

FACT SHEET



WOMEN'S JOBS AND INCOME

Historically, women have found themselves segregated into specific occupations, based on stereotypes of what constitutes women's work and what constitutes men's work. Women's paid and unpaid work has been systematically undervalued, based on these stereotypes, through discriminatory government and employer government policies, and by personal and institutional sexism and racism.

Women's mobility in the workforce has been hampered over the years through job restrictions based on gender such as height and weight restrictions, bans on working night shifts, gender based seniority lists and sexist and racist hiring practices. It may seem hard to believe now but even in the first half of the 20th century, married women were barred from working in the federal public service.

More than 70% of women in the paid labour force continue to be concentrated in a few female-dominated areas: clerical and other administrative positions, sales and service occupations, nursing and related health occupations and teaching.

According to an analysis of Statistics Canada's 1998 Survey of Labour and Income Data (SLID), jobs in male-dominated sectors pay more. Even in female-dominated sectors, jobs performed by women tend to be less highly valued and paid less than the jobs men perform.

- Average earnings in the heavily male dominated trades, transport and equipment operators sector

(93% male) are \$30,904. Average earnings in the manufacturing, processing and utilities sector (61% male) are \$30,090.

- Compare this to average earnings in the female-dominated clerical and administrative sector (71% female) are \$28,875. Women's average earnings within this sector are \$24,989 while men's are \$38,231.
- In the public health sector where women hold 80% of the jobs, their average earnings are less than half of men's: \$33,007 versus \$66,293 for men.
- Women hold 39% of manufacturing, processing and utilities jobs, but their average earnings are less than half of men's: \$17,099 versus \$35,206 for men.
- There are more women in management jobs - 44% - but most of them are in lower paid, lower level administrative positions; women are only 21% of senior managers. Average earnings for women in this occupational group are \$39,048 versus \$58,680 for men.
- Women hold 53% of professional jobs, but most of this figure is accounted for by women's dominance in nursing (95%) and in teaching (69%).
- Women's numbers have increased in some high paying, previously male-dominated, professional fields: in 1999 women made up 47% of all doctors and dentists and 58% of professionals employed in social sciences or religion. However, women made up only 20% of professionals employed in the natural sciences engineering and mathematics.

In fact, the gender gap is wider than commonly believed. Findings from an analysis of the Labour and Income Data show that women's incomes are 61% of men's. In

spite of efforts to close the gender gap, Canadian women still haven't achieved economic equality. Much of the narrowing of the gender gap has come about not because women's incomes have increased but because men's incomes have decreased.

The Labour and Income Data reveal that in 1998, 50% of women in Canada had after tax incomes ranging from \$0 to \$13,786. Only 11% of women had after tax incomes over \$32,367. And there are some disturbing trends. Women in non-unionized, non standard employment had median, after tax incomes that were less than \$11,000. Non-standard employment is the fastest growing sector for women and includes part-time, temporary and self-employment.

Women age 45 to 64 made only 51% of their male counterparts. Their median after tax income was only \$14,779. As retirement income is based on lifetime earnings, women's low incomes in this age group mean a greater risk of poverty in their retirement.

Unionization proves to be the best way to close the gap. Labour and Income Data show that 98% of unionized women had after tax incomes higher than \$13,786 and 38% had incomes over \$32,376. However, cutbacks and privatization initiatives by all levels of government mean a loss of unionized public sector jobs with their salaries, benefits and pensions.

In addition, cutbacks in government spending have forced women to assume a greater burden of health care and educational responsibilities - without pay. Combined with greater workloads, longer hours of work and continuing responsibility for children and domestic chores, it is no wonder that women's economic equality remains an elusive goal.

Women's continuing economic inequality contributes not only to their poverty but also to a continuing culture of violence. Insecure employment means that women are more vulnerable to harassment, while women with low incomes may find it more difficult to leave abusive relationships.

Women in racialized groups and aboriginal women are even more likely to be poor. In 1995, 37% of racially visible women had incomes below Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Offs, compared with 19% of other women and their rate of unemployment was higher. In 1995, 43% of Aboriginal women were below the Low Income Cut-Offs.

What's needed? Among other things: more unionization - women with collective agreements do much better at closing the gender gap; better access to post-secondary education; concerted efforts to fight sexism and racism in the workplace and in educational institutions; employment equity in jobs and training; effective pay equity legislation and measures to create more full-time jobs and reduce insecure, temporary employment.

(Sources: "And We Still Ain't Satisfied": Gender Inequality in Canada - a Status Report for 2001)

