the first the first time when you left school or did you try to stay in school?

P: I stayed in school for the first semester which ended up in February and then I had [Child's name].

I: Oh that's a beautiful name. So then you had [child's name], was there any kind of program to help you stay in school? Or did you want to? What was going on?

P: Um, well at first I didn't but now, like, the years have come by and I'm just like, kicking myself. [Laughs].

"I like the group setting. Something that like, we like voice your opinions and like everybody has something, I just learn better. And hands-on."

### **P7**

I:[Yeah] So um did you, were you able to get, get Grade 12? Did you finish high school or did you leave high school?

P:[sigh] I quit. I got pregnant at 15. Quit school. I, I had to go to work at [community name] and I was hitch-hiking from [hometown] to [other community name] everyday.

"I, I quit Grade, I think 9, not quite 10. Or I just started the 10, I quit. And I been, Oh my God, I went through so, I went back to [college name] I don't know how many times. And I wrote my GED, I'm sure six times... All I need is my math."

"I wrote it [GED]. It took, I don't know, I don't know how many times I had to write it, but I finally passed Social Studies and Science, which were hard. And math. Thank you. And the math, I'm only like 10 points away. You need 450, I have 440. In math."

"I said, hopefully I get Grade 12 before my grandson[half-laughs] He's 15 [half-laughs] and he just turned 16 so. Yeah."

"I wanted to put my name in for uh Environmental, the Environmental Technology course. But math and formulas and [sigh] just way over my head. It was like, goouu."

## **Unhealthy and Unreasonable Work Conditions**

### **P2**

"Oh my goodness – to get out of [hospital name], I said I had experience as a waitress. Huh, that was hilarious. I uh, had applied for a job at the [restaurant name], and I went in to work this day. I – there was two or three orders. At the same table. Anyway I took the wrong order and, when the order came to take out to the tables I took them to the wrong table... I lost the job pretty quick."

### **P3**

I: Yeah. That's neat. Were there anything about your work experiences that uh took away from your self-esteem? Or anything that undermines your confidence?

P: Um, just the, the not working fast enough.

I: They thought you weren't fast enough.

P: Yeah.

I: Kay. Because, of the way they were saying, you know, 'pick up your speed' or, whatnot.

P: Yeah.

I: But you were learning.

P: Yeah. Just wasn't learning fast enough.

I: Do you think that was fair?

P: Um, no. Not really.

"I, from the [hotel], um, right then and there like you had a week and you had to do like eight rooms each day, just the way they did it. And they'd think like 'oh do everything'. And then the next week you had fifteen rooms. So and that's how fast it was. So I'm just like, just got bombarded I guess."

I, the [hotel] fired me because, um, I missed a shift and didn't call in. And they were like, 'no'.

I: So why didn't they give you leeway?

P: Well I was working on the,

I: That's just the way it is?

P: Yeah. Yeah it was stated in the booklet. And it's almost automatic fire if you don't show up for your shift and if you don't call.

I: So did you not call because you didn't want to work there anymore?

P: Oh no, I did.

I: Oh you did call?

P: No, no, I didn't call but uh, um, my phone went dead and I had to charge it and it didn't get charged in time for turn it back on before. And where I was staying didn't have a phone.

I: Right.

P: Yeah. It was my fault.

I: Well, relatively speaking, if you don't have a phone, I mean, you know, you can see how that's,

P: Yeah but I could have went to a store and used a phone.

I: Yeah.

P: There's, there's other ways around but I just didn't take it.

"And four hours, like each week, but it wasn't just like the four hours. It was like, if you like 'oh, I'll call you whenever I need you'. Like it wasn't like you know said 'ok well Wednesday you come in from like, 2-close'... Just I was like the prep cook for when somebody else couldn't get there at the last minute. But yeah he hired me on at first and I was there like, it was just, like an hour here, two hours there and then he'd get me to go to his house and clean."

#### **P4**

"I don't like it, it's not a shame to be a care giver, just to explain the idea, but it is like bad for me because like it is a lot of physical work and it is away from my skills, my education, my experience. You know, like put yourself in my shoes, you really studied a lot in your country, you paid a lot of money, and you were on the top of the community in your country, like you got three cars. You got housekeeper service, and you came here – you do the opposite exactly so even I don't know how to do. Last night they ask of me, a lady she wants me to wear her socks. I

don't know how to do. I tried with her, she said 'no, I don't like, this is not nice, I don't', because I don't know how to do even, you know? ... I just get all that. Oh, I'm so shy. I never tried that in my life, you know?"

"And they are asking me to do, to do, it's too hard for me. And I go, like, I go back home, like 7:30 or 8 o'clock, I just sleep up to twelve, so like three or two hours, three or four, because like I should get up and do, make the food for the kids, do laundry, a lot of stuff like that, so it's very very tired for me. I'm so tired."

**P5**

"Um so I worked in the field in the States for and I graduated. I worked at a Girl Guide, Girl Scout camp the first summer after I graduated and then I went to a printing company. A big printing company. And um was there for three years. I guess. Took a, took a piece of skin off my finger, went down four layers, I caught it in a machine."

"We went to work the next day and the place was locked up, tight as a drum. Bankrupt. So I didn't have a job..."

**P7**

"I was uh I'd get up and go to work from 9 to 5. I'd get home, I'd rest and then I'd iron and then I'd work from 6 to midnight."

I: So long, hard hours. Yeah. Yeah.

P: [Yeah][Yeah] I mean helped, the extra money helped but I, I did it for two years and I was like wiped. I was like, I can't do this anymore.

I: [Yeah] Exhausted.

**P9**

P: I was so desperate oh, I guess it's be two years ago. Time seems to go faster, I mean I'm not very good at dates just, you know life goes so quickly. I was so desperate I did a cleaning job, and there's not, not, I'm just, make it clear that there's nothing wrong with doing cleaning. But I went with this cleaning job and it was so bad that she would not allow us to use gloves to clean toilets because it would slow us down. Then we'd have to clean toilets with just our hands and a rag, it was just awful. And, oh my goodness sometimes I'd clean sixteen toilets in a day, it was just unbelievable. And in the end I couldn't pull up my bed sheets up, like I couldn't pull them up.

I: Cause your hands were so sore?

P: And I think it was the chemical stuff I was getting sick.

### **Underemployment and Insufficient Pay**

#### ***P3***

“I left that because um, like they promised me like, full hours and I only got like 30-hours, three weeks and it went down. And at the last I had four hours, once a week. It’s not a lot. So I’m like, it’s not worth it.”

#### ***P4***

“Uh, [name], some of her friends said, ‘oh we need somebody to work, or babysitter or whatever. Because right now I just have, eh, part time job. It’s five nights every two weeks, and ten dollars each.”

“I’m so tired. And just ten dollars before taxes. See. So nothing at all.”

#### ***P5***

“By the time I left the State jobs, I was making 9 bucks an hour. That was it. So it wasn't a lot of money.”

#### ***P7***

“[I get] uh 40 hours a week and it's only a 14 week project. Just enough for you to get your Unemployment. “

“I have to do a lot of, try to do a lot of crafts to make extra money. You know, 20 here and 20 there or. That's what I do in my spare time.”

P:I wouldn't be able to do it.

I:Yeah. You couldn't pay your rent or-

P:I probably could pay the rent. Um I definitely wouldn't be able to get cable, which I don't have. And I wouldn't be able to smoke or drink, which is good probably [half-laughs] But there are people that are making minimum wage that do drink and smoke. I don't know how they do it. And yeah. Well you, you could live but there is no, there'd just be money for rent and your, like I drive a car. And thank God I have no problems with my car. Um just gas and insurance.

“For the last five years, where I was trying to just make it, you know. And, with my wages, cause I'm making minimum wage and and, it's fine, I can barely get by with minimum wage, but with uh, when you're on Unemployment, it's almost like you're half of what you get when you're minimum wage. Like, yeah. And then you have to readjust, lower, to make it for that, til you go back to work.”

“Yeah. Threw out my TV cause I can't afford cable so I said, Well, what's the sense of having a TV? I got rid of it. And so now I just worked, I changed my living room into kinda like a, I'm trying to change it into a workshop cause I do like baskets and I do beadwork. And then um mosaic so I wanna have like a table for one of those things.”

“But as far as um my, when you're living like this, um I have Native Council, not Native Council, Indian Affairs covers my, like if I have dental. And they'll cover some medication. Thank, I just thank God for that because I would never, you know. My teeth'd be falling out before I could get them fixed. In order to spend that kind of money. And medication, you, if you



had an illness you wouldn't be able to, what would you do?[half-laughs] Live in your car? [half-laughs]”

**P9**

I: Um, so you're currently working full time at the First Baptist?

P: No, it's just part time.

“It was so bad I didn't have money for milk, and I was absolutely had nothing else to sell. I didn't know what, what to do. I literally didn't know what to do. And there're things like, I was excited about Salvation Army, they had their, their fuel cause we were getting down and empty. But in order to get that you had to be there in person. So that would've meant I had to take a day off work at this cleaning job and that wasn't gonna happen. This is what I mean where practical things, we think oh, well, you know, uh you could get that and get half a tank of fuel or whatever. But if you're working, what do you do? Miss a day's work? What're you gonna do then? You get the fuel but you don't have money for the gas to go to work the next day.”

**Expectation to Volunteer**

**P4**

And I started to work volunteer just to be beside my kids... So uh, I just serving them breakfast there and they need, it's multi-culture rule, sometime they ask for any help I can go. Yeah because I'm free after I quit my volunteer at the clinic.

**P9**

P: But I work hours and hours of overtime with no pay. And and, mm – uh, it's, it's certainly encouraged we'll say.

I: To work without getting paid for what you're working?

P: Yeah. My, the minister gives me work at an hour and a half after I'm supposed to be gone.

I: Oh my goodness.

P: Yeah.

I: So you don't feel like you're having much power in the employment that you have.

P: No. None whatsoever.

**Theme Two – Oppression**

**Hospitalization**

**P2**

P: I was put in hospital. And then I was put in uh, put into care.

...

I: So, what happened that you were in [hospital name]?

P: Um – just plain badness.

I: You were –

P: Um. Everything was done for me before and I had no other place to go. So they put you right there to be assessed and, you know. And that's it. Until they find a home for yah.

I: Foster home?

P: Or they put you into care when you're an adult. So –

I: So how long did you live in [hospital name] for?

P: Uh, first time was eight months. I got discharged and then I went, I was in community care, no wait now – all together it was about, uh, about – a year and a half.

I: A year and a half.

P: If it was to run consecutive.

I: And how old to how old? Approximately.

P: Let me see. Early twenties to my mid twenties.

...

I: So what happened when you were twenty-five or in your mid twenties to, have you not going back there?

P: Uh, well I was in there so I saw how some people would treat it. And it wasn't nice.

“Yep. I just more or less wanted to get the heck out of [hospital name]. I figured I was in there long enough.”

“Yep. Uh – [doctor's name] was my doctor. And there wasn't a patient out at [hospital name] who liked him.”

P: Uh, you hear, stories you know, well they do have cells out there, you know, they lock people up... Me and this other girl. Uh, we took off one day – we decided we're going to town. So we both went into town. And at that time, [doctor's name], or some of them, sent the cops after us. They took us back to the hospital. Um – uh let me see what else was there – then, they locked us up three days and two nights. That was just one little room with a little bed on the floor and a mattress.

I: What would happen to you in those rooms?

P: Nothing you'd try to get out and that, but you couldn't

“But anyway, I refused to go down there [to work] one day. So [doctor name] says, ‘I'll fix her’. He put me, locked me up again for three days and two nights. Uh, to make me learn a lesson, made me more angry and irritable... I still to this day have a lot of hatred for him.”

### **P5**

P: 18 months of a lot of hard, hard work. Um and then, in order to even fit in the program, I'm sure you've probably heard about it, but in order to fit in the program you have to have a title. So not only did I have bipolar diagnosis slash depression, I had um, what's that called? Pers-borderline personality disorder. So not a-

I: [Yeah][Ok][Alright] So your knapsack's pretty full.

P: It's full. [half-laughs] It's full and uh, when I first found out about the borderline personality stuff I'm like, I'm not taking that cause I don't need, I'm don't want another title. Uh I don't need another thing on my shoulders to carry, you know. I'm a recovering alcoholic, I've got bipolar now and now I've got borderline. Woo-hoo. [half-laughs]

**Childhood Abuse****P3**

I: Yeah. Wow. So, so um, your grandma had, was looking after your cousin and you and your two brothers. And then so she was locking you outside and, what else? Was she,

P: She hit us all.

I: Hit you, yeah. So then, what happened?

P: Um, I went to school and the, like, the person, they get. Well like she came and she was drunk. Yeah.

P: Uh, two months the first time. And then we moved to my grandparents' house and she ended up like hitting us all the time.

I: Your grandmother?

P: Yeah. And locking us outside.

**P5**

“It's some abuse stuff in there and you know she's [my mother] pound the crap out of me and stuff like that.”

I:[Ok]So the abuse, you said your mom was physically abusive.

P:Oh, yeah.

I:Was there also sexual abuse in there?

P:Outside of the home. Well I shouldn't say outside of the home. Um there was there was a lot outside the home. Um pretty, pretty, for me, pretty violent. Um but then there was my grandfather too who um just certain um come to terms with. I only remember my grandfather's stuff probably two years ago.

“Well, I, I have a lot of, yeah no idea. You have no idea.[sigh] My experience, it's...you know. It started when I was a kid and continues to grow. And I share, not that this has anything to do with poverty, but I like to share it cause it's a reminder for me. Um I hated, I hated my mother when I sobered up. I hated her! Because she beat the crap out of me, she tried to stab me. Um and one time one of her boyfriends, she said I'm gonna kill you, little bastard! And [half-laugh] I never remembered this sort of stuff til I sobered up, I kid you not. And she said you, I'm gonna kill you, little bastard! And I was kinda stuck in a little corner in my bedroom, I couldn't get around her. She was a big lady. I couldn't get around her. And she lunged with a knife and her boyfriend, at the time, grabbed her hand and took the knife out of her hand. But she would've stabbed me[half-laugh] I would've been dead too then, you know. Um but I hated her for all that stuff. I hated her for picking me up and throwing me in cold showers and bouncing me off bathroom tiles and um.”

**P7**

P:[A lot of] Well, when we're grown up, we tell our parents what I re-, what I remember was a lot of fighting. [sigh] My dad would leave mom literally spattered in blood and broken and we'd be there picking her up, cleaning up the blood and cleaning her up. That's basically what our childhood-

I:What you remember. Yeah. Yeah.

P:[Yeah] Like one time she [sigh] she walked in, uh they were fighting. Well when they fought, the older sisters said, Get upstairs, but we were like sitting on the stairway. But you can hear, they heard the punching and the fighting and the whatever. And when he slammed the door, that's when we ran down to see, you know, she was alright and-

I:[Yeah]Were you afraid that she was dead?

P:One time I, I actually thought she was. But I can't, I said, I was the first one to get up in the morning and I came downstairs, the lights were all on, the door was wide open. But the night before, you know, we heard the fighting and everything, so I was-. Yeah. So I crept down, I was only about, would've been about 9 that I remember, and I was looking around the corner, just to make sure he wasn't there. So I looked around the corner, everything was broken glass, there was like pop cap covers, mirror covers, ashtrays, they were everywhere. And I went in, I'd seen her laying in the living room so I went in [sigh], checked up on her on the floor and tried, I was like, Mom? Mom? And she, I couldn't, couldn't hear nothing. I was like sure she was dead. Like cause she wasn't breathing, I couldn't hear nothing. And so I just tried to pull her hair cause her hair was like all like down here. And I tried to move her hair but it was so full of blood that it was like sticky and hard to move. I was there, MOM! And she was, Ughhh. Like that, right. So I ran upstairs and I got my older brother, he was, might been about 14, and I told him, Get up and come get Mom cause she, I thought she was dead. He's there, [name 2]! Get out of my room [laughs]! I was there, Come on! You gotta get up! Really, [name 4], you have to get up! Yeah. So it was a lot of that growing up.

I:[Yeah][So you supposed?][Yeah][Oh, yeah][Yeah] And and any kind of support like what, what help was there?

P:There was none. And you know what? I, my father was very, he's a pedophile, but-

I:[None] So he sexually assaulted you?

P:All the kids. But I never thought the boys were assaulted, I thought it was just girls.

I:But he assaulted your brothers as well?

P:Yeah.

I:Yeah.

P:Because I said, I say I don't want girls, when I have babies. And I don't wanna have and um and I cursed that I was a girl. Said I should've been a boy. I said boys don't get abused lalala. Yeah.

I:[Mhmm] But you found that differently.

P:Yeah.

“The abuse like I, I never thought it was boys. I thought it was cause I grew up wishing I was never a girl cause of the abuse. And I uh, you know, even when my daughter was born, I was like, I don't want her. I tried to give her away to my sister. I was just like, it's just, I don't know, I can't describe the feeling, kinda weird.”

“My sister got slapped once. Like cause we were, you know, she had a argument with the foster mother. And the foster mother slapped her across the face and I came in and I said, Don't you ever ever hit my sister again.”

P:[Oh, yeah] Like my, I told my foster mom, I said, Mom, we can't go back cause, can't make him not.

I:Did she know all that he'd done to you, including the-

P: She said she had no say. But she's gonna pray that, you know, he wouldn't get us back. She said [sigh] I've told your social worker.

I: So the social worker knew that this man sexually assaulted, physically assaulted and verbally abused his kids? [makes whistling noise]

### **Intimate Partner Abuse**

#### ***P2***

P: He put one hammering on me and that was enough.

I: Oh.

P: Very abusive.

I: Okay. Alright.

P: I didn't see that.

I: So you have an experience of leaving an abusive situation.

P: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

P: And um, he uh, his aunt brought him up. And sure she liked to have a drink and so did he. But um – there was some conflict there between him and her... Yeah, but his aunt brought him up and – I'll never forget that night as long as I live. Um – you remember the old-fashioned doors they used to have? The pure wooden doors? Um, he had one, there was one on his bathroom. So, when he grabbed me, he was gonna, he hit his mother. He split her nose, just because she was drinking. She was drunk. But, he split her nose, and I said 'stop that', so he halled off and grabbed me and he just, I'm a big lady, so he grabbed me by the clothes and he just pulled me back and pounded me against the door. I had a bruise the full size of my breast.

I: Wow.

P: Uh, I walked out with the clothes on my back. I didn't want to, but um, I wasn't going to stay and take another pounding that night.

I: Yeah.

P: I didn't go back. I was one of the wise ones.

#### ***P3***

P: Not financially. Um, the person that I was seeing there that was a friend at the last of it he was being really mean.

I: Did he ever hurt you physically? Or,

P: Yep.

I: And probably verbally too?

P: Yep.

I: Yeah. So, did you,

P: I gave up all my friends for him and he cheated on me anyway, so,

I: What does that mean you gave up all your friends?

P: He wouldn't let me talk to anybody.

I: Oh okay so he controlled your life.

P: Yep. It was in a good way cause I needed to get it, in one way, in one way it wasn't.

I: So he thought that the friends you had were,

P: Not good for me.

I: Okay. And in terms of, their habits, or

P: Because they would, no it was just because like, they'd go out, and drink. And if they see him out at the bar with another girl, they'd come and tell me. And he didn't like that.

I: Okay.

P: Yep.

I: So he, he was trying ostracize, or isolate you.

P: Yep. Yeah he used to climb in my balcony and everything.

I: He used to what?

P: Climb in my balcony, my windows and everything to make sure I was home and not with anybody.

I: Oh my. So do you feel safe from him now?

P: Oh yeah.

I: So he doesn't still stalk you?

P: Well last week I went out and he was there, he was calling me a whore and this and that. I'm like, 'you're the one to talk. Look at who had a girlfriend for two months of the relationship.' So.

I: I'm sorry.

P: Why?

I: That he did that to you.

P: Oh. It's my fault. Everything that happens in my life is, is because I let it happen.

I: Well, I'm sorry that he called you nasty names for no good reason.

P: Oh he's the one I told him he should look in the mirror. It's true.

I: But do you feel safe now? Or,

P: Oh yeah.

I: He's not dangerous to you in any way?

P: He wasn't really dangerous in the first place like we used to wrestle all the time, I'm not scared of him.

I: Yeah. So did you press charges against him when he assaulted you?

P: No.

I: No. Any particular reason why you didn't call the police or whatever?

P: No. It's, I don't know. It was, oh it's a long story. Yeah very long story.

I: Sometimes er, sometimes I do work with uh, on other projects too, and it's also on intimate partner violence. And sometimes women don't like to call about an abusive man for fear that they'll lose their kids. Was that part of your fear? Now I don't, this is confidential between you and I.

P: Um, actually when I said that uh, the kids were at their grandparents', that's why, because that one night that uh he wanted to drink so we had a couple of drinks and then we started wrestling then the cops, or the neighbor from upstairs or downstairs called the cops saying there was domestic violence which there was when we were wrestling. But uh, because we were both drinking they took the kids, on me. I blamed him but it's my fault too.

#### **P4**

I: Yeah so is your ex spouse not entitled or obligated to support you in any way?

P: It should be but eh, this is another problem, he said I don't need your kids anymore. Your kids, you know, like I made them myself.

I: So he can do that?

P: Uh yeah in [country of origin] the man can do whatever he wants, and he already married another woman right now so he has a life, so this is something also hurt my kids so I am trying as

I said in the meeting to just be, uh, involved my kids. I don't have to say expression, like, uh, to surround them, you know?

**P5**

P: Um and then I would go to [person's house] and come home and if, [name 3] and I were having a disagreement, he'd sit and throw a double-shot of whiskey in front of me... Oh yeah, we'd have fights and he'd just put out put out um a double in front of me and expect me to drink it and tell me he wanted things the way it used to be and and uh. So every time I tried to sober up that's what I'd get from him and and I lived with his abuse too so um. The alcohol was just part of our our way of surviving but masking too... and when the abuse started happening with [name 3], my ex-husband now, um I'd been meeting with [doctor's name] for addictions. And she was saying that that what [name 3] was doing to me was abuse and and I said, No, I don't, I don't think so because I grew up with my mother um telling me that, you know, he has a license now, he has a license, he can do what he wants kindof thing.

P: [name 3] believed I belonged at home.

I: Oh! I thought you weren't allowed to work because of some immigration-

P: [No] [No] It was [name 3]. You belong at home. And so then he would give me a couple of hundred bucks and tell me to go buy groceries with it. And so and one night, I went out one night and I said I'd be 10, 10 or 10:30 or something and I came in about quarter after 11 and the lights were all shut off and the doors were all locked and [sigh] and...he locked me out. Dead-bolted the doors and locked me out, the son of a bitch! [half-laughs]

I: [Ok] [Ok] [And-] [laughs] Wow.

P: So.

I: So he was very controlling of you-

P: Major control freak. Major control freak. And I would have a fight and he'd go to the bar and talk to his mother and father about us. He'd go to the bar and and he'd come back home and have his, pardon the way I talk about this cause [sigh], you know, have his way and leave me, my legs, my legs and everything all bruised and.

I: So was he sexually abusive to you then?

P: Mhmm. Yeah and I didn't know that's what that was at the time.

I: Cause you didn't want to have sex?

P: Cause I didn't wanna have sex. And-

I: [Yeah] And he just, he didn't ask, he just took his-

P: Just took his- yep. Yep. And um- it's ok. You can't change it. But he uh he was pretty bad. And um, when I first started having all that stuff going on, um with the minister at the church was really involved and it wasn't my church but, because that was [name 3]'s church and she started the whole [half-laughs] when she asked me if I had an alcohol problem, um I called her one night and I just said uh I don't, I don't know what to do. And she said, what's going on? I said, well, um during our our sexual stuff, I was having flashbacks of floating above, above it and watching [name 3], saw the person um fighting over me. It was freaky and so she, she talked to me for a little bit and she called me the next day and she said, well you gotta charge [name3], you gotta charge. I said, I can't do that. I'm living here and, you know. Um because it was so bad that my head was sore and I was crying and and she goes, that's like, that's more than rape and you need to charge him on that. I'm like, I can't. That's not good for the girls, it's not, it wouldn't be good. Um wouldn't be good for me, it wouldn't be good for him, you know. And it, it, it was pretty bad.

And that was around the time I started going back to the [centre name 2], before she cut me off. That was before I got, before I knew, I didn't know until 2000 when I finally left and all three, [name 4] was two. Um and then he come to the apartment and do the same thing in my apartment so my apartment didn't even feel safe. And um was pretty [sigh] bad.

I:[I'm sorry]So he was breaking into the apartment?

P:No, he'd come into the apartment to see the kids and put the kids to bed and take advantage. [sigh] Um, he was, it was it was difficult. And...yeah. Took a while to find a place that was mine and and a voice where I could tell him to leave. Home. Took, took a really long time and and uh, he uh, anyway. What, what do I do, you know? I can't do anything about it so. That, right after I left him in 2000, and I was in um, I guess that was 2000. Um...I filed, started to file for my divorce and stuff and he wouldn't sign the papers and there was nothing wrong with us and that I wasn't an alcoholic and yadda yadda yadda and all this stuff and. It took uh my divorce didn't go through until 2003 [sigh]

I:[Yeah]Three years. Wow.

P:And there was never any support. He never gave me any support payments and until 2003 or 2004, when everything was put in place. And um, it was, I don't know. I don't like to dwell on the past[sigh]. Kindof upsets [sigh] me.

### **P7**

“Whenever I started [sigh] there was some point he came up to me and I was doing the dishes, cause we were like teenager, teenagers in love right all the time. And, you know, if we couldn't go by each other without reaching out and kissing or, you know, just playing and play things and one day I was doing dishes and he came up behind me and he was like, fondling like my breasts and I'm there, ah, I was like, Don't do that, my hands were in water. And he's like, What do you mean don't do that? Like it was like kinda being rough. He was like, I do that anytime I want, these are mine. And he goes, If I want to touch here or like really rough and he goes, I'll touch down there, there's not a goddamn thing you could, that's mine! And it just, his attitude, something triggered and it was like [sigh] I, I felt like screaming at him, Don't, like get your filthy friggin hands off me, dirty pig! And [half-laughs] and then after that it was like, every time he came near me it was like, Oh [sigh] Then I had the creeps, like creepy feeling creeps. I don't know what happened. Something did.”

“But he would fight, you know. Cause I know if I would've took the kids and went to [community name], I would've been pretty well, probably pounded every day by him. I just didn't have that strength to fight him. “

### **P9**

P: Well the major catalyst was um, when we fled my husband. The situation was not safe for the children and myself. I would have stayed in the position to put up with things if he had been good to the children but he wasn't.

I: Did he sexually assault them?

P: Um – I wouldn't say he went that far but he certainly took liberties and he was uh, physically rough with them. Absolutely mentally abusive. Absolute terrifying them. Um, you know I could leave him alone with the kids, couldn't do it, and um, physically bruising them up and the whole thing, but he worked in the system, he worked in the government and he, he warned me for years nobody would believe me, I was a stay-at-home mom. But I had rentals as well, I had, always



some form of income coming in. So, um, when we separated, we went to the Anderson house the whole bit, um – he did have a position of power, he was, he was working the government. He, he worked with the social workers, he worked with all that. And he was very bright, and smooth, and, there was a typical stereotype that that kind of person's going to be running around in boots open, drinking and cursing. He's smooth and he's slick and he's bright. And um, manipulative, and able to turn things around is his, is his benefit. And um, it's about power and control. He vowed he'd bankrupt me and he did. I didn't fall for bankruptcy but the next thing is called a proposal and he wouldn't settle, so I couldn't sell our properties and then I couldn't repair them and then the pipes burst and then the furnace burst and then I was trying to handle everything. My mother was dying, I came down with double pneumonia, he was, he was taking me to court. I can't tell you how many times we went to what I call small court where you are in the chambers with the judge, I can't. Ten, fifteen times? I don't know. It took five years to get a separation agreement out of him, and, he represented himself for years, that's a new battleground when one represents himself and they call up your lawyer and hear them out. Your lawyer is required by law to interact with him. You know, they're protecting their end as well. Thousands and thousands of dollars every week. Every bit of pension I had lost, and he um, and I did everything not to battle him... 2002 we fled, we got an agreement in 2007, I think it was, yeah. 2007, he doesn't see the children one-on-one, he hasn't seen them in years one to one. Which, in itself is – as, as one of the girls said, they were in the car, both in their car seats and one of the girls said 'what day is it? What day is it?' cause they used to be terrified to go with him. They'd have to go a couple hours with him on Tuesdays and a couple hours on Thursdays, and \_\_\_ looked at [daughter] and she said, oh there's not worries now, every day is a good day.

P: I was trying hold things together. I had properties before I was married which he and I couldn't sell them because he insisted that he be put on as co-owner, which I thought was okay, you know, it's not like I can go into this thing and then it's all mercenary, you know, he was to be my partner. Um, and I saw the signs but I, he always came back and – I think if I had been more assertive and more, not so nice, that I would have said, told him to breathe off, and that would have been the end of it.

I: So he was abusive to you from the early days of the marriage?

P: Well it really started when we got married. But then you'd meet him and he'd slick, and, you know nothing he wouldn't do to win you over. And it, I had relief when I finally realized what it was, charming, when you meet him. And if he saw something that was a little, mmhm I thought you were going to meet me here or whatever, and he'd just flick it off or deny it. And then he'd get angrier and nasty. But the final thing and the one thing that always was paramount – it was never his fault. And I think that was the big thing that I carried away with me. But anyway, um, we, we did the best we can and I was able at least to get a proposal but, and, even things like half the pension which I was entitled to, he didn't think I deserved it, and then, you either fight with the lawyer at a thousand dollars a week or you give him what he wants. And even in, then you'd give him what he wants, and then he'd leave and then he'd come back and he'd want something else. It was all about power and control. So anyway, um, that brought us to where we were here, he even had something in the thing I can only be so many kilometers out of the city or I have to compensate him, there's just nothing I wouldn't, my main goal was to do the best I could to protect the children. That was, that was my main thing. I even thought about, like, could I arrange our own death and escape?

“Yeah. And he’d, he’d stalk us outside. He’d be outside the house and then he’d be, he’d show up and he seemed to know our every move. He still knows what we do.”

### **Growing up in Poverty**

#### ***P3***

I: Okay. Yeah. Yeah. So were your growing up years, um, also without a lot of income or, where would you sort of, how would you describe that in terms of income?

P: Uh, we were always on social assistance.

I: Okay. Alright. And it sounds like there were always some addictions, problems with grandma. What about your mom?

P: Um, actually both of my parents were big alcoholics. And my mom has a gambling problem.

#### ***P5***

“And I seen her um, for what it's worth, I never wanted to be like her but I'm on assistance and I I watched her reach for one program and then reach for another program and reach for another program. All for one thing. Um kinda like Christmas time used to be um you know she'd get from this group and then she'd get from this group and then kinda make Christmas her Christmases, I guess. I, I, you know, for a long time I thought that was her way of expressing her love for us and everything until I started my poet's, writing and I realized it was just a it was just materialistic crap.[half-laughs] It wasn't, it was just fake and it was kinda phoney, I mean. So um I never wanted to be like her but in some ways I am because, you know, I'm on assistance and um. Never wanted to be but that's just kinda how it happened.”

I:[Yeah][Yeah] [A little] Um, financially, how was your family? It sounds like it didn't go well.

P:[We weren't] We weren't.

I:And then did your mom own a car? A truck or a van or?

P:Mmmmmmmmmmm she had a car at one point.

I: So it was just sorta sporadic.

P:Mhmm.

#### ***P7***

“Yeah] We did-, we, we kinda didn't, like we used to have much, I guess this is when we were in foster homes.”

I: And uh this is about how financially well-off was your family and it sounds like not at all well in the growing up years. And did your parents own a car or a truck or a van or anything like that?

P:[Yeah, I'm divorced][half-laughs] I don't ever remember us having. No.

### **Social Assistance**

#### ***P2***

P: We're way under the poverty line. Way way under. My income last year was just under ten thousand dollars to live on, for the whole year. So you tell, these people expect us to survive on this, you know?

I: What does it look like trying to live on ten thousand a year?

P: It looks very very bad. Um. There's a lot of things I would like to go to, but can't. Because you cannot afford it. And you know, I was able to meet parts of my family this summer who, somebody that was very generous, and they were up in Toronto, and it was my first time I got to see Toronto. And the, but the poverty is really really bad. And, more and more people go being under the poverty line, so, it's not looking good.

“It's a struggle. I really struggle to get up and get dressed and there's some days that you don't want to. But you have to give yourself a push.”

P: I'm on Social Assistance and Disability Support. Um, in order for me to get around, I have a scooter it's just parked out there... So social services pays my rent. Uh, I have about – I guess three to four, not even four hundred to live on for the month.

I: How do you do that?

P: You can't. You have to. You have to cut, make a lot of cut-backs. You have to.

I: So what do you cut out?

P: Entertainment. They pay for our taxis, medical only. Um, if it's a rainy day and I have to go to the [mental health support centre], they will pay for the taxi at there. But they had to get special permission for that. Um – it's – you know and the sad thing about it, it's gonna get worse unless something's done.

I: Mhm.

P: So.

I: Yeah. Yeah. So do you have a phone?

P: I have a cell phone I cut my landline out.

I: Yeah. So do you ever use your phone service?

P: Uh, I have [phone company] because the bill got so high I couldn't pay it. So –

I: So what do you do now, just pay as you go?

P: No, this is uh through [phone company], my phone. And my disability worker uh, from Disability Support, she's paying for it. So, I wait, if I have any calls to make, um, long distance or anything I do to in the evening. And try not to make no calls. But, um –

I: Right. But all your family's in Toronto.

P: Yeah.

I: So you have to use long distance.

“So, you know. And I didn't realize back then either, it took a long time for it to sink in that everything you get from Welfare, they deduct it off your cheque, penny by penny... So you don't get anything free from Welfare. You don't. And people think, oh, they paid my rent. Big deal, it still comes out of your cheque... You know, so much every month. You know, so there's nothing, it's not nice being on Welfare. But I'm glad it's there that, if you need it... But it's not enough. No, it's, way way under. You know. And then they wonder why there are so many homeless people... I can see why there is now. Back then I couldn't... But I can see why there's so many people not, that's living on the street... You know, cause they can't afford to live by themselves... It's sad. Very sad.”

P: So, I've applied for widow's allowance and his Canada Pension, but I've also applied for, uh, his army pension, if he was given one when he got out. When he retired.

I: So when will you find out if you got that or not?

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P: Don't know. Could take months. Could take years.

I: Oh, okay.

P: But, uh, I've applied for the widow's allowance which is no problem. And his Canada Pension.

I: Alright. So do you know when that will come through for you?

P: Uh, it's gotta be a month at least that I've applied, so –

I: Oh okay.

P: I should hear something any time now.

I: So what do you think about that?

P: I like to, I'm glad.

### **P3**

“Uh, people that struggle a lot. Like people who go to the Salvation Army just to get bread or eggs. Just, I do that, but, um, my kids were living with their grandparents there while I got situated last three months so I'm just getting situated from September and uh, so, just getting that all done. And uh, I know what it's like.”

I: Yeah. Now if you work four hours, well, does it, does it help you at all to work four hours? Or does that only penalize you? In terms of overall income.

P: Um there's, um, no, if you work more than, if you work, I think you're allowed to make a hundred and some dollars a month with the,

I: With social assistance or EI?

P: Social assistance.

I: Okay.

P: Without them docking you.

### **P4**

“I have no money at all right now. The other ten thousand I was paying the rent, food, electricity, for internet. Then I lost everything, no more money. I, eh, I was living in a hotel, so I have no money today. I put an ad on Kajiji, I uh, a single mom with two kids, I like, eh to have any apartment but please four hundred or less, because only my income right now, child tax benefit it is 500 for the two kids. So I said I can pay for the rent and for the food I can go to food bank, I have no choice.”

“So I went, it's very very nice apartment, they just taking 25% from me. From, they said, from child tax benefit, they will say this is my income. And if I have a job, they will take from my job. Because it's not allowed here to take from child tax benefit anything it's not allowed in Canada. But because I have no money, so, I said oh yeah sure, I am already planning to pay four hundred, so just to take one hundred or one hundred fifty is no problem.”

“I am not eligible for EI because I should have 900 hours.”

“Yeah. So I'm trying to find another job right now, I even asked Sara if any project, like eh the girl circuit, I can apply for if it will be like 500 also so it would be okay for me.”

P: I phoned them I tried with them you already came with your money, and I signed a paper I will never have any social assistance.

I: Is that forever. Is that, I mean, is there not an end point for that?

P: Uh they told,

I: Say you're here and you're an old, old woman, you're 70, are you not allowed,

P: Uh three years.

I: Oh.

P: They told me after three years but even when I, I went and I complained to the director of the social assistance, they said you can come but we will give you a job, not money. But the problem about this job, all PEI will know that the social assistance will give me this job. So like charity. So while I'm working all people know, oh this job for the social assistance and I don't like. So when I said the charity, this will be like in secret, they can give me like any job opportunity but don't say this is from the social assistance.

I: Yeah.

P: Right?

I: Yeah, yeah.

P: But here, here no. She told me we will help you to have a job with 10 dollar, but it is under supervision of the social assistance. So I said no, I don't like to hurt, my uh, my kids feeling anymore. No.

### **P5**

"I haven't got, you know. I'm not financially well-off. Yeah, I have a car but if I didn't have a car I'd be lost because the kids required so much attention growing up, you know... So um but it's kinda the only thing I own. It's mine. You know what I mean?"

"I'm not poor in my mind, I'm not poor, like I don't like that word. Poor! And I, you know, and I piped up and said, yeah, but I am poor. I am poor. I'm not poor in my heart cause I appreciate the stuff I have but I am poor. I'm living, you know, with less than, less than, I'm living 100 bucks a month. And all this stuff, the kids need the computer for school, right? And, you know, they don't, they don't consider a computer a necessity, Social Assistance but, in this day and age, it's a necessity. And I would consider a dryer a necessity."

"I don't have enough in in Canadian um Security to even claim Disability Insurance. I don't have enough h- enough hours or slots put in so it doesn't do me any good anyway. I might get about about 40 bucks a month if I. But then I'd lose the 40 from Assistance so [half-laugh]."

I:[Mhmm][Oh][Right][Oh][Yeah, yeah][Mhmm]Yeah and you're not eligible for her to be covered.

P:It wouldn't be covered. It's not covered out of government. It's considered, it's not a necessity.

I:Yeah, yeah.

P:She's having physio and that's out of her father's insurance because they can bill directly to his insurance company. But massage therapist though, you pay up front.

I: And be reimbursed but you have to pay out pay out front.

P:[Yeah] Yeah. And I'm not about to pay and then give him the receipts and then let him claim it. Noooo! Don't think so.

P: If I didn't have somebody's name on this vehicle that I have now, somebody co-signed it for me, it would be gone back.

I:[Mhmm][laughs][Mhmm][Yeah]Right. Is that because Social Assistance don't like you having a vehicle?

P:No, it's because, yeah they don't want me having a vehicle

P: Social Assistance but, in this day and age, it's a necessity. And I would consider a dryer a necessity.

I:[Mhmm][Yeah]They don't?

P:No! A washer's a necessity but a dryer's not.

I:Mhmm. Mhmm. That's funny.

P:[half-laughs] Like so they don't even know what a necessity is!

I:[Mhmm]And maybe a dryer is not a necessity for some people but it is for others.

P:Well, when you have a family, it's a necessity. You can't hang the clothes up in, you know, minus 40 degrees and the wind blowing.

I:[Yeah] And in a small apartment you'd have clothes everywhere.

P:Yep.

I:Yeah. Cause they have to dry inside.

P:Yep.

I:You're right. It should be more context-based.

P:There's just so much that the government's screwing around us. I'll tell you, I'll tell you this really quick story and then I'm gonna go.

### ***P7***

P:[I get] uh 40 hours a week and it's only a 14 week project. Just enough for you to get your Unemployment. And they're making changes to that now, I saw it, I don't know what's gonna happen. So I don't know if we're gonna get less weeks or what's gonna happen.

I:Yeah. So you're living in a subsidized housing or you've got to pay full?

P:[No] I have to pay full. I got my name and I had it in for two years now. And I'm not old, there's subsidized for elder, like seniors, and sometimes they'll let you in there if you're 50, you know, 53 or 4. With a doctor's note. Yeah.

I:[Yeah][Yeah][Yeah][Yeah][Yeah][Yeah][Yeah]Well there's appointments and there's-. Yeah. So you've had your name in the subsidized housing for two years.

P:[Yeah][Mhmm] Yep. Couple years. So I'm kinda in the middle of that. Like, if you put your name for subsidized housing, they take emergency cases first, so I'm not really a considered emergency. But I'm not, I'm too young to get into seniors, their housing and I'm not considered emergency for the other side. I'm kinda like. And I was looking for, like my rent is 650, and I'm looking for like lower places but now the one bedrooms are 650. They are. And 650, that's heat and lights covered.

### ***P9***

“I went on social services for like, two months maybe and it was like a relief.”

“When you’re marginalized and you’re just struggling from day to day, your involvement in your life gets small because you just don’t have the time, don’t have the money, and money you

don't have the transportation like it just, the list just keeps adding and adding and adding and adding up and I heard that, and I just felt like I was on a diving board and I was springing off the diving board.”

“It's not some kind of a, some kind of butting heads, things have happened just to keep us down, and the longer we're down, I see how money brings power, and PEI, there's so many people related to so many people and once you get established with some money, that those doors open, they open which way and any way. If you don't have the money, they slam shut on you, and I see, as a mother of two girls I see it at school all the time.”

above being marginalized because you don't have the money, don't have a voice, is, I've – the old boy's club, if you have money you have a position of power and if you're a boy you get a different set of rules. And we've just undergone that just in the last couple weeks, my daughter, and um, I just wanna get out of this, I'm just, tired. And it's really not nice when it seems you're surrounded by people with money and able to make choices.”

“And I feel like I'm just screwed. I, I'm living from day to day and I don't have a worry about paying the electric bill and I can't cut back anymore.”

“It was so bad I didn't have money for milk, and I was absolutely had nothing else to sell. I didn't know what, what to do. I literally didn't know what to do. And there're things like, I was excited about Salvation Army, they had their, their fuel cause we were getting down and empty. But in order to get that you had to be there in person. So that would've meant I had to take a day off work at this cleaning job and that wasn't gonna happen. This is what I mean where practical things, we think oh, well, you know, uh you could get that and get half a tank of fuel or whatever. But if you're working, what do you do? Miss a day's work? What're you gonna do then? You get the fuel but you don't have money for the gas to go to work the next day.”

“You know that, and that's the things we're really so, when we're on social services it was like oh my goodness, this is so, it was a relief! But I can remember they said something, I had to find a place to live I think it was – 703 – it was a weird number. 703 for all of us with heat and lights. Rent, heat, and lights, which, I don't know where you'd find that in PEI for a family of three.. I don't know. In Charlottetown area I don't know where you'd find that.”

## **Immigration Status**

*P4*

“I went to the college of physicians to ask for a licence, I need to practice medicine... they told me no, we are not allowed. I said how come, they told me you can go to Halifax to ask in Dalhousie, they are not cooperative at all. I said how come, they said this is the rules.”

“So they told me you are not allowed to practice so I started to think about I applied for the Medical Council of Canada first, and I sent my documents and they said they will send back to [country of origin] to see if it is already true or it's fake. And they ask me to pay money, like a fee, for stuff like that. And uh, nothing here. I should go to Halifax or Montreal. No medicine here in PEI... Nothing at all. No books, nothing.”

P: Yeah, so I paid 10 thousand for the medical council of Canada because he will send the medical papers to [country of origin] and I should pay to go to [country of origin] and I should pay to come back to here. And after that they sent it to Philadelphia for, uh, ECMFG, like physician credential of Canada, after that it will come back to here, it's a very long process.

I: So, eventually? Are you confident that you will be allowed to practice as a physician?

P: No, after I did that they told me it's not a guarantee, you, you should have job offer first. After I paid ten thousand. So I said, ugh, how come you told me now? The problem here, nobody tell you, tells you the truth from the start. And when I ask, oh it's still too early, later we'll tell you. You know? I didn't meet anybody to say, oh see, we have a set, and it is one, two, three, four, and it's not a guarantee, so I will never do that. I will never pay ten thousand, and I have no money at all right now. The other ten thousand I was paying the rent, food, electricity, for internet. Then I lost everything, no more money. I, eh, I was living in a hotel, so I have no money today. I put an ad on Kajiji, I uh, a single mom with two kids, I like, eh to have any apartment but please four hundred or less, because only my income right now, child tax benefit it is 500 for the two kids. So I said I can pay for the rent and for the food I can go to food bank, I have no choice.

“I'm, trying, like, to turn around the medical system here so I said to myself I will go volunteer to any clinic, and I will have a good relation with some physician, so in this case I will have like references later to the medical director, maybe he will give me a job. Really I did, and I have good reference letter from them, and even some of them said you already have some skills, eh, we are learning from you. Because in [country of origin] we don't have a lot of investigation a lot of money like that, so I should do everything myself, not eh, not like a nurse, not working with my hand, with my mind... Like you are complain from nothing, a lot of things, I can say, oh I can do all the investigation for you, no. I can do just one or two. Because you should pay yourself, the government don't pay for investigation. So I will think about, oh yeah she just complain from that so the best thing for me see only, from complete blood picture, this is the only thing. I will never do anything for you.”

“I started and I went to meet the medical director, [name], after I had appointment with him, I went, he said sorry I will never meet you, I am so busy right now. It's like abuse also. I said oh yeah, no problem, and I told his secretary, I came by walk, and it was raining already, so why you didn't call me and said sorry, we cancelled. She said, um, I don't know, but maybe misunderstanding. I said okay, say thank you for him, and please give me an email to say what he gonna do with me. So he sent an email for me, and said you are not eligible to practice medicine here in PEI, because you should have some exams, first part, second part, and you have assessment in Newfoundland. I said okay, so how much I will pay, the assessment will cost ten thousand, this is assessment only because I should travel to Newfoundland and stay for two weeks there, and to pay for assessment and I will come back. And two parts of exam I should go Montreal to write my exams and I come back, and I should pay, uh, fifteen hundred, like a fee for each exam. I said well [laughs] welcome to Canada.”

P: He said no. I tried with him by all the ways and he said oh, who allow you to go inside the medical system, it's not allowed to volunteer in any clinic. It's not allowed. So I phoned my doctors again or my supervisor and I said, can I come? Oh really, well uh I'm sorry to say that but I am so busy when I will be free I will give you a call. They scared from him.



I: Oh. Right. Right. So those physicians stopped helping you.

P: Because of him. Okay? And after that I have nothing, I tried, I, I heard about some training courses for the international doctor but not here. In Halifax, Ontario. I phoned, I wanted to come, I wanted to share, I wanted to help, because they give me like minimum money, to, to help my family a little bit, instead of caregiver, but they told me already arrived to PEI, you are a resident of PEI, eh, you lost your chance in any other province. You, PEI should give you the chance, not us, I said but the problems here, they said this is not our fault. So I lost everything right now.

“I applied for science, master degree of science, it should be eligible because I already had master in [country of origin]. But they said the same, it’s not approved and stuff like that so I applied for master degree, I feel sorry to say that I don’t you to take it in bad way but for me, I’m just going backward.”

P: And even I, I I already quit the idea to be a doctor anymore, so I will change my career as I told you like to, to have master of science or to work at bioscience, and technology. Eh, Cathy, she’s working with me right now like in a separate situation to find a job at bioscience.

I: Right. So you have decided that’s it. You’re not going to be a doctor,

P: Yeah, I uh, to be uh, to be flexible a little bit I started to be like that.

“And even some of my supervisors they are like, it’s not just theirs. Like at the end they give me like orders and, you know, some people, um, like they wanted to tell me like indirect message ‘see, we are on the top now of you’. And a lot of, eh, a lot of [name]? It’s like we are like two teams. Eh, some young and some old. And I should do 90% of the work. They want to sit only. And they are asking me to do, to do, it’s too hard for me.”

### **Sexist Attitudes**

*P9*

“But the school system seems to support that because, you know, they wanna be careful legally and we don’t have a restraining order to keep him and you couldn’t really. You know, so your child doesn’t want him there. Well he has a right to be there.”

P: You know, you try not to let on cause you have to, you, you’re coached not to let on, and I believe women are, are, sent a myth on that. Cause I looked up uh, support groups for women online. And it was, you know, be kind to your ex, and, and all the good stuff, you know, try and encourage a relationship between the children and live the other parent. All the good, nice stuff that you would hope. I found a site for men, and it was, you wanna get this and this is what you do: you, you say you want the kids half time, you know c-share. You do this, you do that, it was like a how-to-get-what-you-want. And you could, just reading it, it was scary reading it cause you could feel the negative, you could feel the power and control.

I: So you see a lot of structural inequities in our culture.

P: Absolutely. And I was told and I’m glad that they told me, they said it’s um, the pendulum is switched, and um it’s a man’s world when it comes to divorce. And you know, if a guy doesn’t have no intension of having the kids, my ex couldn’t have the kids for an hour or two. Um, you go after the kids full time so it doesn’t cost you any money. You don’t have to give any support payments.

“And they [my two daughters] were young, so it’s one word after another and then they’d say well you’re divorcing, so you’re just wanna make your ex pay, or yadda yadda yadda.”

### **Theme Three – Motherhood Having Children**

#### ***P3***

I: Oh, neat. So you have kids?

P: Yeah two of them.

I: Oh, how old are they?

P: One’s 7 and one’s 4.

P: Um, my cousin’s actually living with me so she’s watching them.

I: Okay. So is there anyone else that, this is also part of that, so is there anyone else that lives with you or is it mostly your cousin?

P: Um, well yeah she just moved in a couple days ago, um, yeah, but it’s just uh, me, my cousin,

“So uh, [daughter’s name] my daughter had like spelling stuff it’s kinda, it’s hard but we’re getting through it.”

“I’m waiting for uh, my youngest one to get into kindergarten and then I plan on going back to school.”

I: So you were sixteen, almost seventeen, and, uh, tell me about that experience of taking a baby home from the hospital. What your ideas were at that time. Do you remember that? It was seven years ago, but, you might remember them.

P: Um, I was very proud. Very proud, um, I always just wanted the best and like, to do everything right that my mom didn’t do.

I: Yeah.

P: Like, when she sees the kids she’s, she can’t handle them. Half the time she was like, ‘just take them away I want nothing to do with you guys’ and I’d never ever say that to my kids. Never.

I: Yeah. So you’re really changing things from your own experiences as a kid. Uh, do you see that as a strength?

P: It, yeah.

I: I do. [Laughs]. I do too. Yeah. I think I agree with you that’s, pretty phenomenal strength there. Yeah. Yeah. And your daughter is in grade two and so she’s bringing home homework.

P: Uh for the first two years she was in French Immersion, and so it wasn’t really working out. She was kind of, like she’s a really shy person but, I’m trying to get her away from it, I found she was more shier.

I: Oh, cause of the language.

P: Yep.

I: Yeah so she’s in English now.

P: Yep.

I: Do you speak French yourself?

Running head: PEI WOMEN IN POVERTY – OBSTACLES TO EMPLOYMENT

P: Um I used to speak a little bit, not so much anymore though.

I: Mm, yeah. So it might be easier to help her with her homework.

P: Oh it's so much easier.

“Uh, to myself I don't think that I had, a problem. Because like normal, well, for one thing, I normally don't drink when I'm around my kids. Like even if they were in bed or not.”

“I always dreamed about having kids but never getting married.”

**P4**

“I just sleep up to twelve, so like three or two hours, three or four, because like I should get up and do, make the food for the kids, do laundry, a lot of stuff like that, so it's very very tired for me.”

“And, uh, as I told you my two kids in private school was uh, just one to carry the bag for them, because it's not allowed to carry even one bag of the school. Uh this man was just only to carry the bag for them.”

“I uh, to be uh, to be flexible a little bit I started to be like that. To help myself and to help my kids.”

“Beside my brother is here and he is supporting me and my kids like not supporting by money but supporting by emotion. He will be like the dad for my kids.”

“And I surprised I started I bought laptop and iPad for my kids and a lot of clothes for the winter time.”

“And I start, oh what about my kids? I will go through like depression, take a lot of medicine, I will lose my life, my kids have nobody, they started to cry, oh why are you so sick? I felt very bad.”

“Yeah so and some abuse of my kids at school some kids started to spit on them and said your family is dog, you are creepy, negative stranger, go away.”

“But I will never quit. Yeah, I told my kids you should be strong, this is your country right now, don't give up, don't let anybody to, to make any bad impression for you or about you or bad feeling, no this is our country right now and we will never move anywhere.”

“Uh [school name] is good, but [school name], no. Eh, my kids, eh abused there many times and I went to complain to the principal, she refused to meet me, so my brother told her ok, she doesn't want to meet us, we will go to another place right now, to complain that our kids abused. No, no, no wait, just a minute. I, as I told him in the meeting or, just scared to go to CBC Canada. So why it's better to be good from the beginning, you know. So still like race, even from the principal, you are the principal, and you are like the symbol of goodness for every student, you should be good.”

P: I told her that and my brother said if you never do anything, we will go to higher place to complain. So she said, okay, I will never allow this kid to ride the bus with them anymore. And after that it started again, so, it's better, the kids moved already to [school name].

I: [School name],

P: Uh, it's multi-culture.

I: Oh, okay.

P: So a lot of, maybe five or six Canadian only at the class. Because they said it's for the poor people, I think so. But there should for the high class or the rich people cause I hear stuff like that.

P: And I started to work volunteer just to be beside my kids.

I: Yeah.

P: Because they need me, they scared at the beginning to be alone.

I: Yeah.

P: So uh, I just serving them breakfast there and they need, it's multi-culture rule, sometime they ask for any help I can go.

I: So you have two daughters.

P: Yes.

I: And how old are they?

P: um, nine and ten.

“So I went to school and because at the beginning, they started to, it's not physical abuse, it's like, eh, moral abuse. Don't pay attention for her, nobody wants to play with her. Her teacher never give her a chance to, express anything. No, you are a liar! In front of all the kids. Yeah so you know my rule, maybe already some don't like me because of that, but I'm not shy to tell them no don't do that with my kids. It's not allowed to do that. Yeah I am immigrant but now this is my country. I will never let you to do anything like that. So I'm going to the school to complain. Anything happened, when my kids come back every day, I am asking oh what happened today? What did you do? What did you have, what the teacher told, what about the friends. So if, if any I hear anything bad, I will go or I will send email, I want really some explanation for some situation... Because I don't like my kids to have any bad or hard time here because it's enough for me, I already have right now and I don't like to be that reflected on my kids. I said to myself I'm already had a good life in [country of origin], so to have bad life here, I don't care, I am old right now. [Laughs]. And I'm not looking for anything. So just enough to have good life for my kids.”

“I just want to be on my own, with my kids... I don't anybody to interfere in my life anymore, you know. I want to be responsible and I want my kids when they grow up to feel like I did a lot for them, nobody else.”

“I'm not planning to move anywhere. Here it's so safe for my kids.”

“I don't have any hope in my life. I think I have, like uh, I don't think about myself, I won't find anything for me, so. I just living for my kids right now.”

“Yeah every time they came back we just watch a movie together, have a walk together, eat together. I don’t like to let them, uh, a lot of time alone. Because now they feel that I am the only person for them. Before if I wanted to go anywhere they started to cry, we scared about you, if you die, what we gonna do? You are the only one. I said you have your grand mom, your uncle, no no no just only you. So they are just feeling I am the only person for them. Even my oldest uh, kid yesterday asked her about her dad at school, she said already died. I said, why you said that about your dad, she said because I feel he has died for me. And she’s still ten years old, and I never said any bad things about him because I don’t want anybody in the future to say oh you make us hit him, you are so bad, you made us a lot of bad information, no. Every time I say oh he is nice, this is the culture in [country of origin] he must marry. Because in [country of origin] you can marry four at the same time.”

“Yeah. So I don’t like to go away to leave them but at night they already sleeping because I started my work at 11 o’clock they sleep at 8, so no problem. And I came very early, 7:30 so I am catching them before going school. Just they are feeling secure, secure when I’m home.”

“Yeah, they started to be good. Before they had bad mark, last year, and eh, my kids started to get up, walk while they are sleeping or speak, this is from stress. But now they started to feel good. I don’t like to lose my kids, but you know like, different life for them, to be very very high and now, oh, I don’t know how to walk. I can’t walk on the street. I said this is not work, this is nice walk, you have a lot of trees... I’m trying to be positive. [Laughs] I don’t like to say a lot of negative thing, no see we walking but a lot of trees around, birds, nice, yeah. Make it like that.”

“Because they already uh, feel bad about their dad, even sometimes when they see any movie and a lot of kids around the family mom and dad watching TV, they started you know to running some tears. But they started to hiding from me, but I see. So they feel bad about they don’t have dad, but they don’t like to tell me because they love me so much, so they don’t like to put like more on my shoulder.”

“So I feel that. So I want to give them anything and uh, like when I went to the retreat I said okay someday when I come we will go to MacDonalds. [Laughs]... I have money! And I waited two days away from you, you know, so I wanted to give them like message I love them and I will replace anything for you, don’t worry. I don’t like them to be worried. Because before they were very worried, and responsible, I don’t like. They are kids they should play they should enjoy. You know.”

**P5**

P:I have one daughter that's 18.

I: This in here. Where's the kids then? Oh right, it's next. So you have three children. Um...that's weird. So we've got a a woman who's 22-

P:[Mhmm][half-laughs] Yep she's married and on her own.

I:[And on her own] You've got another daughter-

P:18.

I:18. And another daughter?

P:Uh 15.

“No big celebrations. We don't have big celebrations. I do birthday cakes for the kids for their birthdays and that's about it. I'll be lucky if I get a birthday card for my birthday.”

I: And your daughters live with you?

P:[Mhmm]Two of them live with me. The third, first one's married now and living on her own so. So she uh she's happy. I got a dog. And we replaced [name 5] with the dog.[laughs]

I:[Mhmm][Yeah][Yeah][laughs] Who is [name 5]?

P:[name 5] is my oldest.

P:[Yeah] And I get tired of it. To be honest with you.

I:[In terms of] being the big support?

P:Oh my God I get tired of being the parent.[half-laughs] I'd be lying if I didn't say, yeah. You know, even today, I got a 15 year-old passed out twice on me last night in the middle of the night. And so I gotta take her to the doctor this afternoon.

I:[Mhmm][Yeah] Is she using?

P:No.

I:No.

P:No. She's [half-laughs] no.

I:Ok[laughs]

P: I don't need that headache! Oh my God!

I:[She's passed, she's passed out] from just?

P:[Well] She has, she had a concussion in the summer last year. And so then she suffered from post- post-concussion syndrome. And so she's still having headaches and so they think that's post-concussion but I think it's migraines. Cause, I mean this last headache she had, she couldn't even stand the light. That's a migraine. Um so they sent her to the paediatrician and I saw the paediatrician and the paediatrician said, No, it's post-concussion still. I'm like, it's a lon-, it's almost a year later. And she has these big knots in the back of her head and and anyway. Um they want her to have massage therapy but I can't afford massage therapy [sigh] At 47 bucks a shot, 47.25, to be exact.

I:[Mhmm][Oh][Right][Oh][Yeah, yeah][Mhmm]Yeah and you're not eligible for her to be covered.

P:It wouldn't be covered. It's not covered out of government. It's considered, it's not a necessity.

I:Yeah, yeah.

P:She's having physio and that's out of her father's insurance because they can bill directly to his insurance company. But massage therapist though, you pay up front.

I: And be reimbursed but you have to pay out pay out front.

P:[Yeah] Yeah. And I'm not about to pay and then give him the receipts and then let him claim it. Noooo! Don't think so.

“So. Um. Not sure what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna go back to the doctor and see if he can give her something for the headache. She's had a headache pretty much steady for the last two months. Somewhere on the scale of a 5 to a 10. [sigh] Enough!”

“And then I sit here today and I have three daughters and that's all I have in my life. Is just the three kids.”

“Um and I'm not saying, I'm not minimizing my kids cause they're great, but that's all I got to show for my 48 years [half-laughs] is the three kids and I'm not really teaching them anything either, you know.”

P:[half-laughs] You don't know what codependency is? But you're a psychologist! Aren't you a psychologist? Shouldn't you know that? Well I was wicked codependent on [name 5]. And I'm wicked codependent on on, not wanting to hurt people, um in the sense of codependency that way. It's what other people think and not what I feel. I let other people dictate how I'm gonna feel and and um and I didn't think I was codependent last year[half-laughs]

I:[laughs][I wanna hear what you-] [laughs] [Uh-huh][laughs] But, honestly, I do wanna know what you think that means. Like what does that mean for you?

P:[Well-][sigh] I, with [name 5] in particular, I'll use [name 5] because it, I think it was a codependent relationship and it still kindof is a lot. Like, what do you think, [name 5], I should do about this? You know, kinda sorta making her a parent instead of me making the decisions. and how do you think this is going to work? And then, when I do something, and her and [name 9] don't approve it's like should've asked them first! Should've asked them first. And I feel really sad cause I, maybe I made the wrong choice and they make me feel really bad if I do something that, that don't approve, they don't approve of. So it's, and I rely on them a lot, you know. Last week [name 9] got the groceries [sigh] so. You know, I'm the parent, I shouldn't be relying on my children for that kinda stuff.

### **P7**

I:Yeah. And so you're 15 and you have a son and you're living with your in-laws um. How, how is life for you at that time? Do you have any economic independence, like, what what's life like-?

P:[Yeah]I was there and I was like, Oh my God. That I, I made life worse. To me. Cause I was in a house with 11 people and we were kinda like in our backroom and I was like, thought my child wasn't mine, like everyone wanted to hold him. It's just like I just want to have my child, you know.

“I was still a child. I was a child trying to raise child- children. You know like [half-laughs] Sit and cook, I, I didn't know how to cook -half-laughs]”

I:[Yeah]So were those hard times for the kids?

P:Uh, when I was drinking, yeah.

I:Yeah. What happened with them?

P:Um I couldn't even, I'd tee-in but I, I couldn't even work. Like I was, I was dependent on alcohol. It was bad. And I could barely get up in the morning with the kids and uh.

I:[Yeah]So how old would they have been approximately?

P:Uh they might have been maybe eight, same age as.

I:[Eight, maybe five?] How many years apart?

P:They're only a year apart.

I:Ok. So eight and nine or something like that? Or eight and seven?

P:[Mhmm]Seven.

I:Yeah. And was [name 6] a parent to them? You said they were afraid of him. Are they still?

P:[Um] Oh no. My daughter is a little bit. I tell her she's crazy.

I:[Yeah] Yeah. Afraid, what's she afraid of? Did?

P: Well, cause he goes, what the, what the fuck you wanna do that for? You know. She's there, Ahh!

I: She doesn't like his yelling, you're saying.

P: [No] No.

I: Yeah.

P: So she'd tell me, Mommy, kill him [half-laughs]

I: How old is she?

P: She's 34.

I: And your son's a year older so he's 35. Yeah. Got it! [half-laughs]

P: [Yeah][Yeah] Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

I: So in those years, you were drinking and not able to to function um. How were they cared for?

P: [Uh there, there-] Um my sister-in-law came over a lot. She was there. And uh our fighting really got bad and I just, then I went to de- detox for um about a month. And then-

I: [Ok] And they were how old?

P: They were about seven and eight.

P: I couldn't even cook Kraft Dinner [half-laughs]

I: [Yeah] Did anyone teach you?

P: Um what I learned I learned on my own.

I: Ok. So you learned to drain the macaroni at some point. [laughs]

P: Yeah [half-laughs] First couple of times was pretty mushy and. But I'd say [name 6] knew how to cook. Yeah.

“When I, I um, I was living back in Ontario and [sigh] like when I left my husband, um I was living in [community name] for a couple of months and then I left the Island. I ended up in Ontario with my sister. And him and the kids back here.”

I: And and so how long were you-

P: Gone to Ontario?

I: Yeah.

P: Oh, God. We were separated four years.

“Like when it comes to kids, cause I wasn't there for them [sigh] Um and I find that they're really mixed up. Like my son, oh! He's all over the place [half-laughs] Although he's 35. Like he's, he's messed up in a relationship with a girl who's messed up. Like really. Like she's really hooked on drugs and that. [sigh] And he told me last week that he was in Alberta, he said, Mom, I'm going back with with [name 12]. And I said, What do you mean you're going back with [name 12]? Cause I told him, I said, You get the hell away from that girl cause she's very manipulative, like she's an addict. And I know what they're like, I was like that with his dad. The lower I can make his dad feel worse about himself, the more I liked it, you know. At one point. And she was doing that, I could see her doing that to my son. I was like, Get the hell away from her. She's poison. I said, If your dad had, at one point, when he quit drinking and that, I wouldn't quit and um. But I, I didn't tell my son the reason I didn't stay with your dad is cause I wasn't there. I, I didn't love him. Like that way. But. I, I never really actually explained that to the kids, you know. I just said, you know, I left your dad and I left you guys and [sigh] But they don't know that other part but I don't know. I don't think it's really that important telling them now. Anyway.”



“But my daughter's strong. She's, she has family. Like she had my granddaughter when she was uh 15. And like she was had just lived with me in Ontario, I had quit drinking by then, and she came for visits. And she stayed with me for summer and then she went back to school with her dad. And she didn't like living with me cause I had strict rules. She wasn't to be out after [half-laugh] certain hour and she met friends that were much older than her and they were like. So I said, No, you're going back to your dad because Ontario's not a place for [sigh] teenagers, I said, you're from PEI, you're not, you know, you're not street kid. So we got her a ticket and she went back to her dad and she was there a week and I had a a dream about her and she had gotten pregnant and had a baby girl. So I called that night, right the next day and my ex-husband answered and he said, Don't, kids are both out. He said, What's wrong? I said, Oh, it's just a stupid dream I had. He goes, What do you mean? I said, Well I dreamt [name 13] got pregnant and and had a baby girl. And he's goes, [high-pitched, nonsense noises].”

“Anyway, two weeks later, phone rings. He goes, Your fucking daughter's pregnant! Going on. I said, Well, stop yelling! And the f, f, f, f! I said, Calm down! I said, What is it gonna, what good is it gonna do to be upset? Here, you talk to your f'ing daughter. I could hear her crying [half-laugh] And I said, Honey, don't, don't cry. I said, don't worry. I made up my mind I was coming back. Because I was going through this feelings with [name 11], I thought, time is like, oh, you know, being a high-class hooker and making love with him and all that. And I was, and he was so in love with me, his parents were bugging us to get married and I was just like, uhh[sigh] And it made, when she told me she was pregnant, it was like, Hey, I'm outta here. Made the move a lot easier. And plus he said, when he heard he said, Now don't think just because your daughter's pregnant you're gonna just off and leave to to go to PEI every so many months. He goes, You either pick me or your kids.”

“But I, I made up my mind that, when she called I moved back to PEI.”

I:[Were you fearful] that your daughter would be assaulted [by your father]?

P:Well, kindof. I didn't wanna. And now when my granddaughter was born, we're all, the three of us, in that one room. Me and my daughter in a bed and my granddaughter in a little basinet.

### ***P9***

“If you don't have the money, they slam shut on you, and I see, as a mother of two girls I see it at school all the time. And we've just had a major horrendous thing happen to my daughter”

P: Well the major catalyst was um, when we fled my husband. The situation was not safe for the children and myself. I would have stayed in the position to put up with things if he had been good to the children but he wasn't.

I: Did he sexually assault them?

P: Um – I wouldn't say he went that far but he certainly took liberties and he was uh, physically rough with them. Absolutely mentally abusive. Absolute terrifying them. Um, you know I could leave him alone with the kids, couldn't do it, and um, physically bruising them up and the whole thing, but he worked in the system, he worked in the government and he, he warned me for years nobody would believe me,

“2002 we fled, we got an agreement in 2007, I think it was, yeah. 2007, he doesn’t see the children one-on-one, he hasn’t seen them in years one to one. Which, in itself is – as, as one of the girls said, they were in the car, both in their car seats and one of the girls said ‘what day is it? What day is it?’ cause they used to be terrified to go with him. They’d have to go a couple hours with him on Tuesdays and a couple hours on Thursdays, and \_\_\_ looked at [daughter] and she said, oh there’s not worries now, every day is a good day.”

P: Like it was, because it was, I can’t terrible the girls would be screaming or I’d have to drag them out of the car, like this is traumatic. And they wouldn’t want to go, and then he’d allow them one phone call to the house and if I didn’t pick up, they weren’t allowed to call again. He’d pull the telephones out of the walls, he’d lock them in their rooms, and I mean this went on for years. And I just, I got treated as the wacko. I got called into social services one time and, I asked them I said, when \_\_\_ was about, yeah, I think she was three, probably three and a half, I got called into the church. I was going to, I was up on the, in Sunday School so I thought it was just going to be a meeting about curriculum or something. And miss \_\_\_ had drawn on Jesus, an absolutely perfect picture of male genitalia. I mean it wasn’t kid’s, it was a male one. I didn’t know about it and they called me into this. They called up social services and then they sort of dumped it on me. Um,

I: So do you think your husband was exposing himself to the girls?

P: I believe he was totally inappropriate. I don’t think it ever went to sexual intercourse but um, terrified especially terrified [daughter] seemed to be obsessed with [daughter] cause she’s three, and that was one of the reasons why I wanted to leave earlier but I, I was afraid that, as soon as you leave, I was coached that I had to leave. If I didn’t leave, I was putting the girls in jeopardy could come and take the girls. You know. Because I wasn’t protecting them. Soon as I walked out the doors the best interest of the children was to see both parents. And they were young,

I: How old are your girls now?

P: They are fifteen and thirteen.

I: Okay.

P: And they’re really good um, kids knock on wood. Um my, my daughter [name] has gone through a terrible thing

P: And [Participant’s daughter] took a concussion this week, so,

I: [Participant’s daughter], the younger daughter.

P: Yeah she bumped her head, yeah. She’s in concussion so, four an a half hours we don’t even have a doctor. We don’t even, we haven’t had a doctor in years. We had a doctor and they left and then you were floating.

## **Unplanned Pregnancy**

### ***P3***

I: Yeah, yeah. So what did you think about that pregnancy? Is that the child you have now?

P: Yep.

I: Okay.

P: Um, good. I was happy.

I: Yeah, yeah. And so, the, the dad of that pregnancy, was he supportive or what happened?

P: Mhm. So was his parents, they let me move in and stuff and we spent uh, the first almost two years there. Then when I was what, twenty? Oh, nineteen-twenty that we moved out on our own. When I got pregnant for the second one.

I: Yeah. And then was, was that a wanted pregnancy as well?

P: Oh yeah.

I: So both were wanted, or?

P: Um,

I: Maybe unintended but when you found out you wanted?

P: Yah. Uh, the first one was unintended but wanted. And then the second one was wanted.

I: Totally planned for.

P: Yep.

I: Okay. Alright. And so, uh, you, would that, were you pregnant the first the first time when you left school or did you try to stay in school?

P: I stayed in school for the first semester which ended up in February and then I had [Child's name].

### **P5**

“Baby number one that I wasn't expecting. I was on birth control.[half-laughs] So she was a pleasant surprise.”

I: Did you wanna be pregnant or?

P: No.

I: Ok

P: I would've rather waited a while cause [name 3] weren't even married a year before, we just found out in September I was gonna have a have a baby and we weren't even married a year when I found out so the following month would've been a year.

I: Um I, women are are touchy about this, uh but the idea of an abortion cross your mind or?

P: [No]No.

I: So it's just your pregnancy, you're just gonna-

P: I'm pregnant, I'm just gonna live through it and raise the child. And um, I don't know. Never really crossed my mind except it's a. Abortions are are touchy subjects for a lot of people and uh, I mean, I don't, my my belief is um for that that if, if I was raped or something, maybe different. My sister was raped and she had the baby and brought the baby up and so. Good for her. I don't think I could do that cause it'd be a constant reminder.

I: [Yeah][Mhmm][I know, I know, lots and lots] [Mhmm][Yeah][Mhmm]Mhmm, every woman has her own path.

P: Yeah, yeah.

### **P7**

P: Um, I was really kinda young. I, I don't know. I, I didn't thin- I was working on the farm, I was catching bales of hay. And then I felt the, cause I didn't tell my foster parents, and I um was catching bales of hay as they were throwing them down and throwing them over here and I could feel, think I was three months pregnant then, and I could feel like I had my period. And I was wondering what was going on cause I was too scared to tell them and I just thought, I must be

pregnant cause I was already three weeks or three months. So then the bleeding got worse. I was bleeding pretty well all day and then it got worse at night and I was like, should I tell my foster mother? I didn't know what to do so.

I:[Yeah][Yeah][Ok]So were you hoping that the fetus would abort at that point?

P:I was kinda, it didn't bother me if it did.

I:You'd be happy that the pregnant, that the period came back. Yeah. But what happened then?

P:[Yeah][sigh] Um I told my foster mom I thought I was pregnant. She was like, What do you mean you thought, you think, you are pregnant? And I said, I didn't have a period in three months. And so she said [sigh], I'm, I'm taking you to, the to the hospital then. So she took me to the [name of hospital] and they did a pregnancy test and I was..., I was uh, pregnant. But I had no emotions at all. I could've had an abortion or had that baby.

I:[Ok][Yeah]Yeah. So did you birth that, that child?

P:Oh well it was like, you, you went through the same as if you were in real labour.

I:Ok. So there was a miscarriage that had happened. At that time. Ok. Alright. Yeah.

P:[Yep][Yep]Yeah. So I went back to the foster home and that, I got pregnant again. And I went away then.

I:And you ran away that time because you wanted to hold onto the pregnancy or?

P:[I said] they weren't gonna send me away to take my baby. Mhmm.

I:Right. You wanted that baby or you didn't want-?

P:Yeah. I'm not kidding! Yeah.

I:[You, you] [Yeah] I, I, I'm missing something.

P: Ok.

I:I think I'm missing something really important.

P:Well I, I, when I got pregnant, I, I just said, They're not gonna take my baby. They're not gonna just just take it. Um I didn't know how I was gonna [half-laughs] live or whatever but I just figured they weren't gonna take my child.

### **Children with Special Needs**

#### ***P4***

“And my little one started to be very aggressive at school. And she wants to like strangulate her friend. And they called me at school, I went, we went to [doctor's name] psychiatrist, uh, she had anxiety depression from a lot of abuse here in Canada... Even the doctor, he's from [country name], so he told her, I am like you exactly, I'm immigrant, and a lot of picking on me, and I'm a doctor but a lot still pick on me, my colour, my hair, but don't care. Be yourself, you must be proud, you are immigrant you are different because they are all blonde and all pretty. [Laughs] You know, be about, this is what I said... But you are unique, you have black hair, you are brown colour, so they love to be like you exactly. They put some tan! [Laughs]. You know... And he asked me to put her in any sports.”

#### ***P5***

“The 18 year-old's um going to [school name]. She was just diagnosed with uh Autistic Spectrum [half-laughs]...She was hyperactive, Oh my God she was hyperactive! ... Oh my gosh. [half-laughs] Unreal. No fair. Child's house. No fair. And then the 15 year-old di- is um struggling to get through school.”

“She's [my 18-year-old] gonna she's gonna get um privately tested in [sighs] in January. Her father's paying for it. [half-laughs] All the frigging time. Um so we'll see where she's at, she's in Grade 11 but she's only reading, she's reading at a Grade 4 level and can't write. She's basically illiterate. Mhmm.”

P: Oh my God I get tired of being the parent. [half-laughs] I'd be lying if I didn't say, yeah. You know, even today, I got a 15 year-old passed out twice on me last night in the middle of the night. And so I gotta take her to the doctor this afternoon.

I: [Mhmm] [Yeah] Is she using?

P: No.

I: No.

P: No. She's [half-laughs] no.

I: Ok [laughs]

P: I don't need that headache! Oh my God!

I: [She's passed, she's passed out] from just?

P: [Well] She has, she had a concussion in the summer last year. And so then she suffered from post- post-concussion syndrome. And so she's still having headaches and so they think that's post-concussion but I think it's migraines. Cause, I mean this last headache she had, she couldn't even stand the light. That's a migraine. Um so they sent her to the paediatrician and I saw the paediatrician and the paediatrician said, No, it's post-concussion still. I'm like, it's a lon-, it's almost a year later. And she has these big knots in the back of her head and anyway. Um they want her to have massage therapy but I can't afford massage therapy [sigh] At 47 bucks a shot, 47.25, to be exact.

I: [Mhmm] [Oh] [Right] [Oh] [Yeah, yeah] [Mhmm] Yeah and you're not eligible for her to be covered.

P: It wouldn't be covered. It's not covered out of government. It's considered, it's not a necessity.

I: Yeah, yeah.

P: She's having physio and that's out of her father's insurance because they can bill directly to his insurance company. But massage therapist though, you pay up front.

I: And be reimbursed but you have to pay out pay out front.

P: [Yeah] Yeah. And I'm not about to pay and then give him the receipts and then let him claim it. Noooo! Don't think so.

“So. Um. Not sure what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna go back to the doctor and see if he can give her something for the headache. She's had a headache pretty much steady for the last two months. Somewhere on the scale of a 5 to a 10. [sigh] Enough!”

## **Abusive Fathers**

### ***P4***

P: It should be but eh, this is another problem, he [children's father] said I don't need your kids anymore. Your kids, you know, like I made them myself.

I: So he can do that?

P: Uh yeah in [country of origin] the man can do whatever he wants, and he already married another woman right now so he has a life, so this is something also hurt my kids so I am trying as

I said in the meeting to just be, uh, involved my kids. I don't have to say expression, like, uh, to surround them, you know?

**P5**

P:She's [my 18-year-old] having physio and that's out of her father's insurance because they can bill directly to his insurance company. But massage therapist though, you pay up front.

I: And be reimbursed but you have to pay out pay out front.

P:[Yeah] Yeah. And I'm not about to pay and then give him the receipts and then let him claim it. Noooo! Don't think so.

I:[No] And he won't pay out front then?

P:No, no. He's a horrible father.

I:Yeah. Good. [laughs] Yeah. I agree. It's a horrible thing to do to your kid.

P:[What?] So. Um. Not sure what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna go back to the doctor and see if he can give her something for the headache. She's had a headache pretty much steady for the last two months. Somewhere on the scale of a 5 to a 10. [sigh] Enough!

**P9**

“2002 we fled, we got an agreement in 2007, I think it was, yeah. 2007, he doesn't see the children one-on-one, he hasn't seen them in years one to one. Which, in itself is – as, as one of the girls said, they were in the car, both in their car seats and one of the girls said ‘what day is it? What day is it?’ cause they used to be terrified to go with him. They'd have to go a couple hours with him on Tuesdays and a couple hours on Thursdays, and [name] looked at [daughter] and she said, oh there's not worries now, every day is a good day.”

P: Like it was, because it was, I can't terrible the girls would be screaming or I'd have to drag them out of the car, like this is traumatic. And they wouldn't want to go, and then he'd allow them one phone call to the house and if I didn't pick up, they weren't allowed to call again. He'd pull the telephones out of the walls, he'd lock them in their rooms, and I mean this went on for years. And I just, I got treated as the wacko. I got called into social services one time and, I asked them I said, when [daughter's name] was about, yeah, I think she was three, probably three and a half, I got called into the church. I was going to, I was up on the, in Sunday School so I thought it was just going to be a meeting about curriculum or something. And miss had drawn on Jesus, an absolutely perfect picture of male genitalia. I mean it wasn't kid's, it was a male one. I didn't know about it and they called me into this. They called up social services and then they sort of dumped it on me. Um,

I: So do you think your husband was exposing himself to the girls?

P: I believe he was totally inappropriate. I don't think it ever went to sexual intercourse but um, terrified especially terrified [daughter] seemed to be obsessed with [daughter] cause she's three,

“And he still stalks the girls in that he insists and it's in our agreement that he's privy to our house records, their school things and I have no problem with him knowing how they do at school and different things like that. But, he's a sick enough nature he takes and he twists what's perfectly innocent into something not so nice. So, um, say in band, they were gonna go to Dairy Queen and have ice cream, he would be privy to that, you know the sort of intimate emails you'd get from the teachers that come and go. He gets them, and he knows what they do, so he doesn't see them but he shows up at those small events and, and the girls are terrified. They're terrified.

And then he does this waving and smiling and oh I love you, and kissing and throwing things and that's not for them. That's for everybody there. And one of those things, it was two and a half weeks passed my daughter's birthday and he had a Dairy Queen birthday cake there for her. And thank goodness the teacher said something and [daughter] wouldn't have gone if she knew he'd be, she wouldn't have gone. She would have ran back to the car and we would have left. So that's the kind of thing. But the school system seems to support that because, you know, they wanna be careful legally and we don't have a restraining order to keep him and you couldn't really. You know, so your child doesn't want him there. Well he has a right to be there."

### **Having Children Taken Away**

*P2*

"I've had two kids that were, taken from me."

"Uh, but the way they were taken from me, was very very wrong, I still think. And I ha, still have a lot of hatred for, for [government program]. Because I had been [hospital name] at the time, they took that into account, and I wasn't allowed to have them."

P: They got a court order.

I: To take the children?

P: Yeah. Without talking to me. And that, and, all I want from them is an apology for the way they did it. I have a lot of anger inside when I talk about it.

P: And I think, you know, I've been in contact with my oldest boy. He's in [place name]. I found that out, my friend she died from [illness name], and she helped me find them.

I: Yeah, so you knew you had a boy.

P: I had two boys.

I: Okay so your first child was a boy. And did you get to see him at all?

P: Oh I, I saw him in the hospital, that's it.

I: And they, had you sign papers? Did you know what papers you were signing?

P: I knew, at that time, when [doctor name] said it was the best thing.

I: So they decided for you.

P: Yep. And they had their court order before I even signed the paper. They never discussed it with me. You know. And, all I want, there's an awful lot of people, all [person's name], took a lot of kids to [country name]. That's where my oldest boy is.

I: Yeah. And so you got pregnant again. Did you intend to keep that –

P: I, I uh, that's why I got pregnant. I was gonna keep this one. Lost it again.

I: And then, so the, the second pregnancy did they do the same thing to you in the hospital?

P: Yeah.

I: Or was it a different process?

P: I did, I knew I would lose, so I signed the paper. I knew I would lose in the end, so – whaddya got? You got nobody fighting for you. Your own family don't fight for you. So I mean what do you do? You know. [Pause]. It hurts, still to this day it hurts.

I: Yeah. Yeah I can see that.

P: [Sounds of crying] I lived every day, that I would meet them. And I still do, but, I don't think I ever will. I've been in contact with the oldest boy. Uh, the other boy was adopted in [province

name] courts so he's supposed to be here.. But, my friend who died from [illness name], um, she thought that he was, you know, she put a piece in the paper for a couple weeks and I had no response, so. See they can change the names, so.

I: Yeah.

P: But they couldn't change his birth date. But the boy in [country name], uh, I was in contact with him, oh Gosh, I forget how long ago. But he has stopped writing. But I would, I had been right honest with – with the people in, that he was in, that adopted him. And, I was told that [person's name] got paid to take those kids down there. So I, I believed it too. And I'm not saying that she didn't or that she did. Um, but I was told, she, I wasn't the only one that she did this to. You know, my friend that just died, that died there, she uh, they took hers. They took all the, that was a bad thing you couldn't even mention it back then.

I: Did they take them because, like what reasons did they have or is that a stupid question? Maybe that's a stupid question.

P: No it's not a stupid question, it's legit. Um – they told me the Welfare did, I just use myself for this. If you had a kid out of wedlock, uh, you were, it was a bad thing. Back then. Um, if you're not, haven't got a place to live, you haven't got anyone fighting for you, uh, you don't get a chance in hell of raising that kid. You know. The Welfare told me that if I found a place to live, and everything, they would give me my baby back. They never did.

I: You signed papers though.

P: Yep. I lost right from st, day one. So, I won't know what it's like to – hold a – baby anymore. I won't know what it's like to raise my own kids. You know. [Crying]. I'll never remember that. I'll remember but I'll never be able to do it. But I lived since '74, I lived every day that I was wanting to meet those boys. I even went as far as, sending emails to [publisher name], things like that, wanting to tell my story.

I: Yeah.

P: And, I don't hold – giving them up against them. I hold onto that, it's the way they did it. They went behind my back and went to the court and got a court order to take them.

I: Yeah.

P: And that's what hurts so much.

### **P3**

“Um, actually when I said that uh, the kids were at their grandparents', that's why, because that one night that uh he wanted to drink so we had a couple of drinks and then we started wrestling then the cops, or the neighbor from upstairs or downstairs called the cops saying there was domestic violence which there was when we were wrestling. But uh, because we were both drinking they took the kids, on me. I blamed him but it's my fault too.”

P: Um, I was mouthy at the cops cause the showed up and then they ended up taking to the drunk tank. So they thought that I had a problem.

I: So do you, do you think that was fair?

P: No [laughs].

I: Okay.

P: No. Totally not fair.

I: So what should have happened?

P: Um, I don't know. Well, they should have just asked him to leave. Cause it was my house. But we were drinking and there was not a sober person. So they had to call Social Services.



I: And do you think that was fair?

P: Um, well no because I could handle I mean like the kids were sleeping.

I: Right.

P: Like it was like 3 o'clock in the morning. But at the same time I guess it wasn't really fair to the kids. Cause of the state I was in, I guess, and drinking.

P: Um, I just shut everybody out of my life. Deleted everyone from my phone. Just, sat at my house.

I: You really,

P: Yeah it shook me up. So that's one of the things that I didn't want my kids to have to go through.

I: And there they were going through it.

P: Yep.

I: February, just, just passed? So you're on this sort of, new path. So when did the kids come back home to live with you?

P: Um, I had to wait until school was ended because I didn't wanna switch cause, like from [school] to be switched with [school] to be with their grandparents, so I waited until after school.

I: But you were, you know, in their lives, grandparents'

P: Oh yeah. Yep.

I: Did you see them, every day?

P: Every second day.

I: Every second day.

P: Well I guess that, twice a week, not on the weekends.

## **Theme Four – Personal Challenges**

### **Psychological Distress**

#### **P2**

“Um, then if you don't want to drive yourself crazy you've gotta get out of the apartment. So, I just go out and just – I go to [mental health support centre].”

P: It's uh, [mental health support centre] has that, and, if it wasn't for them, I'd be in hospital. Um, there's almost –

I: With what?

P: Mental problems.

“Uh, but, the day is long, because there's nothing for us to do. We go to a library and read or go online, talk to people and that, but, it's not, it's not what I call I life. You know, there's nothing else for people, especially who are disabled, can't do anything.”

“It's a struggle. I really struggle to get up and get dressed and there's some days that you don't want to. But you have to give yourself a push.”

“Just to get up in the morning is a big struggle because it's hard. So much pain. Uh, you don't even wanna do anything. But it, you know you have, you know yourself you have to.”

**P3**

P: I don't wanna live like, the rest of my family, I like, I don't know. I wanna be able to look in the mirror and be proud of myself.

I: Can you do that now?

P: No.

I: No.

P: One day.

I: So, when you look in the mirror, what do you, what do you think of yourself?

P: Um, that I can do better.

I: You're strong physically.

P: Yep.

I: And emotionally?

P: No.

I: No?

P: Try to be.

**P4**

“So I started, I started to have an anxiety depression. And I start, oh what about my kids? I will go through like depression, take a lot of medicine, I will lose my life, my kids have nobody, they started to cry, oh why are you so sick? I felt very bad. I say no, I will get rid of my anxiety depression, I will never take any medicine, I will, uh, try harder to have anything here this is my rights, I will never give up.”

**P5**

“Um my my path has been rocky. I survived.”

“Um suicidal thought was on there. How strong was that? What scale 1 to 5? And, you know, many, many a time in my walk, I've been suicidal. Many times. And, if not for the kids, I'd probably be dead.”

“So. And I had a wedding in May [sigh] So I'm just starting to deal with Mom's death now. The grieving process. Oooh! [half-laugh] I've had a lot of losses.”

“Because who, she got mad because [doctor] was, had been treating me for depression with a bunch of different anti-depressants and they worked for four or five weeks and then I just I just crashed again. And so she said I'm gonna try you on lithium and she got mad cause medical doctor put me on lithium and not the psychiatrist.”

“18 months of a lot of hard, hard work. Um and then, in order to even fit in the program, I'm sure you've probably heard about it, but in order to fit in the program you have to have a title. So not only did I have bipolar diagnosis slash depression, I had um, what's that called? Pers-borderline personality disorder.”

“When I first found out about the borderline personality stuff I'm like, I'm not taking that cause I don't need, I'm don't want another title. Uh I don't need another thing on my shoulders to carry,

you know. I'm a recovering alcoholic, I've got bipolar now and now I've got borderline. Woo-hoo.[half-laugh]

The rows of doctors and [sigh] and psychologists, and going and me to see what I could do to make things different for my kids.

“Tons of, I have tons of skills now that I didn't have. I don't even call them skills, I call them tools. Um the self-soothe is really important. I call it self-soothe now, it used to be self-soothing crap cause I just didn't know how to do it. And it was, felt awkward doing it, right? Cause you never done it and and thoughts. They used to give us these little dots and any like, if you, if you, if you, mind's racing really fast and you can't sorta focus on like, where'd I put my keys? Or where's this or where's that? I have these little colored dots around my house, I have one on my computer screen. Um I have one underneath the kitchen sink and so, to slow us down, we could look at these thoughts and it'd sorta send you back to where you needed to be centred.”

“Um that she, they wanted to know about my mental health. And I said, well if you see me walk out, I'm regrouping, I'm refocusing. You know, if you see me get up for a minute, just sortof move out of the room or whatever, it just means I'm, I'm refocusing. And I've um I I do it a fair bit. Didn't do it too much on the weekend, though. I was pretty good.”

“So that's kinda what I do when. And I, and I can't say, and I said to [name 2] and [name 6] the same thing, I can't say that um my mental health's good right now but it does have its moments. It does have its it, it, it rears its ugly little head. And um it has its valleys, you know, it has its peaks and it has its valleys but it's pretty pretty level right now. Which is another reason why, you know, [name 4] thought it would be a really good and and I think. One of the things I said to [name 6] and [name 2] is that I wanna give back.”

“I, with [name 5] in particular, I'll use [name 5] because it, I think it was a codependent relationship and it still kindof is a lot. Like, what do you think, [name 5], I should do about this? You know, kinda sorta making her a parent instead of me making the decisions. and how do you think this is going to work? And then, when I do something, and her and [name 9] don't approve it's like should've asked them first! Should've asked them first. And I feel really sad cause I, maybe I made the wrong choice and they make me feel really bad if I do something that, that don't approve, they don't approve of. So it's, and I rely on them a lot, you know. Last week [name 9] got the groceries [sigh] so. You know, I'm the parent, I shouldn't be relying on my children for that kinda stuff.”

### **P7**

“I wasn't spiritually, I had no spiritual strength, I had no emotional strength and or physical strength. I had no strength.”

“There was one point in my life, I actually went to my father and I said, Dad, I forgive you. For the way you treated me. When we were children. And I hugged him. And I kissed him. But I did that for me cause I figured um when you drink so much, like I'm hurting myself over something he did. So I, I had to say, I forgive you even though he didn't say he was sorry. He just like I hugged him and he he patted my shoulder but he never said, you know, sorry. But I found I had to do it... For me. For, to heal. And I even told him, I said, Dad, um I have to forgive you for um

for things that you did so I can heal. So. So it, it, that's the reason why I had to do it [half-laughs] I did it though.”

“I end up in at the doctor's once and he put me on [sigh] uh what was the name? Zolof? For about a month.”

“It's cause I like started to shake and like I couldn't stop it. Like you couldn't see it, but I could feel it from inside I think. Yep. I don't wanna keep it on the outside.”

“No! [laughs] But I was just praying for it. But I said, If there's one ounce of hope, the, help me. And I [sigh] just fell, I just fell on the floor. I cried, I cried my heart out.”

“I'm seeing a psychiatrist.”

“I, I sometimes [sigh] I still catch myself, like there's, there's that, I used to call it, like a shadow coming over me. And I'd get, I'd fall like I can almost feel dep-, myself falling in depression. [sigh] And then I started um um thinking like, Ok when I get in that space, I got there by my thinking, you know. I'm, I'm trying to be more aware what am I thinking at that time like am I feeling sorry for myself or [sigh] Am I thinking that, you know, what the heck is going on up here, eh? That makes me fall down so high. I kinda, before I never used to be able to catch it, but now I can catch it. And I, I'll revert my thinking differently.”

“I'm just glad that I never, I mean, when I was 11 I tried to commit suicide in the foster home. And I tried to commit suicide another time. I can't remember. But I, I'm so grateful it never happened cause uh I think of everything I could've missed. I tried to commit suicide when I left my kids.”

P: I was working in Ontario, I was around Lake [half-laughs] Ontario and I told my boyfriend later, I said, Yeah, I took a, a case of beer, I was sitting all along this rock, drinking, drunk as arse and I wanted to just fall in drunk in the water and be washed away with the tides. He said, The lakes don't have tides. I'm there, What?![laughs] He said, No. I said, Because I woke up, I was on the, I must have gotten up and tried to go back to where I was cause I was in a black coat. And I was the [half-laughs] next morning I felt the foot on my shoulder. Hey! Hey! Somebody kicking me awake cause my hair, if you can imagine, every grain of my hair, being loaded with sand. Like member how I said my mother's face was like this. Well I was like total mucked and sand, you couldn't even see my face. And my whole body was just, just like I had rolled in- I:[laughs][Yeah][Oh my goodness][laughs]Sand.

P:The sand. The guy thought he was looking at a corpse.

I:So you were hoping the water would come up and take you out? That was, that was your plan.

P:[Yeah] I even called my foster, my mother-in-law and told her goodbye and tell the kids goodbye and I love them and [name 6]. I did, I didn't think I'd wake up [half-laughs]

### **Physical Disabilities**

#### **P2**

“Uh, but, the day is long, because there’s nothing for us to do. We go to a library and read or go online, talk to people and that, but, it’s not, it’s not what I call I life. You know, there’s nothing else for people, especially who are disabled, can’t do anything.”

Disability Support. Um, in order for me to get around, I have a scooter it’s just parked out there. I know that there’s a ramp, I tried to get up but it’s too long the machine, it’s more or less made for wheelchairs that ramp.

“But, trying to get a job, especially if you’re disabled, uh, is next to impossible.”

P: Well, my fingers like this.

I: Yeah, well –

P: I can’t go like this.

I: [Laughter]

P: I never could. I don’t even, in 1983 I went back to [school name], to get my grade twelve.

### **Substance Abuse and Addictions**

#### **P3**

“Um, actually when I said that uh, the kids were at their grandparents’, that’s why, because that one night that uh he wanted to drink so we had a couple of drinks and then we started wrestling then the cops, or the neighbor from upstairs or downstairs called the cops saying there was domestic violence which there was when we were wrestling. But uh, because we were both drinking they took the kids, on me. I blamed him but it’s my fault too.”

I: Okay. So did you have to go through detox? Or,

P: No, no I just had to go to the thing. And then I had to make sure that um, well because I did smoke weed at the time, I had to make sure that all of it was out, that I had it cleaned a few times.

I: Okay.

P: I did that.

I: Yeah, yeah you did that [laughs] let’s acknowledge that, yes I did that.

P: Well it was just, um, I’ve always smoked weed. Um, when I lived with my mom. We used to smoke it all the time so it just became a habit.

I: Yeah. Yeah and tobacco too? Or just,

P: Yep. Yeah I smoke.

I: Yeah. And so, um, they, they put you, you called it the ‘drunk tank’.

P: Mhm.

I: Um, so they put you there, and then they made you go for counseling? Or,

P: Put me in the drunk tank and then,

I: How much control did you have over what you wanted?

P: I did what they told me too.

I: Cause this is how to get the kids back.

P: Yep.

I: Okay. Alright. Do you think you’d have done it if it weren’t for the kids?

P: Uh, to myself I don't think that I had, a problem. Because like normal, well, for one thing, I normally don't drink when I'm around my kids. Like even if they were in bed or not.

I: Yeah.

P: So that's my slip-up. Which, I'm a, you learn from your mistakes.

**P5**

“Uh I don't need another thing on my shoulders to carry, you know. I'm a recovering alcoholic.”

P:[laughs] Well it sortof, the sobriety started when well, close to 22 was when I started trying to get sober and she was 2, I think. Um [half-laughs] and I get in so many years but the journey was uh um...it's been a difficult one. It's been in that sobriety mode when I first sobered up um...right away I had fall-backs of using stuff. So I was six months in my first try in sobriety and I had flash-backs of use. Um didn't know really what was going on, just kinda one day meetings and um, and the the alcoholism would be a part of me anyway cause my dad was an alcoholic. Um but, when I moved to PEI from Boston, it really it really intensified. [half-laughs] Um and then I would go to [person's house] and come home and if, [name 3] and I were having a disagreement, he'd sit and throw a double-shot of whiskey in front of me and um.

I:[Yeah] This is after you'd been behaving?

P:Oh yeah, we'd have fights and he'd just put out put out um a double in front of me and except me to drink it and tell me he wanted things the way it used to be and and uh. So every time I tried to sober up that's what I'd get from him and and I lived with his abuse too so um. The alcohol was just part of our our way of surviving but masking too. And the house used to be spotless. You couldn't, you could never put a put a coat on a chair. Like you could literally spit off- eat off my floors because that was my way of hiding my drinking and so um.

P:The way the way the sobriety, the way it started to come up was I was at uh a Girl Guide function. I was a Girl Guide Commissioner. District Commissioner and I had to meet with the church in [community,] [church name] to see if the minister would do a part of the Thinking Day service for us. And we we were just sitting, talking and just out of the blue she said, Do you have a problem with alcohol? [half-laughs]

I:[Yeah]Why did she ask that you think?

P:I'm a firm believer in things happen for a reason. Um and she must have of seen, like it must have been written all over my face or something. I don't know, something I said to her and made her think that. And I never really asked her what made her say that but I think she's put in my path for a reason. Um I'm a I'm a firm believer in that. And I said, well right in her office at the church, I told her she's off her, and I quote, off her goddamn rocker[laughs]In church! She said ok, I'd just thought I'd ask, I'd just thought I'd ask and then um.

**P7**

“And I, I don't smoke. Thank God! First year I, I was smoking [sigh] and it's like [sigh] I was bumming constantly for cigarettes or money for cig-, you know, for smokes and that and I'm just like, I'm, I can't do it. I quit which is good. I quit them away. I did quit. And I said, Thank God I don't drink or smoke![laughs]”

P: Like I, I even had a gambling problem, at one time. So I had cu-, get over that. Like every [laughs] now it seems like everything I do, I get, I kinda overdo. Then I have to get myself off it. Cause gambling is a worse addiction just like your smoking and your drinking and that so.

I:[Ok][Ok] [Wow][Yeah][Yeah][Mhmm] Mhmm. So did you know that you had a gambling addiction at the time that you working at Red Shores? Or was that after it? Or how was that?

P:Well, the Red Shores um when you work at Red Shores you're not allowed to even gamble on any game or, which was good too, because I wasn't allowed to gamble on even the machines.

“I was like, Maybe if I had a beer or something that half-drunk, it wouldn't be so bad. So I did get half-drunk and it didn't matter. Like use me, abuse me, I don't give a shit [half-laughs] I didn't feel, like, no, I didn't think then. And so I think he kinda picked up on that, oh she likes, you know, and then we started drinking um [sigh] like the hard stuff and it was like, he, he could do whatever he wanted. Didn't matter. I was drunk. I didn't care. But it was no good to the kids either.[sigh]”

“Um I couldn't even, I'd tee-in but I, I couldn't even work. Like I was, I was dependent on alcohol. It was bad. And I could barely get up in the morning with the kids and uh.”

P:[No] I was still. And then after we separated, I was still drinking. And I-

I:[Yeah. So the detox didn't work.]

P:No. I went back to drinking.

I:Yeah. Cause that was my, my question is if you're drinking to numb, what do you then use to cope?

P:I went to Ontario. I drank steady like. For over a year. Just drink, drink, drink. Yeah. Get up in the morning, go behind the house and drink my guts out. [sigh] Come in, look for a beer that somebody might not have drank and fix myself up again and start all over. And I-

I:[Yeah] And was your sister also drinking?

P:My sister [name 8], yeah, was drinking.

I:Is that who you were living with at that moment? So your environment really supported that. Like so what, why did you stop? What changed?

P:[Yeah][Um] I don't know. We, we were drinking every day and I just got tired. Like we got into a fight, me and my sister, and I ended up bleeding that night. And I ran through a cornfield, couldn't get out. I woke up the next morning, I was still there. It was raining [half-laughs] A little shirt on and I was like, I woke up, I didn't know which way was out. Cause it's just like the corn was so high. And I was like, just fed up with my life. I said, God, if, you know, what the hell am I doing? What am I doing? And I was like, if my life is, if I'm gonna end up just like mom, I said, strike me with lightening. I don't care. Kill me right now.

P: I just went out and had a few beer and. [sigh] Came home and I was falling and he said, I called my dad and I said, What do you mean I called my dad? I don't even know his number. He said, You called your dad last night and he said, I don't even wanna repeat what you told him.

I:[Ok]So you got angry at your dad that you were leashing out.

P:[Yeah] But I did it in a blackout. I had a blackout. But I remembered his number. Cause I was talking to my sister after that and she said, Yeah, you, do you remember calling Dad? I said,

Yeah, I, I, that's what [name 11] said but I didn't believe him cause I don't even know Dad's number. Well you remembered it-

“I was like in the, the, I got off the alcohol, got off the ciges- cigarettes. No I wasn't, I was smoking then. [sigh] But I got into gambling and I was like, Oh you stupid idiot! You just spent the last friggin money on frickin machines, you know, cursing myself. And I thought, What the heck am I doing? I used to do that when I drank, you know, get drunk and go in blackouts and [sigh] be cursing myself. You know, you stupid idiot! What did you do that for? And. Yeah.”

P:[laughs][Well] I don't think there was a really [sigh] I can't. I'm trying to do my Step 4 in AA.  
I:Can you tell me about that?

P:It's, well the first is you admit you're an alcoholic, right. You admit it to someone and to God, whatever. That you're an alcoholic which I don't have a problem doing. Number 2 uh I forget what number 2, 3 [half-laughs] but number 4 is you make a personal [sigh] you uh you, you, you have to write a personal journey of yourself. Like how it was then and. Like I tried to write this four times and I get half-way through and it's just like, my writing gets funny and I get all emotional, crying over like stuff like that and.

“No, it's um drink, drinking kinda numbed your life a little bit. Yeah.”

### **Language Barriers**

*P4*

“Yeah, so I started to say, okay, I will change my mind a little bit, no problem to be a doctor. Maybe I will study education program. I applied for one year education program here as professional, to be a teacher, they told me no, you are international, your English it's not perfect to study education. I said how come because you don't know how to write. You should write an essay.”

“I said but I already studied 7 years with English and it's not a big deal. I will study one year and maybe I will sign any paper, I will never get any graduation except I pass. Just to help me I can't wait without anything. They said no. I said okay.”



**Appendix 3: Individual Theme Charts**

## P2 – Themes

<b>Clusters</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Choice Quote</b>
Societal Standards of Employment	Educational Level	“And uh, I know it’s hard for people if you don’t have grade twelve, you can forget about getting work.”
	Difficulty with Academic Material	“But I don’t have a memory like I used to. Math was always my difficulty.”
	Disposable Employee Model	“When the order came to take out to the tables I took them to the wrong table... I lost the job pretty quick.”
Oppression	Hospitalization	“Then, they locked us up three days and two nights. That was just one little room with a little bed on the floor and a mattress.”
	Having Children Taken Away	“Uh, but the way they were taken from me, was very very wrong, I still think. And I ha, still have a lot of hatred for, for [government program]. Because I had been [hospital name] at the time, they took that into account, and I wasn’t allowed to have them.”
Personal Barriers	Emotional Problems	“Um, then if you don’t want to drive yourself crazy you’ve gotta get out of the apartment. So, I just go out and just – I go to [mental health support centre].”
	Physical Disability	“Uh, but, the day is long, because there’s nothing for us to do. We go to a library and read or go online, talk to people and that, but, it’s not, it’s not what I call I life. You know, there’s nothing else for people, especially who are disabled, can’t do anything.”

## P3 – Themes

Clusters	Themes	Choice Quote
Societal Standards of Employment	Educational Level	I: No. So you did grade 11? P: Well, not quite. I: Not quite? P: I have like the first semester.
	Disposable Employee Model	“I, from the [hotel], um, right then and there like you had a week and you had to do like eight rooms each day, just the way they did it. And they’d think like ‘oh do everything’. And then the next week you had fifteen rooms. So and that’s how fast it was. So I’m just like, just got bombarded I guess.”
	Not enough jobs / hours	“I left that because um, like they promised me like, full hours and I only got like 30-hours, three weeks and it went down. And at the last I had four hours, once a week. It’s not a lot. So I’m like, it’s not worth it.”
Oppression	Growing up in Poverty	“Uh, we [my childhood family] were always on social assistance. “
	Childhood Abuse	“And then we moved to my grandparents’ house and she ended up like hitting us all the time... And locking us outside.”
	Having Children Taken Away	“Um, I just shut everybody out of my life. Deleted everyone from my phone. Just, sat at my house.”
	Abusive Romantic Partner	“[My boyfriend would] Climb in my balcony, my windows and everything to make sure I was home and not with anybody.”
	Social Assistance	“Uh, people that struggle a lot. Like people who go to the Salvation Army just to get bread or eggs. Just, I do that.”
Personal Barriers	Negative Self Concept	P: I don’t wanna live like, the rest of my family, I like, I don’t know. I wanna be able to look in the mirror and be proud of myself. I: Can you do that now? P: No.
	Addictions	“I’ve always smoked weed. Um, when I lived with my mom. We used to smoke it all the time so it just became a habit.”
Motherhood	Having Children	“I’m waiting for uh, my youngest one to get into kindergarten and then I plan on going back to school.”

**P4 - Themes**

<b>Clusters</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Choice Quote</b>
Immigrant Policies	Language Barriers	“I said but I already studied 7 years with English and it’s not a big deal. I will study one year and maybe I will sign any paper, I will never get any graduation except I pass. Just to help me I can’t wait without anything. They said no. I said okay.”
	International Credentials	“I paid 10 thousand for the medical council of Canada because he will send the medical papers to [country of origin] and I should pay to go to [country of origin] and I should pay to come back to here. And after that they sent it to Philadelphia for, uh, ECMFG, like physician credential of Canada, after that it will come back to here, it’s a very long process... after I did that they told me it’s not a guarantee, you, you should have job offer first. After I paid ten thousand. So I said, ugh, how come you told me now? The problem here, nobody tell you, tells you the truth from the start.”
Societal Standards of Employment	Disposable Employee Model	“And they are asking me to do, to do, it’s too hard for me. And I go, like, I go back home, like 7:30 or 8 o’clock, I just sleep up to twelve, so like three or two hours, three or four, because like I should get up and do, make the food for the kids, do laundry, a lot of stuff like that, so it’s very very tired for me. I’m so tired.”
	Not Enough Pay	“I’m so tired. And just ten dollars before taxes. See. So nothing at all.”
Oppression	Racism / Ethnicity	“Yeah so and some abuse of my kids at school some kids started to spit on them and said your family is dog, you are creepy, negative stranger, go away.”
	Neglectful Romantic Partner	“It should be but eh, this is another problem, he [children’s father] said I don’t need your kids anymore. Your kids, you know, like I made them myself.”
	Bullying in the Workplace	“And even some of my supervisors they are like, it’s not just theirs. Like at the end they give me like orders and, you know, some people, um, like they wanted to tell me like indirect message ‘see, we are on the top now of you’.”
Emotional Barriers	Emotional Problems	“So I started, I started to have an anxiety depression.”
Motherhood	Having Children	“I want to be responsible and I want my kids when they grow up to feel like I did a lot for them, nobody else.”

**P5 - Themes**

<b>Clusters</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Choice Quote</b>
Oppression	Growing up in Poverty	I:[Yeah][Yeah] [A little] Um, financially, how was your family? It sounds like it didn't go well. P:[We weren't] We weren't. I:And then did your mom own a car? A truck or a van or? P:Mmmmmmmmmmmmm she had a car at one point. I: So it was just sorta sporadic. P:Mhmm.
	Childhood Abuse	“It's some abuse stuff in there and you know she's [my mother] pound the crap out of me and stuff like that.”
	Abusive Romantic Partner	“He'd go to the bar and and he'd come back home and have his, pardon the way I talk about this cause [sigh], you know, have his way and leave me, my legs, my legs and everything all bruised”
	Medical Labels	“When I first found out about the borderline personality stuff I'm like, I'm not taking that cause I don't need, I'm don't want another title. Uh I don't need another thing on my shoulders to carry, you know. I'm a recovering alcoholic, I've got bipolar now and now I've got borderline. Woo-hoo.[half-laughs]”
Emotional Barriers	Emotional Problems	“Um suicidal thought was on there. How strong was that? What scale 1 to 5? And, you know, many, many a time in my walk, I've been suicidal. Many times. And, if not for the kids, I'd probably be dead.”
Motherhood	Unplanned Pregnancies	“Baby number one that I wasn't expecting. I was on birth control.[half-laughs] So she was a pleasant surprise.”
	Having Children	“Um and I'm not saying, I'm not minimizing my kids cause they're great, but that's all I got to show for my 48 years [half-laughs] is the three kids and I'm not really teaching them anything either, you know.”
	Children with Behavioural Problems	“The 18 year-old's um going to [school name]. She was just diagnosed with uh Austic Spectrum [half-laughs]...She was hyperactive, Oh my God she was hyperactive! ... Oh my gosh. [half-laughs] Unreal. No fair. Child's house. No fair. And then the 15 year-old di- is um struggling to get through school.”
Addictions	Alcoholism	“The alcohol was just part of our our way of surviving but masking too. And the house used to be spotless. You couldn't, you could never put a put a coat on a chair. Like you could literally spit off- eat off my floors because that was my way of hiding my drinking”

**P7 – Themes**

<b>Clusters</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Choice Quote</b>
Societal Standards of Employment	Educational Level	P:[sigh] I quit. I got pregnant at 15. Quit school. I, I had to go to work at [community name] and I was hitch-hiking from [hometown] to [other community name] everyday.
	Difficulty with Material	“I wrote it [GED]. It took, I don't know, I don't know how many times I had to write it, but I finally passed Social Studies and Science, which were hard. And math. Thank you. And the math, I'm only like 10 points away. You need 450, I have 440. In math.”
Oppression	Childhood Abuse	“Well, when we're grown up, we tell our parents what I re-, what I remember was a lot of fighting. [sigh] My dad would leave mom literally spattered in blood and broken and we'd be there picking her up, cleaning up the blood and cleaning her up.”
	Childhood Sexual Abuse	P:And you know what? I, my father was very, he's a pedophile, but- I:[None] So he sexually assaulted you? P:All the kids. But I never thought the boys were assaulted, I thought it was just girls.
	Growing up in Poverty	“Yeah] We did-, we, we kinda didn't, like we used to have much, I guess this is when we were in foster homes.”
Motherhood	Unplanned Pregnancy	I:And you ran away that time because you wanted to hold onto the pregnancy or? P:[I said] they weren't gonna send me away to take my baby. Mhmm.
	Having Children	“I was still a child. I was a child trying to raise child-children. You know like [half-laughs] Sit and cook, I, I didn't know how to cook -half-laughs]”
Emotional Barriers	Depression	“I end up in at the doctor's once and he put me on [sigh] uh what was the name? Zolof? For about a month.”
Addictions	Alcoholism	“Um I couldn't even, I'd tee-in but I, I couldn't even work. Like I was, I was dependent on alcohol. It was bad. And I could barely get up in the morning with the kids and uh.”
	Gambling	“Like I, I even had a gambling problem, at one time. So I had cu-, get over that. “

**P9 - Themes**

<b>Clusters</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Choice Quote</b>
Societal Standards of Employment	Disposable Employee Model	“I went with this cleaning job and it was so bad that she would not allow us to use gloves to clean toilets because it would slow us down. Then we’d have to clean toilets with just our hands and a rag, it was just awful. And, oh my goodness sometimes I’d clean sixteen toilets in a day, it was just unbelievable. And in the end I couldn’t pull up my bed sheets up, like I couldn’t pull them up.”
Oppression	Abusive Romantic Partner	“He [ex husband] doesn’t see the children one-on-one, he hasn’t seen them in years one to one. Which, in itself is – as, as one of the girls said, they were in the car, both in their car seats and one of the girls said ‘what day is it? What day is it?’ cause they used to be terrified to go with him. They’d have to go a couple hours with him on Tuesdays and a couple hours on Thursdays, and [name] looked at [daughter] and she said, oh there’s not worries now, every day is a good day.”
	Divorce Procedure	“It took five years to get a separation agreement out of him, and, he represented himself for years, that’s a new battleground when one represents himself and they call up your lawyer and hear them out. Your lawyer is required by law to interact with him. You know, they’re protecting their end as well. Thousands and thousands of dollars every week. Every bit of pension I had lost, and he um, and I did everything not to battle him.”
	Sexist Attitudes	Absolutely. And I was told and I’m glad that they told me, they said it’s um, the pendulum is switched, and um it’s a man’s world when it comes to divorce. And you know, if a guy doesn’t have no intension of having the kids, my ex couldn’t have the kids for an hour or two. Um, you go after the kids full time so it doesn’t cost you any money. You don’t have to give any support payments.
Motherhood	Having Children	“If you don’t have the money, they slam shut on you, and I see, as a mother of two girls I see it at school all the time. And we’ve just had a major horrendous thing happen to my daughter”