

Assessing Gender Equality

Trends in the Situation of Women and Men in Canada

Status of Women Canada

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ASSESSING GENDER EQUALITY

This background paper has been prepared by Status of Women Canada (SWC) based on a framework for assessing the state of gender equality initiated in 2004 in collaboration with several federal departments. It is a work in progress and at this point focuses on six main categories – economic security, education, work, health, immigration and justice. It compares the situation between women and men as well as among them, based on factors such as age, family status, disability, Aboriginal origin, visible minority, and immigrant status. Making comparisons among women is especially important as their patterns of education, work for pay or profit, work in the household and other activities tend to more varied than men's, whether on a day-to-day basis or over the lifetime.

The framework is intended as a diagnostic tool to aid in assessing change over time – to show progress and to improve understanding of gender equality gaps so that they can be better addressed. Within this diagnostic framework, a great deal of population-based data has been compiled showing areas of change and progress for women, areas of similarity between women and men and areas of inequality. This paper summarizes some of the key trends. Moreover, because SWC is in the process of consulting on potential ways to move forward on gender equality, this paper, while providing some context, tends to focus on gender equality gaps. Comprehensive information will be available in Statistics Canada's *Women In Canada: A gender-based statistical report*, due to be published later in the year. SWC is providing support for this publication.

We recognize that various sources of information are important in assessing where and how best to move forward. For example, in a few places in this paper we use results information from federal programs. This is a source that we hope to build upon in a long-term gender equality strategy. Hand-in-hand with our efforts to establish an ongoing statistical or quantitative basis for assessing gender equality, SWC also continues to support and value qualitative work that goes beyond the numbers and enables Canadians to have their voices heard.

TRENDS IN THE SITUATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN CANADA

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Within Canada, declining fertility rates (in 2002 the rate was 1.5 compared to 2.3 in 1970) coupled with an aging population, mean that seniors will account for a larger proportion of the population over the next number of decades. The majority of those seniors will be women. Currently, women over the age of 65 account for 7% and men for 5.5% of the population. It is important to note that among Aboriginal people in Canada trends are quite different with higher fertility rates and a younger population. Immigrants made up 18.4% of the population in 2001 and will continue to be a main source of population growth.

Changing trends and increasing diversity in the composition of families also have implications for gender equality. For example, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of families with children that are headed by lone parents. In 1961, only 9% of all families with children were headed by a female lone-parent, numbers that increased to 16.4% in 1991 and 20.1% in 2001, rates that are

much higher than among men.¹ Moreover, lone-parenthood is also more likely to occur within certain populations. In 2001, 8.7% of all Canadian women were lone parents (compared to 2.1% of men). These rates are marginally higher for immigrants (9.4% of immigrant women, 2.1% of immigrant men) and visible minority communities (10.4% of women, 2% of men), dramatically higher for Aboriginal women (19.4%) and significantly higher for Aboriginal men (4.8%).

Families, in general, are getting smaller and an increasing number of women are living alone, including 38% of all women aged 65 and over. There has also been a decline in the 'breadwinner' model of the family and an increase in the number of dual earner families. For example, in 1965, 33% of families were dual earner families, a proportion that more than doubled to 72% by 2002.²

Some of these changes in living and work arrangements are resulting in greater work-family stress. This has implications for the work that women do for pay or profit and for their care-giving responsibilities. Being the primary caregivers of children continues to be reflected in women's lower incomes, even with their increased labour force participation. Given an aging population, and the large share of informal caregiving for seniors³ done by women, maintaining positive trends in gender equality presents new challenges. Increased demands on women to care for aging relatives, for example, may reduce their ability to meet their own care and financial needs by the time they are seniors themselves.

EDUCATION TRENDS

There has been a dramatic increase in the proportion of the female population with a university degree in the past several decades. In 2001, the percentage of women and men who have earned a university certificate, diploma or degree was almost the same (17.8% of women and 18.1% of men).⁴ This positive trend for women is likely to continue. In the 2001-02 academic year women accounted for 56.7% of full-time students in universities, up from 37% in 1972-73. Women also accounted for almost half of all doctorate students, a sharp increase from 18.8% in 1972-73.⁵

While gains in educational attainment have been made in general, access and affordability remain issues for some women. For example, data from the Canada Student Loans Program indicates that every year from 1996 to 2002, the percentage of student loans negotiated by women has increased (53% in 1996 to 58.3% in 2002) and decreased among men (47% in 1996 and 41.7% in 2002).⁶

Some women face particular difficulty in accessing and affording higher education. Lone mothers, for example, face severe challenges in pursuing post-secondary education, due to the combined costs of education and children along with the time demands of studying and caring for children in a one-parent family.⁷ Social assistance is generally not available for individuals who receive student loans meaning

¹ Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada

² Statistics Canada (2002). *Income Trends in Canada*.

³ Statistics Canada, Gender Social Survey, 2002

⁴ Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2001

⁵ Statistics Canada, Centre for Education Statistics

⁶ Canada Student Loans Program, HRSDC

⁷ Stephenson, M., & Emery, R. (2003). *Living Beyond the Edge: The Impact of Trends in Non-standard Work on Single/Lone Parent Mothers*. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada.

that lone parents must borrow large amounts to meet family needs, putting them in a situation of high expense, risk and stress both during their studies and the repayment period.⁸

Table 1

Women to Men’s Average Employment Income (University Graduates)

Age Group	1995 (%)	2000 (%)
15- 24	87.3	84.3
25-34	81.4	76.7
35-44	74.2	70.3
45-54	69.3	67.7
55-64	63.1	59.7

Despite advances in education, female graduates do not necessarily see the same benefits as men in the labour market. To some extent this may reflect women’s continuing pursuit of fields of study where they have traditionally predominated, such as social sciences and humanities, while making smaller inroads into male-dominated fields such as physical sciences and engineering. Table 1 shows that for every age group, the employment income gap between male and female university graduates who work full time has widened between 1995 and 2000.⁹

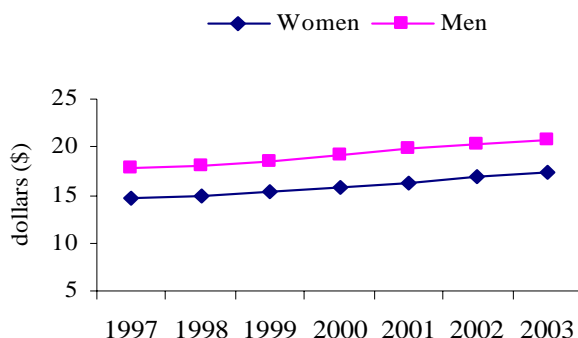
PAID WORK TRENDS

Women’s increased participation in the labour market has been one of the most significant trends in the last few decades. The employment rate for women increased from 42% in 1972 to 57.2% in 2003 while the rate for men decreased from 73% to 68%. Among women with children under the age of 16, 72% were employed in 2003, a dramatic rise from 39% in 1976 and 56% in 1986.¹⁰

Despite women’s increased labour force participation, the percentage employed full-time has decreased marginally from 76.3% in 1976 to 72.2% in 2003. During this period, women’s part-time employment rate increased from 23.7% to 27.8%. In comparison, 11% of employed men worked part-time in 2003.¹¹ While part-time and other non-standard employment can be a strategy to balance work and family demands, for example, it also generally means lower earnings and less access to benefits, and for some this type of work is involuntary.

Figure 1

Hourly Wage Rates for Full-time Employees



Although women have made strides in terms of labour market experience and attachment, they continue to face obstacles. For example, among full-time employees, women have consistently lower hourly wages than men, as shown in Figure 1.

The wage differentials can be partially explained by the fact that women still face some occupational segregation and job under-valuation. A substantial proportion of women are employed in a limited range of occupations where the proportion of women is high and where

⁸ National Council of Welfare (2002). *The Cost of Poverty*. See also: New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women (2002). *Guide for Lone Mothers Seeking to Return to Post-Secondary Studies in New Brunswick*, National Council of Welfare Reports (2004). *Welfare Incomes 2004*. Ottawa: Author.

⁹ Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey

¹¹ Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey

average earnings are often lower than in jobs where men predominate. For example, women are over-represented in nursing (87.7%), teaching (63%) and clerical jobs (75%) and under-represented in areas such as senior management positions (24.2%), engineering (22%) and trades (6.6%).¹²

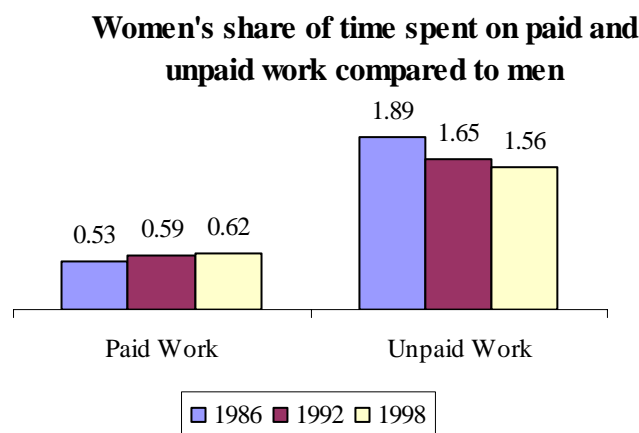
The 2003 female-to-male earnings ratio for full-time, full-year employment was 71.2. The ratio was 58.4 in 1967 and it climbed fairly steadily but this trend appears to have reached a plateau. With small fluctuations up and down, it has remained around the 70 mark since 1990.

Access to quality, affordable childcare also continues to be a key factor in women's employment, especially for lone parents. The number of licensed day care spaces increased dramatically over a 30-year period from 17,391 in 1971 to 593,390 in 2001. However, with 1,695,900 children aged 4 and under in Canada¹³ demand still outweighs supply.

UNPAID WORK TRENDS

On average, women spent 4.3 hours per day in unpaid work (e.g., care for children and others, household maintenance), in 1998 compared to 2.8 hours spent by men. Among women, 2.4 hours per day were spent caring for children compared to 1.8 hours among men.¹⁴ Balancing paid and unpaid work is a key element of women's challenge to attain economic equality. The current distribution of unpaid work, the growing care needs of the elderly along with childcare, and an increased need to earn an income, suggest that this balance has yet to be achieved for Canadian women.¹⁵

Figure 2



As Figure 2 indicates, the balance between women and men in sharing paid and unpaid work shows signs of improvement. Women's share of paid work time is increasing and their share of unpaid work time is decreasing. Women's share of unpaid work is still over one-and-a-half times that of men's, however. Time-stress is also more pronounced among women and it appears to be increasing for both women and men. In 1993, 16% of women and 12% of men reported being time stressed, increasing to

21% and 16%, respectively, in 1998)¹⁶. Underlying the averages for all women and men, there are considerable differences depending on family type, age and number of children and other factors that affect how well individuals and families are faring. For example, between 1986 and 1992, in households where there was a child under 6 and mothers were employed full-time, women's share of paid work time and unpaid child-oriented time both increased. These mothers significantly reduced

¹² Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey

¹³ Statistics Canada, CANSIM, table [051-0001](#).

¹⁴ Statistics Canada, General Social Survey 1998

¹⁵ Statistics Canada, General Social Survey

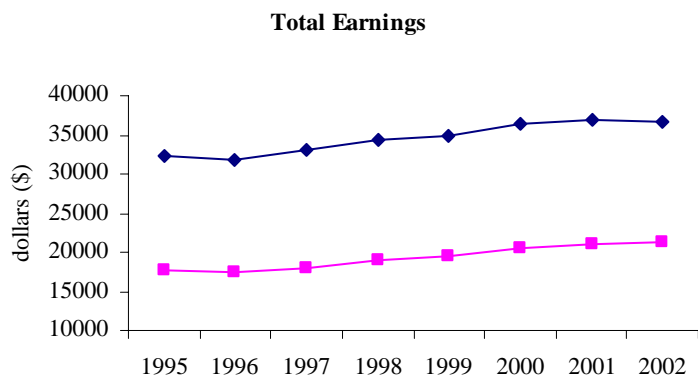
¹⁶ Statistics Canada, General Social Survey

their share of unpaid work for themselves and the household and dramatically reduced their share of unpaid work for other relatives and friends.¹⁷

EARNINGS AND INCOME TRENDS

Women’s earnings are gradually increasing but are still well below men’s. Figure 3 shows that between 1995 and 2002, the relative gap between women remained sizeable.

Figure 3. Total Earnings for Women and Men

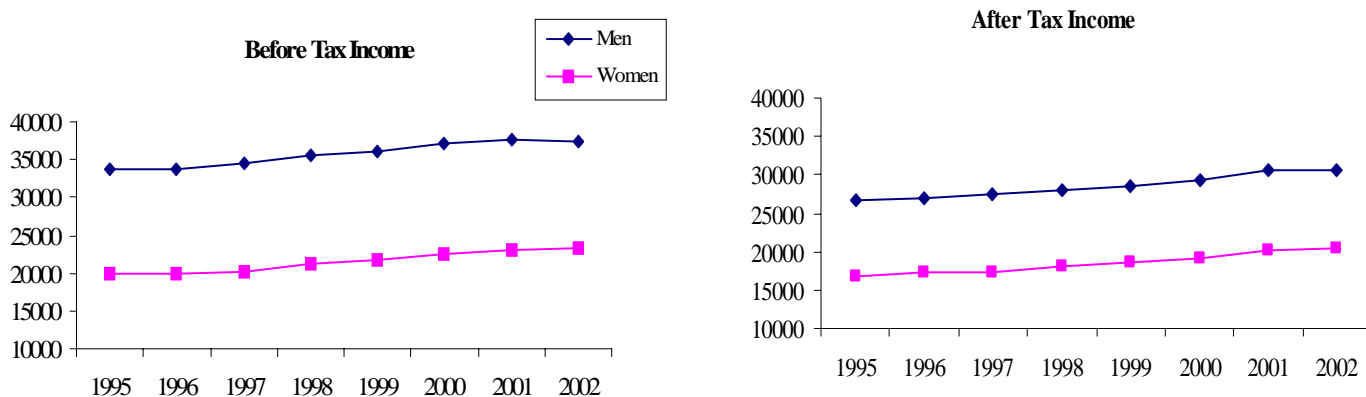


Average male earnings in 1995 were \$32,312, compared to \$17,788 for women (about 55% of men’s). In 2002, men still earned substantially more at \$36,748 compared to \$21,337 for women although women’s relative earnings increased to about 58%.

While earnings make up the largest share of total income for men and women, other sources of income, such as child support payments, maternity benefits, child

benefits paid to the mother, social assistance and old age security are relatively more important to women. When all sources of income are considered for all women and men, including seniors who were not included in when earnings were calculated, the gap between women and men is not as wide as with earnings alone as can be seen in Figure 4. Men’s average total income was \$36,577 in 2002 and women’s was \$22,415, or about 61%. Many people view after tax income as a better reflection of how much money people actually have to spend. In addition because our tax system is generally progressive those with less income pay relatively less tax. Using this measure, the gender gap narrows further, with women’s relative after-tax income of women at 66% of men’s, also shown in Figure 4¹⁸.

Figure 4. Total Before and After Tax Income for Women and Men



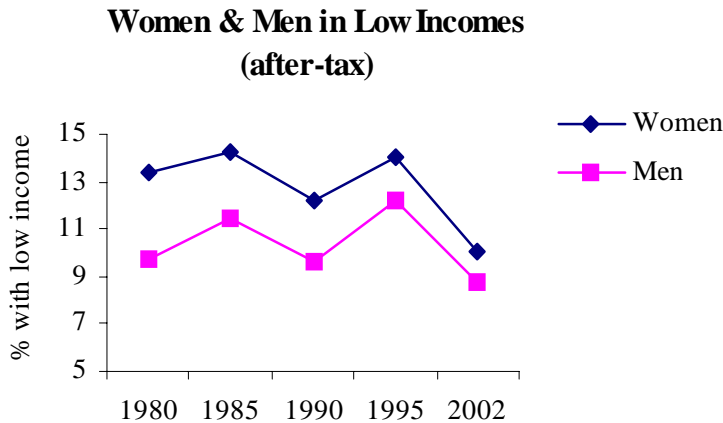
¹⁷ Economic Gender Equality Indicators, F/P/T/ Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, 1997

¹⁸ Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey and Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics

POVERTY

As the earnings and income figures above would suggest, women are more at risk of living in poverty than men. Canada does not have an official poverty rate but Statistics Canada has for many years

Figure 5



produced low-income cut-offs and we use those, after tax, in this paper. Overall, women continue to be over-represented among people living in low income, as Figure 5 shows, although the gap has narrowed.

As with other overall trends, however, underlying the averages there can be significant differences among women and men. One of the most significant is seen in the incidence of low income. The earnings and income data

presented earlier were all based on individuals but low-income cut-offs are based on household size. Because most women live in male-female couples, women's rates of low-income are the same as men's in these households. In fact, women's income helps prevent more households from being in a low income situation. For other women, the picture is quite different.

Figure 6 shows low-income rates for selected populations compared to the general rate in 2002. In each case, women face far higher rates of low-income than the average for women and the rates are higher than for men in a comparable situation. In addition to the high rate of 34.8% for lone parents, 39% of children in female-headed lone parent families were living in low-income as well.

Figure 6

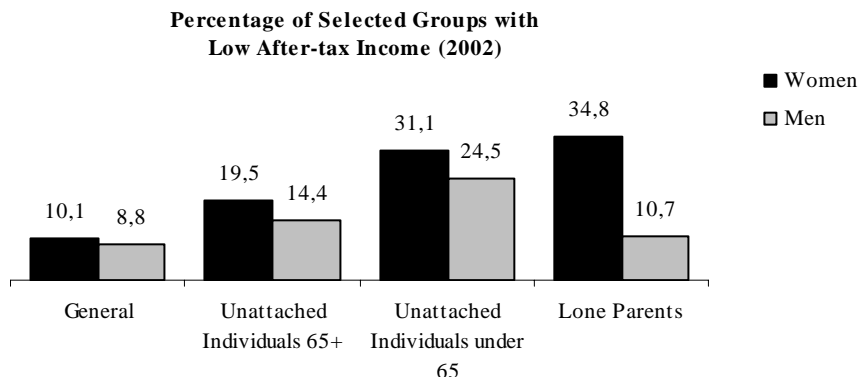
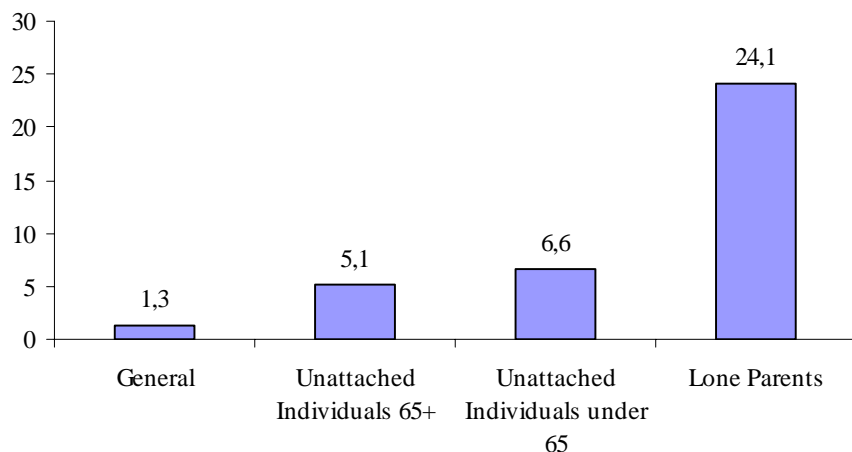


Figure 7 presents the information in a different way to focus on the size of the gender gap - the additional risk of poverty that women face compared to men in each group. This added risk is several percentage points higher for unattached individuals and dramatically higher for lone parents. Many female lone parents have incomes far below the cut-offs and they tend to stay in poverty longer than other Canadians. Also, because women move out of lone-parenthood as

children become adults, or new marriages or common-law relationships are formed, lone parenthood and its risk of poverty affects more Canadians than those counted in a given year.¹⁹

Figure 7

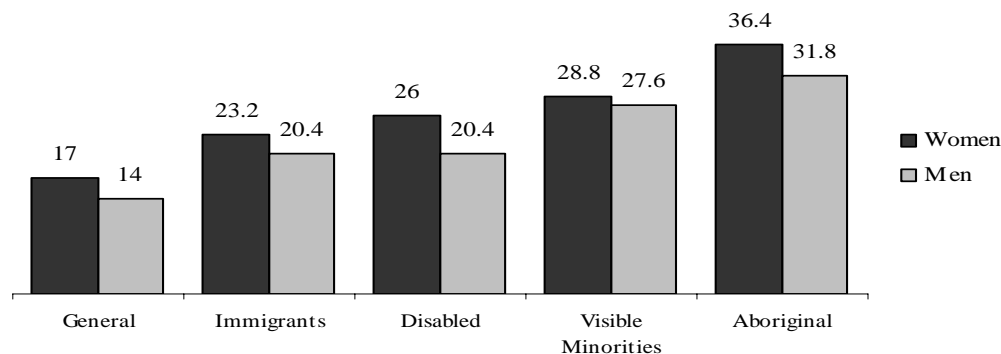
Size of Gender Gap for Women Among Selected Groups with Low After-Tax Income (in percentage points)



Women are also affected by factors in addition to age and family or relationship status as Figure 8 illustrates. While Figure 8 uses before tax income based on 2001 Census data and cannot be compared directly to the data in Figure 6, similar gendered patterns are revealed.²⁰ Aboriginal women, women with disabilities and immigrant women face greater risk of low income than men in the same population group. As indicated earlier, some of these groups of women are also more likely to be lone parents than the average. Because of the diversity of Canada’s population, working towards gender equality in our particular context, requires attention to the combination of gender and other factors²¹

Figure 8

Low-income status (%) of certain populations of Women and Men (2001)



¹⁹ National Council of Welfare (2002). *The Cost of Poverty*. Ottawa: Author

²⁰ Data on after-tax income for these groups is not available.

²¹ For information on Canada’s situation relative to other countries, see for example, Picot, G., & Myles, J. (2005). *Income inequality and low income in Canada: An international perspective*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

HEALTH

Life expectancy at birth is a key indicator of a population's health status. In 2002 it reached highs for both women and men in Canada. Life expectancy for women is 82.1 years. Men, on average, can expect to live 77.2 years. Women, however, experience more years of disability and have more co-morbidities than men.²² Women also bear a larger death burden than men due to sex-specific causes such as breast cancer, ovarian cancer and pregnancy-related complications. On the other hand, there is evidence that men are more likely to die from external causes such as accidents and injury.

For Aboriginal peoples, examination of life expectancy shows a very different experience. Although life expectancy has improved, it is still lower than the national average. Life expectancy at birth among the status Indian population, for example, has gone up for males from 59.2 years in 1975 to 68.9 years in 2000, and for females from 65.9 years to 76.3.²³

Poverty, economic insecurity and lack of access to benefits and services can also have a harmful impact on women's health. In this regard, women with low levels of education, income and control over their work environment are at higher risk of heart disease than other women. For example, Aboriginal women have higher rates of poverty, unemployment and poor housing and have lower life expectancy, higher rates of a range of health conditions and experience higher mortality due to violence.²⁴

VIOLENCE AND CRIME

Violence against women is another issue that profoundly affects women's health, and also affects and is affected by their socio-economic status. For example, women may be forced to stay in abusive relationships in order to avoid living in poverty as lone mothers.²⁵

Violence against women is still an alarming problem within Canadian society and some women are also affected by violence based on a combination of race and gender and other factors that disadvantage them and render them more vulnerable. The gendered nature of family violence is apparent in the rates of documented abuse against women compared to men. For example, although it is estimated that 7% of women and 6% of men have experienced some form of spousal violence in the previous 5 years,²⁶ women are more likely to report being injured (see Figure 9).

Between 1974 and 2003, the rate of spousal homicide against females has typically been 4 to 5 times higher than the rate of male spousal homicide.²⁷ Between 1994 and 2003, females aged 15-to-24 had

²² Statistics Canada, Participation and Activity Limitation Survey

²³ Statistics Canada, Census of Canada

²⁴ Lin (2004)

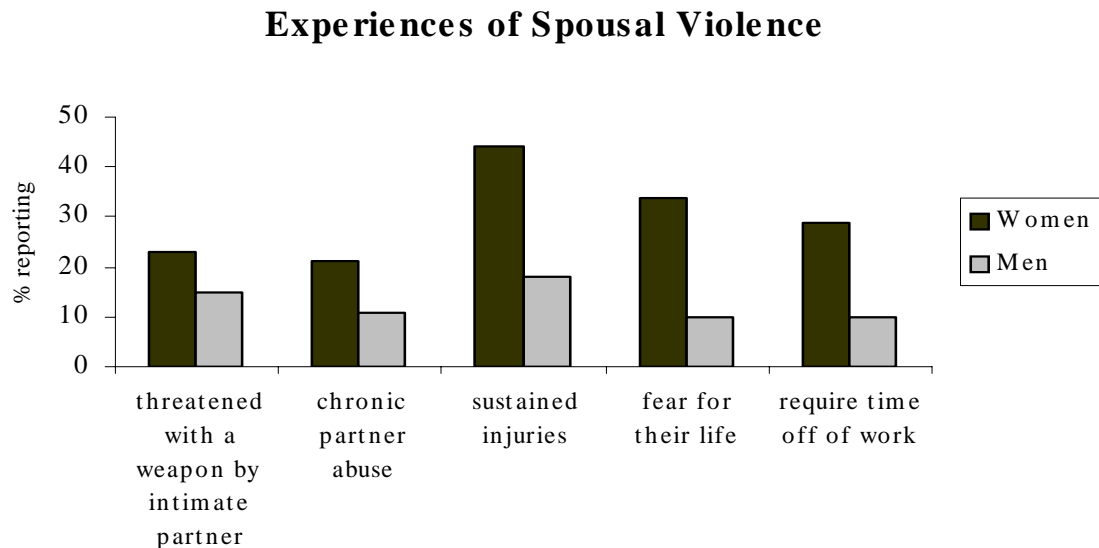
²⁵ Scott, E., London, A., & Myers, N. (2002). Dangerous Dependencies: The Intersection of Welfare Reform and Domestic Violence. *Gender & Society*, 16, 878-897. See also: Purvin, D. (2003). Weaving a Tangled Safety Net. *Violence Against Women*, 9, 1263-1277.

²⁶ Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004

²⁷ Family Violence in Canada, 2005

the highest rate of spousal homicide - nearly 3 times the overall rate of spousal homicide for female victims during the same period and nearly 3 times the rate of males aged 15-to-24.

Figure 9



In 2003, girls were the victims in 8 out of 10 family-related sexual assaults committed against children and youth, assaults typically perpetrated by parents. Rates of family-related sexual assault were highest for teenage girls, especially for young teenage girls aged 12-to-14.²⁸ Similarly, senior women are more likely than their male counterparts to be victims of family violence. Close to four out of ten senior female victims are assaulted by a family member, while this is the case for 20% of senior male victims.

With regard to criminal harassment and stalking, 80% of victims were stalked by men regardless of the sex of the victim. The most common gender pattern in stalking is one of male offender and female victim (53%) followed by male-male (28%)²⁹.

Aboriginal women are particularly at risk of experiencing both race-based and gender-based violence. Notably, Aboriginal people are three times more likely to be victims of spousal violence than were those who were non-Aboriginal (21% versus 7%, respectively). In particular, the rate of spousal assault among Aboriginal women is twice as high as Aboriginal men and three times higher than non-Aboriginal women and men.³⁰ Moreover, results of the 2004 General Social Survey on victimization indicate that Aboriginal people are twice as likely as non-Aboriginal people to have reported experiencing some form of stalking in the previous five years which caused them to fear for their life (17% versus 9%).

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ *Family Violence in Canada: a Statistical Profile 2005*, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada

³⁰ *Assessing Violence Against Women: A Statistical Profile*, F/P/T/ Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, 2002

CONCLUSION

Over the last 30 years, the situation of women and men has changed significantly in some respects, such as dramatic increases in women's labour force participation and educational attainment and dramatic reduction in the rate of poverty among seniors. There are equally significant constants, such as the fact that women still perform the vast majority of unpaid work, especially child-oriented work and care for others, and that women and girls remain vulnerable to gender-based violence.

Overall, Canada has made a considerable amount of progress towards gender equality. However, although many women are doing well, there are a number of areas where large gaps persist. Poverty and economic insecurity are very much gendered issues and for women, this is especially related to family, caregiving and minority status. Female lone parents and Aboriginal women face particularly high risks of poverty and they face the greatest barriers to being able to balance the need to earn income and care for dependants.

Moving forward on gender equality will continue to require an analysis of the situation of women and men that takes many, diverse factors into account. Moreover, gender equality is not an end that can be achieved once and for all. It is a goal that exists in a dynamic world – society and the economy will continue to evolve and will bring new opportunities and challenges.