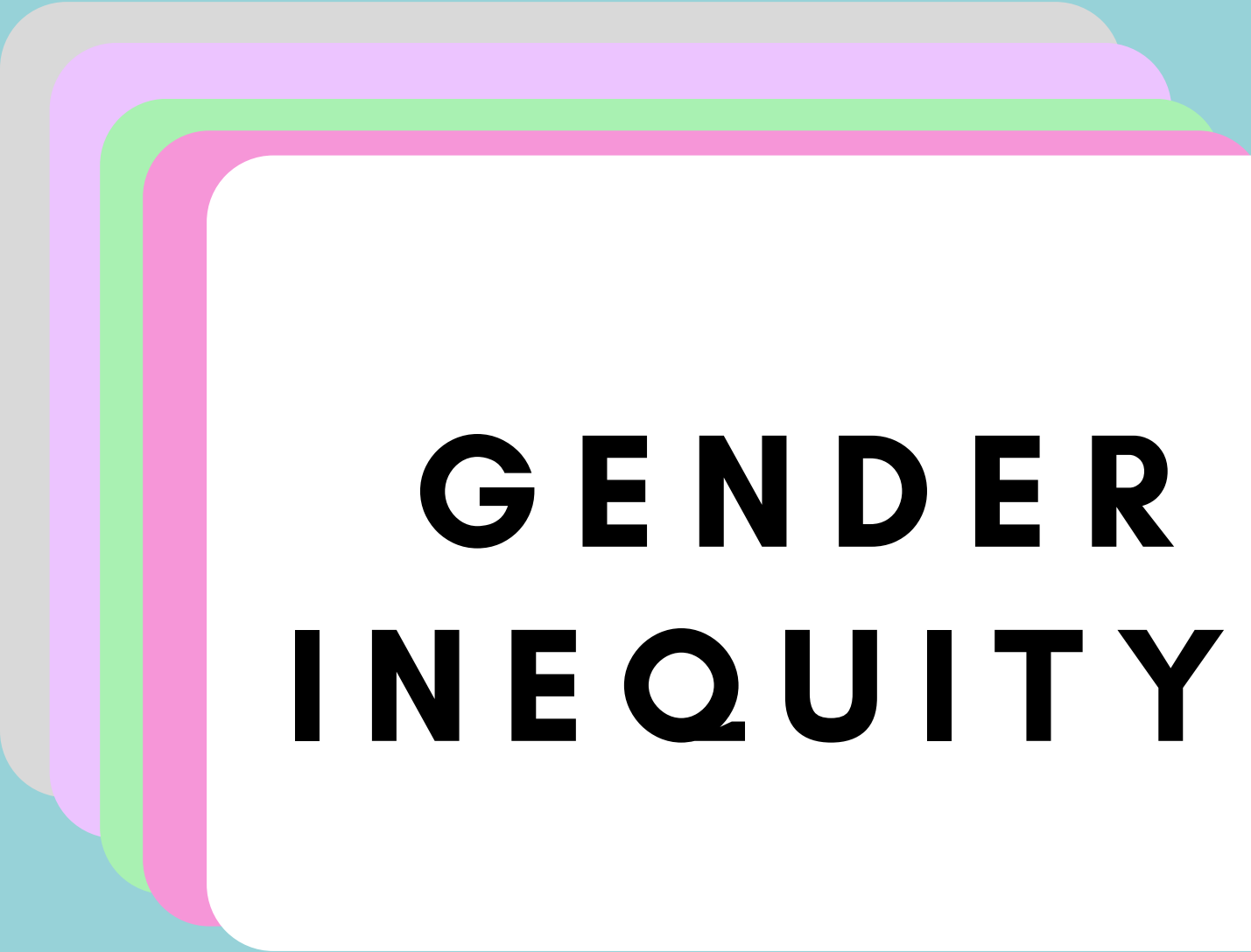




GENDER INEQUITY

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We wish to acknowledge that the land we live on and work from is situated on the traditional and unceded lands of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc within Secwépemc'ulucw, the traditional territory of the Secwépemc people. We honour and respect the people and the territory and recognize the impacts of colonization that are still occurring to this day. We are grateful to be learning, sharing knowledge and growing on this beautiful land.

INTRODUCTION

Gender inequity is a major issue in the workforce.

For example, in Canada, half the workforce is made up of women, and they only hold 1/4 of management roles. What's more, women earn less than men even with the same education and experience (1).

This report provides a summary of organizational culture and factors that lead to gender inequity, its impact on marginalized and racialized communities/groups, the lack of women in leadership and in fields that are primarily male, the wage gap, how corporations are making progress, how COVID-19 made things worse, and what policies and solutions could help to repair this issue.

Gender inequity is a global issue, but most studies are done in North America (51.3%), Australia (17.1%), and Africa (10.5%), all continents with a shared history of colonization, leading to increased calls for action (2).

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IMPACTS OF GENDER INEQUITY

1. Organization Factors

Research found that **society's expectations of gender roles can hurt women's careers**. In general, women face many more disruptions in their day-to-day lives. However, when employers offer benefits such as sick days or premenstrual syndrome (PMS) days, those who take advantage of the benefits have been shown to get the brunt end of criticism, earn less, have lower performance evaluations and fewer promotions/opportunities (3).

One study suggested 5 things that could improve women's quality of employment and fairness:

1. Managers and leaders who care about gender equality including policies that support it.

2. Schedule control- more flexibility around scheduling and reduction of stereotypes towards women who take advantage of the offered flexibility.

3. Equal communication between colleagues at all levels instead of following the chain of command.

4. Men's use of paternity leave shows that sharing responsibilities within family systems is important for all genders.

5. Meritocracy - sharing individual achievements instead of general goals for everyone (3).

2. Marginalized Populations

There are **interconnected layers of gender inequality** apparent in the workforce and experiences of discrimination.

In addition to being an already marginalized group, many **Indigenous women** face challenges in finding employment, getting an education, and accessing healthcare and resources to improve their overall quality of life (11). These challenges are related to deep-seated issues which began during colonization. Following this, Indigenous women (and people) were displaced into rural communities, facing ongoing racism and poverty while not having any control over contested things like land and resources (12). Living in these rural pockets of society makes it even more challenging to access support, and there is very little research done in these communities.

Next, when it comes to racialized women, gender inequity is more pronounced with the unemployment rate for **Black women** in Canada being approximately 13%, which is much higher than the overall rate for the entire Canadian population at 7.8% (8). Also, only 1/20 of corporate leaders in the United States are Black women (9). Interestingly, the United States does not offer paid maternity leave, affecting racialized women in career advancement more because they are often single mothers or primary caregivers. (10).

However, despite these challenges, research shows that Black women are more ambitious to move into senior leadership roles than women overall (9). Unfortunately, they get questioned about competence more frequently, and 1/3 were denied a promotion because of their race or gender (9).

Many women with **disabilities** face negative stereotypes and a workplace culture that doubts their abilities, making it difficult to find employment (4). Also, people with **mental health** challenges are often stigmatized and face barriers such as a lack of resources and support to get and keep meaningful work. Therefore, it is important to understand and address these challenges to create equal opportunity and inclusion within the workforce.

The statistics for **seniors** are shocking and unfortunate. They either need to continue working or return to work after retirement because of financial insecurity (7). Also, the lack of knowledge and understanding many older women have reported around financial planning is a problem when considering retirement planning, avoiding excessive debt, and the need to borrow from pension accounts (5).

Statistics Canada does not collect data on non-binary and transgender individuals which does not paint an accurate picture of the landscape of marginalized women in Canada (13).

In 2015, 16.3% of senior women lived on low income compared to 11.9% of their male counterparts (5). The same year, 1 in 5 seniors reported working at some point, the highest rate since 1981, with a significant portion being Indigenous, Métis or Inuit; 30% worked full-time hours the entire year (6).

Senior women demonstrate greater vulnerability concerning financial security due to lower levels of financial literacy; 45% of women responded "I do not know" to questions evaluating financial literacy compared to 32% of men (5).

3. Leadership & Male-Dominated Fields

Gender inequity continues to be a trend in leadership roles and specific fields that are dominated by men. For example, not much has changed when it comes to including women and ethnic minority groups since the 1970s in Alberta's oil industry (14). Similarly, the tech/engineering field is saturated with men, with 32% of women reporting being the only woman in the room (9). This matters because these fields typically pay more and have greater opportunities for career advancement, which ultimately promotes men's socioeconomic growth over women's (15). Also, for women employed within these fields, home life responsibilities get in the way of their progress and work privileges compared to male colleagues. They also face stereotypes about physical strength, leadership ability, and willingness to travel to remote locations (15).

When looking at corporate leadership, Fortune 500 reports that **progress in gender parity has decreased** since 2016. That same year, the number of women on boards decreased by 2% after seven years of steady growth in

this area (9). Countries such as France have enforced policies like Loi Rixian, a law that makes it mandatory to have a certain amount of women in leadership roles (10).

Norway initiated a gender quota for boards of directors of 40% women, and Sweden has a gender quota for women on corporate boards of 25% (2).

There is generally hostility toward these quotas (2).

Research shows two problems that women board candidates and directors face. The first is a false belief that there are not enough qualified female candidates even though the criteria excludes women (pool problem) (16). Next, when women get the job they seek, some would say they received the position to fill a quota, which diminishes their competency or accomplishments (tokenism) (16). People will always have unconscious biases, but workplace education and awareness may reduce the likelihood (16).

To make matters worse, women experience more micro-aggressions (passive aggressive or "unintentional" comments/behaviors with an underhanded message) and biases about promotions (9).

Despite all this, research demonstrates that **women do more to promote employee well-being and inclusive policies**, which often goes unnoticed to others. More and more, there is a pattern of women leaving leadership roles for better opportunities, citing the need for more flexibility as the reason (9).

It is also important to acknowledge **corporations that are doing things well**. For instance, Cummins is a progressive power technology company that strives to excel in equity and inclusion (17). In 2018, they created a global philanthropic initiative called "Cummins Powers Women" to create opportunities for women/girls in countries such as India (17).

Additionally, the Women in Technology Conference was created to advocate for gender equity during recruitment stages of hiring, reduce the pay gap, and motivate the next generation of female engineers/employees (17).

Cummin's noteworthy moves include an \$11 million grant to support gender equality through education, remove barriers that block women from advancing, and empower more women to enter the tech field (17).

Lastly, their Women's Empowerment Network is an employee resource group that provides flexible work arrangements (including an extended paternity policy) and has built award-winning breastfeeding facilities and workspaces (17).

4. Wage Gap

Canada can begin to close the wage gap in the following 5 ways:

1. Encourage women to pursue higher-paying occupations by getting STEM degrees and mentoring younger generations in these fields.
2. Providing competent and caring management - including creating a positive job experience, feeling satisfied in their work and believing they are being treated fairly.
3. Creating policies that provide flexibility through telecommuting, parental leave, balances for demands of work and family, making childcare affordable, and encouraging men to take parental leave.
4. Crucial to name and acknowledge discrimination and unconscious biases; organizations and governments must be transparent about hiring practices, wages and promotion requirements.
5. Ensure there are structures to monitor and disclose issues in a safe environment (15).

Canada ranks 13 out of 16 with peer countries in the wage gap between genders, which is alarming (15). In contrast, the United Kingdom passed the Equality Act in 2010, making unequal pay for race, gender, and sexual orientation illegal (10).

In addition, women often work fewer hours because of childcare responsibilities and are overrepresented in lower-paying professions, which means **earning less over time**, ultimately affecting career growth and earnings (15).

In Canada, Prince Edward Island has the lowest wage gap; the highest is Newfoundland and Labrador at 30% (15). This percentage is high because 87% of women are employed in lower-paying jobs and are paid below the provincial average (15).

5. Corporate Sector

Compared with social services, large corporations are typically more progressive in equity and inclusion

polices (18). The Human Rights Campaign (2022) developed the Corporate Equality Index (CEI), a yearly report highlighting which corporations excel in responding to workplace inclusion with LGBTQ+ policies.

Some corporations named in the CEI are doing impressive things right now when it comes to gender equity. For instance, Apple has many more women in leadership positions and has also increased the number of nursing rooms for mothers within office spaces (20). They also put social justice initiatives in place such as access to education, supporting criminal justice reform, and removing barriers for underrepresented communities (20). Also American Airlines (2023), is speaking out publicly against voting legislation in Texas (laws that make it harder for people to vote) and similar bills, including supporting the Crown Act (non-discrimination policy around hair texture for employees). They have also launched workplace training to educate staff on diversity/inclusion with specific efforts towards increasing awareness around microaggressions and how to respond (21).

The main features named for inclusion in the CEI 2022 report were:

- **workforce protection (including sexual orientation and gender identity)**
- **inclusive benefits (spousal benefits, domestic partner benefits, and transgender-inclusive health insurance)**
- **supporting inclusive culture and corporate social responsibility (internal education and training best practices, LGBTQ+ employee resource group or diversity council, outreach/engagement with LGBTQ+ community) (19).**



IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON GENDER INEQUITY

1. Occupations

The COVID-19 pandemic has created further problems for gender inequity.

At this time, it became obvious that women represented most positions in retail, hospitality, tourism (22), and fashion (23). Unfortunately, these sectors tend to have lower wages, no matter the qualifications, resulting in women being paid less than men (13). Also, these sectors were more likely to be regulated to shut down their operations or drastically cut down hours, causing huge salary cuts or individuals losing their job entirely (22). This significantly impacted women, who are more likely to be employed in these sectors.

Other groups of women who were impacted and had significant loss of income include those who are Indigenous, experiencing economic marginalization, have disabilities and are single mothers (25).

Additionally, older women tend to be overlooked in research which does not fully recognize that they have lower life incomes, leading to lower pensions and having to work longer (22).

The pandemic has not been entirely negative for women. Some countries with women in leadership positions, including Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, New Zealand, and Taiwan were successful in pandemic response and recovery (24). These countries made decisions that resulted in earlier lockdowns, lower death rates, and a more rapid flattening of the curve (24

One in three older women are considered low-income, with rising rates of 55% in employment, particularly in the caring sectors (13).

2. Gender-Based Violence

The pandemic also worsened conditions of gender-based violence. For example, in certain cities and communities, shelters for victims of violence became overly crowded (22). Due to the shortage of support/resources and women mainly being employed in lower-income jobs, many did not have the opportunity and financial freedom to leave violent homes (22).

The issue of modern slavery (human trafficking, forced marriage, forced organ donation, and compelled labour) also became much more prominent, even though it is believed to be highly underreported because it is such an underground industry (26). Additionally, early research during the pandemic showed that women and girls were socially and economically disadvantaged because of limited access to family planning support, a lack of sexual and reproductive healthcare, and higher rates of maternal deaths within United Nations countries (26). These are some of the gaps that need to be looked at and taken seriously in the years following the pandemic.

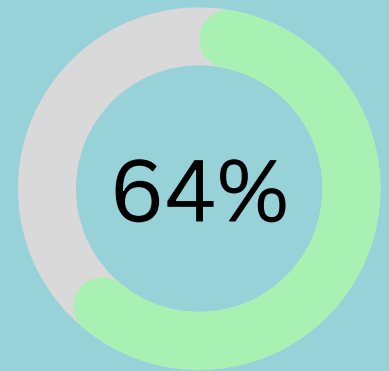
3. Unpaid Care Work

Women also took on the brunt of unpaid care work and household responsibilities during the pandemic. This creates a barrier for women being in a position to earn more and advance within their employment roles. Women tend to cut back on their jobs to care for children or older adults due to societal norms/expectations and the work environment (22). People usually think it is normal and expected for women to step into caregiving roles. As a result, women have to lower their aspirations, such as getting a promotion, holding off on upgrading their education, taking on new projects, or leaving their jobs entirely to make time for their children's schedules or other caregiving duties (28).

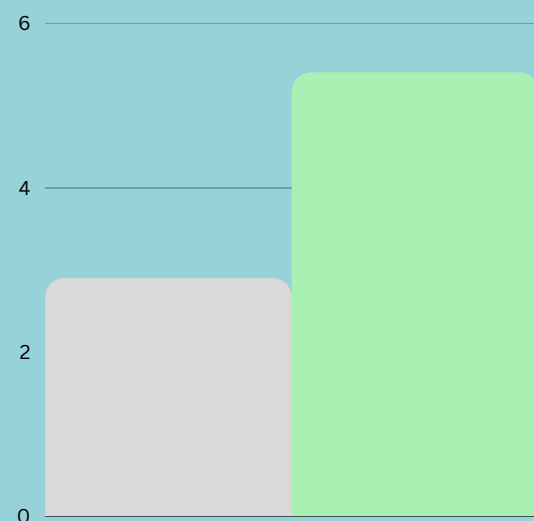
Women's unpaid care work drives inequality, lower income, poorer education outcomes and physical and mental health stressors (22). To help combat these gaps for women, more emphasis on inclusive social protection and support measures needs to be incorporated (22).



1 in 4 Canadians provide more than 15 hours a week to caring for a family member or friend (27).



Women represent the majority of those providing care (28).



Women spend 5.4 hours a day compared to men's 2.9 hours a day completing unpaid care work and household responsibilities (13).

**POLICIES
AND
SOLUTIONS
TO
CONSIDER**

Regarding post-pandemic policies, research shows that women who have a choice around working remotely or in the office have less burnout; the **choice is key** (9). One study suggested that 1/10 women chose only to work on-site yet reported limitations of being less connected to their colleagues and putting more pressure on managers (9). Overall, remote options lead to fewer micro-aggressions and accessibility for underrepresented groups. Finally, affirmative action policies (policies created to try to encourage all people to have an opportunity to succeed) are pretty controversial (some supportive/some opposed). Studies at the organizational level show an increase in stigma for women and a decrease in performance. However, we need more longitudinal research in this area to better understand the whole picture, as we currently have gaps in the data regarding this concern (2).

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives urges the implementation of protocols and policies that provide victim support and protect oppressed groups (including women) from harassment and discrimination in the workplace - additionally, advocating for more quality research by addressing gaps and engaging marginalized communities in producing and using information (1).

There is a need for policies that support work/life balance such as paying for or hosting childcare (30).

The Health Equity Impact Assessment (HEIA) is a Canadian tool that helps identify unintended impacts on marginalized and vulnerable groups such as Indigenous peoples, those with disabilities, and low income through assessing potential positive or negative effects, identifying barriers and opportunities for improvement, and suggesting ways to monitor and measure success. The tool also considers various determinants of health that contribute to health equity (29).

A 2019 report completed by the Employment and Social Development sector in Canada argued for the importance of increasing awareness around gender equality, challenging widespread myths through the notion of changing structures instead of people, and adopting an intersectional approach to gender equality in the workplace (28).

FINAL THOUGHTS

In summary, **gender equity is clearly a problem** within the workforce, both in Canada and abroad. Women are extremely resilient in carrying on even though they are still underrepresented in leadership capacities, earn less than men with the same education and experience, and high paying male dominated fields persist.

Unfortunately, this trend takes a **greater toll on marginalized and racialized communities** which highlights the need to adopt an intersectional approach to combat this issue. Not to mention the overdue demand for policies/protocols that protect groups who are oppressed from being harassed or discriminated in the workforce. It's not asking a lot for women/trans/nonbinary to be able to feel safe in their place of employment.

Although we have identified some tools, such as the HEIA and affirmative action policies are underway in certain pockets of society, more research is needed to understand the impact and effectiveness of these things.

And then there was COVID-19....

What a setback the pandemic created for women in many ways besides the success that female political leaders had in responding quickly and effectively to flatten the curve. Aside from that, we have learned that policies to support work/life balance including remote employment options and a reduction in women taking on caregiving duties are critical.

Overall, if gender inequity within the workforce were to become a reality, this report calls for a concerted effort between employers, policy makers, allies and workers.

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