Misleading Headline: Canadian Poverty Down 25%!!!

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Saturday, April 08, 2006

http://politicsrespun.org/2006/04/misleading-headline-canadian-poverty-down-25/

Today's Vancouver version [at least] of the *Metro* free weekday newspaper had a blindingly annoying headline [see below] about the decline in the number of poor Canadians.

Between 2003 and 2004 fewer poor Canadians got so much poorer that they fell under the "low-income cutoff" mark, compared to 1996.

This does not mean that there are fewer poor Canadians...despite what the headline says.

This only means that compared to about a decade ago, the rate of increase of almost "poor" Canadians actually becoming "poor" declined somewhat.

Depending on how diligently you read the sub-headline, it can indicate that there are 25% fewer poor Canadians today compared to a decade ago. 25% actually refers to the amount of decrease in the rate of almost "poor" Canadians slipping below this poverty line.

"Real" newspapers with real depth in their stories sometimes have misleading headlines that imply something that isn't substantiated in the story.

When you have a growing number of pseudo-newspapers providing truncated stories that do not go into depth, you have a greater tendency to mislead the public due to space constraints. I don't think I could come up with an accurate and meaningful headline and sub-headline to fit the space that this piece filled in today's *Metro*.

The problem isn't the complexity of the issue or the difficulty of stating the topic succinctly. The problem is insubstantial media that trains society out of needing depth or explanation or analysis.

Fewer low-income Canadians: study
Number down 25 per cent since 1996

Statistics Canada says fewer Canadians slipped into low income in 2004 while more had managed to climb out.

A new study analyzing the economic well-being of Canadians with low income and low wages indicates 3.3 per cent of Canadians above Statistics Canada's low-income cutoff in 2003 had fallen below the low-income mark in 2004.

This was much lower than a decade earlier, when the rate of slipping below the mark was about 5.5 per cent.

The study backed previous research showing low income is not a permanent state for most Canadians facing it.

The study shows a third of Canadians (34 per cent) below the low-income cutoff in 2003 had climbed above the mark by 2004, and that people below the cutoff were about 21 per cent more likely to recover in 2004 than in 1994.

The cutoff level varies by family size and where they live. By that measure, about 3.5 million people were living in low income in 2004, down by about 1.1 million from the peak in 1996.

How low is low? A family that spends abouttwo-thirdss of its income on food shelter and clothing is at the cutoff point for being low-income.