

In 40 years, how far has pay equity come? [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS In February of 1967, Prime Minister Lester Pearson called for an investigation into the status of Canadian women. The Bird Commission, so called for its chairperson, Ottawa journalist Florence Bird, which was pushed for legislation entitling women to equal pay with men performing work of equal value, met 890 witnesses and received 468 briefs and 1,000 letters. That year, 11 per cent of wives earned more than their husbands. Forty years later, how far has the nation come? New data from Statistics Canada reveal some expected gains but also some troublesome reminders of workplace inequity. The data, based on a 2003 study, show the number of women that are the primary breadwinners in dual-earner couples has increased dramatically. In about 1.4 million of 4.7 million dual-earner couples, wives earned more than their husbands. That's about 30 per cent. "If (women have) got advances over 40 years, some of that clearly will be entry into different occupations like medicine and law," University of Toronto sociology professor John Kervin says. The reasons, according to the report, include expanded employment opportunities and child-care options, wider access to higher education and the possibility that for more couples the rising cost of living has demanded two incomes. Primary-earner wives are typically slightly older than other working wives, with slightly older husbands, are less likely to have pre-school-aged children at home, and are generally more educated, with more than one-third of primary-earner wives having more education than their husbands. "Compared to 40 years ago, it's not surprising we find big steps. The real question is what have we done in the last five or 10 years," Kervin adds. The report shows that when those women are compared to primary breadwinning men that do the same job, there is a significant gap in earnings. On average, primary breadwinning wives earned \$41,200 in 2003, far below the \$57,800 earned by their male counterparts. ... - reprinted from the Toronto Star

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