

A Vibrant Communities Webinar

Basic Income: Towards Gender Equity

With Tracy Smith-Carrier, Josephine Grey & Evelyn Forget
Moderated by Laura Cattari

Webinar Speakers



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Hamilton Roundtable
for Poverty Reduction



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Low Income Families
Together (LIFT)



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- COVID-19 has had a greater impact on women than men
- Women represent 70% of health and social service providers worldwide, according to the WHO; frontline workers with greater exposure to the virus
- More than half (56%) of the women in Canada are employed in the 5 C's: caring, clerical, catering, cashiering, cleaning (Moyser, 2017)
- Loss of jobs (2x the rate of men for working-age population), or reduced working hours, arising from occupying jobs in the low-waged retail and service sector
- Increased exposure to intimate partner violence

Profound gendered division of labour:

- Home schooling children
- Shopping and domestic labour (Wright, 2020)
- Second Shift (Hochschild, 1989) – now Triple Shift for mothers



Relative to men, women are more likely to:

- Experience poverty (Smith-Carrier, 2017)
- Shoulder the disproportionate share of caring labour (Armstrong & Laxer, 2006) and provisioning work (Neysmith et al., 2012)
- Be precariously employed, in minimum wage jobs
- Be paid less for the same work
- Receive less in pension programs (Vosko, 2006)
- Be abused or trafficked (McLaughlin, 2020)
- Multiple intersections occupied by women (based on age, race, class, disability, and so forth) compound disadvantage and lead to increasingly more harmful health, social and health outcomes (e.g., Smith-Carrier, 2017)

Women

Racialized Women

- 3x more likely to experience poverty relative to non-racialized Canadians = racialization of poverty (Block & Galabuzi, 2011)
- Few data on health and race in Canada – a gap needing to be filled
- Over-representation of Black people among front-line workers - up to 80% of women working as aides in LTC homes in Montreal are racialized women (Bouka & Bouka, 2020)

Indigenous Women

- Ongoing systemic inequalities on reserves has resulted in greater exposure to COVID-19 for Indigenous women and their families due to overcrowded housing issues and the lack of access to clean water for regular handwashing (Carling & Mankani, 2020)
- Over 80% of people on reserves have median income below low-income measure (Press, 2017)

- Offered as an (adequate, non-conditional) individual benefit, basic income (BI) could enable women's economic independence
- Women would have *greater choice*: to further their education/training, start a business, stay at home for a time to raise a family, leave a toxic job for a better one, etc.
- More flexibility in determining one's hours of work, with resources to pay public or private childcare providers (e.g., other family members) (Smith-Carrier & Benbow, 2019)
- Could give women more bargaining power in employment (Halpenny, 2019; Zelleke, 2011)
- Unpaid work would receive recognition, "not as a *payment* for care work but as a universal *support* for care work, providing everyone with a more effective opportunity to engage in it" (Baker, 2008, p. 4)

Employment

- A basic income would ensure mothers' access to adequate housing options and would equip them with the financial wherewithal to improve their housing prospects
- Would provide more housing choices that meet families' bedroom and space requirements; increases choice in neighbourhood selection and accommodation closer to important amenities (Smith-Carrier & Benbow, 2019)

Housing

- Access to finances (income) is one of the most significant factors determining whether a woman stays or leaves an abusive relationship (Wendt & Hornosty, 2010)
- A basic income would provide more choice for women if, and when, fleeing intimate partner violence, as well as in choosing a housing neighbourhood that ensure the family's access to safety (Smith-Carrier & Benbow, 2019)

Intimate Partner Violence

- Income is the single most important determinant of health – the lack of it results in a multitude of adverse health consequences (Raphael, 2011)
- Research shows a strong connection between maternal and child health outcomes (Fitzsimons et al., 2017)
- BI would improve the health and well-being of mother and child, including the food security of the family
- The mental health of women would improve as they experience the assurance of income stability (Smith-Carrier & Benbow, 2019)

Health and Well-being

- Common critiques – (1) the cost argument; (2) the work disincentive argument, and (women specifically) (3) the argument that basic income could reify/reinforce a gendered division of labour (Zelleke, 2008)

Yet, these are not borne out in research...

- BI is not costly relative to the costs of our current system (Smith-Carrier & Green, 2017)
- BI does not translate into significant reductions of labour force participation (Forget, 2011)
- It could, in fact, allow for a smoother transition to a more gendered division of labour (e.g., a universal caregiver model; Fraser, 1994)



Basic Income and Women

- BI is not a panacea – it would not expressly resolve affordable housing issues, remedy the shortage of quality childcare facilities or eliminate gender inequality in the short-term (the latter, see Regehr, 2014)
- It would, however, immediately address the feminization of poverty that continues to beleaguer women in Canada (Kwok & Wallis, 2008)
- And it would give women more choices and opportunities in the many important domains of their lives

Limitations

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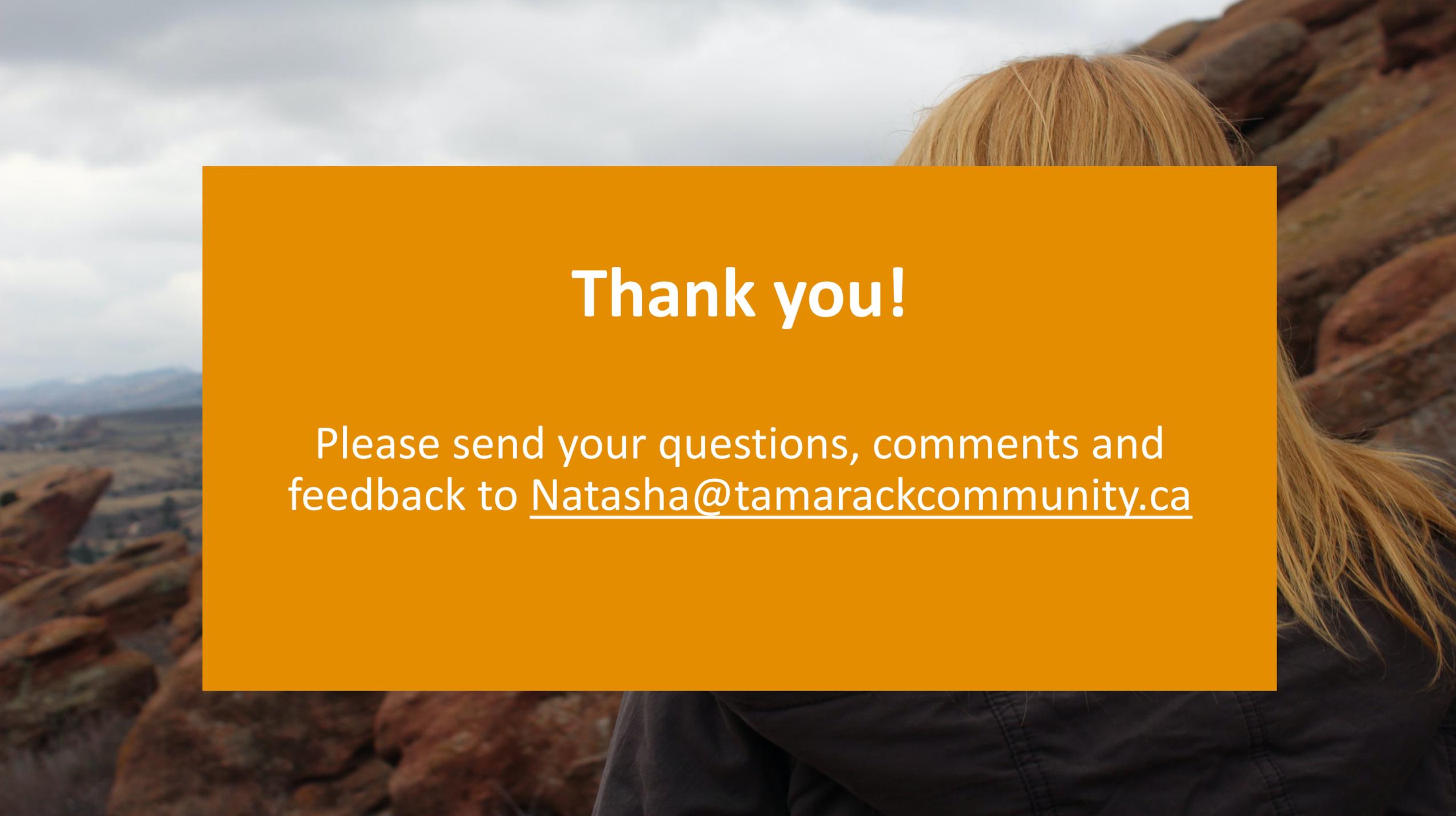
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A person with long blonde hair is seen from behind, looking out over a vast, rocky landscape. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. The foreground and middle ground are filled with reddish-brown, layered rock formations. The person is wearing a dark jacket.

Thank you!

Please send your questions, comments and feedback to Natasha@tamarackcommunity.ca