

Study: Women in Canada: Women and paid work

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Wednesday, March 8, 2017

Since the Second World War, the labour force participation of women in Canada, particularly mothers, has increased considerably. At the same time, the labour force participation of men has fallen. In spite of these converging trends, women continue to have a lower rate of labour force participation than men, reflecting their greater responsibility for housework and childcare.

More than 80% of women in Canada aged 25 to 54 participated in the labour market in 2015, compared with just over 20% in 1950. A smaller proportion of men participated in the labour market in 2015 (90.9%) than in 1950 (97.1%). While the gender gap in labour force participation rates decreased from 75.5 percentage points in 1950 to 8.9 percentage points in 2015, it did not disappear.

These findings are taken from "[Women and paid work](#)," a chapter of *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, released today. Primarily using data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), and focusing on people aged 25 to 54, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of women's labour market experiences in comparison to those of men, and explores how they have evolved over time.

Over three-quarters of women are employed, but women work fewer hours and experience more work interruptions than men

Overall, women were less likely than men to be employed: 77.5% of women were employed in 2015, compared with 85.3% of men.

Women were also more likely than men to work on a part-time basis (18.9% versus 5.5%), and to do so for voluntary reasons (67.2% versus 53.0%), typically to care for children. This meant that women spent an average of 5.6 fewer hours per week on paid work than men (35.5 hours versus 41.1 hours).

In addition to working fewer hours on a weekly basis, women who worked full-time were more likely than their male counterparts to experience work absences and interruptions. A higher proportion of women (30.0%) than men (23.9%) were away from work sometime during the LFS reference week. Among employees who were away from work, a greater proportion of women (38.4%) than men (24.8%) were absent for the full week.

The reasons provided by women and men for their work absence differed. Women were more likely to be away from work for involuntary reasons (47.9%)—their own illness, disability, personal or familial reasons, including maternity and parental leave—than men (27.6%). On the other hand, men were more likely to be away from work for other reasons, such as vacation.

Women also tended to have more work interruptions than men—defined as being away from work for more than three months since they first began working for a period of at least six months, and the total duration of their work interruptions amounted to an average of 18.5 months (approximately 1.5 years) in 2011. The comparable figure for men was 8.6 months. This reflects women's greater likelihood of taking maternity/parental leave, and doing so for longer durations than men, as well as women's greater likelihood of experiencing family and/or sickness-related work absences.

Over half of women are employed in traditionally-female occupations

Although paid work has become a central and enduring role for most women, they are often employed in occupations that have been the purview of women historically. In 2015, 56.1% of women were employed in teaching, nursing and related health occupations, social work, clerical or other administrative positions, or sales and services, compared with 17.1% of men. This gender distribution across occupations was little changed from 1987, when 59.2% of women and 15.7% of men were employed in traditionally-female occupations.

Women remain outnumbered in natural and applied science occupations that usually require a university degree. These occupations serve as a proxy for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. Specifically, in 2015, 24.4% of the people employed in professional scientific occupations were women, while 75.6% were men. This mostly reflects the sub-group of computer and information systems professionals, which is the largest and the most unbalanced in terms of gender (23.1% are women and 76.9% are men) after engineering.

Partly as a result of federal and provincial employment equity legislation pertaining to public servants, gender parity existed in the public sector with respect to women's representation in leadership positions in 2015: 54.0% of legislators and senior government managers and officials were women. In contrast, 25.6% of senior managers in the private sector were women.

Women earn \$0.87 for every dollar earned by men, largely as a result of wage inequality between women and men within occupations

The gender wage ratio (women's earnings over men's earnings) reflects the broader state of gender equality in society. In 2015, women earned an average of \$26.11 per hour, while men earned an average of \$29.86. These figures correspond to a gender wage ratio of 0.87, meaning that women earned \$0.87 for every dollar earned by men.

The gender wage ratio tends to improve with increasing levels of educational attainment. In 2015, the gender wage ratio was 0.74 among those with less than a high school diploma, compared with 0.88 among those with a Bachelor's degree. Even among those with a university degree above the Bachelor's level, women earned \$0.90 for every dollar earned by men.

The gender wage gap—that is, the difference between the wages of women and men—may result from the differential allocation of female and male workers across occupations. Women tend to be over-represented in low-paying occupations and under-represented in high-paying ones. However, if the overall occupational distribution of women was equivalent to that of men, women's average wages would be essentially unchanged at \$26.10 per hour. It follows that the gender wage ratio would remain the same.

The gender wage gap is largely a function of wage inequality between women and men in the same occupations. In 2015, men out-earned women in every occupational group, except for 2 (of 46). Given their occupational distribution, if women earned the same amount as men within occupations, their average wages would increase by an average of \$2.86 per hour. As a result, the gender wage ratio would reach 0.97.

Note to readers

Annual estimates from the Labour Force Survey are averages of 12 monthly estimates.

The **participation rate** is the number of employed and unemployed as a percentage of the population.

The **employment rate** is the number of employed persons as a percentage of the population 15 years of age and over. The rate for a particular group (for example, youth aged 15 to 24) is the number employed in that group as a percentage of the population for that group. For more detailed information, see the Guide to the Labour Force Survey (71-543-G).

Data in this report are presented and analyzed by sex, as per international guidelines for producing gender statistics. For more information, see United Nations Statistics Division, [Gender Statistics Manual](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers 3701, 4428 and 4501.

"Women and paid work" is now available online as part of *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, seventh edition (**89-503-X**).

Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report is a collaborative effort of Status of Women Canada and Statistics Canada.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact Melissa Moyser (613-951-4027; melissa.moyser@canada.ca) or Client Services (toll free: 1-866-873-8788; statcan.labour-travail.statcan@canada.ca), Labour Statistics Division, or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).