



CFUW Ontario Council Response

To

Consultations on the Gender Wage Gap

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Submitted by
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The Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) was established in 1919 to raise the social, economic and legal status of women, and to improve education and human rights. Almost a hundred years later, the Ontario Council CFUW strives to create a world where women have economic security, workplaces free of discrimination and harassment, and where women have the social supports necessary, to participate fully in the workforce.

A number of factors affect women's capacity to earn a living and contribute to the economy of the province. Negative societal attitudes on "women's work", lack of political will, effective legislation and oversight, along with discriminating business practices and insufficient social supports all contribute to the gender wage gap.

Today there are more women enrolled in and graduating from post-secondary institutions, demonstrating higher education and skills in various sectors. However, once entered into employment, women face numerous challenges that contribute to the gender wage gap.

Value and Attitude

Why is the work done by women perceived to be of less value, and given less value monetarily? What is necessary to change stereotypical attitudes?

Education is key to encouraging attitudinal change through the education curriculum starting at an early age to offering career counselling in secondary to providing employment knowledge of workplace practices, employee rights, and public campaigns.

Female dominated occupations need to reflect their true value monetarily. Non-traditional work for women, including, but not only in the STEM, needs to be encouraged and expanded. More women are needed in the Board rooms and in the upper level of management. These women can be role models and mentors for other women.

Social Supports

What do women need to keep them in the labour force and give them the scaffolding to succeed?

As the primary care giver in families for children and the elderly, women face not only the double work load of job responsibilities and care giving, but also the lack of compensation and employment opportunities, possible job loss and financial uncertainty.

Actions needed are numerous:

- affordable, accessible, quality early learning and child care
- better home care
- maternity and paternity leaves without penalties
- work environments free of harassment and discrimination

- a living wage for low income
- opportunities for full time positions and advancement
- employers and management staff who are trained in human resources, and can assist employees who are dealing with domestic abuse and other traumas to receive services
- access to legal aid with financial support when an employment infraction occurs

Business Practices in the Workplace

Who are the companies with the best business practices that can be role models? What tools do they use? How is the gender lens being applied?

The workplaces that put human resources as their priority and emphasize capacity building among their employees would have a process in place to address barriers faced by women:

- loss of seniority and opportunities through maternity leaves
- contract, part-time, temporary work where seniority is not accrued, no benefits, and less salary for the same work done by full time workers
- lack of flexibility in jobs/profession
- internal barriers preventing advancement
- hiring practices
- absence of pension plan

Role models need to demonstrate equal opportunities, an inclusive work culture, an open and transparent work environment, and apply a gender lens to all areas. Mandatory progress reports, set targets with timelines combined with those items previously mentioned would make change happen to eliminate the gender wage gaps.

Political Will

What can government do to ensure that half its population, women, have fair and equal treatment in the work place? What protection is given to women and what measures can be taken to prevent women from being undervalued. Previous legislation needs to be reviewed and where necessary modernized.

- initiate a Provincial Action Plan for Gender Equality in the Labour Market
- bring all the stakeholders to the table, business, government, institutions, workers representing all the sectors
- adopt the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and encourage all municipalities to build this into their policies and communities (already ratified by Canada in 1981)
- adher to 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—as the federal government has committed to conducting gender based analysis on all future legislation, policies, and programs
- abide by the '25 by 25' signed by Canada in 2014 to achieve goal of reducing the gap in participation rates by 25% by 2025
- adher to target of 2025 for Accessibility for all Ontarians

Effective Legislation and Oversight

- return designated pay equity funding and improve the pay equity enforcement structure
- encourage the Ontario Women's Directorate to include a focus on women's economics issues
- address the widening of the pay gap due to increasing privatization of public sector work and loss of union protection, higher pay, and access to full time positions
- require businesses to publish equal pay and employee income reports
- include the pay gap with the Poverty Reduction Strategy
- provide governance and oversight for the pay gap
- monitor adherence to the pay transparency laws
- remove age discrimination in the Ontario Benefit program
- increase the age for Youth in Care to access services
- ensure stable funding is provided to Women's Shelters to provide longer accessibility for those in need

Whether you're a woman lawyer in legal aid or a midwife, an Early Childhood Educator, or a retail clerk, women have the right to equal pay and employment opportunities. Systemic discrimination and bias have undervalued women's work and prevented access to higher paying jobs in male dominated work places. Gender discrimination contributes significantly to the gender wage gap and precarious employment in the cases of Aboriginal women, women with disabilities and immigrant women.

Collaboration of government, business, labour, organizations and leaders is necessary to address the gender wage gap. The benefits to the province, communities and families would make a difference in the economy and in society as a whole.

CFUW Ontario Council is composed of 54 clubs within Ontario, comprised of members living in urban and rural areas across Ontario. We are non-partisan, nonsectarian, a voluntary, self-funded, non-governmental organization. Our members are active in public affairs, advocating on public education, justice, health and environmental issues as well as the status of women and human rights. Ontario Council is part of the Canadian Federation of University Women which is the largest affiliate of the Graduate Women International.

Sincerely

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