



ISSUES FACING WOMEN WORKERS IN CANADA



February 2019



Executive Summary

Recent research conducted by NUPGE has provided supporting evidence to the claim that there is a generational divide among workers—both union members and non-members—due to different circumstances, life experiences, and perceptions. Some of today’s workers’ key concerns seem as though they are generation specific, such as precarious employment, access to affordable child care, and pension stability. Once we dig deeper, however, we find that these issues have surprisingly interconnected and cross-generational impacts: they *come full circle*.

It is important to acknowledge that certain struggles may indeed be more pronounced in certain segments of the population. For example, recent attacks on pensions will have more immediate impacts on older workers; lack of access to affordable child care may have more direct effects on younger workers with children; and the gender pay gap is larger for marginalized women. It is valuable, however, to also note that many of these struggles are interconnected. Not only are these issues themselves connected due to their systemic nature, but also workers’ concerns are connected across generations.

Inspired by the research findings, this research paper aims to highlight some of those links across the generations of workers in Canada and the issues they face, and with a focus on women workers. In presenting this research, we hope to counter the narrative that aims to pit the younger and older generations of workers against one another.

Key Findings

Women and Paid Work

It is well documented that women workers generally earn less than their male counterparts, also known as *pay inequity* (or the gender pay gap, wage gap, wage inequality, etc.). The size of the gender pay gap varies depending on the method of calculation used, though a gap persists in all cases and across generations. Furthermore, data shows that the gender pay gap is larger for marginalized women.

Increasingly, *precarious employment*—work that is temporary, part-time, freelance, contract-based and/or without benefits—is having pronounced effects on younger workers, who are the first generation to enter this less secure labour market. But notably, this type of employment is nothing new for women workers, who have long been overrepresented in low-paying, less secure and part-time work.

Pension coverage in Canada is declining overall, but it has increased among women workers due to gender differences in industry. Although a more immediate concern for older workers, workers across generations support pensions and other benefits. Furthermore, pension policy changes and plan deficits threaten the retirement security for all workers.

Providing and Receiving Care

Many families struggle to find accessible and affordable *child care* due to high fees, waitlists, and inadequate access to licensed spaces. These barriers to access impact mostly those workers with young children—and these are likely (but not solely) younger workers. But may in turn impact older workers, such as grandparents, who provide child care or other forms of support.

Across generations, women are overrepresented among *caregivers*, both paid and unpaid. While we know that many older workers provide care to aging parents, young people are increasingly relied on to provide unpaid care in their families and communities. And those in middle age are “sandwiched” by care demands for both their (adult) children and aging parents. Across generations, most caregivers are also balancing the demands of paid work.

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV)—domestic violence, family violence, violence against women, intimate partner violence, and sexual violence—impacts women across generations. Young women, senior women, Indigenous women, women with disabilities, LGBTQ2 women and non-binary people, and immigrant, refugee and non-status women experience a higher rate of violence. Although we have seen increasing awareness, researchers and advocates have long identified the need for increased supports to address GBV.

Moving Forward

Unfortunately, workers are often pitted against one another—across generations as well as across races, genders, abilities, sexualities, across different citizenship statuses, sectors, union statuses, etc.—when in reality, many concerns are shared or linked through common problems. It is these problems, or the systems at their root, that warrant concern and attention. In fact, they present opportunities for workers and communities to come together across generations (and other lines of difference) and work together to tackle these problems.

Research conducted by NUPGE has provided supporting evidence to the claim that there is a generational divide among workers—both union members and non-members—due to different circumstances, life experiences, and perceptions. Some of today’s workers’ key concerns seem as though they are generation specific, such as precarious employment, access to affordable child care, and pension stability. Once we dig deeper, however, we find that these issues have surprisingly cross-generational impacts.

It is important to acknowledge that certain struggles may indeed be more pronounced in certain segments of the population. For example, recent attacks on pensions will have more immediate impacts on older workers; lack of access to affordable child care may have more direct effects on younger workers with children; and the gender pay gap is larger for marginalized women. It is valuable, however, to also note that many of these struggles are interconnected. Not only are these issues themselves connected due to their systemic nature, but also workers’ concerns are connected across generations.

This research aims to highlight some of those links across the generations of workers in Canada and the issues they face. This paper focuses on the issues and connections between women workers. In doing so, we hope to counter the narrative that aims to pit the younger and older generations of workers against one another.

Many of the challenges once faced by (or still facing) the older generation of workers, defined here as approximately 36 years and older, have *come full circle*. The younger generation of workers (approximately between 18 and 35 years) are facing similar challenges as those workers before them. For women workers in particular, some of these concerns include pay equity, gender-based violence, and access to affordable child care. Furthermore, both younger and older generations of workers in Canada are facing new challenges due to the changing political economy, such as the increasingly precarious nature of employment, attacks on pensions, and an increasing demand for care.

Although one particular issue, such as accessing and providing care, may have different impacts across generations or groups of workers, these issues and experiences are interconnected. This means that many workers actually share more common concerns than may be apparent at first glance. In turn, workers’ efforts towards (and advocacy for) comprehensive solutions to these systemic issues are linked.

A. Women and Paid Work

Pay Equity

Some challenges facing women workers more clearly affect workers across generations. One of these more intuitively cross-generational concerns is the presence of pay inequity. It is well documented that women generally earn less than their male counterparts. The gender pay gap (also known as the wage gap, pay inequity, wage inequality, etc.) has become a key topic of interest and debate when it comes to gender equality, particularly in relation to work.

The size of the gender pay gap varies, depending on the method of calculation used, though a gap persists in all cases. Furthermore, we often hear about only one pay gap, while in reality, the gap is larger for racialized women, Indigenous women, women with disabilities,¹ (im)migrant women,² and LGBTQ2 women and non-binary people.³

When comparing hourly wages (i.e., when men and women put in the same number of hours of work), women generally earn 87% of what men earn.⁴ This calculation method yields the smallest gap. The more commonly cited figure is that women earned \$0.74 for every dollar earned by men in 2014, or 74% of what men earned.⁵ Racialized women earned only 70%.⁶ This calculation uses annual earnings of full-time, full-year workers.

Since women work fewer hours on average than men, even on a full-time basis—due to gendered family responsibilities and the reality that women disproportionately work full-time jobs that pay fewer hours—this figure has been critiqued. Some argue that this figure overestimates wage inequality due to gender differences in work hours. Instead, the hourly wages of full-time workers better speak to gender-based discrimination.⁷ However, others argue that the bias, norms and other factors baked into the figure offer valuable insight into pay inequity and, in fact, the 74% figure may even underestimate the pay gap.⁸

According to Statistics Canada, when we compare the combined earnings of all working women compared to those of all working men, women earn 69%.⁹ Racialized women earn only 58% of what non-racialized men earn,¹⁰ and Indigenous women earn a shocking

¹ Amanda Burlock. May 2017. “Women with Disabilities.” Statistics Canada 89-503-X.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14695-eng.htm>

² Sheila Block and Grace-Edward Galabuzi. Persistent Inequality: Ontario’s Colour-coded Labour Market.” December 2018. Toronto: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Ontario.

<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Ontario%20Office/2018/12/Persistent%20inequality.pdf>

³ Kate McInturff. December 13, 2017. “A Deficit Worth Worrying About: The Gendered and Racialized Wage Gap.” Canadian Women’s Foundation. <https://www.canadianwomen.org/deficit-worth-worrying-gendered-racialized-wage-gap/>. See also: Ishani Nath. “Forth transgender women, the pay equity gap is even wider.” Maclean’s, February 8, 2018. <https://www.macleans.ca/society/for-transgender-women-the-pay-equity-gap-is-even-wider/>

⁴ Melissa Moyser. March 2017. “Women and Paid Work.” Statistics Canada.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.htm>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Catherine McIntyre. February 8, 2018. “These are the key numbers that explain the wage gap for women.” Maclean’s. <https://www.macleans.ca/society/pay-equity-statistics-canada/>

⁷ Moyser. 2017. “Women and Paid Work.”

⁸ McIntyre. 2018. “These are the key numbers that explain the wage gap for women.”

⁹ Cited in: McIntyre. 2018. “These are the key numbers that explain the wage gap for women.”

¹⁰ Sheila Block and Grace-Edward Galabuzi. Persistent Inequality: Ontario’s Colour-coded Labour Market.” December 2018. Toronto: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Ontario.

<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Ontario%20Office/2018/12/Persistent%20inequality.pdf>

46%.¹¹ This figure, too, is criticized for omitting differences in the types of jobs or number of hours worked. Yet others believe this is what paints the most accurate picture of pay inequity, because it encompasses the various ways that systemic discrimination results in women earning less.¹²

Regardless of the calculation method used, it is clear that a gendered gap in earnings exists in Canada. This is a concern for all women—particularly for marginalized women—across generations. The various methods of calculation rely on Statistics Canada data that documents earnings of workers aged 25 to 54, thereby encompassing both younger and older generations.¹³ Evidently, pay equity—and, more broadly, women’s opportunities in the workforce—are long-standing issues. The nature of the problem has simply changed somewhat over time.

For example, former MP Laurin Liu argues that millennial women workers experience the pay gap differently because they were largely raised on the ethos of meritocracy and the narrative that women can do and be anything, leaving them “wanting more.” This insight helps to counter the narrative that millennial workers are “entitled.” Instead, it frames the attitude of many young women workers as wanting more than the status quo and recognizing that they deserve the same opportunities as both their peers and forbearers. While different groups and generations of women workers may experience pay inequity differently (in both real and perceived ways), it remains a problem that impacts all women workers.

Job Security

Another shared concern across generations of workers is job security. Job security is influenced by many factors and impacts women workers in unique ways. Like pay equity, a key topic of discussion in recent years is the increasingly precarious nature of employment, meaning work that is temporary, often part-time, or freelance, or contract-based, and/or without benefits. This compounds already pervasive income inequality as well as pension instability, job loss, etc., which are concerns for older as well as younger workers.

A recent research report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that professionals are not immune to precarious employment. Significant portions of the private sector (40%) and the public sector (30%) are precariously employed professionals.¹⁴ The majority of precariously employed professionals (60%) are women.

¹¹ McIntyre. 2018. “These are the key numbers that explain the wage gap for women.”

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Statistics Canada. “Gender pay ratio of workers aged 25 to 54, Canada, 1976 to 2015.” Last modified January 24, 2018. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694/c-g/c-g017-eng.htm>

¹⁴ Trish Hennessy and Ricardo Tranjan. August 2018. “No Safe Harbour: Precarious Work and Economic Insecurity Among Skilled Professionals in Canada.” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/no-safe-harbour>

Precarity is not a new phenomenon for women workers. Women have long been overrepresented in low-paying, less secure part-time work.¹⁵ Proportionately more women work in the services-producing sector in which high levels of precariousness are found, particularly in accommodation and food services and in “other services.”¹⁶ Racialized women and newcomer women are also overrepresented in these sectors.¹⁷

Although precarious employment has been historically concentrated in the private sector, the public sector has seen an increase in precarious employment. Public sector precarity has been exacerbated by increased privatization, outsourcing, contract and part-time work, with women—particularly Indigenous, racialized, and LGBTQ2 women and women with disabilities—experiencing the most pronounced negative effects.¹⁸

Women continue to be concentrated in traditionally female occupations (i.e., ones that parallel their traditional gender roles), such as health care, education, social services, administrative and clerical work.¹⁹ In addition to care-oriented roles in their paid employment, women tend to disproportionately provide unpaid care work for children and other family members, as well as performing other duties within the household.²⁰ This care work means that women are more likely than men to experience career interruptions, both long-term, planned absences, and short-term, sporadic and unanticipated ones, including the so-called “motherhood penalty.”²¹

According to research by the OECD, gender inequality in unpaid care work, discussed further below, contributes to gender gaps in labour outcomes, including wages. The cross-country analysis shows that when women are responsible for most of the unpaid care work, they are less likely to be involved in paid employment. And those who are active in the paid labour force are more likely to be working in part-time or informal jobs and earning less.²²

¹⁵ Moyser. 2017. “Women and Paid Work.”

¹⁶ “Other services” include repair and maintenance services, personal care and laundry, and civic and professional organizations. See: Andrea M. Noack and Leah F. Vosko. November 2011. “What Types of Jobs are Precarious?” In *Precarious Jobs in Ontario: Mapping Dimensions of Labour Market Insecurity by Workers’ Social Location and Context*, 22-27. Paper commissioned by the Law Commission of Ontario. <https://www.lco-cdo.org/en/our-current-projects/vulnerable-workers-and-precarious-work/commissioned-papers/precarious-jobs-in-ontario-mapping-dimensions-of-labour-market-insecurity-by-workers-social-location-and-context/v-what-types-of-jobs-are-precarious/>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Leah Levac and Yuriko Cowper-Smith. April 2016. “Women and Public Sector Precarity: Causes, Conditions and Consequences.” Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIA-W-ICREF). <http://www.criaw-icref.ca/en/page/women-and-public-sector-precarity>

¹⁹ Moyser. 2017. “Women and Paid Work.”

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Gaëlle Ferrant, Luca Maria Pesando and Keiko Nowacka. December 2014. “Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes.” OECD Development Centre. https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid_care_work.pdf

Furthermore, the various forms of precarious employment are less likely to be unionized.²³ It is worth noting the relationship between unionization and job security. Overall, unionization rates in Canada have declined in recent decades. According to Statistics Canada, unionization rates have declined among men while they have remained relatively stable among women. However, between 1981 and 2012, the unionization rate moderately declined among women under the age of 45 years, while it rose among women aged 45 to 64 years.²⁴ Unionization has been shown to be positively associated with improved job security and tenure, in addition to other benefits, such as higher wages, good benefits and working conditions, greater equality, training and education, advocacy and workplace democracy.^{25,26,27}

Unpaid internships have become increasingly common and sold to young workers as a necessary stepping stone to their careers. The majority of unpaid internships are occupied by women.²⁸ It is clear that there are many factors impacting women's job security.

Precarious employment is often discussed in relation to the challenges it presents to younger workers struggling to enter the workforce and begin their careers. While precarious employment does have a real impact on new and younger workers, particularly women, it is important to consider the ways in which older workers are impacted by precarity, and more broadly, by job insecurity. Recent research on precarious work and economic insecurity among skilled professionals in Canada found that there is a higher incidence of precarity among professionals aged 55 and up.²⁹

The common perception and narrative of later adulthood is one of retirement involving a permanent exit from employment and entry into total leisure.³⁰ Due to medical advances and lifestyle changes, however, people are living longer and older adults' exit from paid work is being delayed. It remains true that labour force participation rates are lower among older adults (over 55 years) and women have lower participation rates than men. Yet

²³ "Vulnerable workers in precarious jobs. In The Changing Workplaces Review - Final Report. Government of Ontario. <https://www.ontario.ca/document/changing-workplaces-review-final-report/chapter-4-vulnerable-workers-precarious-jobs>

²⁴ Diane Galarnau and Thao Sohn. November 2013. "Long term trends in unionization." Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2013001/article/11878-eng.htm>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Errol Black and Jim Silver. June 10, 2011. "Fast Facts: How Unions Protect Our Human Rights." Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) Commentary. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/fast-facts-how-unions-protect-our-human-rights>

²⁷ Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). No date. "Top 10 Union advantages." <https://cupe.ca/top-10-union-advantages>

²⁸ The Canadian Press. May 21, 2014. "Unpaid interns mostly female: upcoming study claims." CBC News. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/unpaid-interns-mostly-female-upcoming-study-claims-1.2649099>

²⁹ Hennessy and Tranjan. 2018. "No Safe Harbour."

³⁰ Moyser. 2017. "Women and Paid Work."

between 2000 and 2015, the employment rate of older women rose more than that of older men, narrowing the gender employment gap among older people. By 2015, 30.0% of older women and 40.8% of older men were employed.³¹

As noted above, employment among older adults has increased due to advanced population health. Longer life expectancy is also changing the nature of this “third age” or “encore” life stage, as older adults are increasingly engaging in education, paid work, volunteerism and informal ways of helping out.³² Another factor contributing to older adults continuing to work longer is economic/financial reasons. This trend was noticeable following the global economic recession of 2008–2009 in particular.³³

Pensions

Another factor related to job and income security is the presence and stability of pensions. Fewer and fewer workers receive workplace pensions, particularly among younger workers. While pension coverage for men has fallen since the late 1970s, coverage has increased for women. Between 1977 and 2011, the proportion of employed men (aged 25 to 54) covered by registered pension plans (RPPs)—including defined benefit RPPs, defined contribution RPPs, and hybrid plans—decreased from 52% to 37%. Among employed women of the same age, RPP coverage increased from 36% to 40%.³⁴

The gender differences in RPP coverage are likely attributable to gender differences in industry. Women are predominantly employed in industries with higher coverage rates, such as health care and social services education and public administration.³⁵ It is worth noting, though, that pension coverage rates for Canadian-born women are higher than for immigrant women.

Pensions are typically considered to be an issue affecting older workers. While it may be true that pension-related concerns may more immediately impact older workers, they impact all workers in time. In fact, retirement security is likely to become an increasing concern for younger workers due to low RPP coverage and recent policy changes. Young workers are generally less likely to be covered by RPPs than their older counterparts. This trend is due to a general decline in pension coverage over the last decade.³⁶ Despite low coverage among younger workers, there continues to be strong support for

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Marie Drolet and René Morissette. December 18, 2014. “New facts on pension coverage in Canada.” Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2014001/article/14120-eng.htm>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

pensions. A large majority of millennial workers (85%) believe the government should provide benefits.³⁷ A Nanos survey from 2015 found that 88% of respondents support enhancing Canada Pension Plan (CPP) benefits.³⁸

Furthermore, in recent years workers have seen attacks on pensions at both the federal^{39,40} and provincial levels⁴¹ in Canada. These policy changes as well as pension plan deficits⁴² threaten the state of many workers' pensions, thereby jeopardizing secure retirement and contributing to income inequality.⁴³ The attacks on pensions impact not only workers with RPPs through their workplace, but also those that will rely on the Canada Pension Plan (CPP).

In one example, the Trudeau government announced in 2016 expansions to the CPP that will begin in 2019.⁴⁴ Although this will help to address the decline of workplace pension plans, critics have argued that the pension reforms do not go far enough to keep pace with rising costs of living.⁴⁵ Moreover, critics have argued that women who take time off work to care for children, and people with disabilities who rely on disability benefits will be "penalized" by the reforms. These individuals will be negatively impacted by the reforms

³⁷ Jeffrey C. Martin and Wayne Lewchuk. September 2018. "The Generation Effect: Millennials, employment precarity and the 21st century workplace." McMaster University and Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO).

<https://www.economics.mcmaster.ca/pepsa/documents/the-generation-effect-full-report.pdf>.

³⁸ Bill Curry. "Canadians support increasing CPP benefits, poll finds." The Globe and Mail, May 4, 2015.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/canadians-support-increasing-cpp-benefits-poll-finds/article24234182/>

³⁹ Canadian Labour Congress. November 16, 2016. "Canada's unions call anti-pension bill C-27 a betrayal." <http://canadianlabour.ca/news/news-archive/canada%E2%80%99s-unions-call-anti-pension-bill-c-27-betrayal>

⁴⁰ Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). November 2016. "CUPE Backgrounder on Federal Bill C-27." https://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/backgrounder_bill_c-27_act_to_amend_pbsa_final_en_2016-11-23_0.pdf

⁴¹ National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE). January 16, 2018. "Manitoba government shows changes to public pension may be on the horizon." Press release.

<https://nupge.ca/content/manitoba-government-shows-changes-public-pension-may-be-horizon>

⁴² Cole Eisen, David Macdonald, and Chris Roberts. November 2017. "The Lion's Share: Pension deficits and shareholder payments among Canada's largest companies." Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2017/11/CPA%20The%20Lions%20Share%20.pdf>

⁴³ NUPGE. February 7, 2017. "NUPGE pension conference looks at challenges facing pension plans."

<https://nupge.ca/content/nupge-pension-conference-looks-challenges-facing-pension-plans>

⁴⁴ Government of Canada. "Canada Pension Plan enhancement." Last modified April 11, 2017.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-enhancement.html>

⁴⁵ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). November 2017. "Missing the Mark: Federal Midterm Report Card." Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2017/11/Missing%20The%20Mark.pdf>

because the expanded CPP would eliminate the so-called drop-out provisions brought into the CPP in the late 1970s that allow individuals to exclude time spent child-rearing or receiving disability benefits.⁴⁶

Women workers already face challenges when it comes to retirement security. It is more difficult for women to save for retirement due to their disproportionate representation in caregiving roles. When women take time off work to care for children or other family members, they cannot pay into their workplace pension or CPP, and they do not develop the same retirement income base.⁴⁷ This is exacerbated by the fact that women already earn less than their male counterparts, also known as the gender pay gap. Furthermore, women's longer life expectancy means that women typically require more funds for their retirement.⁴⁸

Another important consideration is the management of pension funds. In addition to policy changes, research shows that many private sector pension plans in Canada are underfunded as a result of the financial crisis, low interest rates, and regulatory issues.⁴⁹ Pension plan deficits may jeopardize the benefits received by beneficiaries, as seen in the recent case of Sears Canada.⁵⁰

Relatedly, the stability of pension plans is impacted by how pension funds are invested. For example, some pension fund managers are investing pension funds in the fossil fuel industry. A recent report found this to be the case with the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation, which controls one of Canada's largest consolidated pools of wealth, and includes almost all of B.C.'s public sector pension funds.⁵¹ Not only does pension fund investment in fossil fuels undermine Canada's ability to move away from a fossil fuel-based economy to address the climate crisis, but it also jeopardizes the stability and sustainability of many workers' pensions (i.e., retirement).

⁴⁶ Karina Roman. November 23, 2016. "Canada Pension Plan expansion 'penalizes' women, the disabled, says the opposition." CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/cpp-disabled-women-penalize-1.3864498>

⁴⁷ Rob Carrick. May 2018. "Why it's even harder to save for retirement for women." The Globe and Mail. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/investing/markets/inside-the-market/article-life-expectancy-gap-narrowing-but-women-still-need-to-save-more-for/>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ For a detailed analysis, see: Eisen, Macdonald, and Roberts. November 2017. "The Lion's Share: Pension deficits and shareholder payments among Canada's largest companies." CCPA.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Zoë Yunker, Jessica Dempsey and James Rowe. June 2018. "Canada's Fossil-Fuelled Pensions: The Case of the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation." Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives BC Office. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/fossil-fuelled-pensions>

B. Providing and Receiving Care

Child Care

It is widely known (and experienced first-hand) that many families in Canada struggle to find affordable and accessible child care. Families rely on diverse child care arrangements. For children aged 4 years and under, Canadian families in 2011 used daycare (31%), home daycare (30%), private arrangements (relatives, nannies, etc.) (27%), or preschool/nursery schools (9%).⁵²

Turning our focus to regulated or licensed child care, researchers and analysts have documented the high fees for child care which, in some cities, are increasing faster than the rate of inflation.⁵³ While recent years have seen some increase in the number of regulated child care spaces,⁵⁴ there continue to be wait-lists for child care spaces across Canada—even in regions with lower fees, such as Quebec, Manitoba, and PEI, where provincial governments set fees and provide operational funding.⁵⁵

Furthermore, new research found that many “child care deserts” exist across Canada. Child care deserts are those areas “without adequate access to child care, irrespective of fees.”⁵⁶ According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives study, approximately 44% of all non-school-aged children (776,000 children) in Canada live in child care deserts.⁵⁷ For these reasons, families and advocates have long called for a universal public child care system in Canada.

These barriers to accessing affordable child care affect workers across generations. They clearly impact younger workers with families who may be seeking child care. Not only are high child-care fees a financial burden, they impact parents’ career choices and opportunities—particularly women’s. The gender employment gap (i.e., difference in employment rates of men and women) tends to be greater in census metropolitan areas with high child care fees.⁵⁸

However, when we dig deeper, we find that child care concerns also impact the older generation of workers. Younger workers and their families may rely on parents or older family members for meeting their child care needs—whether through financial support or

⁵² Nathan Battams. May 2017. “A Snapshot of Women, Work and Family in Canada.” Vanier Institute of the Family. <https://vanierinstitute.ca/snapshot-women-work-family-canada/>

⁵³ David Macdonald and Martha Friendly. December 2017. “Time Out: Child care fees in Canada 2017.” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/timeout>

⁵⁴ Martha Friendly, Elise Larsen, Laura Feltham, Bethany Grady, Barry Forer, and Michelle Jones. April 2018. “Early childhood education and care in Canada 2016.” 11th edition. Childcare Resource and Research Unit. <http://childcarecanada.org/publications/ecec-canada/early-childhood-education-and-care-canada-2016>

⁵⁵ Macdonald and Friendly. 2017. “Time Out.”

⁵⁶ David Macdonald. June 28, 2018. “Child Care Deserts in Canada.” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/child-care-deserts-canada>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Moyser. 2017. “Women and Paid Work.”

providing care themselves. As noted above, 27% of Canadian families rely on private arrangements for child care.

This demand for providing care has increased for the older generation of workers. Factors include delayed marriage, childbearing and transitions to adulthood, as well as population aging.⁵⁹⁶⁰ This means that middle-aged or older workers are increasingly likely to provide support and care to *both* their adult children and their elderly parents.

Across generations, we know that women are overrepresented among caregivers—both within the household and outside of it—which will be discussed further below.⁶¹ Taking time off to care for children (or other family members) contributes to women’s lower income, career breaks, and pension funds. On average, women with children earn 12% less per hour than those without children.⁶² This wage gap is known as the “mommy tax” or “motherhood earnings gap.” Evidently, child care responsibilities impact women’s careers and incomes in the long term, and thus the impacts span generations.

Caregiving

Many of the issues surrounding child care are similar to caregiving or care work more broadly. Providing care to family members other than children is often considered to impact older workers who may care for their elderly parents. As noted above, it is true that middle-aged and older workers are being squeezed by care demands for both their children and parents, if not other family members as well.

An understudied phenomenon, however, is that young people are increasingly relied on to provide unpaid care in their families and communities.⁶³ According to Statistics Canada’s 2012 General Social Survey, 27% of Canadians between 15 and 29 years are “young carers,” or young people who provide unpaid care for others due to illness, disability, addiction or injury.⁶⁴ Young carers may also be relied upon for economic reasons.⁶⁵ Interestingly, the amount of time that young people aged 15 to 24 spend caring for others is similar to that of their counterparts aged 45 to 54.⁶⁶

Caregiving is an important role and can benefit providers themselves. Caregiving can foster empathy and compassion, build connections across generations, and contribute to

⁵⁹ Melissa Moyser and Amanda Burlock. July 30, 2018. “Time use: Total work burden, unpaid work, and leisure.” Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/54931-eng.htm#n18>

⁶⁰ Suzanne M. Bianchi. 2011. “Family change and time allocation in American families.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 638(1): 21-44.

⁶¹ Moyser and Burlock. 2018. “Time use.”

⁶² Battams. May 2017. “A Snapshot of Women, Work and Family in Canada.”

⁶³ Grant Charles, Tim Stainton and Sheila K. Marshall. January 2011. “Young carers in immigrant families: An ignored population.” *Canadian Social Work* 12(1): 83-92.

⁶⁴ Andrea Breen. April 5, 2016. “It’s Time to Care for Our (Young) Carers.” Vanier Institute of the Family. <http://vanierinstitute.ca/time-care-young-carers/>

⁶⁵ Charles et al. 2011. “Young carers in immigrant families.”

⁶⁶ Breen. 2016. “It’s Time to Care for Our (Young) Carers.”

feelings of pride and competence, particularly for young people.⁶⁷ However, it can also be a strain on top of other responsibilities for carers of all ages. Young carers in particular face stress, social isolation, guilt, and impacts on physical and mental health.⁶⁸ Proper supports for caregivers, including for young carers, are crucial.⁶⁹

As noted above, care work is disproportionately performed by women. Care work or the care economy is constituted of the paid and unpaid economic activities related to the provision of care, including care for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, and for health care, education, leisure and other personal services.⁷⁰ In Canada, a great deal of care work is done by racialized women, immigrant women and temporary migrant workers.⁷¹

There continues to be a clearly gendered division of labour in the home, and it is present across generations. Women's participation in the (formal or paid) workforce has increased in recent decades. Women now make up almost half of Canada's workforce, marking a 30% increase in the last 40 years.⁷²

It is true that there has been some balancing of gender roles. Women are engaging in more paid work and less unpaid work (specifically housework, while time with children has remained the same) than in the past, while men are engaging in less paid work and more unpaid work (particularly child care).⁷³ However, "there is evidence that men have not increased their participation in unpaid work to the same extent as either women have increased their participation in paid work, or as women have decreased their participation in unpaid work."^{74,75}

As a result, as women's labour force participation has increased, women continue to do the bulk of unpaid work—including housework and child care tasks. In heterosexual households, women continue to provide a disproportionate share of unpaid work (3.9

⁶⁷ Grant Charles, Tim Stainton and Sheila Marshall. July 2012. "Young Carers in Canada: The Hidden Costs and Benefits of Young Caregiving." The Vanier Institute of the Family. http://vanierinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CFT_2012-07-00_EN.pdf

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Grant Charles. 2011. "Bringing your carers out of the shadows: A strength-based approach." *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 20(3): 26-30.

⁷⁰ Ito Peng. March 16, 2018. "Why Canadians should care about the global care economy." OpenCanada. <https://www.opencanada.org/features/why-canadians-should-care-about-global-care-economy/>

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Moyser and Burlock. 2018. "Time use."

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Suzanne M. Bianchi, Liana C. Sayer, Melissa A. Milkie, and John P. Robinson. 2012. "Housework: Who did it, does or will do it, and how much does it matter?" *Social Forces* 91(1): 55-63. See also: Katherine Marshall. 2006. "Converging gender roles." *Perspectives on Labour and Income*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-001-XIE.

hours per day compared to men's 2.4 hours per day).⁷⁶ This phenomenon is commonly referred to the "second shift" or "double burden" of paid and unpaid work that women experience.

The majority (60%) of caregivers are also balancing the demands of paid work, which may contribute to conflicting demands between paid work and caregiving.⁷⁷ Among women caregivers aged 45 to 65, the proportion also in the labour force increases to 72%.⁷⁸ Across generations and genders, increased caregiving demands also reduce the amount of leisure time enjoyed.⁷⁹

The care economy is a quickly-expanding sector. Given the rising care demand (due in part to Canada's aging population), there will only continue to be added pressure on health care and other caregiving services.⁸⁰ Since the care economy is women dominated, an active and well-supported care economy can contribute to job growth for women (and men), which is known to have positive impacts on women's social status, economic growth, and gender equality in the household.⁸¹ Experts and advocates have called for Canadian policy-makers and the public to recognize the value of care work, which allows us to rethink traditional economies and gender roles by highlighting the value of unpaid care work traditionally done by women.⁸²

C. Gender-Based Violence

Finally, an important concern facing women workers across generations is the presence of gender-based violence and the limited supports for survivors. Gender-based violence (GBV)—an encompassing term for domestic violence, family violence, violence against women, intimate partner violence, and sexual violence—not only has personal impacts on survivors, but it also has notable economic implications⁸³ and impacts on the workplace.⁸⁴ In 2014, women self-reported over 1.2 million violent victimization incidents (56% of all violent incidents), which included incidents of physical assault, sexual assault,

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Maire Sinha. September 2013. "Portrait of caregivers, 2012." Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-652-X - No. 001. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-652-x/89-652-x2013001-eng.htm>

⁷⁸ Vanier Institute of the Family. 2017. "Women, Caregiving and Work in Canada." Infographic. <https://vanierinstitute.ca/snapshot-women-work-family-canada/>

⁷⁹ Bianchi. 2011. "Family change and time allocation in American families."

⁸⁰ Peng. 2018. "Why Canadians should care about the global care economy."

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Kate McInturff. July 2013. "The Gap in the Gender Gap: Violence Against Women in Canada." Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2013/07/Gap_in_Gender_Gap_VAW.pdf

⁸⁴ Nadine C. Wathen, Jennifer C. D. MacGregor, and Barbara J. MacQuarrie. 2015. "The Impact of Domestic Violence in the Workplace: Results From a Pan-Canadian Survey." *Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine* 57(7): 65-71.

or robbery.⁸⁵ Women have a 20% higher risk of being victimized than men, largely due to higher rates of sexual assault.⁸⁶

Young women (15 to 34 years) experience a higher risk of violence. In 2014, young women were nearly 1.9 times more likely to experience violence than young men.⁸⁷ They are 2 to 3 times as likely as their older counterparts (35 years and older) to self-report experiencing spousal violence, 3 times as likely to self-report non-spousal violence, and 5 times more likely to experience sexual assault.⁸⁸ However, it is also worth noting that older women are also vulnerable to violence. Senior women are 24% more likely than their male counterparts to experience family violence.⁸⁹

Across generations, marginalized women disproportionately experience violence. Indigenous women report violence 2.7 times more than non-Indigenous women,⁹⁰ and they are killed at 6 times the rate of non-Indigenous women.⁹¹ Women with disabilities are 2 to 3 times more likely to experience violence than non-disabled women.⁹² Not only do immigrant, refugee and non-status women experience violence and abuse, but they face unique barriers to accessing supports.⁹³ There is also a strong correlation between poverty and experiencing violence.⁹⁴

Gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals are 3 times more likely than heterosexual individuals to report experiencing violence. Transgender women report high levels of violence and harassment.⁹⁵ Although Statistics Canada does not track the instance of

⁸⁵ Statistics Canada. June 6, 2017. "Study: Women in Canada: Women and the Criminal Justice System." Statistics Canada, The Daily. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/170606/dq170606a-eng.htm>

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Hope Hutchins. February 2013. "Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends: Section 2: Risk factors for violence against women." *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2013001/article/11766/11766-2-eng.htm#a20>

⁸⁹ Dyna Ibrahim. January 2016. "Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2014 Section 5: Police-reported family violence against seniors". *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14303/05-eng.htm>

⁹⁰ Statistics Canada. 2017. "Women in Canada."

⁹¹ Canadian Women's Foundation. No date. "The Facts about Gender-Based Violence." <https://www.canadianwomen.org/the-facts/gender-based-violence/> (accessed August 15, 2018).

⁹² Fran Odette and Doris Rajan. November 2013. "Violence Against Women with DisAbilities and Deaf Women: An Overview." Learning Network Brief (12). London, Ontario: Learning Network, Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children. <http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/violence-against-women-disabilities-and-deaf-women-overview>

⁹³ Canadian Council for Refugees. No date. "Violence against newcomer women." <http://ccrweb.ca/en/violence-against-women> (accessed August 14, 2018).

⁹⁴ Government of Canada. "Breaking the Links between poverty and violence against women: A resource guide – Working with women living in poverty on violence issues." Public Health Agency of Canada. Last modified July 26, 2012. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/prevention-resource-centre/women/violence-against-women-resource-guide/strategies-initiatives.html>

⁹⁵ Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Ontario. 2018. "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans & Queer identified People and Mental Health." <https://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/lesbian-gay-bisexual-trans->

violence among transgender people, an Ontario-based study found that 20% of all transgender Ontarians had been physically or sexually assaulted for being transgender, while 34% had been threatened or harassed.⁹⁶ These numbers paint a scary picture of the experience of GBV for those individuals of intersecting identities.

Researchers and advocates have long identified the lack of public spending and coordinated policy response to meaningfully address GBV.⁹⁷ According to data from the General Social Survey since 1999, the prevalence of violence against women has remained fairly stable over time.⁹⁸ GBV has been impacted by under-funding of social services, housing, and supports for women affected by violence.⁹⁹

In June 2017, the Canadian government announced a national strategy to address GBV.¹⁰⁰ The hope is that the funding, programs, and supports will help to prevent GBV and support those affected. In the wake of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, increased awareness and mainstream discussion about GBV provide an opportunity for women (and all people) across generations to support one another in the fight against GBV. This includes older women workers supporting and advocating for younger women both within and outside the workplace. In particular, there is an important opportunity for privileged women to support and amplify the voices of marginalized women.

Conclusions: So What?

Unfortunately, workers are often pitted against one another—across generations as well as across races, genders, abilities, sexualities, citizenship statuses, sectors, union statuses, etc.—when in reality, many of workers’ concerns are shared or linked through common problems. It is these problems—or the systems at their root—that warrant concern and attention. In fact, they present opportunities for workers and communities to come together across generations (and other lines of difference) and work together to tackle these problems.

[queer-identified-people-and-mental-health/](#). See also: Status of Women Canada. “About Gender-Based Violence.” Last modified February 19, 2018. <https://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/violence/strategy-strategie/gbv-vfs-en.html?wbdisable=true#fn7>

⁹⁶ Egale Canada Human Rights Trust. 2016. “Canada: Discrimination and Violence against Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Women and Gender Diverse and Two Spirit People on the Basis of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression.” Prepared for The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for consideration at the 65th session, 2016. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/CAN/INT_CEDAW_NGO_CAN_25380_E.pdf

⁹⁷ McInturff. 2013. “The Gap in the Gender Gap.”

⁹⁸ Maire Sinha. 2013. “Section 1: Prevalence and severity of violence against women.” Statistics Canada. Last modified November 30, 2015. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2013001/article/11766/11766-1-eng.htm>

⁹⁹ Canadian Network of Women’s Shelters & Transition Houses. October 2013. “The Case for a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women.” http://ywcacanada.ca/data/research_docs/00000307.pdf

¹⁰⁰ Status of Women Canada. “Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence.” Last modified July 3, 2018. <https://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/violence/strategy-strategie/index-en.html>

Unions and labour organizations have a valuable role to play in bringing workers together around these shared concerns, supporting their members, and advocating for all workers, their families, and communities to find systemic solutions to these issues. Together, the labour movement can continue to strive towards more equitable employment, decent livelihoods, and sustainable communities.



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