



Wage Gap Contributor: Under-valuation of Traditional Female Occupations

The under-valuation of traditional female occupations is what many researchers consider to be “discrimination”.

This contributor refers to paying lower wages to women, regardless of whether men perform the same duties. These pay practices are inherited from a period when men’s work contribution was more fully valued in the workplace. Because it is deeply rooted in our society, employers sometimes discriminate in what they pay their workers without knowing it.

How Does Under-valuation Contribute to the Wage Gap?

Marie-Thérèse Chica’s economic segmentation theory describes the workforce as being segmented into two labour markets, primary and secondary.

The **primary labour market** consists of jobs that are well paid, and offer good, stable working conditions for its employees with opportunities for advancement. Jobs in this labour market include professionals, senior managers, and highly skilled blue-collar workers, and are occupied traditionally and predominantly by men.

Jobs in the **secondary labour market** are characterized as those that are low paid, offer minimum training, and unfavourable working conditions. Jobs in this market include office jobs, retail sales, and under-skilled blue-collar workers. Due to these factors, there is a tendency for a high turnover rate for jobs in this labour market. Women are over-represented in the secondary labour market

“Our societal attitudes have spawned the problem of under-valuation of the work women do, and it can only be solved by changing these attitudes.”

Source: Report of the New Brunswick Wage Gap Roundtable, 2003

Why Are Female Occupations Paid Lower?

Reasons for devaluing female job classes include:

- Prejudices and stereotypes
- Job evaluation methods
- Payment practices
- Difference between the negotiation power by unions and accreditation units
- Government’s legislative role
- Resistance to change during the pay equity process

Source: Marie-Thérèse Chica, L’équité salariale, 2000, N.B. Wage Gap Roundtable Report, 2003

How Have Women’s Jobs Been Undervalued?

Historically our society has overlooked the value of work typically performed by women.

For example:

- Employers may have overlooked the manual skills needed by a word processing operator while recognizing and valuing the manual skills of a machinery repairman’s job.
- Employers may not have valued the effort of lifting patients by nurses, or children by daycare workers, but valued the lifting of heavy objects by workmen on a construction site or in a warehouse.
- Employers may not have valued the responsibility of caring for children by daycare workers, while the responsibility for equipment; finances or other material resources were valued and paid for.



“Good human resources planning that includes addressing the wage gap within the workplace will help to ensure that a stable and qualified workforce will be developed to meet current and future human resource needs.”

– Sandra Mark, Executive Director
Cities of New Brunswick Association

Job titles can also lead to false assumptions about job value. “Manager” may sound more important than the position of “Administrative Assistant”. However, the evaluation of the job would better indicate whether the jobs have similar or different levels of factors used in evaluating the job classes.

*Adapted in part from the Ontario Pay Equity Commission Employee/Employer Information Fact Sheets.

How Does Pay Equity Address this Issue?

Pay equity addresses this issue by using gender-neutral / gender-sensitive job classification and pay systems to objectively evaluate and classify jobs.

Pay Equity is defined as equal pay for work of equal value.

A pay equity process requires that jobs be evaluated and work mostly or traditionally done by women be compared to work mostly or traditionally done by men. If jobs are of **comparable value**, then female jobs and male jobs should be paid the same.

The pay equity process requires employers, unions and employees to fully describe and value *all* the aspects of female and male jobs so that they can be evaluated and paid for.

An Opportunity for Economic Growth

Addressing the under-valuation of traditional female occupations through increased job diversification and implementation of pay equity can help to improve women’s economic independence. By improving women’s economic independence, these women will be more economically productive thereby contributing to New Brunswick’s economic growth. By closing the wage gap, New Brunswick will move towards a more competitive economy and progressive society.

Want To Know More About The Wage Gap?

Visit the Province of New Brunswick’s Wage Gap Reduction Initiative website at:
www.gnb.ca/wagegap

For more information, contact us:
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