

Boys, men's and fathers issues in Canada

The problems that boys and men have with stereotyping, discrimination, health, family issues and violence do not stop at international boundaries. Reform and advocacy movements to in these areas differ in character between, say, the US and Canada. This is a personal view of "the movement" in Canada and does not claim to represent others or to be complete.

History: Like the US, Canada has a long history of differential treatment of males and females --conscription, voting, family law, criminal court practice, etc. Like the US, Canada has three levels of government, federal, provincial/state and municipal. Unlike the US, which has long had a written constitution, Canada has only recently developed a "Charter of Rights and Freedoms" (CCRF, 1982) which is still in evolving interpretation by the courts.

A number of court challenges by Canadian men of blatantly unequal treatment in criminal and family law, have lost fairly consistently in Appeals and Supreme Courts. Canadian judges are strongly feminist by training and ideology. Thus, although CCRF has sections guaranteeing equality of the sexes (sections 15 and 28) judges have "read in" that in practice this means legal remedies only for discrimination against women, and read out or ignored provisions that plainly guarantee "equality for male and female persons".

Family Law History: Divorce Law was reformed in a "no-fault" basis in 1968 by Pierre Trudeau (some claim his reforms were based on his trip to Soviet Russia a few years earlier.) Divorce law was further reformed in 1986, adding the "friendly parent rule" and other supposedly pro-shared-parenting reforms. With the Child Support Guidelines of 1997, the Canadian Parliament (Senate and House of Commons) jointly studied child custody and recommended shared parenting, but this has been blocked ever since by vested interests in the legal profession and feminist movement.

Legal System: Marriage and divorce are under federal law, as is criminal law, but the administration of the courts, collection of child support is provincial, as are common law separations. The shared jurisdiction creates a difficult area for reformers.

Domestic Violence: In 1989, Marc Lepine a young Montreal man, killed 14 women students at an Engineering College in Montreal, then killed himself. This event has been exploited ever since by anti-male ideologues to promote women-only services, blame men and boys for violence, and raise funding for ideological feminist advocacy. Lepine was raised by a single mother, who blamed the father, an Arab, who had been denied access to his son. No connection was ever shown between Lepine (or the father) and any men's group, but the the federal government department "Status of Women" (SOW) consequently aimed to "marginalize men" and their organizations. SOW lists men's equality advocates on the government website, against their will, as potential Lepines. The women's shelter movement and biased media stereotype men and boys, largely for fund-raising and to promote their careers.

Abuse against boys: a baby boy was starved to death in a women's shelter in Toronto. Shelter staff blamed the father, who had never been allowed contact with the boy. The mother and the staff were not even charged, but the director of the shelter received an honorary doctorate from Queen's University, Kingston, for her feminist work. There are a lot of perverse incentives in Canada for abusive behaviour by women, particularly when the victims are boys, and anti-male advocacy

is funded in most government departments at all levels.

In Saskatchewan, a father had his baby boy given to an adoption agency without his consent or knowledge and the provincial government systematically and deliberately blocked his efforts to have access to his child. A British Columbia man took the provincial government to the Supreme Court in an effort to get his name on the birth certificate of his son. He won but the government is still blocking him.

Legal Parent: Canada's federal same sex marriage law also has a provision removing "mother" and "father" from an array of federal laws, substituting "legal parent", perhaps a plan by radical feminist lawyers of the Justice Department to block the Supreme Court birth certificate judgment mentioned above. There are other implications to "legal parent": as it is undefined, a "legal parent" could be a daycare, school, or indeed any corporation. It is singular, so increasingly fathers are treated as non-parents, except for paying support. E.g. on Remembrance Day (our veterans' day) only female parents of soldiers are honoured by the government.

Fathers organizations were blocked from presenting to the government on "legal parent", as the former Liberal government was largely captive of special interests. A loose national network of advocates got a shared parenting policy into the Conservative Party, now a minority government.

Advocacy Progress and Strategy: From the 70s to the 90s a number of advocates and grassroots organizations raised awareness and support for shared parenting/co-parenting/joint custody to over 70% in public opinion. Progress in legal reform in law and practice since then has been blocked by a small number of vested interests. A number of efforts to create national organizations in Canada have failed, due to leadership, fundraising, personality issues and the like. A number of provinces and regions have effective organizations, and a number of advocates have developed effective ways of working together in projects across the country.

Some key people and publications in Canada:

The Invisible Boy, by Fred Matthews, Toronto Youth Services (available free on Health Canada's site www.hc-sc.gc.ca)

Everyman Magazine, www.everyman.org, (no longer publishing, evolved into www.gripmagazine.org, a web-based magazine on gender relations.)

Fact (www.fact.on.ca) Toronto membership-based divorce support & advocacy organization, one of the largest in Canada.

Fathers 4 Justice (F4J) direct action protest group, www.fathers-4-justice.ca International connections

ECMAS (Equal Child Maintenance and Support. Alberta joint custody and equal parenting advocacy group. www.ecmas.org)

Parents' Coalition of BC: www.parentswhocare.ca British Columbia provincial group promoting equal shared parenting.

Quebec: www.lapresrupture.qc.ca (After the breakup, French)

Some organizations I am involved in: (commoners@rogers.com) Commoners Publishing: book publishing on men's issues Canadian Council for Co-parenting (www.coparent.ca) a federally-chartered non-profit, dating from 1984, promoting joint custody. ccc@rogers.com

Men's Health Network of Canada, mhnc@rogers.com

FatherCraft Canada, brochures on fathering, advocacy for equality for fathers. fathercraft@rogers.com

EPOC, Equal Parents of Canada, national email group of key advocates (subscribe at www.groups.yahoo.com)