



Nova Scotia Advisory Council
on the Status of Women
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BACKGROUND – WOMEN'S PAID AND UNPAID WORK

Women and the Labour Force

Women make up 47 per cent of Nova Scotia's total labour force. They make up nearly 70 per cent of part time workers and 43 per cent of full-time workers. In 1999, they comprised 35.7% of self-employed persons in Nova Scotia.

Over the past 10 years, women have made gains in the professions, such as law, medicine, academia, and senior management. They now comprise 33 per cent of lawyers and 35 percent of physicians.

Women are much more likely than men to work part-time, and 61 per cent work in clerical/administrative and sales/service occupations. More and more, women are moving into self-employment and contract work and miss important benefits like maternity, parental or compassionate care leave with at least partial financial support.

The Gender Wage Gap

On average, women working full-time earn about 72 cents for every dollar earned by men, a substantial increase over the 58 cents earned in 1971. In 2001, single women earned 98.8 per cent of what single men earned; married women earned 68.7 per cent of married men's wages.

Women who are general practitioners now earn, on average, about what their male counterparts earn. But so few women are specialist physicians that their average salaries are not reported by Statistics Canada. In law, women earn about half of what men earn, for reasons that may include their concentration in lower-earning areas of the profession.

Many more women work in the 10 lowest-paying occupations than the 10 highest paying. These occupations include child care workers, cashiers, bartenders and food servers. Though significantly outnumbered, men tend to earn more than women in these occupations.

Increasing Numbers of Mothers in the Labour Force

Increases in labour force participation of married women and women with children are dramatic. In 2002, nearly two-thirds of women with very young children (aged 0-2 years) held paid work, compared with only a quarter in 1976. In more than half of male-female couple families, both partners are employed. This is up from 33 per cent in 1976.

This trend has significant implications for children, parents, child care providers, employers, and government. The implications for social policy can hardly be overstated.

Importance of Educational Attainment for Women

While higher levels of educational attainment are linked to higher employment rates for both women and men, this is especially the case for women. Men with lower levels of education have considerably higher employment rates than women with comparable levels of education. Women and men with higher levels of education, on the other hand, have very similar employment rates.

Employment Equity Groups

Unemployment rates of equity groups within Nova Scotia are high; for example, those of recently immigrated women, people of African descent, First Nations people living on-reserve, and people with disabilities.

Women's Involvement in Public Affairs

Only 12 per cent of MLAs in Nova Scotia's legislature are female, one of the lowest levels of female representation in the country.

Currently there are six female MLAs in Nova Scotia's legislature. Since 1960, when the first woman was elected, there have been only 24 female MLAs in Nova Scotia.

In 2003, women made up only 29 per cent of all members of government agencies, boards, and commissions in Nova Scotia, down from 39 per cent almost 10 years before.

Unpaid Work

Women are almost two and a half times more likely than men to be spending more than 60 hours per week caring for children. Close to 30 per cent of women reported spending 60 hours per week on unpaid childcare.

In 2001, 65 per cent of all Nova Scotian women between the ages of 25 and 44 indicated that they spent some time caring for children. Just over half (52 per cent) of men in this age group indicated doing some unpaid child care.

A fifth of Nova Scotian women and 15 percent of Nova Scotian men spend some amount of time providing unpaid care or assistance to seniors. Men are slightly more likely than women to provide fewer than 5 hours of care to seniors per week while women are more likely to be providing at least 10 hours of care to seniors per week.