

# Canada's working moms still earning less, doing more than dads <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Stastna, Kazi

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## EXCERPTS:

Can't think of what to get mom for Mother's Day? How about a fairer wage and a break from household chores and child-care responsibilities?

In recent years the focus has been on statistics showing women outperforming men in school, graduating in greater numbers than men from university and increasingly becoming the primary breadwinners in their families. So it is easy to forget that women in Canada still earn on average 25 per cent less than men do and do the bulk of housework and child care, according to the most recent figures from Statistics Canada.

"The gender division of labour has been there a very long time; it's evolving, but it's evolving very slowly," says Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, a professor of labour economics, innovation and human resources management at the University of Quebec in Montreal.

"What we're seeing is a rather slow change partly because organizations where people work aren't changing that much."  
19th best place for mothers

In Canada, mothers are a significant part of the workforce: 73 per cent of women with children under the age of 16 living at home were employed as of 2009, compared to 39 per cent three decades ago.

"It's one of the highest participation rates of any group, and it's because families can't cope with one income," says Marjorie Griffin Cohen, a political science and women's studies professor at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver.

"We have social services that are arranged around the notion that we have a one-income family, but very few people have income that can pay for an entire family to exist."

The mothers who do work, however, are, on average, paid less for their labour than their male counterparts and even some of their female counterparts.

According to the 2010-2011 **Statistics Canada survey** of women's economic and employment status, women earned only 75 per cent of what men did in 2009, and the **wage gap** was even greater if all employed men and women — and not just full-year, full-time workers — were considered: in that larger grouping, women earned only 69 per cent of what men did.

Women who had children earned between 12 and 20 per cent less than women without children.

This economic inequity helped put Canada behind Portugal, Estonia, Slovenia and 15 other countries in terms of conditions that make a country a good place to be a mother. It was ranked 19th out of 43 countries in this year's **State of the World's Mothers report**, put out annually by the global charity Save the Children.

What's more, it doesn't matter whether women are doctors or sales clerks, their income disadvantage in Canada extends across professions, with women in medicine and health-related jobs as well as women in sales and service industries earning around 57 per cent of what men in those occupations do, according to the Statistics Canada report.

Women in business and finance fare only slightly better, earning 59 cents for every \$1 their male counterparts make.

The most gender parity in income exists in arts, culture, recreation, teaching and natural sciences. In those areas, women earned 83 per cent to 85 per cent as much as men.

## Women predominate in part-time, low-wage work

And while women may have had an **easier time than men** during the recent recession, the fact is that what insulated them from

the kind of job losses men experienced in sectors such as manufacturing, natural resources and construction was that they hold more of the kind of low-wage, service and part-time jobs that were not as affected by the economic slowdown.

Nearly seven out of 10 part-time workers in 2009 were women, **according to Statistics Canada.**

Many of those women are working part time because of child-care responsibilities. Among women age 25 to 44 working part time in 2009, 35 per cent said they were doing so in order to care for their children.

Child care responsibilities still fall largely to women, who spend more than twice the time doing unpaid child care than men, according to **2010 figures from Statistics Canada.**

Even when government supports exist to encourage men to do their share, they don't always do so, it seems. Only 30 per cent of new fathers made use of the parental leave they were entitled to in 2009, **Statistics Canada found.** That was up slightly from 28 per cent the previous year but nowhere near the 88 per cent of new mothers who drew maternity or parental benefits.

In Quebec, the rate was much higher since in that province men are eligible for five weeks of paternity leave, which can only be taken by the father, on top of whatever other parental leave they might take, and the wage compensation is more generous than the federal plan.

About 80 per cent of Quebec fathers take paternity leave compared to about 15 per cent in the rest of Canada, Tremblay said.

Tremblay attributes Quebec's higher participation rate in part to the fact that women's groups, unions and other organizations helped put the issue of work-life balance on the public agenda more prominently than in other provinces. (Even before it instituted its own paternity leave in 2006, Quebec had more fathers who took parental leave than was the case elsewhere in Canada.)

It's too early to tell whether fathers' involvement in Canada's parental leave programs will have a long-term impact on the division of parenting responsibilities, Tremblay said, but the experience in other countries suggests it might.

"Sweden has had the reserve paternity leave since 1974," Tremblay said. "Some research there has shown the earlier the father is involved and the longer he is involved — the longer he stays with the baby — the more he'll be present over the years after that."

The reluctance of many fathers to take parental leave, says Cohen, is a product of the economic reality that often makes it easier for a family to forego the income of the mother rather than the father and the long-standing stereotypes about gender roles that persist even in modern, purportedly egalitarian households.

Parenting is still largely a full-time job for a woman and a part-time job for a man, according to Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook. A married mother of two, she has been vocal about the need to change the expectations of who does what in the home.

Sandberg has spoken often about the impact gender stereotypes have on women's working lives, including in a series of web interviews accompanying the forthcoming AOL-PBS documentary project **Makers: Women Who Make America.**

"Go to any party ... [where] there are families there with little kids, watch the baby cry, watch who gets up. It's pretty much almost always the woman, and when it's not, the man gets this huge praise, 'Oh, my God, you went to change a diaper,'" Sandberg, a former Google executive and a chief of staff at the U.S. Treasury Department, says in **one of the 30-second video segments** on Makers.com.

"We still live in expectations around child rearing — even among very modern families and very modern couples — that the woman's default [is

being] in charge, and if the women are default in charge, they will never succeed as much as men do in the workplace."

## The double burden

Along with child rearing, women in North American families also do a **greater share of the housework**.

In Canada, women spent an average of 13.8 hours a week on domestic chores in 2009 versus 8.3 hours for men, **Statistics Canada reports**.

This skewed division of labour results in what has been dubbed the "double burden," which not only saddles women with a disproportionate share of what should be a two-person job but also impedes them in the workplace, where it can result in women missing out on advancement opportunities and self-selecting themselves out of assignments and promotions that would benefit their career.

"The No. 1 impediment to women succeeding in the workforce is now in the home," Sandberg said in a 2010 **New Yorker magazine profile**.

"Most people assume that women are responsible for households and child care. Most couples operate that way — not all. That fundamental assumption holds women back."

Cohen says that for Canadian women, the burden could be eased if employers and governments provided parents with better, more affordable child-care options and flexible work arrangements.

"We tend to organize our labour force and our public policy as though everyone were working full time, full year and didn't have children," she said.

"That is something that has not been rectified, and ... giving people \$100 a month [the amount of the federal Universal Child Care Benefit] doesn't go anywhere near dealing with what people truly need in order to deal with what is a very serious problem: which is how their children are cared for when they're in the labour force."

Many employers still assume women won't be as invested in their work after they have children, and they react negatively to male employees taking time off for family responsibilities, Tremblay said. In her research, Tremblay interviewed men who said they wanted to take a more active role in their family life but didn't feel comfortable asking for time off for family reasons at work.

"The finance sector, the IT sector, multimedia — those are all sectors where putting forward demands for the family won't necessarily be perceived very positively, so the men just won't put them forward," she said.

## Gender divisions still present among professions

Women are also disadvantaged in the workforce because they remain concentrated in the same occupations that have been female dominated for decades, such as teaching, nursing and other health-related jobs, and clerical, administrative, sales and service work.

Sixty-seven per cent of employed women in Canada were working in these areas as of 2009, compared to 31 per cent of employed men, **the Statistics Canada survey found**.

Conversely, in the natural sciences, engineering and mathematics, women made up only 22 per cent of professionals.

The exceptions are business and finance, where the proportion of women went from 38 per cent in 1987 to 51 per cent in 2009, and some diagnostic and treating health care professions such as doctors and dentists, where women's participation went from 43 per cent in 1987 to 55 per cent in 2009.

"We've kind of been lulled into complacency because we see more women doctors, more women lawyers, but, in fact, what we're seeing at the middle end and the low end of wage earning ... [is] a very stubborn

division of labour by gender," Cohen said.

Women are not well represented in fields such as construction, trades, transportation, manufacturing and natural resources industries, and the government has done little to help integrate them into those parts of the workforce, Cohen said.

A lack of apprenticeship programs means that women are not being trained for such jobs, and those who have enough training are not being hired.

As a result, women are losing out on job opportunities in growth industries where there is a demand for labour, such as the oilsands. Cohen cites the example of the recession in 2008-09, when governments poured money into new infrastructure programs as a way to help stimulate the flagging economy, money that went primarily to jobs for men, not women.

"You have to have government really seriously instituting programs," Cohen said. "It's not just a matter of women applying for a job and getting one if employers aren't going to hire them, and they aren't going to hire them unless the government makes them do it when they give them all the money to build all of this infrastructure."

## Corporate boards mostly male

While the common refrain in recent years has been that women have "made it" and no longer have to struggle for equality, the reality on the ground tells a different story.

Nearly a third (31 per cent in 2009, **according to Statistics Canada**) of women in two-income families may **earn more than their husbands**, but only a small percentage of them attain the highest levels in their profession.

Women tend to occupy lower-level managerial positions — only 32 per cent of senior managers were women in 2009, according to the **Statistics Canada survey** — and make up only a tiny proportion of the boards of directors at Canadian companies.

Even when they are in senior positions, they are generally still having to juggle more family responsibilities, on top of their added workload, than their male counterparts, says Tremblay.

"In qualitative interviews with managers — men and women in different sectors — you do see that the preoccupation with family issues is still present for women even if they are in a managerial position," she said. "Whereas for men in those kind of positions, it does not tend to be very important — usually, there is really somebody else fully responsible for this."

A mere 14.5 per cent of board seats in private and 10.3 per cent in public companies on the FP500, the list of Canada's 500 largest private and public corporations, were held by women in 2011, according to a **census conducted by Catalyst**, which tracks women's advancement in business. Almost 40 per cent of private companies and more than 46 per cent of public companies on the FP500 had no women at all on their boards.

The numbers are similar in the U.S. and in many parts of the world — except places like Norway, where the government **mandated** that 40 per cent of seats on corporate boards be held by women and which ranked No.1 on the **State of the World's Mothers report**.

"Women are not making it to the top of any profession anywhere in the world," Sandberg **told an audience at the TEDWomen conference** in December 2010. "A hundred and ninety heads of state; nine are women. Of all the people in parliament in the world, 13 per cent are women. In the corporate sector, women at the top — C-level jobs, board seats — tops out at 15, 16 per cent. The numbers have not moved since 2002 and are going in the wrong direction."

- reprinted from CBC news

**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** gender <sup>[3]</sup>

parent involvement <sup>[4]</sup>  
maternity and parental leave <sup>[5]</sup>  
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