

**Master's Thesis
Executive Summary**

**Social Justice, Wealth Equity and Gender Equality:
Baha'is and non-Baha'is of Alberta
by
Les Kuzyk**

The Baha'i Faith

The Baha'i Faith presents itself as the latest world religion to appear (initialized in 1844), comparable to such religions as Christianity or Islam. The religion suggests a societal model that, if followed through behavior in accordance with beliefs, would show improved levels of social justice. Baha'is see a world of the future with extremes of poverty and wealth eliminated as well as an equal status of the two genders. The Baha'i Faith is a global religion, with an interest in the entire globe, and presents its model of society as one to be examined and emulated at any global location. This study seeks to empirically measure the actualization of two Baha'i tenets at this stage in the evolution of the faith, in the sample Baha'i community of the province of Alberta, Canada.

Baha'is are taught to be benevolent with their resources, including both time and financial wealth. This study theorized that, with a group of people behaving according to their beliefs, wealth would be redistributed through spiritually influenced benevolent donations. The Baha'i Faith instructs the wealthy to be extra responsible in this activity. Baha'is are also taught to behave in a manner that promotes gender equality.

The NSGVP survey

The National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP) was carried out by Statistics Canada in association with the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy and other Canadian institutions. These surveys, carried out in 1997 and 2000, are the primary sources of comparison for this survey in the realm of wealth equity.

Results Summary

Wealth Equity and Benevolence – Baha'is of Alberta in Comparison

- The vast majority of the Baha'i community of Alberta believe the meaning and purpose of life to be spiritual.
- Baha'is of Alberta are of average household income.
- The gross domestic product per capita, adjusted for purchasing power parity, of Canada is \$27,840US. The world average is \$6400 US. Baha'is of Canada are 4.4 times as wealthy as the average inhabitant of the planet.
- The most distinct demographic difference between Baha'is and the general population is formal education. 51% of Baha'is have at least an undergraduate degree compared to 16% of the general population of Alberta (NSGVP 2000).
- 33% of Baha'is of Alberta believe donating money and volunteering to be the best way to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth, 37% believe differential taxation to be the best method while 85% believe universal education (another Baha'i tenet) to be the best method.
- Baha'is donate an average of 2.5% of their gross household incomes.
- Baha'is donate 3.7 times as much as the general population of Alberta (NSGVP 1997).
- Religiously active Baha'is of Alberta donate 5.1 times as much as the most benevolent religious grouping of the general population of Canada (NSGVP 1997).
- Third generation Baha'is are almost twice as benevolent with financial resources as first and second generation Baha'is of Alberta.
- The same basic pattern exists within the Baha'i community as well as in the general population of Alberta, where persons in the lowest income bracket donate a higher percentage of their incomes.
- Another basic pattern exists within the Baha'i community and in the general population of Alberta, where the vast majority of donation value comes from a small select group of people. The top 25% of Baha'is and non-Baha'is account for 79% and 81% of the total value of donations respectively.
- Religiosity has a positive impact on benevolence. Baha'is attending all Baha'i 19 day feasts give 3.7 times as much as less regular Baha'i

attendees. Non-Baha'is (NSGVP 1997) attending religious services weekly give 4.2 times as much as less regular non-Baha'i attendees.

- Baha'is prefer to donate their financial resources through their place of worship, for reasons of religious obligation.
- Baha'is of Alberta volunteer 151 average annual hours compared with 146 hours for the general population of Alberta (NSGVP 1997).
- The same basic pattern exists within the Baha'i community as well as in the general population of Alberta, where the vast majority of volunteer time comes from a small select group of people. The top 25% of both Baha'is and non-Baha'is account for 64% and 71% of volunteer hours respectively.
- The Gini coefficient (the most widely used method of measuring income wealth disparity, where 0 represents perfect equality and 100 represents perfect inequality) for the Baha'i community is 31.9, while that of the general population of Alberta is 40.1. The Baha'is community has a lower measure of wealth disparity.
- The wealth distribution ratio (top decile to bottom decile) drops significantly from 22:1 before the effects of differential taxation in Alberta to 7:1 after the impact of this secular differential taxation.

Gender Differences and Equalities

- 60% of respondents to this survey were women, while 56% of respondents to the NSGVP 2000 survey were women.
- 79% of Baha'i women agree or strongly agree that extremes of poverty and wealth exist in Alberta; 65% of Baha'i men agree these extremes exist.
- 81% of Baha'i women and 59% of Baha'is men agree or strongly agree their family is wealthy when compared with 'families around the world'.
- Women are more represented in the top 25% of both volunteers and donors within the Baha'i community of Alberta.
- Women in Alberta are paid less than men in Alberta. Women in Calgary, Alberta earn 75.4% as much as men among university graduates.
- Women within Baha'i administrative decision-making bodies (50% in the two major cities of Alberta) are better represented than in the general

population of Alberta secular administration bodies (28% on city councils of the two major cities of Alberta).

Conclusions

- A higher level of formal education, not necessarily a spiritually motivated activity, is the most likely factor to effect the lower measure of wealth disparity within the Baha'i community of Alberta.
- Baha'is of Alberta are significantly more benevolent than the general population of Alberta.
- Baha'is of Alberta are very wealthy in a global sense. Donating 2.5% of household income suggests a lack of Baha'i behavior in response to the Baha'i teaching to the wealthy to give more.
- Wealthy Baha'is continue to give lower percentages of their incomes than less wealthy Baha'is. Behavior in response to the Baha'i teaching to the wealthy to give more again lacks evidence.
- Secular progressive taxation is more likely to have a significant influence on wealth redistribution than benevolence.
- Though religion has influence on benevolence, both here and according to the NSGVP, the speculated spiritually influenced act of donating financially is difficult to show as a primary factor in wealth redistribution.
- A small focused group of people give most of the donation value and contribute most of the volunteer time.
- Women are better represented on administrative decision-making bodies within the Baha'i community than in comparable secular bodies.
- Women have more of a social ethic, they are more aware of such issues as wealth disparity, both locally and globally, both in belief and in their behavior addressing the problem.
- Baha'i teachings as a whole, including gender equality and universal education, may influence Baha'i behavior which may be the causal factor creating improved social justice within the Baha'i community.