

The best and worst places to be a woman in Canada 2015 ^[1]

The gender gap in Canada's 25 biggest cities

Author: McInturff, Kate

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Full report ^[2]

Introduction

It's been quite a year for women. Beyoncé put feminism up in lights, while Time Magazine tried to ban it. Patricia Arquette's Oscar speech made pay equity the talk of the town. The Jian Ghomeshi scandal took the entire country through the tragic implications of sexual assault. The Twitter hashtag #beenrapedneverreported started with two Canadian journalists and exploded with the stories of millions of survivors worldwide. Sexual assault on campus got a closer look from the media and university administrators. August bodies from Parliament to the Canadian Forces found themselves struggling to find the tools to address sexism, discrimination and violence among their ranks.

Many in Canada have responded to these news stories with surprise and disbelief. Women outnumber men at university, so surely they must be bringing home the same kind of paycheque. The news is full of newly elected women premiers—how can there be a problem with women's political representation? Headline after headline is drawing attention to the issue of violence against women—that must be making a difference.

The reality is Canada has a gender gap. Even working full time, women continue to bring home 20% less than the men that work beside them. That includes women with university degrees. Aboriginal women, racialized women and immigrant women take home even less. Men outnumber women two to one among senior managers and three to one among elected officials. More than a million women report having experienced domestic or sexual violence in the past five years alone. The rate of violent victimization triples for Aboriginal women and girls.

This report is intended to provide an annual measure of the gaps that exist between men and women in communities across Canada. It is also a reminder that with the right choices and policies these gaps can be closed.

Governments, communities and individuals across the country are working to make women's lives better and to close the gaps in men's and women's well-being. Cities have much to learn from one another. Looking at which city fares the worst and best in terms of gender equality isn't about winning the cup, it's about identifying what works in one community and bringing it home to another—so that every city in Canada is a good place to be a woman.

How the Index Works

This report ranks each city based on a comparison of how men and women are faring in five different areas: economic security, leadership, health, personal security, and education. The report focuses primarily on the gap between men and women, rather than their overall levels of well-being. It does so in order to measure the difference between the access women and men have to the public goods available in their community, not the overall wealth of a community.

Statistics have their limits and the report reflects that. Statistical indicators have been chosen based on international best practices. Each indicator serves as a proxy for well-being. For example, levels of employment and pay stand in as a proxy for economic security. However, these indicators cannot paint the full picture of a lived life, nor can they fully capture differences between groups of women and transgender persons. To help get us there, this year's report takes a closer look at one city (Saskatoon) to provide a fuller picture of how a community is working to close its gaps and where it continues to struggle.

The Results

Once again, communities in Quebec fare better than cities in other provinces. The reasons for this are increasingly clear. The province of Quebec has put in place a number of policies that address the specific challenges that women face in balancing work and family life. These policies include subsidized child care, more generous parental leave benefits, and paternity leave. A comparison of the impact of these policies in Quebec and European countries with similar policies demonstrates the strong correlation between them and women's access to work and better pay.

There are 2.5 million more women in the workforce today than there were 30 years ago. Women continue to spend nearly twice as many hours as men do looking after the household and taking care of children and other family members. The combination of these factors means that women are facing a significant time crunch in their day. Yet stagnant male wages mean that households very much depend on women staying in paid work. When governments provide access to better paid parental leave, leave for both parents, and affordable child care, women and their families are better able to access paid work and ensure their financial stability. This is why most Quebec cities fare better in the rankings.

Cities like Gatineau and Victoria, where there is a large public sector employer, also come out on top—particularly in narrowing the wage gap and in promoting women into senior management positions. Women in Gatineau see the smallest gap in their pay, earning 87 cents on the male dollar. Women in Victoria come the closest to having the same level of employment as men, trailing them by a mere 3%. This happens for several reasons. Public sector employers are highly unionized and, as a result, have robust wage-setting processes. They have strong equity regulations in place—regulations which ensure that the employer must keep track of whether or not there are discriminatory gaps in pay and promotion. The public sector has a high level of transparency when it comes to rates of pay and promotion, which ensures that employees themselves know where gaps in pay and promotion exist. The correlation between public sector employment and greater equality is evident not only in Canada but across high-income countries.

Regions that depend on predominantly male industries tend to land at the end of this list, with Calgary, Edmonton and Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo taking up the bottom three spots. Men and women tend to work in different occupations across Canada. However, when a regional economy is dominated by the occupations where men work, without the same level of growth in the industries where women work, the gap in employment and pay gets bigger. Thus, while Edmonton can boast some of the highest wages in the country, it also has one of the biggest gaps in what men and women earn, with women who work full time bringing home \$16,000 less annually than men.

The construction industry and the mining, oil and gas sectors are two of the biggest employers in Alberta. Men hold 88% of the jobs in construction and 76% of the jobs in the extractive sector in Alberta.¹¹ There are fewer jobs available in female-dominated sectors like education and health care in the province. While there are a number of initiatives working to train women for jobs in predominately male industries, there has been very little change in the share of women holding jobs in mining and construction over the past decade. The shift of women into these sectors is happening very slowly. Without growth in the predominantly female occupational sectors, women will continue to find themselves underemployed. Without investment in the sectors that do the most to narrow the pay gap (e.g., education and nursing), women will continue to take home less money for the same amount of work.

Prairie cities Winnipeg and Saskatoon, as well as Eastern cities Halifax and St. John's, boast some of the smallest gaps in health. Two-thirds of women in Halifax and St. John's rate their health as good or excellent. Women in Winnipeg and Halifax are the most likely to have been screened for cervical cancer in the past three years. Women in these four cities are also the least likely to identify high levels of stress in their lives.

Women's levels of political representation are low in every region. Victoria is the only major city in which women outnumber men among city councilors.

St. John's has no female city councilors at all. When all the regional municipalities that fall within the census metropolitan area are counted, Victoria still comes out on top—with women making up 45% of their elected officials. Hamilton is at the bottom of the pack, with women making up only 20% of elected officials.

Canadian cities have some challenges in common. Rates of sexual assault, harassment and intimate partner violence remain persistently high in Canada, changing little over the past 20 years. Over a million women report having experienced one of these forms of violence in the past five years. While it is an imperfect measure, the index relies on the only data available at the local level—police-reported crime rates—to capture the public safety issues that disproportionately affect women. The results clearly show a persistent problem that Canadian cities face in common. Even in the cities with the lowest levels of police-reported sexual assault and intimate partner violence (Kelowna and Abbotsford-Mission) the impact is still significant. Statistics Canada estimates that police-reported sexual assaults represent only 10% and police-reported intimate partner violence only 30% of actual incidents. Given this trend, it is likely that over 400 incidents of sexual and domestic violence occurred in each of these two small communities in the space of a year.

Canadian cities also share some of their achievements. Women's educational levels are higher than men's in every area except the trades. Out of the 25 cities examined, Ottawa had the most university graduates, with nearly one in three women holding a university degree. Women in Oshawa are the most likely to have completed a college or CEGEP degree. Sherbrooke has the biggest share of women in the trades, with 13% of women in the city having completed training or an apprenticeship.

It is also clear that Canadian cities share a common will to narrow the gap between women and men. Local initiatives, some of them highlighted below, are thriving across the country. They include a group of food servers in Edmonton who got tired of being asked to wear miniskirts at work, and an organization in Quebec City that ensures that Deaf women have access to perinatal care. What is needed now is the opportunity for those working at the local level to share their insights and experiences with each other and with decision-makers at all levels of government. By learning from each other, every Canadian city has the opportunity to make their hometown the best place to be a woman in Canada.

The Rankings:

1. Victoria
2. Gatineau

3. Quebec City
4. Abbotsford-Mission
5. Halifax
6. London
7. Vancouver
8. Barrie
9. Montreal
10. Oshawa
11. Ottawa
12. Toronto
13. Kelowna
14. Regina
15. St. John's
16. St. Catharines-Niagara
17. Kingston
18. Winnipeg
19. Sherbrooke
20. Hamilton
21. Saskatoon
22. Windsor
23. Calgary
24. Edmonton
25. Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: equality ^[4]

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