Gender Equality in the Labour Market

Lessons Learned

Final Report

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Acknowledgments

This study summarizes the lessons learned on gender equality in the labour market. It examines mainstream policies and programs (from selected industrialized countries) that may affect women and men differently, as well as targeted approaches aimed specifically at women or sub-groups of women. The overall purpose is to identify those policies and programs that have succeeded in improving the position of women in the labour market.

The report was prepared by Prairie Research Associates, Inc. (PRA) for the Evaluation and Data Development directorate of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), under its direction.

This study benefited from the participation and input of numerous provincial and territorial key informants, representatives from HRDC and other federal government departments and agencies, representatives from universities, unions and non-governmental organizations concerned with gender policy issues, and representatives from U.S. federal government departments.

The technical paper, produced for HRDC as part of this study, is available upon request. It is also available on the Internet at: http://hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/edd.

Series

Canadian governments are trying to achieve the most productive and cost-effective results from human resource programs and policies. Professionally-conducted evaluations can help them reach that goal. They document our experiences with policies and programs that have had similar goals. They add to the "corporate memory" that helps us make still better decisions in the future.

At Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), we have a strong commitment to continuous learning and improvement. Over the past decade, we have invested time and money in evaluating many of our programs and policies covering a wide range of human resources development issues. These have been complemented by our reviews of evaluations conducted by other governments, in Canada and internationally, in the area of human resource initiatives.

HRDC developed the "Lessons Learned" series to make this wealth of information and insight available to more people more easily. The Lessons Learned studies are a series of documents and supporting videos that synthesise what evaluations in Canada and other countries have taught us about a range of high-profile human resource policy priorities. They summarise what we know about the effectiveness of policy initiatives, programs, services and funding mechanisms.

Lessons Learned are of interest to senior managers and policy analysts in Canada's governments. Program managers, public policy researchers and other stakeholders can also benefit from understanding the lessons we have learned from past and present programs.

As a learning organization, HRDC will continue to experiment with new approaches and evaluate their effectiveness. HRDC recognizes the vital importance of the evaluation process and is committed to continuing its work in this area.

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1. Introduction

Issues Women Face in the Labour Market

One of the most significant social and economic developments of the twentieth century has been the entry of women into the paid labour force. The growing participation of women in the labour market has been one of the basic trends at work in virtually all industrialized nations over the last half of this century. In the early 1960s, women, especially wives with dependent children, were still more likely to remain at home and pursue domestic duties, while men, particularly husbands and fathers, were engaged in the paid workforce. But in contemporary industrialized societies, this scenario is increasingly rare.

Several factors account for the rapid expansion of female employment. These include demographic changes, such as lower birthrates, rising divorce rates, and delays in marriage and childrearing, as well as other developments such as women's rising education levels, changes in social attitudes, and growing demand for women's labour in an expanding service sector. Finally, structural economic changes have placed serious limits on the ability of a single male wage earner to earn enough to support his family, and have in many cases necessitated women's entry into the workforce[1].

One of the major obstacles to gender equality has been the failure of workplace and social institutions … to keep pace with changing labour market trends.

The past thirty years have witnessed significant improvements to women's labour market position. Yet women continue to compete in the workforce on an unequal terrain with men, and to experience unequal labour market outcomes as a result. One of the major obstacles to gender equality has been the failure of workplace and social institutions, historically organized around the male breadwinner model of the family, to keep pace with changing labour market trends. Women's entry into the workforce, for example, has not significantly altered the allocation of responsibilities for domestic duties and child care within the home. Women continue to bear the main responsibilities for child care and household work, even in countries

[1] Crompton and Geran (1995)

such as Canada, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark, which have achieved high rates of female participation in the labour force.

Many women who work outside the home are now confronting the "double day." [2] This phenomenon has important implications for women's labour market status. Non-standard work patterns, such as part-time employment, are sometimes proposed as a suitable alternative to the conflicting demands of work and family. Yet many women work part-time, not because such work is easily compatible with family duties, but because they cannot get full-time employment. Moreover, part-time and other forms of non-standard work are typically characterized by fewer benefits, reduced earnings, limited opportunities for career advancement, and greater insecurity. Under these circumstances, the choice women make for atypical work arrangements may not always be voluntary, but may be constrained by a variety of other factors.

In addition to the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men, other issues that pertain to gender equality in the labour market include:

- discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace
- women's concentration in low paying sectors
- higher rates of poverty in comparison to men
- women's under-representation in senior positions
- obstacles to adequate education and training
- lack of access to child and elder care.

Addressing these issues is a goal of governments in all industrialized countries.

Gender equality as a policy goal

Most countries of the world recognize women's entitlement to equal rights with men, in accordance with international conventions and as a matter of social justice. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), known as an "international bill of rights for women", is the second most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world. Many countries have also enacted legislation and established organizational structures on a domestic level to promote gender equality.

[2] Marshall (1994)

It is important to note that the concept of equality has evolved over time. At the turn of the century, the focus and debate on women's rights involved issues of "formal equality", or obtaining the same treatment, opportunity and privileges for women as for men. The advancement of women's formal equality led to very important reforms such as women's right to vote, and legal protection from discrimination on the basis of sex. However, it is increasingly recognized that treating men and women similarly will not lead to equal outcomes in many cases because of socio-economic differentials between them. The notion of "substantive equality" recognizes that both freedom from discrimination and positive actions are required to arrive at equal outcomes.

It is increasingly recognized that treating men and women similarly will not lead to equal outcomes in many cases because of socio-economic differentials between them.

In recent years, the focus has also shifted from *women's* equality to *gender* equality. Gender refers not to men and women *per se*, but to the relationship between them and the ways in which roles are socially constructed. The concept of gender equality, therefore, implies a fuller understanding that social arrangements, not biological differences, lead to inequality, and that these are changeable over time and different between cultures.

The importance of advancing substantive gender equality is broadly accepted, as shown by international support for the *Beijing Platform for Action*, adopted at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995. In Canada, jurisprudence about the constitutional gender equality guarantees has affirmed a substantive approach to equality, which means that the yardstick of substantive equality can be applied to government legislation and programs.

In addition to conceptual issues about gender equality, policy-makers also face practical issues about which policies and instruments to pursue in order to meet gender equality goals. There are efforts to institutionalize gender-based analysis of policies, programs and legislation within many advanced industrialized countries to ensure that policies are developed with a good understanding of gender relations and differentials in the economy and society, and how these can shape policy outcomes. Work in this area is on-going, but best practices and case studies are beginning to emerge from many jurisdictions, of which this study is one contribution[3].

There are efforts to ensure that policies are developed with a good understanding of gender relations and differentials in the economy and society, and how these can shape policy outcomes.

Purpose of this study

This report is a summary of a Lessons Learned background document reviewing policies and programs affecting gender equality in the

[3] For more information and resources, see Status of Women Canada's gender-based analysis website at http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/gba-acs/index.html.

labour market in Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and selected European nations.[4] Focusing on research and evaluations conducted in those countries over the last thirty years, the study presents findings on the topic of gender equality and the labour market, with a view to identifying those programs and policies that have succeeded in improving the position of women in the labour market. Although published research and evaluations constituted the primary sources of information for the study, a number of key informants were also selected to review, comment and complete the information obtained from these sources. The key informants were chosen based on their expertise and knowledge of issues pertaining to gender equality. In all, 41 individuals[5] were consulted, including representatives from the Canadian federal government and provincial governments, national non-governmental organizations, and the United States' federal government.

The study examines mainstream policies and programs that may affect women and men differently, as well as targeted approaches aimed specifically at women or sub-groups of women. A wide range of policies and programs may potentially affect women's position in the labour market. This report focuses on five important categories of policy/program initiatives.[6]

- *Employment standards* are designed to protect workers from possible exploitation through unregulated labour markets. These standards typically govern wages, working conditions, benefits and leaves, hours of work, vacations, and protection from unjust dismissal. They may be set out in legislation, in collective bargaining agreements, or through voluntary codes of conduct. Effective employment standards are critical to protect the large number of women engaged in non-standard forms of work.

- *Equal opportunities policies* such as employment equity (in Canada) and affirmative action (in the United States) are designed to improve women's chances in recruitment, training, and promotion. Although most nations have formal equality and sex discrimination legislation in place, there is growing recognition that the prohibition of discrimination is not always enough to eliminate it in actual practice. Equal opportunities policies go a step further in seeking to bring about substantive change through positive measures.

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[4] The background document, *Gender Equality in the Labour Market: Lessons Learned – Background Report,* is available from HRDC. It discusses the issues covered in this summary document in detail and includes an extensive bibliography of sources.

[5] The full list of key informants is available in the background document mentioned above.

[6] Many programs and policies that affect women's labour market outcomes in a substantial way, such as employment insurance, taxation, social assistance, and systems of formal education, are significant enough to merit a separate discussion.

- *Policies that affect pay* may include initiatives specifically designed to address the gender earnings differential, such as equal pay for work of equal value and pay equity. But women's earnings can also be influenced by the overall structure of wages in the economy and by the mechanisms used to determine wages.

- *Labour market training* aims at improving the job prospects and earnings potential of unemployed or underemployed individuals by developing their human capital. In many countries, income support is increasingly contingent on participation in employment and training programs, a development which has major implications for low-income women who make up a large proportion of income assistance recipients.

- *Policies to reconcile work and family responsibilities* may either attempt to help women balance work and family duties with greater ease, or to facilitate the reallocation of some of the responsibility for unpaid work to men. These include policies for maternity or parental leave, child care policies, and flexible work arrangements.

Implicit in the discussion of issues such as training, equal pay, and reconciling work and family responsibilities, is the role that cultural attitudes and social norms play in hindering women's progress in the labour market. Although this study does not focus specifically on policies and programs that aim to educate against discrimination, it is important to recognize education as a long-term instrument for changing the attitudes and norms that can be important obstacles to women's advancement.

2. Implications of the Present Economic Context

Despite the gains women have made in the last three decades, a large body of research has recently emerged suggesting that major economic changes occurring on a global scale are having detrimental consequences for women's labour market position. At best, these developments are judged likely to limit further progress toward gender equality. While macroeconomic policies are not in themselves the subject of this study, it would be misleading to present a review of past policies and programs without drawing attention to present economic circumstances. In particular, the wider economic context may place constraints on what it is possible to achieve through policy interventions such as those reviewed here.

Economic Restructuring

With changes occurring within the global economy, there has been a move toward deregulation of labour markets, and an increase in flexible forms of labour ...

In recent years, the term restructuring has been used to refer to a series of changes occurring within the global economy. These changes include increased international competition between nations for investment, increased capital mobility, a greater emphasis on trade, and reduced public spending and regulation of the economy. With these changes there has been a move toward deregulation of labour markets, as well as a corresponding increase in flexible forms of labour such as part-time work, contracting and sub-contracting, outsourcing and homework.[7] At the same time, economies have shifted from a manufacturing to a knowledge base. This shift has been accompanied by an increasing emphasis on the need for highly skilled specialist workers.

There is a considerable body of literature examining the differential impact on women and men of these labour market changes. In most industrialized nations, a pattern of "harmonizing down" for some men has emerged.[8]. In Canada, men's real earnings have not increased for over 20 years, and male participation rates have fallen over the same period. Certain traditionally male occupations, mainly in the primary resource industries and manufacturing, are disappearing altogether. A growing proportion of men is either unemployed, employed involuntarily

[7] Statistics Canada reports that in 1999, 41% of employed women worked in a non-standard work arrangement - including part-time work, temporary work, self-employment, and multiple job holding - up from 35% in 1989. Although the proportion of men working in non-standard work arrangements has also grown over this period, men are still less likely than women to hold non-standard jobs (only 29% of men worked in non-standard jobs in 1999, up from 22% in 1989). (Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2000.)

[8] Armstrong (1996)

part-time, or holding non-permanent employment. Many observers caution that the deterioration in men's labour market position may exaggerate the gains women have made over the last few decades.

Three trends associated with restructuring have important implications for women's labour market position.

- **Expansion of the service sector: growing wage polarization and increase in non-standard work**

Women … remain over-represented among low-paid, contingent workers.

While the manufacturing and primary industries have declined, the service sector, where women have traditionally been concentrated, has grown quite substantially. The service sector is highly heterogeneous, encompassing both well-paid professional and technical occupations as well as low-skill, poorly paid occupations. A stratum of highly skilled, high-status workers has formed, coupled with a large mass of technically semi-skilled or unskilled workers who acquire their training on the job or in short courses lasting a few weeks[9]. Wage polarization has accompanied the growing demand for highly skilled workers and declining demand for unskilled labour. Increasingly, the workforce is segmented into a primary labour market offering good wages, job security, and opportunities for advancement, and a secondary labour market of low-paid, contingent workers[10] Women, and especially visible minority women, remain over-represented in the latter.

Women are much more likely than men to have non-standard employment.

Furthermore, the service sector is the site of a large and growing proportion of non-standard forms of work, typically providing less job security, lower pay, and fewer fringe benefits[11]. Non-standard forms of work include part-time, temporary, non-day, homework, and shiftwork, multiple job-holding, and contracting and sub-contracting. Women are much more likely than men to have non-standard employment[12]. While the shift toward atypical forms of work may benefit women to the extent that they disproportionately occupy these kinds of jobs, the increased demand for non-standard workers will not necessarily be accompanied by higher wages.[13]

- **Decline of the public sector**

A second important development associated with restructuring is the decline of the public sector. Over the past few decades, growth of the public sector has been an important factor in women's integration into the labour market in industrialized countries.

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[9] Standing (1989)
[10] Economic Council of Canada (1991)
[11] Krahn (1995)
[12] Krahn (1995)
[13] Gunderson (1998)

The OECD reports that women are now over-represented among public employees in all countries.[14]

The public sector has also been a source of *especially good* jobs for women. Public sector workers are significantly more educated and significantly more likely than their private sector counterparts to be employed in professional, managerial, and technical occupations. Large numbers of public sector workers are women employed in female-dominated professional occupations in sectors like education, health, and social services. Furthermore, the gender gap in earnings is smaller in the public sector than in the private, due both to the concentration of highly skilled female-dominated professions in the public sector, and to a more compressed wage structure overall. [15]

- **Rise in self-employment**

A third trend associated with restructuring is the dramatic expansion in self-employment. The number of self-employed has rapidly expanded as large corporations and governments downsize and jobs are eliminated. Rising self-employment is also associated with the growth of the service sector and with the adoption of policies promoting contracting out and privatization by government.

Thirty-one percent of employment growth from 1976 to 1997 has been in the form of self-employment. Although self-employment is more prevalent among men than among women, in recent years, female self-employment has grown faster than self-employment among men. In 1996, women constituted about one third of all self-employed Canadians, compared to 26% twenty years before[16]. For some women, business creation is a solution to unemployment or underemployment. On the other hand, for highly educated and professional women who leave well-paid positions in order to head their own businesses, self-employment is frequently a response to the "glass ceiling."

While self-employment certainly allows some women to improve their economic situation, for many others it offers limited opportunities.

- Difficulty in obtaining financing is the obstacle women report most frequently to business start-up and expansion. A 1994 study by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business reported that 42% of self-employed women were concerned about access to financing.[17] Compared to men, women are more often associated with factors related to loan refusal. These include their concentration in sectors, such as food and beverage, retail trade, and other services, that have

[14] OECD (1994)
[15] Wage structures are discussed in detail in the section on policies affecting pay.
[16] Lin, Yates and Picot (1999), p. 4.
[17] Cited in Business Development Bank of Canada, *Women Entrepreneurs: ...* (1997)

lower than average approval rates. Other factors are smaller firm size, fewer liquid assets, less managerial experience, and an unproven track record.[18]

- Statistics Canada reports that self-employed women are concentrated in just a few service industries. The most common occupations for self-employed women are child care, sales, and hairdressing[19]. Thus, a considerable portion of self-employment is located at the lower end of the labour market and offers relatively poor wages and insecure work.

- Once self-employed, women typically earn less than both their paid worker counterparts and self-employed men, and receive fewer benefits.

… self-employment programs have tended to benefit men more than women.

Many governments are encouraging people to start their own businesses as a way of promoting economic independence and job growth. Entrepreneurship programs have been widely introduced. But these programs do not generally achieve high female participation rates, nor do they address the problem of women's limited access to credit. In fact, the evaluation literature indicates that, so far, self-employment programs have tended to benefit men more than women[20].

Some jurisdictions have introduced self-employment programs targeted specifically at women. For example, the Women's Enterprise Initiative, funded through Western Economic Diversification Canada, provides business information and services to women entrepreneurs. Services include access to a loan fund, advisory services, and networking. Similarly, one of the main purposes of New Opportunities for Women (NOW), a European Union-wide initiative financed through the European Social Fund, is to promote women's entrepreneurship. Most projects funded through NOW combine training with activities such as market research, drawing up business plans, mentorship, and developing sector-specific knowledge. In the future the initiative intends to focus on facilitating access to capital and financial aid, and on providing more support after business set-up. These kinds of measures can help to overcome some of the unique barriers women face when seeking to become self-employed.

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[18] Fabowale et al. 1994)
[19] Cited in Business Development Bank of Canada, *Women Entrepreneurs: …* (1997).
[20] For example see Graves and Gauthier (1995) and Martin (1998).

3. Lessons Learned

The following summarizes the main lessons learned from the review of research and evaluations on policies and programs affecting gender equality in the labour market. The lessons are also based on results of consultations with key informants who helped to validate the information obtained from the published material.

Employment Standards

Employment standards governing wages and benefits, working conditions, leaves, and so on can help to protect women who occupy non-standard jobs.

In the present context of economic restructuring, some employers are turning to low-cost, "flexible" forms of labour[21] such as part-time, homework, temporary work, contract and sub-contract relationships, and nominal forms of self-employment[22]. These arrangements reduce labour costs for two reasons. First, the workers involved are usually non-unionized and outside the scope of coverage of collective bargaining agreements. Second, employing non-standard workers allows employers to avoid paying the same level of wages and benefits as paid to regular employees, and to avoid EI and CPP contributions. These considerations are of particular concern to women, who make up the majority of workers in non-standard employment relationships. Employment standards governing wages and benefits, working conditions, leaves, and so on can help to protect these women.

Lesson 1 The effectiveness of employment standards legislation is constrained by difficulties in protecting individuals engaged in non-standard work, and enhanced by the existence of strong and effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms

In Canada, the federal government, the provinces and the territories have all enacted employment standards legislation governing minimum wages, benefits, overtime, working conditions, leaves, termination of employment, and so on. However, the legislation has been widely criticized as ineffective for two reasons.

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[21] According to the 1999 *Workplace and Employee Survey - Compendium*, while the use of flexible hours, part-time workers and temporary workers has increased overall, these "organizational changes" are not the only ones adopted by businesses. "Re-engineering", "downsizing" and "greater reliance on functional flexibility" constitute other types of strategies used by businesses to adapt to changes in the economic environment. [See Statistics Canada (June 2001)]

[22] Bush (1994), p. 39. See also, Goodswaard and Nanteuil (2000)

First of all, employment standards legislation has been designed, in general, for standard forms of employment. It is based on a model of stable employment relations that presumes full-time work on a continuing basis for a single employer on the employer's premises.[23] This model is constrained by the tendency towards a growing proportion of the workforce being engaged in non-standard forms of work, where fixed-term contracts, work off the employer's premises, and employer responsibility that is shared between two or more parties are becoming the norm.

To ensure that employment standards legislation remains applicable to those workers most in need of its protection, some analysts have suggested that a clear definition of an employee needs to be adopted and consistently enforced in employment laws across jurisdictions. This would help to prevent the possibility of some employers altering the legal characterization of employment relationships, which would deny workers the status of employees, thereby disqualifying them from coverage by the relevant legislation.[24]

Another criticism of current employment standards legislation is that it is rarely enforced adequately. Dagg points out that, in Canada, very few provinces actively monitor and enforce their employment standards legislation. Most rely instead on the investigation of individual complaints. However, the complaint-based approach has its limits. For example, workers may choose not to lodge a complaint against their employer for fear of reprisals. Furthermore, very few complaints ever result in significant sanctions being imposed on the employer.

Several reforms have been proposed as means of ensuring that employment standards legislation remains applicable to those workers most in need of its protection.

Many critics of current employment standards legislation have pointed to the need for improved monitoring and enforcement initiatives. One good example of an effective enforcement strategy is the "No Sweat" campaign, developed by the United States' Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division. The "No Sweat" campaign is a three-pronged initiative, which combines enforcement, education/outreach and recognition[25]. It targets the garment industry in an effort to enforce compliance with labour laws. Since its inception in 1995, the "No Sweat" campaign has reduced overtime and minimum wage violations and recovered $8.4 million for 29,000 garment workers. Other low-wage

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[23] See *Report of the Advisory Committee on the Changing Workplace* (1997), especially Chapters 4 and 5; Fudge (1991); Goldstein et al. (1999); Vosko (1997); and Yanz et al. (1999).

[24] Dagg (1997), p. 83.

[25] *The enforcement strategy* includes targeted enforcement sweeps in major garment centres, notifying manufacturers of "hot goods" produced by their contractors, and issuing quarterly enforcement reports. *The education/outreach strategy* includes compliance monitoring workshops to provide industry with information on how to implement an effective monitoring program. *The recognition strategy* includes the publication of a Trendsetters List recognizing retailers and manufacturers that have assumed responsibility for monitoring the labour practices of their contractors.

industries, including agriculture, home nursing, and restaurants and hotels, are the targets of similar initiatives in the United States. While the success of the "No Sweat" campaign may be particular to the American context - and, more specifically, to the garment industry in the US - further research may help us extract lessons on what makes the initiative work and why. These lessons, in turn, may be useful in helping other nations devise monitoring and enforcement strategies suited to their contexts.

In addition to improving monitoring and enforcement strategies and rewriting legislation to provide coverage to non-standard workers, researchers have suggested other possible adjustments to employment standards legislation and practices:

- *Joint and several liability between employers* to make contractors, sub-contractors, and immediate employers legally liable for employment standards violations.
- *The right to make anonymous and third party complaints* to help mitigate fears of reprisal through disciplinary measures or job loss.
- *More strenuous reporting and record-keeping practices* to ensure that all work is documented and labour standards consequently maintained.

Another possible solution to the problem of labour standards violations in non-standard work, and one that is fairly common in Europe, is broadly-based collective bargaining involving multiple employers and covering all workers in an industry or sector, not just those who are unionized. Broadly-based collective bargaining is more relevant than firm-level bargaining to present employment patterns, because it assures contingent workers of coverage even when they move from one employer to another within an industry.

One solution to labour standards violations in non-standard work … is broadly-based collective bargaining involving multiple employers and covering all workers in an industry or sector, not just those who are unionized.

In recent years, there has also been growing interest in voluntary codes of conduct and monitoring systems. Yanz et al. explain this growth by the fact that voluntary codes "seem to be compatible with the neo-liberal model of trade liberalization, privatization, cost-cutting, flexibility, and global competitiveness". The authors recognize that voluntary codes of conduct may not be useful in the absence of either independent monitoring or transparent voluntary monitoring processes. They see voluntary codes as complementing and reinforcing state regulation rather than replacing it[26]. In the end, however, despite their recent proliferation at the national and international levels, there is so far little evidence of the impact of voluntary codes of conduct.

[26] Yanz et al. (1999), p. 49.

Equal Opportunities Policies

Labour market discrimination is a central factor affecting women's employment opportunities and earnings. Discrimination exists when equally qualified individuals are treated differently solely on the basis of their gender.

Discrimination may be either intentional or systemic. When employers intentionally discriminate against women, they may presume that women are not capable of doing certain jobs, due to their generally weaker physical strength relative to men, or due to alleged differences in their psychological makeup. Or they may presume that female employees will impose undue hardships on the employer, workplace, or workforce. Systemic discrimination, on the other hand, is largely unintentional. It may refer to social pressures that steer girls and young women toward careers in traditionally female occupations, or to organizational practices and workplace cultures that discourage women from applying for jobs in traditionally male occupations or from pursuing studies in these fields.

One striking evidence of the impact of discrimination is the persistent inability of women to penetrate the upper echelons of corporations, government, and academia in numbers that reflect their presence in the workforce as a whole.

Regardless of its nature, discrimination can and does exist at all levels within organizations. Some of the most striking evidence of its impact is the persistent inability of women to penetrate the upper echelons of corporations, government, and academia in numbers that reflect their presence in the workforce as a whole. Furthermore, the higher the position, the larger the gap. Very few women reach the highest positions as executive heads of organizations, and progress in this direction is marginal in comparison to the large number of qualified women in the labour market. The term "glass ceiling" was coined in the United States in the 1970s to refer to the subtle barriers, created by attitudinal and organizational prejudices, that bar women from reaching top executive positions.

Discrimination does not, however, only limit women's upward mobility within organizations. It may also affect their ability to access male-dominated occupations and sectors of the economy such as trades, technologies, and scientific and technical fields. The consequence is a labour market that remains highly segregated along gender lines in all industrialized countries, with men dominating in scientific and technical occupations, and women in caring and nurturing professions.

… there is growing recognition that discrimination is primarily systemic and unintentional …

As a first step toward achieving gender equality in the labour market, many industrialized nations have introduced gender equality legislation and laws prohibiting discrimination in employment on the basis of sex. Yet there is growing recognition that discrimination is primarily systemic and unintentional, and that ending it and preventing its future perpetration may require measures that go beyond the

imposition of legislative bans. Many countries have therefore introduced *equal opportunities policies* as a means to this end.

Lesson 2 Equal opportunities policies that state goals and timetables and include enforcement mechanisms can yield positive results

Equal opportunities policies are designed to end discrimination in employment on the basis of gender (or other relevant factors such as age or visible minority status) and to prevent its future perpetration. There are two possible approaches when implementing such policies.

The first approach is guided by the principle of *equality of opportunity*. Policies proceeding from this principle may include active recruitment, hiring and training of women, as well as supporting measures such as assistance with child care, provision of parental leave, and flexible work arrangements. The aim of these policies is to level the playing field, thus promoting the achievement of an appropriate representation of women throughout the organization and the workforce as a whole.

The second approach is guided by the principle of *equality of result*. These policies, which are sometimes called positive or affirmative action, are usually intended as temporary measures to remove the effects of past discrimination.[27] These policies assume that equality of opportunity policies are insufficient if some groups enter the labour market from unequal starting points due to a history of discrimination. Once the consequences of past discrimination have been rectified - that is, once the target groups are represented in an organization in the same proportion as they are in the external labour force - positive action should in theory be removed. In this way positive action differs from other equal opportunities policies such as child care and flexible work arrangements, which ideally should remain a permanent part of an employer's personnel policy. Positive action places an obligation on employers to implement plans in which preferential treatment is given to members of the target groups. This is usually achieved through close government involvement in a systematic approach involving quotas. *Affirmative action* in the United States is an example of a policy guided by the principle of equality of result that includes *quotas*, timetables for their completion, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the results.

The Canadian employment equity program, for its part, aims to remove barriers and improve working conditions for persons from designated groups. Rather than adopt a 'preferential treatment' approach, the 1996 Employment Equity Act (EEA) places an obligation on public and private sector federal employers to analyse their workforce, develop appropriate

[27] Lim (1996)

employment equity action plans, and report annually on the representation in their workforce of persons from designated groups. Instead of quotas, employers are required to set numerical goals[28] and to take measures to achieve them. They are also required to set timetables for the attainment of goals, and to monitor and evaluate results. The Canadian Human Rights Commission is mandated to monitor employers' compliance with their employment equity action plans. The Commission's audit process is based on a "premise of negotiation and persuasion dictated by the Act's guiding principle, and the Commission's own long standing practice that, wherever possible, undertakings be agreed upon to redress areas of non-compliance. Should this process fail, the Commission may issue a direction and either party may appeal to a special tribunal to resolve contentious issues."[29]

… there is some evidence from the United States that affirmative action policies have increased women's employment and earnings and improved employee retention.

In many countries equal opportunities policies are of recent origin and there has so far been little systematic investigation of their effects. But there is some evidence from the United States, where affirmative action has been in place for three decades, to demonstrate that these policies have increased women's employment and earnings and improved employee retention. For example, Leonard (1990)[30] found that:

- Employment of members of protected groups, including women, grew significantly faster in contractor establishments as compared to non-contractor establishments. However, affirmative action was more successful in establishments that are growing and have many job openings.

- Affirmative action had positive impacts on occupational advance. However, this upgrading may have been overstated because of biased reporting to the government.

- Affirmative action programs work best when they are vigorously enforced, when they work with other policies that augment the skills of members of protected groups, and when they work with growing employers.

Canadian employment equity legislation, by contrast, is relatively new. Preliminary results suggest a small positive effect on representative hiring and pay for at least some groups of women.[31] Caucasian females appear to be benefiting most from the legislation. Further research is

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[28] It is important to make the distinction between quotas and numerical goals. While quotas are seen as a rigid threshold that must be reached if one wishes to avoid a penalty, numerical goals refers to more flexible, rational goals that employers can use, like all business goals, as planning and evaluation tools.

[29] Canadian Human Rights Commission (2000), p. 9.

[30] For other studies finding a positive impact of affirmative action, see Leonard (1984, 1985); Beller (1982); and Holzer and Neumark (1998).

[31] For examples see Lum (1995); Leck and Saunders (1992a, 1992b); and Leck, St. Onge and Lalancette (1995).

required to determine if this pattern will be sustained in the longer term. Further research may also help to determine the reasons for this differential impact.

Nonetheless there is ample evidence[32] to illustrate the effectiveness of equal opportunities policies that clearly state the type and magnitude of the changes expected, include timetables for their achievement, and specify the penalties accruing to organizations that fail to comply with the legislation. One of the biggest criticisms of Canada's original employment equity legislation was that it lacked the mandatory goals, timetables, and enforcement mechanisms necessary to accomplish its purpose. In 1992, a comprehensive review of the legislation confirmed that problems with implementation, monitoring and enforcement of the legislation accounted for the disappointing record of employers' employment equity initiatives[33]. The new *Employment Equity Act,* introduced in 1996, requires employers to post numerical goals in their employment equity plans and empowers the Canadian Human Rights Commission to monitor employer compliance.[34]

One criticism of Canada's original employment equity legislation was that it lacked the mandatory goals, timetables, and enforcement mechanisms necessary to accomplish its purpose. … New legislation requires employers to post numerical targets … and empowers the Canadian Human Rights Commission to monitor employer compliance.

Policies That Affect Pay

The existence, in all industrialized countries, of a gender gap in earnings is one of the most obvious examples of persistent labour market inequality between men and women. Previously, differences in productivity-related characteristics, such as education, training, work experience, and differential labour force attachment explained a substantial portion of the gender gap in earnings. However, as the quality and level of women's education and training have improved, and the gender gap in other productivity-related factors has narrowed, the portion of the earnings gap attributable to these factors has declined. Today segregation by occupation and industry is one of the most significant factors in accounting for the gender gap in earnings.

… a gender gap in earnings is an example of persistent labour market inequality between men and women. … Segregation by occupation and industry is a significant factor accounting for the gender gap in earnings.

Lesson 3 Pay equity policies and legislation can be effective in reducing the gender gap in pay

In North America, the main strategy to deal with pay differentials arising from the fact that women and men do different work is *pay equity* or *comparable worth*. Pay equity assumes that women's

[32] See The Canadian Human Rights Commission's annual Employment Equity Report, and Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC)'s *Employment Equity Act* Annual Reports (produced by the Labour Branch of HRDC).

[33] Redway (1992)

[34] As in the preceding discussion on employment standards, our focus here has been on methods of enforcing employment equity legislation. However, further research on the use of incentives would be necessary in order to assess the effectiveness of such policies.

occupations are compensated at a lower rate than men's are *because* it is women who work in these occupations. Its objective is to eliminate any systematic relationship between wages and the gender composition of employment, after allowing for differences in productivity-related characteristics.

Pay equity policies share the principle that jobs that are qualitatively dissimilar in nature can nevertheless be compared in terms of skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions through a methodology of job evaluation. Female-dominated jobs that are shown to be similar in these terms to male-dominated jobs are eligible for pay adjustments. Gunderson reports that in organizations in which it has been implemented, pay equity has resulted in an overall increase in pay in female-dominated occupations of 10-20%[35]. These adjustments frequently represent a significant improvement in the financial circumstances of the individual women who receive them. For example:

- In Minnesota, 8,500 state employees, mainly clerical and health care workers, received adjustments averaging $2,200 over four years. These adjustments closed 31% of the pay gap.

- In Manitoba, pay equity adjustments resulted in an average 15% increase over hourly rates. Within the government overall, including professionals, these adjustments closed 28% of the gender differential. However, a much more significant reduction in the gap was apparent when professionals were excluded. Among the remaining workers, many of whom were clerical and health workers, pay equity adjustments reduced the gender gap by about 50%.

- In 1999, the federal government and the Public Service Alliance of Canada, which represents clerks, secretaries and several other female-dominated job categories, settled a 16-year-old pay equity dispute. The federal government agreed to implement the 1998 Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling on pay equity that ordered the Treasury Board to adjust the salaries of employees in the affected job categories to reflect their value relative to jobs performed mostly by men. Under the agreement, between $3.3 and $3.6 billion would be paid out retroactively to some 230,000 current and former public service employees in the aforementioned job categories. Highlights of the agreement include: ongoing pay equity adjustments; retroactive lump-sum payments; interest; adjustments to maternity allowance; disability insurance and long term disability benefits; severance pay; acting situations; promotions; and, overtime. The adjustments were retroactive to March 8, 1985.

[35] Gunderson (1989)

However, in other jurisdictions, such as Ontario, the impact of pay equity on the gender pay gap has been more modest. Furthermore, decisions made at every stage of the job evaluation process can substantially affect the number of women who receive adjustments, as well as the magnitude of those adjustments.

- Gender predominance standards affect the number of women eligible to receive adjustments: the lower the cut-off, the greater the number of women potentially eligible for compensation.

- The choice of job evaluation system can also have important consequences. A frequent charge made by advocates of pay equity is that many pay equity exercises employ gender-biased job evaluation systems. Most jurisdictions explicitly require a "gender-neutral" job evaluation system, but nowhere is this requirement defined, and in practice it may be difficult to meet.

- The statistical method employed to adjust the compensation level of female job classes is another important factor. A job-to-job match may be used, which has the effect of moving the female wage up to the bottom of the male distribution and results in a low ceiling for adjustments. Or the wages of female-dominated jobs may be moved up to the average male pay line. The latter method usually results in higher average increases for women.

Several other factors can restrict the effectiveness of pay equity policies. The most serious shortcomings are associated with complaint-based approaches. Launching a pay equity complaint typically requires financial resources, time commitments and sophisticated legal skills to which many women do not have access.

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However, even when proactive plans are in place, their capacity to narrow the gender gap in pay may be restricted by several factors[36].

- The absence of a male comparator in some establishments may leave large numbers of women in female-dominated jobs ineligible for pay equity adjustments. This problem has been encountered in most jurisdictions at the federal and provincial/state levels in Canada and the United States, but it could be mitigated by allowing comparisons across establishments. Such a strategy would not only increase the number of women eligible for adjustments, but it would also imply greater economy-wide effects.

[36] These factors do not necessarily reflect inherent limits of pay equity but rather shortcomings in the way certain pay equity statutes have been constructed. It is important to make the distinction between fundamental limitations of pay equity as public policy and flaws in specific statutes or approaches.

- Pay equity legislation does not apply to women in male-dominated or mixed occupations.[37] A gender gap in pay would still prevail even if pay equity were completely successful in the areas where it applies.

- The restriction of pay equity to the public sector in most jurisdictions leaves large numbers of women beyond its scope of application. Many of the lowest-paying jobs in the economy are located in the private sector, and women remain over-represented in these occupations.

Lesson 4 Policies that narrow the overall earnings distribution narrow the gender earnings gap

Recent literature on the gender pay gap has drawn attention to the impact of wage-setting mechanisms and overall wage structure on the magnitude of the pay differential. This interest has arisen primarily because the United States and Canada, despite their more long-standing commitment to equal opportunities policies such as employment equity and pay equity, have the largest gender pay gaps among industrialized nations.

… the relatively more decentralized wage-setting system in the United States and Canada accounts for the larger gender pay differential in those countries.

Several authors have found that the relatively more decentralized wage setting system in the United States and Canada accounts for the larger gender pay differential in those countries.[38] In decentralized wage systems, wages are set at the firm, rather than at the industry or national, level. This results in a highly dispersed earnings distribution. In other words, there is a big difference between the earnings of the highest-income earners and the lowest-income earners in these countries. Women, who are disproportionately located at the low end of the earnings distribution, tend to lose from this kind of arrangement. By contrast, Australia and many European nations have a long tradition of centralized wage determination involving a dominant union sector and strong collective bargaining. In these countries, wage structures are much more compressed. However, Australia has recently moved toward enterprise-level bargaining, or the more decentralized wage-setting system, such as exists in North America. The effect of this shift on the gender pay gap is not yet known.

Wage structures vary not only across countries, but also across sectors within individual countries. For instance, the gender gap in earnings is often smaller in the public sector than in the private sector. This is due both to the more compressed wage structures in the public sector and to the concentration of highly skilled female-dominated professions typically found there. However, the earnings benefits of public sector employment are not universally found. The public sector pay premium is largest in Canada and the United States, and declines as the size of

[37] A mixed occupation is one where there is no clear majority of either male or female employees.
[38] For examples see Blau and Kahn (1996); Kidd and Shannon (1996); and Whitehouse (1992).

the public sector increases. Gornick and Jacobs (1998) found that in Sweden, which has one of the largest public sectors among industrialized nations, both men and women public sector workers receive a pay *penalty*.[39] In other words, once compositional differences, such as education and occupation, are controlled for, men and women working in the Swedish public sector earn less than their private sector counterparts.

Despite this exception, compressed wage structures generally benefit women, who are over-represented among low-income earners. Any policy that serves to narrow the overall earnings distribution will narrow the gender earnings gap.

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Labour Market Training

Improvements in women's educational qualifications are one of the most significant factors in accounting for improvements in their labour market status over the last few decades. Today women possess educational qualifications that equal or surpass those of men in most industrialized countries. However, women and men continue to pursue different areas of study, and gender bias remains strong in engineering and technology, mathematics and computer science.[40] Gender-based differences in fields of study can contribute to differential labour market outcomes for men and women.

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This study does not review systems of formal education and their implications for women. Instead it focuses on programs that usually fall under the heading of "training." Although the distinction between education and training is not always readily apparent, in this study training refers to any initiatives that impart skills or knowledge to individuals, primarily in order to meet the needs of employers, and that are not usually part of regular programming in schools and other public institutions.

Training has become a watchword in the present climate of economic restructuring. The characteristics of the new economy – the demise of traditional industries and the emergence of new ones; the predominance of information technology; and the growing polarization of the workforce into "good" jobs and "bad" jobs – have led to a strong emphasis on continuous learning, skills upgrading, and the cultivation of a "training culture." The demand for labour has shifted to the highly skilled, while those with low level or obsolete qualifications find themselves at a serious disadvantage, and often unemployed.

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[39] Gornick and Jacobs (1998)
[40] Statistics Canada (1995)

In the next section the main findings from research into labour market training programs for women are presented. Two caveats should be borne in mind. Most of the evaluation literature comes from Canada and the United States, where there is a mandatory requirement on public authorities to evaluate their labour market programs. Second, most evaluations provide evidence on short-term outcomes, usually one to two years after program completion, which may be too short a period for a full impact assessment.

Lesson 5 Successful training programs provide adequate supports to participants, are tailored to individual needs, and are sensitive to obstacles to training.

The main measure of success when evaluating training programs is whether they lead to increased earnings and employability, or time spent working, of participants. This criterion has become especially predominant as governments seek to reduce their expenditures on income assistance and programs are designed to encourage a speedy transition into the workforce.

Nearly all evaluations report increases in men and women's employability and earnings in the short term.

Nearly all evaluations report increases in men's and women's employability and earnings in the short term. Typically, training programs have a greater effect on employability than on earnings. It should be noted, however, that positive effects tend to be modest and diminish over time. This is true of almost all types of intervention, including formal classroom training, on-the-job training, job-search assistance, wage subsidies to employment in the private sector, and mixed strategies.[41] Earnings gains are usually in the realm of 10-30%. Moreover, since these earnings increases occur relative to an extremely low wage, they are not significant in any practical sense. This helps to explain the difficulty single mothers, who make up a large proportion of social assistance caseloads in North America, encounter in sustaining a successful transition from welfare to work. Because social assistance rates, unlike wages, are based on need and geared to family size, benefits can easily exceed the earnings from low-wage work. When the additional costs of labour force participation, such as child care, transportation, and reduced welfare benefits are factored in, single mothers, like many other categories of welfare recipients, stand to lose from labour market participation. In Canada, the recently-introduced National Child Benefit has been designed to address this problem, as it provides a supplement to working parents to enable them to meet the higher costs of participating in the work force.

[41] As discussed in a previous section, self-employment assistance programs are more successful for men than women.

When training programs are effective, adult women record the most consistently positive results of all categories of participants, though the reason for this differential impact is not clear. The lack of an explanation for this phenomenon constitutes a knowledge gap on which future evaluations should definitely focus.

Furthermore, a 1995 evaluation of the Employability Improvement Program (EIP) found that women had outcomes similar to those for males under the Jobs Opportunities and Project-Based Training components of EIP (the former provides wage subsidies to employers who hire participants; the latter provides integrated classroom and on-the-job training to clients). However, compared to men, women had larger gains in employability under the Purchase of Training component, which provides institutional training to clients through training courses purchased from public or private institutions. The objective in this case is to help the unemployed learn new job skills, get academic upgrading or language training.[42]

The success of training programs appears to depend on several important factors.

- **Adequate financial and collateral supports to training should be in place**

Adequate financial supports should be in place for the duration of training programs. Training allowances should cover child care, transportation, and any additional cost women may incur as a result of their participation. Manitoba's Taking Charge! Program, for example, provided training allowances covering the cost of child care, transportation, clothing, and other job-related expenses to participants, most of whom were single mothers on income assistance. Failure to cover these costs reduces women's ability to participate in training. Under the Severely Employment Disadvantaged Option of the Canadian Jobs Strategy's Job Entry Program, for instance, about half of single mothers with at least one dependent said they could not participate in the program if dependent care allowances were not available.[43]

In rural and isolated communities where child care services are not widely available, it may be necessary to provide these services directly. Providing a child care allowance to trainees only works where there is a proper supply of child care spaces.

[42] Human Resources Development Canada, Employability Improvement Program: Final Report (1995)
[43] TRICAN Consulting Group (1993)

- **Training should be tailored to individual needs and circumstances**

Women are not a homogeneous group with identical training needs. Training programs are more successful when they are tailored to the individual circumstances and specific requirements of participants. Many jurisdictions have implemented individual case management as a way of ensuring that these needs are met. Some of the issues that may require consideration when developing training programs for women are listed below. Of course, some of these issues may apply equally to men.

- Training should be offered at convenient times. Many women work irregular hours, shift work, or hold multiple jobs. Others may face time restrictions due to child care duties.

- Training should be accessible in geographical terms. This issue is particularly acute for rural women and Aboriginal women in isolated northern communities.

- For women with disabilities, special arrangements for transportation, communication, attendant care, and so on may be necessary.

- Aboriginal and immigrant women may require ESL/FSL (English as a second language/ French as a second language) training.

- Immigrant women often possess education and training credentials and/or previous work experience that are not recognized in Canada. For these women, prior learning assessments are important.

- **Sensitivity to cultural and family-related obstacles to training is sometimes required**

Women's access to training programs and their ability to complete these programs successfully can be strongly influenced by their family and household responsibilities, and by cultural attitudes about appropriate roles for women and men. The experience of women attempting to "adjust out" of the Canadian groundfish industry is a case in point. The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS) was a mixed program intended to assist displaced fishers and processing workers through income support, counselling, training, mobility assistance, employment supports, early retirement programs, and some job creation initiatives. The recent evaluation of TAGS found that women faced many more constraints to adjustment than men, due to traditional gender roles and their often-unequal positions in the family, the fishery, and the community.[44] In addition to lack of child care, which the evaluation identified as the biggest obstacle to women's participation in adjustment programs:

[44] Human Resources Development Canada (1998)

- Women expressed more positive views toward adjustment and had higher levels of formal education than men, but were more constrained by family and community ties and cultural values. In total, 31% of male clients and 22% of female clients adjusted.

- Women saw themselves as much less mobile than men because of family and household responsibilities and traditional gender roles in families. Over half the men interviewed were unwilling to move for a job opportunity for their wives, whereas almost all women were willing to follow their husbands. Under these circumstances, the limited availability of locally delivered training programs restricted the training options of most women.

Thus, sensitivity to the possible obstacles to training posed by cultural attitudes and traditional gender roles is required. However, it is important to make a distinction here between short-term and long-term policy goals and responses. Adapting training programs to take into account obstacles posed by attitudes and norms is mere recognition - not acceptance or endorsement - of the reality with which women still have to contend in industrialised countries. Recognizing this reality in no way negates the necessity for policymakers to concentrate part of their efforts on changing entrenched social attitudes (which is necessarily a much more medium/long-term process).

Lesson 6 Bridging programs can help women overcome barriers to labour market participation

Bridging programs ensure that women possess the basic skills requires to participate in the labour force … however they do not always lead to immediate employment.

Bridging programs are designed to help women overcome any personal, cultural, or systemic barriers to labour market participation and advancement. Often these programs are aimed at women wishing to re-enter the workforce after a prolonged absence, women on social assistance, and others facing barriers to full-time employment. The main focus of these programs is ensuring that these women possess the basic skills required in order to participate in the labour force at all. They typically provide counselling services, life skills training, and basic skills training in numeracy and literacy. These components are often combined with job search skills, training in interview techniques and other employment-related skills, and a strong emphasis on work placements.[45] Other bridging programs are designed to move women into trades and technologies or to help immigrant women integrate into the Canadian labour force.

Bridging programs do not always lead to immediate employment. This does not necessarily mean that they are unsuccessful and should be eliminated. Bridging programs can meet a variety of training needs that

[45] Federal-Provincial-Territorial Joint Working Group of Status of Women and Labour Market Officials on Education and Training (1994)

may be overlooked by programs geared toward immediate employment. However, funding for bridging programs has always been unstable, and some successful programs have been eliminated in spite of having achieved good results. Concern has been expressed that evaluation criteria based on how many people immediately find jobs after participating in training may jeopardize further funding for bridging programs.

Lesson 7 Training should be linked to areas of high demand or further training opportunities

There is little point in training women for occupations in which there is already a surplus, or which offer, at best, the prospect of low-paid employment, few opportunities for advance, and a possible return to income support.

Training frequently prepares women for jobs that are most vulnerable to disappearance or declining quality in the coming years. The most prevalent training options for women in Canada, for example, are clerical and service occupations. But clerical occupations suffered the single largest decline of any occupational group in Canada over the course of the 1990s.[46] There is little point in training women for occupations in which there is already a surplus, or which offer, at best, the prospect of low-paid employment, few opportunities for advance, and a possible return to income support.

Training women in areas suffering a shortage of qualified individuals, such as trades and other technical fields, could help to reverse this situation. Training efforts in Canada have so far done little to improve the distribution of women beyond low-paying, stereotypical occupations or to improve their access to highly skilled occupations in high demand. Since the 1960s, Canadian women have received training primarily in low-paying, traditional occupations such as clerical skills, personal service, and sales. Women's participation in apprenticeship training is extremely low, and the majority of women apprentices train in traditional, female-dominated trades such as hairdressing.

One potential way of addressing the problem of exit level jobs is by developing … a more sequential training process linking various levels of training …

One potential way of addressing the problem of individuals who hold jobs with no prospect of advancement is to develop closer linkages between training levels. A more sequential training process linking various levels of training may be beneficial. "Job ladders" would allow women to progress from relatively low levels of skill (and unskilled and poorly paid work) to higher levels of skill and more demanding, better-paid, and more stable occupations. Another strategy is to cultivate closer linkages with the private sector in order better to identify areas of current and future demand. However, concern has been expressed that private sector involvement may lead to training that focuses merely on employers' requirements at the expense of women's longer-term needs. Training in transferable skills, as well as in job-specific skills, is necessary to ensure that women's opportunities for employment are not contingent on a single employer.

[46] Betcherman et al. (1998)

At the same time, however, it should be recognized that the most consistently positive results for training programs, in terms of the number of people securing employment, are obtained in areas experiencing robust economic growth. Three of the most successful programs in the United States, California's GAIN program, the Baltimore Options program, and San Diego's Saturation Work Initiative Model ran during periods of economic growth and prosperity. This suggests, at the very least, that expectations about the number of people who can find work should be reasonable. This is especially so in isolated and rural areas, and in regions, such as Atlantic Canada, experiencing economic recession due to the collapse of major resource-based industries.

Community development programs may offer these communities the possibility of improving overall economic conditions, and thus offering increased employment opportunities for women. Women in Rural Economic Development (WRED), a federal non-profit corporation, has been at the forefront of community development initiatives. Its focus is to build the economic capacity of rural Ontario regions, through mentorship, life skills training, farm diversification training, co-operative marketing, capital access, and entrepreneurship training. WRED provides startup or extension capital to rural women entrepreneurs with no or poor credit history. WRED has successfully provided business development assistance to over 500 women.[47]

Policies to Reconcile Work and Family Responsibilities

Women, regardless of their labour market status, continue to bear the primary responsibilities for dependent care and household work in all industrialized countries.

The dramatic increase in female employment over the last thirty years has not been matched, in any country, by an equally dramatic reallocation of domestic duties between men and women. Women, regardless of their labour market status, continue to bear the primary responsibilities for dependent care and household work in all industrialized countries.

- Many women who engage in paid work are now confronting the "double day." It is well established that employed women spend substantially more time on domestic duties than do employed men. Furthermore, the kinds of chores that women and men do are different. Women tend to have the main responsibility for child care, meal preparation, cleaning, and laundry, while men devote their time to activities such as home repairs and outdoor maintenance, which are more discretionary and do not need to be done regularly.

[47] National Women's Reference Group on Labour Market Issues (1998)

- Employed women experience significant time pressures as they attempt to juggle work and family. In Canada, married mothers employed full-time work more hours per day than any other group, and 33% - about twice the proportion of men – suffer from extreme levels of time stress.[48]

- Women tend to have a more discontinuous labour market history than men as a result of their family responsibilities. Leaving the labour force to bear and raise children can limit women's earnings and restrict their opportunities for work-related training and career advancement. Likewise, a work history consisting of shorter-term bouts of employment punctuated by exits from the workforce can limit women's eligibility for employment insurance benefits, which are often contingent on a continuous work history.

- Among dual-earner couples, women are much more likely than men to alter their employment patterns when they have children.[49] Rather than leaving the labour market altogether, many women opt for part-time employment. While this may seem to be an adequate solution to the conflicting demands of work and family, part-time work usually implies lower earnings, fewer benefits, less job security, and fewer opportunities for promotion. Furthermore, part-time work solves the work-family conflict by perpetuating traditional gender roles.

… the policy challenge is to facilitate a work-family balance for all employees, not just for women.

These considerations suggest that developing policies to allow women to balance their work and family responsibilities more easily may only be part of the solution to the problem posed by the often-incompatible demands of work and family. Equally important are policies (such as flex-time and parental leave) that encourage a more equitable distribution of family responsibilities between men and women. In fact, the policy challenge is to facilitate a work-family balance for *all* employees, not just for women. Otherwise, these policies may reinforce, rather than dismantle, the gender division of labour and the consequences women face in the labour market.

Policies that attempt to address the conflict between work and family include maternity and parental leave policies, child care policies, and flexible work arrangements.[50]

Lesson 8 The consequences of leave are poorly understood and further research in this area is required

Provisions for leave are one of the main policy responses to the work-family conflict. Leave policies were originally designed to help protect

[48] Woolley (1998)
[49] Marshall (1994)
[50] For more information, see: http://labour.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/worklife

women from some of the labour market consequences that can result from their childbearing role. Today most countries, in recognition of the growing role of fathers in raising children, offer parental leave to both parents, and some offer a separate maternity leave to mothers as well. There is wide variation among nations in the extent and generosity of their policies for leave. The most generous arrangements, at wage replacement rates that typically exceed 80%, are available in Europe. New Zealand, by contrast, is the only country where leave is both unpaid and parents are merely guaranteed a job to return to, rather than their old job or its equivalent.

The economic consequences of leave remain poorly understood and further research in this area is required. Proponents believe that leave promotes the retention of women with their firms, leads to higher earnings, and strengthens women's labour force attachment. Opponents counter that leave may limit women's opportunities for training and promotion, which usually requires some degree of continuity on the job.

The "mommy track" debate arose in the United States in the late 1980s out of this concern over the possible detrimental impact of leave and other flexibility policies on women's careers. The suggestion surfaced that women who wish to balance parenthood and career demonstrate a lack of professional commitment and should expect to sacrifice career advancement. This line of thinking seems to have caught on in North America. One US researcher remarked that actual employee use of leave and other family-friendly policies "is so small, it's shocking." [51] In a recent survey of Canadian professional and senior management women, a majority agreed that advancement in their organizations depends on putting their careers before their personal or family lives, and over half said the very fact of having children hinders a woman's ability to advance professionally.[52]

… systematic empirical evidence on the impact of leave policies is limited and inconclusive.

Nevertheless systematic empirical evidence on the impact of leave policies is limited and inconclusive. Several studies find that leave promotes women's retention with their firm, and is associated with increases in women's employment.[53] Evidence on the effects of leave on pay is more ambiguous. Some studies find that taking leave is positively associated with increases in women's pay.[54] However, Ruhm found that at longer durations, parental leave may be paid for through lower relative wages[55]. Further research in this area is required.

[51] Quoted in Debra Schwartz (1994)
[52] Gerkovich Griffith et al. (1998)
[53] For examples see Ruhm (1998); Ruhm and Teague (1995); and Waldfogel et al. (1998).
[54] For examples see Spalter-Roth and Hartmann (1990) and Waldfogel (1998).
[55] Ruhm (1998)

Although there has been a steady increase in fathers' take up of parental leave over the last few decades, women are still far more likely than men to take leave, and to take it for substantially longer periods.

The possibility that parental leave policies may promote a diversification of gender roles has proved elusive in practice. In all countries, women are still far more likely to take parental leave than men. In some countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands, leave provisions are explicitly designed to reinforce a traditional child-rearing role for women. However, even in Sweden, where parental leave was introduced as part of a policy package designed both to draw women into the labour force and to encourage men to share in the responsibility for raising children, there is only limited evidence to suggest that it has succeeded in the latter goal. Although there has been a steady increase in fathers' take up of parental leave over the last few decades, women are still far more likely than men to take leave, and to take it for substantially longer periods.

The barriers preventing a more extensive male involvement in parental leave remain unclear. One explanation may be that men usually earn more than their partners do, and so it makes financial sense for them to continue working. Other possible explanations may include lack of social support from friends and acquaintances; lack of exposure to non-traditional models of fathering; and unwillingness on the part of mothers to share child care responsibilities. Further research is required to determine whether financial considerations or cultural attitudes and norms explain fathers' low rates of participation in parental leave.

Lesson 9 Access to affordable child care is critical to women's labour force participation

… mothers, especially those with preschool children, cannot enter the labour force without access to affordable non-parental childcare.

In 1984, the Abella report on equality in employment observed that "childcare is the ramp that provides equal access to the workforce for mothers." Clearly mothers, especially those with preschool children, cannot enter the labour force without access to affordable non-parental child care. In the absence of such care, mothers may have to leave the paid workforce for several years, or work part-time. Difficulties in obtaining child care may prevent women from changing jobs, accepting promotions, or taking advantage of educational opportunities and training programs to enhance their employment prospects. Child care problems may also cause women to take excessive sick days because they must stay home when their children are sick; these absences may be held against them and may lead to poor references, lack of promotion, or disciplinary measures. For single or low-income mothers, the availability of affordable child care is especially critical, and can mean the difference between financial independence and subsistence on social assistance.[56]

[56] Doherty, Friendly and Oloman (1998)

A large number of studies in the United States and Canada have demonstrated that child care costs have a significant negative effect on the labour force participation of both married and single mothers. A cross-national comparison of maternal labour force participation demonstrates that rates are highest in countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, where public child care services are widely available at no or low cost. The extent to which child care is publicly provided varies considerably across countries. Baker identifies three basic models of child care.[57]

- *The social welfare model* departs minimally from the premise that children are the private concern of their parents. The majority of child care services are provided by family members, neighbours, or private caregivers. Government assistance is extremely selective and subsidizes only the poorest and most disadvantaged children. This model has a long-standing history in the Anglo-Saxon nations, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States. In both countries a relatively high proportion of mothers participate in the labour force, even though both rank near the bottom of countries in terms of child care provision. The actual level of employment-parenting conflict that exists in these countries may be partially masked by high levels of economic necessity.

- *The public responsibility model* lies at the opposite end of the spectrum. The European nations have long acknowledged that children are a major public resource and that the whole society should share in the cost of rearing them. Countries best exemplifying the public responsibility model are France, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. These countries view child care as a right of all families, essential both to child development and to women's participation in the labour force. Government sets standards of education and care, and child care services are heavily subsidized. If parents pay fees, they are charged on a sliding scale according to income. Not coincidentally, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland have the highest rates of maternal employment among industrialized nations. However, in France, the labour force participation rate of mothers is similar to that in the US, the UK, and Canada.

- *The mixed responsibility model* lies between the social welfare and public responsibility models. In this arrangement, government provides some child care services, but encourages voluntary organizations, the private sector and employers to develop services through capital grants or tax concessions. Lone-parent families or those with low incomes may be given priority for subsidized spaces, and government may provide income tax deductions or credits for child care. More variation in the quality of services and costs is

[57] Baker (1995)

apparent than in the public responsibility model, and there is often a shortage of spaces and a high use of relatives as care providers. This is a diverse group of countries that includes Australia, Canada, and the Netherlands. Across these countries, there is wide variation in mothers' labour force participation, with rates comparatively high in Canada, and low in Australia and the Netherlands. Studies have shown that cultural expectations about the paid employment of mothers are very important in accounting for these differences.

Thus, the availability of affordable child care is associated with high rates of maternal labour force participation. However, other factors also play a part in explaining varying rates of maternal participation in the labour force across countries. Cultural norms and expectations about the paid employment of mothers are very important in accounting for these differences. In countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, considerable social pressure is still exerted on mothers to stay at home and raise their children. In Canada, where maternal employment is more widely accepted, a much higher proportion of mothers work, even though child care services are neither more affordable nor more widely available. Economic necessity is another important factor. In some countries, mothers work in spite of the poor availability of child care.

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Employer support for child care has received attention as a potential solution to the shortage of high quality, affordable child care in most countries. In fact, employer support for child care and other "family-friendly" policies are now routinely touted as a critical component of an effective human resource management strategy and a win-win proposition for both employees and employers.[58] Such policies are said to help employees manage their work and family responsibilities, in the process reducing stress and improving morale. Among the benefits expected to accrue to employers are reduced absenteeism, enhanced employee retention, and increased productivity.

Employer support for child care can take various forms, including information and referral services, on-site or near-site child care centres, and child care subsidies. The most prevalent type of support provided by Canadian and US employers is information and referral services, which help employees find, monitor and plan their child care arrangements. In 1997, almost one quarter of Canadian companies surveyed by the Conference Board of Canada reported offering information and referral services. However, only about 8% offered on- or near-site child care in the same year, and only 2% provided any type of child care subsidy. Thus the main employer initiative in Canada does not address the main problems confronting parents with regard to child care – that is, its cost and availability. Furthermore, the majority

[58] Johnson, Duxbury and Higgins (1997)

of firms providing child care assistance are large and well established. They therefore offer no benefit to the large numbers of women who work for small firms unable to afford to implement such policies.

Some employers have implemented innovative solutions to the child care needs of their employees, and these policies are likely to be of particular benefit to female employees. On the other hand, it appears that the majority of employers do not feel great pressure to elevate child care to a high place on their agenda. A comparative study of family-friendly employers reports that government commitment to work-family issues encourages employers to become more involved, while the absence of national policies does not necessarily lead to more generous employer measures.[59] The need for an increased supply of affordable, high quality child care spaces is not likely to be addressed satisfactorily if left to the private sector alone.

… government commitment to work-family issues encourages employers to become more involved, while the absence of national policies does not necessarily lead to more generous employer measures.

Lesson 10 Systematic research into the labour market impact of flexible work arrangements is necessary

Flexible work arrangements are another potential solution to the work-family conflict. Like employer support for child care, these arrangements are frequently promoted as beneficial to both employer and employee. On the one hand, they help the employer by providing an opportunity to cover extended hours. On the other hand, they benefit employees by giving them some control in organizing their work schedule around family demands.

Flexible work arrangements … are frequently promoted as beneficial to both employer and employee.

Flexible work arrangements can either restructure or reduce employees' work time. The most common forms of flexible work arrangements are flextime, flexplace, and job sharing. But while the availability of these options has been increasing in most countries over the last decade, there has so far been little systematic investigation into their economic impact. At this stage it is only possible to make note of several emerging concerns:

- Many employees do not feel free to use flexible work policies as much as they would like, for fear of damaging their careers. Traditional beliefs about the nature of work persist. These include the notions that commitment to career is demonstrated by the amount of time spent in the office, that presence and hours are the best indicators of employee productivity, that "real" professional work can only be accomplished on a full-time basis, and that those employees who are serious about advancing will make themselves available to the office at all times. Employees are less reluctant to

[59] Hogg and Harker (1992)

take advantage of flexible work policies in companies where management is amenable to alternative perspectives about the nature of work.

- There is a possibility that flexible work arrangements may slow down women's careers or lead to lower pay. But these policies may also enhance retention and allow women to maintain a career identity, professional skills, and career momentum.

Research into the impact for employees, and for women in particular, of flexible work arrangements is urgently required.

4. Conclusion

The entry of women into the labour force has been one of the most significant developments of the twentieth century. But while the past thirty years have witnessed major improvements to women's labour market status, women continue to confront obstacles to equality with men in the workforce.

The introduction of measures designed to equalize women's labour market opportunities and outcomes has been a feature of public policy in all industrialized countries over the last three decades. Most of these measures have succeeded at improving women's labour market position, although results are at best preliminary. A great deal more research is required before we have an adequate understanding of the effects of these policies on women's labour market position.

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Most of the measures reviewed in this study require fairly significant public expenditure and regulation of the economy. This is true of employment standards legislation, equal opportunity policies, pay equity policies, labour market training programs, leave policies, and child care policies. It is also true of structural features of the labour market, such as centralized wage setting, which have benefited women.

This study reviewed only some of the many policies and programs that affect women's position in the workforce. It did not consider formal education systems, even though improvement in women's educational qualifications is one of the most important factors in accounting for their improved labour market status over the past thirty years, and will continue to play a prominent role in accounting for future advances. Nor did it discuss income redistribution policies such as taxation, social assistance and employment insurance. Research has demonstrated that these policies, by creating incentives or disincentives to work, can either reinforce women's secondary status in the labour market, or help to promote gender equality. These topics are significant enough to merit a separate discussion.

Health and housing policy, and sexual harassment and domestic violence legislation are other potentially significant factors. All of these topics require investigation for a thorough understanding of policies and programs promoting gender equality in the labour market.

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