

Canada ranks poorly in health outcomes in global gender equality report ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Canada has cracked the top 20 of an international gender equality report, but shockingly ranks poorly in the category of health outcomes and life expectancy.

The World Economic Forum has issued its ninth annual Global Gender Gap Report, a study that measures 142 countries for gender equality across four pillars: economy, politics, health, and education.

The United States improved its ranking to 20 after narrowing its wage gap and improving the number of women in government and ministerial positions, the report said. Canada is ranked 19th, up from 20th last year and 21st the year before.

While Canada is among several countries to rank first in educational attainment, where there is almost no gender gap at all, it ranks 17th in economic participation and opportunity, and 42nd in political empowerment.

Perhaps most shockingly, Canada ranks 100 out of 142 countries in the category of health outcomes and survival. Dragging down its ranking in the health category is a rank of 94 in the birth ratio category, which measures the ratio of boy versus girl births.

Canada also ranked 111th in the life expectancy of women compared to men.

Indeed, the gender gaps are worsening in the health and educational attainment categories in some parts of the world. About 30 per cent of countries have wider education gaps than they did nine years ago, while 40 per cent of countries have wider health and survival gaps than nine years ago, the report said.

The report notes that healthy and educated women are more likely to have healthier and more educated children, "creating a virtuous cycle for any community or country."

And when the number of women involved in political decision-making "reaches a critical mass, their decisions - which take into account the needs of a wider segment of society - lead to more inclusive results," the report says.

"Achieving gender equality is obviously necessary for economic reasons," Klaus Schwab, the World Economic Forum's founder and executive chairman, said in a statement.

"Only those economies who have full access to all their talent will remain competitive and will prosper. But even more important, gender equality is a matter of justice. As a humanity, we also have the obligation to ensure a balanced set of values."

Political empowerment progress

Meanwhile, worldwide, much of the progress in gender equality over the past decade has come from more women entering the workforce, particularly politics, according to the report. However, the gender gap in political empowerment remains widest of four categories studied.

The gender gap is narrowest in the category of health outcomes and survival at 96 per cent globally, with some 35 countries having no gap at all. The gender gap in educational attainment is at 94 per cent globally, with 25 countries having no gap at all.

However, the global gender gap for economic participation and opportunity "lags stubbornly behind" at 60 per cent, up from 56 per cent in 2006, the study says.

And the gap for political empowerment "remains wider still" at 21 percent, the report notes. However, it is the political empowerment category that has seen the greatest improvement since the study began in 2006, largely because of the spike in the number of women who have entered politics.

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