

Unionized women in Canada more likely to earn the equivalent of a man's wage [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A study on the employment status of Canadian women released Thursday says women are earning only 60 per cent of what men earn in the same jobs, but can make up to 83 per cent of a man's salary if they work in unionized jobs.

"The gap with unionized women is smaller," said Karen Hadley, who wrote the report on the status of women in the workplace for the National Action Committee on the Status of Women.

Hadley says women in unionized workplaces have more opportunities to rise through the ranks at work because of the benefits of job security, wage protection and child care.

She said her findings were based on previously unreleased data from Statistics Canada that show women across Canada are worse off economically than men.

According to the report, a woman's average after-tax income in 1998 was only \$16,662. During that same year, men earned on average \$9,075 more than women.

Women in full-time unionized positions earned an average of \$29,000 a year. Men in the same positions were earning \$35,000 per year, a difference of \$6,000.

"Maybe in some jobs women are getting higher salaries, but the labour market is changing," Hadley said.

She said many women are sticking with traditionally female jobs in the health, teaching and clerical fields because of higher pay offered by unions.

This, she says, helps women escape the cycle of poverty, where they must depend on welfare and other government subsidies to survive.

"It does suggest ways to move women out of the system," said Carolyn Egan, president of the United Steelworkers Union local 3800 in Toronto.

Egan says women who have access to child care benefits and other perks offered by unions are often able to lead productive lives on and off the job.

"Unionization does have a real impact on income levels, benefits offered and pension plans," she said.

"That's why you see women unionizing at rates greater than in the past."

Marika Morris, a research co-ordinator at the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, said while unions helped close the gap between wages, other initiatives were also needed.

"Unionization is definitely an option, but we must look at public policy options as well," she said. "Unless you put initiatives in place for the equality of women, you'll always have poverty and you'll always have women earning less."

Morris added many jobs in the service and sales industries held by women do not have structures in place that allow for unionization.

She said women in management positions must also help raise awareness of the income gap suffered by most women.

"It's up to everybody to fix the problem," she said. "Women are earning lower incomes at every level, in every sector."

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