

Women's wage gap getting wider in Canada, new report indicates ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Women in Canada still earn much less than men for the same work, and also bear far more of the burden of extra unpaid work, according to a report released today.

That's just one of the findings of the wide-ranging report from Oxfam Canada and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

The report, titled Making Women Count, looked at income inequality since the global recession that began in 2008, with a specific focus on how women are faring in Canada and around the world.

Wage gap now at 72%

While there are pockets of progress, on the whole, the report does not paint an encouraging picture. In 2009, women in Canada earned on average 74.4 per cent of what men earned. In 2010, it was 73.6 per cent, and in 2011, it was 72 per cent, roughly where it remains today.

Doubters of the gender wage gap often argue that women earn less than men mainly because they work fewer hours, as a group, than men do. But Monday's report says the data doesn't back that up.

"The gap in men's and women's incomes is not simply the result of women working fewer hours," the report said. "Nor is it the result of different levels of education and experience. Even when all of these factors are considered, the result remains the same: a wage gap."

The most up to date data from Statistics Canada on the issue is from 2011. Even after stripping out the impact of part-time or temporary work people may choose to do, Statistics Canada data shows that women earn 72 cents for every dollar a man makes doing the same type of work: full-time, and full-year.

Part of the problem is that for whatever reason, women find themselves disproportionately represented in lower-paying industries. The report cites the example of truck drivers (the majority are men) who are paid an average of \$45,417 per year, while Early Childhood Educators (the majority are women) are paid \$25,252 per year.

That's just one example of a systemic imbalance.

Women, on the whole, also perform much more unpaid work than men do. That doesn't mean internships and the like; rather, it refers to the hours in the day that are dedicated to primarily household tasks.

Household chores

In low- and middle-income countries, the report says, women spend three times as many hours as men on unpaid care work each day. The situation in Canada is only slightly better, with women performing nearly twice as many hours of unpaid work each day as do men.

Globally, women spend between three and six hours every day on domestic and care giving work. Men spend markedly less time on such activities — between 30 minutes and two hours a day.

All those hours doing unpaid work eats into the earning potential of women during the remaining hours they have available for paid work. And there again, women on the whole are drawing the short end of the stick, the report says.

Levels of women who are employed in Canada have climbed steadily through the 1980s and '90s, but still have yet to match those of men, despite a demographic impetus against that: there are currently more women of working age in Canada than men, and on the whole, they are more likely to have higher education.

Currently, 59 per cent of minimum wage workers in Canada are women. Yet, women in Canada's labour force are more likely to have a university degree than men, but are paid less, on average, across all types of work.

"Education alone is not sufficient to overcome discrimination in wages and employment," the report says. "Clearly other forces are at play." The wage gap is even greater for some groups of women in Canada, such as aboriginal women, women of different races, and immigrant women.

Global problem

Indeed, it's even worse in other countries, where the report suggests the global manufacturing supply chain is disadvantaging women more than men.

"The fact that women are good for economic growth does not necessarily mean that economic growth is always good for women," the report says. "In a global economy that depends on ever cheaper labour to produce profits for the global elite, paying women in low-income countries desperately low wages has become a means to drive profitability."

While a university-educated career woman in Canada may have little in common with an uneducated low-skilled worker in Bangladesh, they likely have one area in common: child rearing.

Despite modest progress on this front in recent decades, women still perform the lion's share of child-care related duties in the world. In a survey of 31 developing countries, 39 per cent of working women with children under six years old said they care for their children themselves during the work day — "literally doing two jobs at once," the report says.

Impact of child care

It is in the area of child rearing that the report says policymakers have the easiest and most effective tools at their disposal to close the wage gap, by advancing subsidized daycare programs which statistics indicate are more than worth their cost in terms of returns to the economy.

"The lack of child-care spaces keeps mothers out of the workforce long after they want and need to return," the report says. "The high cost of child care means that a working parent often spends as much as a third of their income on child care."

The report gives the example of Quebec, where subsidized full-day daycare was implemented in 1997. Since then, the employment rate for Quebec women has doubled, and their poverty rates have dropped from 36 per cent to 22 per cent. According to a recent estimate from a G20 report, the impact of that surge of workers and taxpayers due to people no longer having to leave work to care for children resulted in a 1.7 per cent increase in Quebec's GDP, and an increase in provincial and federal tax revenues that exceed the program's cost.

In other words, subsidized daycare in Quebec has paid for itself and then some.

Researcher Kate McInturff of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives worked on the report, and said in a release that's part of why fixing the wage gap is good for everyone, not just women.

"In a world where so many women are still left behind, addressing the unequal economics of women's work will have a transformative impact on our economy," McInturff said.

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