

In a shrinking workforce women outnumber men [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

It has finally happened.

More Canadian women than men were in paid employment during the first half of 2009, according to Statistics Canada.

But on the eve of annual Labour Day celebrations Monday, this historic milestone holds little promise for women in their longstanding battle for economic equality.

Women still make up about 70 per cent of part-time workers and 60 per cent of minimum wage earners. Forty per cent are employed in precarious jobs that are generally poorly paid with little or no job security or benefits such as pensions. And the average full-time, full-year female worker still earns just 71.4 cents for every dollar earned by a man working similar hours, according to the latest Statistics Canada data from 2007.

"This is hardly cause for celebration," says Laurell Ritchie of the Canadian Auto Workers, who first noticed the phenomenon buried in a StatsCan report released last week.

"This is more a reflection of the economic recession - and losses in the male-dominated manufacturing and resource sectors - than a reflection of any economic gains for women," she says. "It also reflects job growth in some areas of the service sector that tend to be dominated by women."

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Toronto child-care worker Cherie Blades, 38, says women have always worked more than men, but "much of it has been at home and unpaid.

"Our work is just not valued," says Blades. She hopes to instil a sense of hope, confidence and equity in the children she works with at Pape Children's House in Riverdale so the situation is different for them.

The new StatsCan data for women's employment raise serious questions about how we treat children and families, says economist Marjorie Cohen, a political science and women's studies professor at Simon Fraser University. "It may be just a blip. But if this is a long-term trend, it indicates a major structural change in the labour force. It means that (child care) is not just a women's issue, but a fundamental issue for our society to deal with."

Women have been looking for economic security since time immemorial, says Armine Yalnizyan, senior economist at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

"But all we've managed to do is settle for economic independence. Unfortunately, that independence hasn't come with equal opportunities, equal wages or equal working conditions to men. Labour Day was set up to celebrate gains workers have made over time. But there's little in this situation to celebrate."

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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