

Women's employment and the phenomenon of dual breadwinners in canada

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Throughout the early parts of Canadian history, Canadian women served only as wives and mothers where they shared the reservations of motherhood, the tasks and responsibilities of managing their home, and the vocation of serving their families (Errington 7). Throughout this century, labor or work was significantly divided based on gender. As Elizabeth Jane Errington wrote, “ Men hunted, worked the fields, and tended to the heavy outdoor chores. W]omen kept the home, raised the children, and provided the food and clothing needed for daily subsistence” (8). Regardless of their economic status, women were limited to producing goods and services for their households. They were tasked to clean the house, cook food for the family and worked on a routine household chore. Thus the lives of Canadian women were dictated by the “ cycles of pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation” (Errington 11). During the twentieth century, women were still discriminated in employment.

There were reports of unequal pays between men and women workers wherein men's salary is far above than women's salary. However, during the 1950s to 1960s, the “ new employment statutes” in Canada were formed to prevent discrimination in employment relation to race, religion, and gender. For instance, the “ first Canadian Bill of Rights” has enclosed equal employment opportunity for all Canadians regardless of their gender, thereby prescribing equal pay for men and women. However, this bill failed to address the employment condition of the disadvantaged group.

Thus, in 1970s, brought by increased pressure from minority and women group, the federal government instituted special programs that would

improve the employment status of both groups. In 1977, the Legislature passed the “ Canadian Human Rights Act” which aimed “ to protect Canadians from discrimination based on ten grounds: race, national ethnic origin, color, religion, age, sex, marital status, family status, disability and conviction for offence for which a pardon has been granted (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada” [HRSDC]).

Six years later, the “ Royal Commission on Equality in Employment (RCEE)” was founded to advance equal employment opportunities through methods deemed as most effective, efficient, and equitable. This activity was delegated to individuals with disabilities, aboriginal peoples, minority persons and women. The following year, Judge Rosalie Abella released the report of this commission which addressed the problem relating to employment disadvantage. This report served as an instrument in the creation of “ Employment Equity Act” in 1986, the purpose of which is to:

Achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in the fulfillment of the goals, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and visible minority people by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences.
(HRSDC)

Ever since this Act was instituted, the number of women's employment increased significantly, almost causing women to claim equal percentage of employment with men's employment. Considering a family where both a father and a mother are employed, dual breadwinners have become a trend in most family living in Canada. As the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC), referring to equal pay between men and women, noted " Canadian women have achieved considerable progress towards equality in the past few decades but are still far from having reached full substantive equality. Current Trend in Employment Equity: A report on Women's Employment From 2005 to 2006, women's representation in employment remained steady at 42. 7 percent. In 2005, the percentage of women's representation in the private sector was 43. 3 percent, while in 2006, it was at 43.

1. At the public sector, women's representation was at 41. 7 percent in 2005, while in 2006, women's employment was 42. 1 percent. Although, women's employment is significantly high, it remained below the availability in both the public sectors and private sector with a total 48. percentage (HRDC). In the federally regulated private sector, most women found employment in the banking sector with 134, 274 women population or 68. 4 percent in 2006. Other private sectors where women have representations are in communications, with 88, 398 employed women or 40. 8 percent; transportation with 38, 949 women employees or 24. 5 percent; and others with 14, 783 women representation or 30. 2 percent (HRSDC). Meanwhile, the number of women based on their selected occupational group is also noticeable with a total of 44. percent in 2006, wherein women who are

employed as senior manager was 22. 2 percent; middle and other managerial level at 44. 2 percent; professionals at 46. 3 percent; and Employment Equity Occupational Groups at 44. 7 percent. Compared to the employment equity data in 2001 wherein women employment based on occupational group is summed up to 45. 3 percent, women's representation is lower in 2005 where said total percentage was at 44. 5. Yet, it increased with . 2 percent as compared to the previous year (2008) (HRDC n. p.).

Furthermore, according to a report from Labor Force Survey (LFS), the total number of employment in Canada has declined in March 2009, recording an estimated 61, 000 unemployed. This marked the highest unemployment rate of 8. 0 percent as compared to 2001 where unemployment rate is only at 0. 3 percent. Employment losses are common among men ages 25 to 54 with 7. 7 percent unemployment rate, and the youth ages 15 to 24 with 14. 8 percent unemployment rate. In contrast to 7. 7 percent unemployment rate among men between the ages 25 and 54, the percentage of unemployed women in the same age bracket was at 5. percent (Statistics Canada 7). Employment of men whose age ranges from 25 to 54 was at 7, 236. 6 (in thousands) while employment among women in the same age bracket was at 7, 246. 5 (in thousands) recorded in March 2009 (Statistic Canada 24).

Increased in unemployment rate was due to the financial crisis that faced the world economy where Canada is one of the most affected countries. Looking at the figures, one may assume that women are claiming equal distribution of employment among men. Also noticeable is the low unemployment rate among women (5. %) as compared to men (7. 7%). This only indicates that

women are participating actively (by being employed) in both public and private sectors in Canada. Most Canadian women are now becoming family's breadwinners. Employment Equity for Women is not yet in Full Substance Many changes have occurred concerning women's representation in the federal government of Canada. Aside from labor force participation, Canadian women also found themselves actively participating in electoral federal voting (Erickson and O'Neill 375).

According to Erickson and O'Neill, factors such as increase in levels of education, occupational segregation, and lower pay rates incited Canadian women to cast their vote on people, party, or policy that aims for women equality with men. Armed with these struggles, Canadian women are now seeking for a fairer treatment in the workplace. Gender-sensitive groups petition for creating policies that would provide equal pay, treatment, and opportunities for women seeking for employment and those who are already working.

They also urge the federal government to stop violence against women which are often manifested in the form of spousal and sexual assaults. Although the status of Canadian women has significantly developed from being housekeepers to becoming senior managers, equality between men and women in the workplace is not yet fully realized and implemented. As the CHRC noted, " For instance, in 2000, the average employment income for full-time female employees working year-round was 70. 8% of the income of male workers. Aside from the employment income, other factors such as gender, ethnic origin, race, and disability contributed to the economic

disadvantage of Canadian women. As has been stated, “gender-based violence in the form of spousal and sexual assaults” also prohibits the substantive equality of men and women (CHRC). With regard to nature of employment, although the employment rate of Canadian women has increased, they are “more likely to be hired in part-time and temporary work as compared to men” (Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich 456).

This indicates that Canadian women are more exposed to negative employment environments such as “limited benefits and statutory entitlements, low earnings, job insecurity, low job tenure, poor working conditions, and high risks of being sick” (Cranford et al. 456). Many critics blamed the “feminization of employment norm [which] caused the erosion of the standard employment relationship [which then led to] the spread of non-standard forms of employment that exhibit qualities of [unstable] employment” often experienced by most Canadian women (Cranford et al. 56). The growth of non-standard employment began in 1980s and is continuously being practiced in the country. Furthermore, the feminization of employment standards was said to be brought by the following factors: occupational and industrial segregation; increased number of women participating in formal labor force; the gendering of jobs to accommodate more laborers; and occupational and income division between and among men and women (Cranford et al. 460). Looking at this employment trend, it seems that Canadian women are still victims of inequality.

In fact, many studies confirmed that the reason why most Canadian women working on a part-time and temporary basis is because they are being

obliged to perform their chore of care giving for their family. As Cranford and associates put it: “[O]ver-representation of women in more precarious forms of employment is shaped by continuous gender inequalities in households resulting in women’s greater responsibilities for unpaid domestic work compared to men” (460).

Thus, although most Canadian women are now taking their part as breadwinners of the family, they are still more bound by their household responsibilities as compared to men. Women Employment and Dual Breadwinners With the increasing number of women receiving higher levels of education, particularly those who are able to finish their college degrees, most of them are finding their chance to be employed in a high paying job. Being highly paid, these women are no longer concerned with the financial support that would come from their spouses.

Most of them are interested in becoming successful in their chosen career. Such women’s aggressiveness often results in bringing home higher income as compared to their husband. However, over time, the phenomenon of dual breadwinners in most households across the globe has been bombarded with different issues relating to gender roles, equality, economic status, and others. It has been perceived that when a woman (particularly married woman) starts to work and serve as the breadwinner of their family, indirectly, the tendency is that later, she would abandon her role as a wife and as a mother.

As Dr. Gail Saltz wrote: For some couples, having the woman make more money than the man creates an insurmountable problem. Some men feel emasculated if their wives are the primary breadwinners and they are asked to take on more household chores and additional childcare responsibilities. And some women feel resentful if they not only shoulder most of the household's financial obligations, but also are expected to pick up the lion's share of the domestic responsibilities.

Moreover, living in a society that associates money with power, most people believe that the one who brings home more money automatically would lead or dominate the members of the family. Yet, the positive effect of women's employment and the event of dual breadwinners can be observed in the progress of the economic and financial status of each household where both parents are employed and are receiving good income. Women Breadwinners in Canada

One of the most radical changes in Canadian employment condition brought by the passage of Employment Equity Act was the growth of dual-earner husband-wife families as early as in 1960s. Statistics Canada identified that the increased in numbers of dual-earner couples during the past years was brought by the growth in numbers of wives who serving as the main wage earner in the family. In 1967, it was recorded that approximately 11 percent of married women were earning more than their spouses.

In 2003, this percentage had nearly tripled, recording 29 percent increase on the number of women serving as primary breadwinners. Findings revealed

that wives serving as primary breadwinners have an income of approximately \$41, 200 in 2003 compared to \$57, 800 income of their male counterparts (Statistics Canada). Although it has been noted that there are a considerable number of Canadian women who serve as primary breadwinners, Statistic Canada noted that primary-earner married women are receiving an income that is less than the income of primary-earner husband.

Thus, families with wives as primary breadwinners are noted to lag behind the families with husbands serving as primary breadwinner. As stated in Statistic Canada report, Family incomes in which the wife was the primary breadwinner averaged \$74, 000 in 2003, compared with \$86, 000 for families in which the husband was the primary earner. In addition, on average, primary-earner wives contributed less to family income than primary-earner husbands. Employment earnings of primary-earner wives represented just over half of their family's income, while the earnings of primary-earner husbands corresponded to two-thirds.

Analyzing this development, it can be assumed that although most Canadian women had found their place in labor sectors, there are still factors which serve as barriers for women to become the primary breadwinners of their families. Analysis and Conclusion Although women's employment had increased over time and that there are a significant number of women who serve as family's breadwinners, women have not yet reached an equal status with men nor replaced them as the primary earner in many families in Canada.

One of the factors contributing to such trend is related to the amount of income being received by most employed women. Although the Employment Equity Act encouraged equal pay between men and women, most companies in Canada still give higher income, benefits, and incentives to male workers due to perceived work hazard where male workers are more exposed.

Another reason is that most women are engaged in low paying job. Although there are some who work as managers and high professionals, many women are employed in blue-collar occupations such as clerical, secretarial, service, and sales jobs where the salary is low.

Men who are employed in blue-collar jobs receive higher pay than men because of the nature of their work which require strong physical attributes. Moreover, though there are a large number of women employed in both private and public sectors, the tenure of their employment could not guaranty high earnings. In addition, most women are more often receive part-time, temporary, or contractual jobs as compared to a large number of men working as full-time employees. Being employed as part-time worker prohibits women to receive more benefits and incentives being given to full-time employees.

With these conditions, the following conditions of employed women in Canada can be inferred: (1) equity and equality between men and women has not yet reached its full substantive goal; (2) Canadian women are still victims of male dominion both in family and labor affairs; (3) Canadian women are still struggling to have an equal status with Canadian men as primary breadwinners; and (4) Canadian women still need to encourage the

federal government to create a more effective and efficient policy addressing the issues of inequality between men and women by enclosing all the aspects of living (economic, social, political and cultural).

Only when these conditions are addressed properly will Canadian women receive their equal share in all aspects of living among with men. Meanwhile, the positive effects of women's employment and phenomenon of dual breadwinners in Canada are: (1) women are able to contribute to the budget of the family; and (2) families with dual breadwinners are more likely to progress economically and financially.

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