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**Is There Such Thing as  
Employment and Pay  
Equity for the Less  
Educated in Québec?**

*Marie-Josée Legault*

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« **Is There Such Thing as Employment and Pay Equity for the Less Educated in Québec?** »  
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## RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article, je démontre, d'une part, que le marché du travail est encore grandement divisé selon le genre mais que, d'autre part, les conséquences matérielles de cette division sont très différentes selon le niveau de scolarité ; en effet, dans les emplois qui exigent le moins de scolarité, les femmes paient très cher la division sexuelle des emplois. À la différence des emplois plus qualifiés, les emplois les moins qualifiés présentent une très grande différence de salaires selon qu'ils sont principalement masculins ou féminins. Qui plus est, cette différence est un phénomène généralisé et favorise les emplois masculins. Cet écart de rémunération en faveur des hommes, dans les emplois requérant un secondaire V ou moins, ne présente qu'une très légère tendance à la baisse, alors que les écarts entre hommes et femmes, dans les emplois requérant un niveau de scolarité plus élevé, sont nettement à la baisse. Comme le niveau de rémunération de l'emploi n'est pas la seule dimension qui en définit la qualité, ni encore le seul critère de choix des candidats, l'Institut de la Statistique du Québec (ISQ) a mis au point une typologie de la qualité de l'emploi qui a pour grande vertu de permettre de comparer tous les emplois salariés (les travailleurs autonomes en sont exclus) d'un territoire économique donné, entre eux et à travers le temps, et aussi de comparer des groupes de travailleurs détenant des caractéristiques particulières (sexe, âge, statut syndical, origine ethnique) au point de vue de la qualité des emplois détenus. En résumé, l'indice de qualité de l'emploi de l'ISQ présente un écart défavorable aux femmes dans les emplois de bonne qualité, quoiqu'à la baisse entre 1997 et 2007. Lorsqu'on décompose les groupes des hommes et des femmes selon le niveau de scolarité (dernier diplôme obtenu), on constate que cet écart touche en fait les femmes moins scolarisées. L'article démontre enfin que trois voies d'action souvent invoquées, à l'heure actuelle, permettent peu d'espoir pour contrer ce phénomène particulier : l'application de la Loi sur l'équité salariale, la négociation collective et la promotion interne. Néanmoins, ce problème touche près de 500 000 femmes au Québec, après 25 ans de pratique des programmes d'accès à l'égalité et près de 15 ans d'application de la Loi sur l'équité salariale. Les programmes d'accès à l'égalité sont le mécanisme d'action qui permet le plus d'espoir, à condition de parvenir à s'implanter dans les secteurs d'emploi touchés.

### **Mots clés :**

Ségrégation sexuelle du travail ; division sexuelle du travail ; écarts salariaux entre hommes et femmes ; main-d'œuvre peu qualifiée ; équité en emploi ; équité salariale.

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## ABSTRACT

*In this paper I will show two things: first, that the labour market is still very divided with respect to gender and, second, that the material impact of this division differs sharply by level of education; among occupations that require the least education, women pay a very high price for this gender based division of employment. In contrast with occupations where more education is needed, those requiring the least education show a huge difference in wages according to whether they are predominantly male or predominantly female. This difference is a widespread phenomenon that favours so-called male occupations. The corresponding pay gap, in favour of men, in occupations requiring a high school diploma (Secondary V in Québec) or less, is shrinking only slightly, whereas the gaps between men and women in occupations requiring more education are clearly closing. Given that pay is not the only factor in determining the quality of a job, nor even the only criterion job seekers base their decisions on, the Institut de la Statistique du Québec (ISQ) has developed a typology of job quality that has the advantage of allowing comparisons of all salaried or wage-earning jobs (self-employed workers are excluded) in a given economic territory, between them and over time, as well as comparisons of groups of workers having specific characteristics (sex, age, union status, ethnic origin). In short, the ISQ's job quality index indicates a gap to the detriment of women in good quality jobs, although the gap narrowed between 1997 and 2007. A breakdown of the men and women's groups by level of education (highest diploma/degree earned) shows that the gap really affects the women in the least educated group. The article then demonstrates that three often mentioned options for action, at present, offer little hope to counter that particular phenomenon: Québec's Pay Equity Act application, collective bargaining and internal promotion. Yet, this problem still affects approximately 500,000 women, after 25 years of equal access programs and close to 15 years of implementation of the Pay Equity Act. Employment equity programs are the most promising initiatives, given that they find their way into the affected employment sectors.*

**Keywords:**

*Labour market segregation; gender bias; gendered wage gaps; unskilled labour force; employment equity; pay equity.*

*Marie-Josée Legault*



## INTRODUCTION

While women have made gains in terms of labour force participation, the division of labour is still largely gender based as there is a concentration of workers of one sex or the other in certain occupations and jobs, even though other occupations have a more mixed workforce. Some jobs have such a high concentration of women or men that they can be called 'predominantly female' or 'predominantly male'.

To determine whether an occupation is predominantly female or male, the *Institut de la Statistique du Québec (ISQ)* uses a diversity index that can be defined as the difference between the proportion of men or women in the overall labour force and their proportion in a specific occupation.

In 2006, for instance, the proportion of women in the labour force was 47%, while that of men was 53%. An occupation is considered 'female' if the proportion of women is equal to or greater than the 47% in the labour force, and 'predominantly female' if the proportion of women is equal to or greater than 73.5%.

If women account for less than 47%, the occupation is termed 'male', down to a female proportion of 23%, and 'predominantly male' if the proportion of women is less than 23%.

Of the 520 occupations listed in Canada's **National Occupational Classification (NOC)**, in 2006, 347 were deemed male or predominantly male and 174 female or predominantly female (see Table 1). There were therefore virtually twice as many predominantly male occupations as predominantly female occupations, and so the men in these occupations had more diverse options available to them. Approximately three quarters of workers are employed in predominantly male or predominantly female occupations (78.7% of working women, 73.3% of working men).

**TABLE 1**  
**Breakdown of Labour Force by Degree to which**  
**Occupations are Female or Male, Québec, 1991–2006**

	2006		2001		1991	
	NUMBER OF OCCUPATIONS	% OF LABOUR FORCE	NUMBER OF OCCUPATIONS	% OF LABOUR FORCE	NUMBER OF OCCUPATIONS	% OF LABOUR FORCE
<b>WOMEN</b>						
In female or very female occupations	174	78.7	170	77.7	152	79.2
In occupations that are more male than female	125	15.4	115	16.6	109	14.8
In predominantly male occupations	221	6.0	221	5.7	245	6.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>MEN</b>						
In male occupations	347	73.3	337	75.5	353	77.3
In occupations that are more female than male	102	20.3	103	18.2	92	16.5
In predominantly female occupations	71	6.4	66	6.3	61	6.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census (97F0012XCB01022). Compilations by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.  
[http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/societe/march\\_travl\\_renmr/cat\\_profs\\_sectr\\_activ/professions/recens2001/tabwebprof\\_jjuin03-4.htm](http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/societe/march_travl_renmr/cat_profs_sectr_activ/professions/recens2001/tabwebprof_jjuin03-4.htm)



In 2006, women were working in 221 occupations where there was a very high concentration of men. Conversely, men were to be found in 71 occupations with a very high proportion of women. Are we to conclude from this that men are at a disadvantage in this situation? Not necessarily. To answer that question, we must first determine what the advantage might be to working in an occupation predominantly performed by people of the opposite sex: Is it the same for men and for women? To find out, we would have to take a look at the quality of the very female or very male occupations, as we will do later in this paper.

In this paper I will show two things: first, that the labour market is still very divided with respect to gender and, second, that the material impact of this division differs sharply by level of education; among occupations that require the least education, women pay a very high price for this gender based division of employment. In contrast with occupations where more education is needed, those requiring the least education show a huge difference in wages according to whether they are predominantly male or predominantly female. This difference is a widespread phenomenon that favours so-called male occupations. The corresponding pay gap, in favour of men, in occupations requiring a high school diploma (Secondary V in Québec)<sup>1</sup> or less, is shrinking only slightly, whereas the gaps between men and women in occupations requiring more education are clearly closing. Considering that pay is not the only factor in determining the quality of a job, nor even the only criterion job seekers base their decisions on, the *Institut de la Statistique du Québec* (ISQ) has developed a typology of job quality that has the advantage of allowing comparisons of all salaried or wage-earning jobs (self-employed workers are excluded) in a given economic territory, between them and over time, as well as comparisons of groups of workers having specific characteristics (sex, age, union status and/or ethnic origin). In short, the ISQ's job quality index indicates a gap to the detriment of women in good-quality jobs, although the gap narrowed between 1997 and 2007. A breakdown of the men's and women's groups by level of education (highest diploma/degree earned) shows that the gap really affects the women in the least-educated group. I will examine three options for action that, at present, offer little hope for improvement, despite the fact that this problem still affects approximately 500,000 women, after 25 years of equal access programs and close to 15 years of implementation of the Pay Equity Act.

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<sup>1</sup> . In Québec, high school finishes upon completion of Secondary V (the equivalent of Grade 11 in the rest of Canada).



## 1. PAY AND EMPLOYMENT EQUITY LEGISLATION IN QUÉBEC AND CANADA

### 1.1. Employment Equity

Under the Canadian Federation, most of the workers are subject to provincial laws, as labor and commerce as well are under provincial jurisdiction, and provincial public sector as well. It should be noted that the Government of Québec has never adopted a proactive legislation regarding employment equity in the private sector, aside from requiring organizations that solicit contracts and subsidies from them to hire women, under “contractual obligation”. In general, however, the Government of Québec has opted for a voluntary approach with respect to private employers, and a proactive one with the public sector (*Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies*, RSQ, ch. A-2.01).

Only the Canadian government has enacted a proactive approach in the private sector, since 1985, in the case of organizations that employ 100 employees or more, under the *Employment Equity Act* (RSC (1995) c. 44.) This law applies only to organizations that come under federal jurisdiction in keeping with the Canadian Constitution: federal public service, federal Crown corporations, private firms crossing provincial boundaries (banking, (tele)communications, international and national transportation industries). It was covering 1.1 million employees in 2008, that means a very small proportion (7%) of the 14.4 millions Canadian workers. Moreover, the Federal government imposes a “contractual obligation” as well.

Systemic discrimination is the fundamental concept behind the entire Québec legal apparatus in terms of equity. It is based on leaving out of account the intent to discriminate in the process for evaluating a discriminatory situation by the commission or the court, and replacing it with the notion of the detrimental effect on the members of the target groups. Systemic discrimination is neither explicit nor voluntary, neither conscious nor intentional. It is often the result of a management system that is based on a certain number of presuppositions, most often implicit, with respect to various groups and includes practices and traditions that perpetuate a situation of inequality with respect to the members of the target groups. There is no guilt in the fact that the court decides that systemic discrimination exists, only an obligation to eliminate the detrimental effects specifically by implementing an affirmative access program. But still, it is the essential notion that triggers the equity policy.

There is a necessary distinction between direct and systemic discrimination. Direct, or individual, discrimination is promulgated by prejudiced individuals and can be penalized after an individual complaint has been filed. Systemic discrimination involves discrimination that is built into employment systems, often unintentionally. Such systems always have an adverse impact on one group (i.e., women) compared to another (men); they may reflect old social values (e.g., ‘men are breadwinners and should be paid more’).

The necessary criterion to establish for systemic discrimination refers to the “under-use” of the members of the four target groups: women, members of cultural communities, people with disabilities, and Native people. It should be noted that this criterion does not result in a verdict of guilt under the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedom. It is merely a threshold under which it is possible to implement preferential criteria for selecting personnel without being accused of discrimination under the Charter. The members of the target groups are under used when their numbers in a given job, in a given organization are less than their availability rate on the job market.

When this threshold is established, the employer may practice preferential hiring or promotion for the members of the target groups “when they have the same qualifications as the other candidates”, until these objectives are attained. Numerical objectives are not hiring *quotas* in the sense that they are not based on the obligatory and automatic hiring of individuals based on the sole fact that they belong to the designated group. The implementation of quantitative objectives is recommended by both the Canadian and the Québec governments following a decision issued by the Supreme Court of Canada that concluded that preferential hiring was the only way in which to overcome the effects of the systemic discrimination inherent in current human resources management procedures<sup>2</sup>.

Affirmative action programs aim essentially at increasing the representation of the members of the target groups and at breaking down the sexual segregation of jobs by providing access to all types of jobs. The **H**uman **R**ights **C**ommission (HRC) provides a framework for establishing quantitative objectives and attributing advantages so as to determine a level beyond which the advantages are no longer legitimate and can result in complaints from the members of the groups who do not enjoy such advantages, as lawsuits for “reverse discrimination”.

The employer must also analyze its employment practices in order to eliminate any trace of systemic discrimination and make long-term changes in its practices.

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<sup>2</sup> Action travail des femmes (ATF) vs. Canadian National Railway Company (CN) (1987) 1 SCR 1114.

## 1.2. Pay Equity

In Canada and North America as well, pay equity, also known as “fair wages” or “fair pay,” is a means to redress a particular kind of intra-organization gender based wage discrimination that results from a combination of gender based occupational segregation and underpayment of women’s work. The need for pay equity is indeed premised on the hypothesis that female jobs have been undervalued and underpaid because they have been performed primarily by women. It means that they have not been paid fairly in terms of their intrinsic value to the organization. Unlike employment equity, pay equity law focuses on gender, excluding race, disability or other discriminating status.

Initially, pay equity was incorporated into the Canadian Human Rights Legislation with a complaint based, human rights style approach. Such legislation was first passed in Québec (effective in 1976) and then in the federal sector (effective in 1978). A key lesson learned from these is that they are not as effective for redressing discrimination built into compensation systems as a proactive approach (Beeman, 2004). Québec, the first jurisdiction to require pay equity (1976), changed its initial complaint based approach to a proactive one in 1996 (Pay equity act, RSQ, ch. E-12.001). It has now been in force for close to 15 years.

A proactive approach does not assume guilt of those involved in setting salaries and/or wages. It recognizes the systemic nature of the problem and requires organizations to examine their wage determination systems and, if any inequities are found, to redress them. The basic three step pay equity process includes defining female and male jobs; using a gender neutral job evaluation system to assess the value of female and male jobs; and using a method to determine fair wages for female jobs that are of comparable value to male jobs; the pay for the male job cannot be lowered.

Nearly all of the 14 Canadian jurisdictions are involved with pay equity: (1) the Federal Public Service, the Federal Crown Corporations, private firms crossing provincial boundaries (banking, communication, and transportation industries); 2) nine of ten provincial governments which cover provincial public services, broader public sector organizations (e.g., schools, hospitals, etc.), and private firms operating within their provincial boundaries; 3) three Canadian territories. Only in Alberta is there no pay equity activity at the provincial level. All pay equity remedies since 1985 have been proactive except for the one in the Yukon Territory which included pay equity in its Human Rights Legislation. Private sector organizations are covered in six jurisdictions: two with proactive legislation (Ontario since 1988 and Québec since 1996), and four jurisdictions where pay equity is covered by the Human Rights Legislation (federally regulated industries and territories covered by the Canadian Human Rights Act: Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Yukon) (Weiner, 2002, p. S 104-5).

Pay equity is concerned with the wage determination aspect of compensation — the establishment of a salary or a salary range — for female dominated and male dominated jobs within an organization. Pay equity in Canada indeed takes place within a single organization, as compared to countries with broader, more centralized wage setting mechanisms (e.g., Australia).

Job evaluation systems are the mechanism used to assess the value of job content. Job evaluation systems include the factors on which jobs are assessed, the weightings of these factors, the way in which job information is collected, and the application of the factors to the job information. Gender neutral job evaluation is the key to pay equity. Job evaluation, which has been used since the 1930s, was always intended to achieve internal equity: a fair comparison of the value of work within an organization. Though compatible with pay equity, in reality, job evaluation systems either incorporated gender bias or were used in a gender biased manner. Pay (and employment) equity are aimed at redressing systemic gendered discrimination in wage setting.

Pay equity defines fairness in terms of a reasonable job content/wage ratio: jobs of equal value to the organization should be assigned the same salary or salary range. Job's value is defined in terms of skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions. The aggregate value of female jobs is compared to the aggregate value of a corresponding male job — or to the corresponding point on a jobs line. If the value of the work is comparable, then “equal pay” is needed, though the actual duties and responsibilities of the female and male jobs can be very different.

As a result, both men and women in female jobs benefit if their job is not found to be under-paid relative to its value, while men nor women in male dominated jobs benefit from pay equity, as can be the case after an internal equity operation.

Pay equity is directed at redressing underpayment of women's work while temporarily taking occupational segregation for granted (Armstrong and Cornish 1997, p. 71). However, it is theoretically possible — and politically wished — that over time the higher wages that become associated with female jobs because of pay equity could attract a higher proportion of men to the occupation:

As long as women's jobs are paid fairly given their value, pay equity is achieved even though occupational segregation continues. Employment equity, on the other hand, is designed to reduce occupational segregation among traditional male jobs by removing the barriers that have kept

women (and other designated groups) out. Employment equity “accepts” the wages associated with traditionally female jobs, that is, it is unconcerned that female jobs may be underpaid relative to their value. (Weiner, 2002, p. S 102)

Some feel that pay equity is not needed because employment equity will remove the barriers that prevent women from moving into higher paid male jobs. Such a view makes two inappropriate assumptions:

First, that all men’s jobs pay more than all women’s jobs; janitors compared to nurses show that this is not true. Second, that all women will move into higher level male jobs; this denies the continuing need for what have traditionally been female jobs. Pay equity is needed because of the presence of both occupational segregation and the underpayment of women’s work. (Weiner, 2002, p. S 102)

True, janitors are better paid than nurses are; but they are different level jobs. We will see here that among jobs requiring a same lower level of education, men’s jobs are generally better paid than women’s. That being said, there are various types of gender wage gaps, not all of those being addressed by pay equity legislations:

- Men working in higher valued jobs than women (segregation in employment, employment and pay inequity);
- Men and women working in substantially the same jobs, but men work in higher-wage industries (idem);
- Men and women working in substantially the same jobs for the same employer and
  - men have higher human capital or productivity, or
  - men are paid more (unequal pay for equal work, direct discrimination);
- Men and women working in equally valued jobs for the same employer and men are paid more (discrimination that pay equity is designed to redress) (Weiner, 2002, p. S 103).

We will here focus on the first source of pay inequity that pay equity legislation fails to address and eradicate (men working in higher valued jobs than women). Baker and Fortin (1999) have looked at the relationship between the proportion of men and women in an occupation and their pay and shown that in the U.S., there is a negative relationship between hourly wages and the proportion of women in an occupation (so concluded Sorensen, 1990). This is related to pay equity since the proportion of women in an occupation is expected to be related to female dominated jobs at the level of the firm. Nan Weiner, a Canadian expert, asserts that “this same relationship does not exist in Canada” (Weiner, 2002, p. S 113). An indepth analysis of less qualified jobs shows that things are not that simple.





## **2. LABOUR FORCE CONCENTRATION OF WOMEN AND MEN**

Is the situation changing in gendered workforce concentration? Some underlying trends are stable, as can be seen in Table 2, below. The top 10 occupations in 2006 were among the top 20 in 2001 and 1991, with one exception. The top three female occupations remained the same: secretary (98% women), sales clerk (56.7%) and cashier (86.1%); sales clerk and cashier are relatively unskilled occupations.

**TABLE 2**  
**Top 10 Female Occupations, Québec, 1991, 2001, 2006**

<b>RANK IN 2006</b>	<b>OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE NOC-s 2006, <b>WOMEN</b></b>	<b>% WOMEN IN 2006</b>	<b>RANK IN 2001</b>	<b>% WOMEN IN 2001</b>	<b>RANK IN 1991</b>	<b>% WOMEN IN 1991</b>
1	Secretaries (except legal and medical)	98.0	1	97.7	1	98.3
2	Retail Salespersons and Sales Clerks	56.7	2	58.7	2	58.7
3	Cashiers	86.1	3	86.5	3	88.0
4	Early Childhood Educators and Assistants	95.9	7	95.7	20	95.9
5	General Office Clerks	87.2	8	83.2	4	79.1
6	Registered Nurses	91.0	5	91.0	6	91.4
7	Elementary School/and Kindergarten Teachers	87.1	6	86.0	8	85.8
8	Accounting and Related Clerks	84.8	4	87.8	5	81.6
9	Food and Beverage Servers	76.4	9	79.1	7	80.9
10	Nurse Aides, Orderlies and Patient Service Associates	81.4	11	79.6	10	74.7
	<b>% Women in Top 10 Occupations</b>	<b>81.3</b>		<b>74.8</b>		
	<b>% Women in Labour Force</b>	<b>47.1</b>		<b>46.2</b>		

Source: 2006: Special compilation by the ISQ; 2001 and 1991: Les 20 principales professions **féminines** et masculines, Québec, 1991 et 2001, Statistics Canada, 2001 Census (97F0012XCB01022). Compilations by the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).

[http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/societe/march\\_travil/remnr/cat\\_prof/sectr\\_activ/professions/recens2001/tabwebprof\\_juin03-1.htm](http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/societe/march_travil/remnr/cat_prof/sectr_activ/professions/recens2001/tabwebprof_juin03-1.htm)

If we broaden the scope of our study to include the top 50 occupations for women in 2006, we obtain a range that encompasses two thirds of working women. If, from this group, we take occupations where no more than a high school diploma is required, it can be seen (Table 3) that a third of women in the labour force work in 20 occupations that have a very high percentage of female employees.

**TABLE 3**  
**Selection of Occupations Among the Top 50 for Women in 2006, Québec**

RANK	OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE NOC-s 2006	LABOUR FORCE (15 AND OVER)	% OF FEMALE LABOUR FORCE	% WOMEN
1	Secretaries (except legal and medical)	99,105	5.4	98.0
3	Cashiers	70,425	3.8	86.1
5	General office clerks	55,740	3.0	87.2
8	Accounting and Related Clerks	45,250	2.4	84.8
9	Food and Beverage Servers	41,605	2.2	76.4
10	Nurse Aides, Orderlies and Patient Service Associates	41,245	2.2	81.4
16	Receptionists and Switchboard Operators	24,940	1.3	87.8
17	Customer Service, Information and Related Clerks	24,065	1.3	63.5
19	Hairstylists and Barbers	22,225	1.2	85.2
20	Customer Service Representatives - Financial Services	21,300	1.2	88.3
23	Industrial Sewing Machine Operators	16,920	0.9	89.8
24	Visiting Homemakers, Housekeepers and Related Occupations	14,920	0.8	86.6
27	Elementary and Secondary School Teacher Assistants	12,985	0.7	83.2
29	Administrative Clerks	12,755	0.7	74.3
31	Licensed Practical Nurses	11,895	0.6	91.4
32	Other Assisting Occupations in Support of Health Services	11,805	0.6	85.2
33	Babysitters, Nannies and Parents' Helpers	11,190	0.6	96.6
34	Aestheticians, Electrologists and Related Occupations	10,895	0.6	96.0
37	Bookkeepers	9,765	0.5	80.4
	Total (% women: weighted average)	559,030	30.2	86.5
	Total for Top 50 Occupations (% women: weighted average)	1,222,945	66.1	67.7
	Total for 520 Occupations	1,849,195	100	47.1

Source: Special compilation by the ISQ

In 2006, women were still underrepresented in the less skilled, predominantly male occupations, as Table 4 shows: truck driver, automotive service technician, carpenter, janitor, material handler, and delivery driver and construction labourer. Construction industry occupations in general are still predominantly male (98.8% men; Legault & Danvoye, 2007, p. 64).

Women have made noteworthy progress among bus drivers, subway operators and other transit operators (proportion of jobs rising from 21.2% in 1991 to 26.1% in 2001) and among technical sales specialists (proportion up from 21.5% in 1991 to 27.4% in 2001) — which pushed these two occupations from predominantly male to just male — and among shippers and receivers (from 17.6% to 22.3%).

Yet, overall, it can be seen that there is a higher proportion of men than women in the manufacturing industries, while there are more women in the service industries. Even within the service sector, there are still some gender divisions, with more men than women employed in the transportation industry, for instance (Table 4).

If, as we did for women, we broaden our scope to include the top 100 occupations for men in 2006 (Table 5), we arrive at a range that encompasses virtually two thirds of men in the labour force. If, from this group, we take occupations that require no more than a high school diploma, it can be seen (Table 5) that 28.2% of working men are employed in 37 occupations where the percentage of male workers is very high.

**TABLE 4**  
**Top 10 male occupations, Québec, 1991, 2001, 2006**

<b>RANK IN 2006</b>	<b>OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE NOC-S 2006, MEN</b>	<b>% MEN IN 2006</b>	<b>RANK IN 2001</b>	<b>% MEN IN 2001</b>	<b>RANK IN 1991</b>	<b>% MEN IN 1991</b>
1	Retail salespersons and sales clerks	43.3	3	41.3	1	41.3
2	Truck drivers	96.5	2	97.7	3	98.6
3	Retail trade managers	57.8	4	63.3	2	65.8
4	Automotive service technicians, truck and bus mechanics and mechanical repairers	98.4	6	99.1	5	99.1
5	Carpenters	98.8	11	99.1	6	99.0
6	Janitors, caretakers and building superintendents	82.1	5	79.2	4	81.3
7	Material handlers	89.1	7	90.6	11	91.9
8	Delivery and courier service drivers	92.8	8		9	
9	Cooks	52.3	14	46.9	13	51.6
10	Construction trade helpers and labourers	94.1	23	95.8	10	96.9
	<b>% men in top 10 occupations</b>	<b>70.2</b>		<b>67.3</b>		
	<b>% men in 520 occupations</b>	<b>52.9</b>		<b>53.8</b>		

Source: 2006: Special compilation by the ISQ; 2001 and 1991: Les 20 principales professions féminines et masculines, Québec, 1991 et 2001, Statistics Canada, 2001 Census (97F0012XCB01022). Compilations by the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).  
[http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/societe/march\\_travl\\_remnr/cat\\_prof\\_sctr\\_activ/professions/recens2001/tabwebprof\\_juin03-1.htm](http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/societe/march_travl_remnr/cat_prof_sctr_activ/professions/recens2001/tabwebprof_juin03-1.htm).

**TABLE 5**  
**Selection of occupations among top 100 for MEN in 2006, Québec**

<b>RANK</b>	<b>OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE NOC-S 2006</b>	<b>LABOUR FORCE (15 AND OVER)</b>	<b>% OF MALE LABOUR FORCE</b>	<b>% MEN</b>
2	Truck Drivers	63,385	3.0	96.5
4	Automotive Service Technicians, Truck and Bus Mechanics and Mechanical Repairers	37,630	1.8	98.4
5	Carpenters	34,600	1.7	98.7
6	Janitors, Caretakers and Building Superintendents	34,170	1.6	82.1
7	Material Handlers	33,210	1.6	89.1
8	Delivery and Courier Service Drivers	30,980	1.5	92.8
10	Construction Trades Helpers and Labourers	27,935	1.3	94.1
15	Shippers and Receivers	24,450	1.2	75.2
18	Welders and Related Machine Operators	22,995	1.1	95.8
20	Security Guards and Related Occupations	20,790	1.0	75.3
21	Construction Millwrights and Industrial Mechanics (except textile)	20,660	1.0	98.2
28	Heavy Equipment Operators (except crane)	16,120	0.8	98.7
29	Machinists and Machining and Tooling Inspectors	16,030	0.8	94.5
30	Landscaping and Grounds Maintenance Labourers	15,375	0.7	88.3
31	Labourers in Wood, Pulp and Paper Processing	15,055	0.7	87.2
33	General Farm Workers	14,570	0.7	71.4
34	Electricians (except industrial and power system)	14,400	0.7	98.5
40	Storekeepers and Parts Clerks	12,020	0.6	86.8
44	Public Works and Maintenance Labourers	10,875	0.5	86.7
51	Taxi and Limousine Drivers and Chauffeurs	9,555	0.5	92.9
55	Plumbers	8,765	0.4	98.3
58	Motor Vehicle Body Repairers	8,550	0.4	97.3
67	Printing Press Operators	7,540	0.4	85.5

## IS THERE SUCH THING AS EMPLOYMENT AND PAY EQUITY FOR THE LESS EDUCATED IN QUÉBEC?

<b>RANK</b>	<b>OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE NOC-S 2006</b>	<b>LABOUR FORCE (15 AND OVER)</b>	<b>% OF MALE LABOUR FORCE</b>	<b>% MEN</b>
70	Furniture and fixture assemblers and inspectors	7,435	0.4	79.3
71	Heavy-duty equipment mechanics	7,415	0.4	98.4
73	Cabinetmakers	7,305	0.4	89.9
74	Residential and commercial installers and servicers	7,215	0.3	95.2
78	Butchers, meat cutters and fishmongers - retail and wholesale	6,915	0.3	84
81	Specialized cleaners	6,495	0.3	87.8
82	Chefs	6,455	0.3	76.3
83	Residential home builders and renovators	6,220	0.3	97
90	Process control and machine operators, food and beverage processing	5,485	0.3	70.3
91	Plasterers, drywall installers and finishers and lathers	5,475	0.3	93.8
94	Letter carriers	5,255	0.3	68.8
98	Sawmill machine operators	4,950	0.2	94.3
99	Service station attendants	4,750	0.2	71.7
100	Bricklayers	4,730	0.2	99
	<b>Total (% men: weighted average)</b>	<b>585,760</b>	<b>28.2</b>	<b>90.5</b>
	<b>Total for top 100 occupations (% men: weighted average)</b>	<b>1,415,485</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>58.1</b>
	<b>Total for 520 occupations</b>	<b>2,080,075</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>52.9</b>

Source: Special compilation by the ISQ

In other words, if, from all occupations, we first take the top ones for women and for men, so that we have around two thirds of male and female workers, and if we then look at occupations that: 1) require no more than a high school diploma and 2) are predominantly male or female, in other words, highly gender-divided, then it can be seen that a third of working women are employed in 20 occupations having a very high proportion of female workers (weighted average of 86.5%), and that 28.2% of men work in 37 occupations having a very high proportion of male workers (weighted average of 90.5%). This means that around a third of men and women work in predominantly male or predominantly female occupations requiring no more than a high school diploma.

Does gender division, or gender based concentration of workers, affect all occupations in the economy to the same degree? Occupational sex segregation is well distributed throughout the economy and is not restricted to occupations requiring lower levels of education. If, from the top 50 occupations for women, we extract those requiring a junior college diploma or university degree and involving managerial duties — this time without choosing those with the highest proportion of male or female workers and without excluding mixed workforce occupations — we obtain relatively comparable weighted average proportions of women and men for the four groups (Table 6).

**TABLE 6**  
**Concentration by Sex and by Level of Education**  
**Required for Occupation, Québec, 2006**

<b>OCCUPATIONS</b>	<b>TOP 50 AMONG WOMEN</b>	<b>TOP 100 AMONG MEN</b>
<b>Requiring a junior college or university degree, and involving managerial duties</b>	<b>75.8%</b>	<b>73.4%</b>
<b>Requiring a high school diploma or less</b>	<b>72.8%</b>	<b>69.3%</b>

Source: Special compilation by the ISQ.

So, while the concentration of one gender or the other in an occupation is not restricted to jobs requiring fewer qualifications, the consequences of such segregation are much more serious in these jobs, as we shall see.



### **3. OCCUPATIONAL SEX SEGREGATION HAS A VERY SIGNIFICANT MATERIAL IMPACT ON THE LESS EDUCATED**

#### **3.1. The General Wage Gap**

In industrialized societies in general, the average rates of pay — whether hourly, weekly or annual — for men are higher than those for women; only the size of the gap varies with the pay period considered.

The advantage of comparing annual compensation is that it represents actual employment income available to workers, taking into account the actual duration of paid work, excluding periods of unemployment, time between temporary jobs, and part time work, but including overtime hours. On the other hand, it does not provide a precise indication of the value of work in the marketplace, as variations in the length of time worked confuse the picture.

Weekly compensation is closer to representing the value of work in the marketplace, as it excludes confounding factors such as periods without employment (due to temporary job status or to periods of unemployment during the year), but is nevertheless affected by two other confounding factors: work pattern (full time or part time) and overtime hours.

Looking at hourly compensation has the advantage of not introducing any confounding factors such as work pattern (full time, part time), employment status (permanent, temporary), periods without employment or overtime hours.

The gap between men's and women's hourly pay is always less than the gap between their weekly or annual pay. Weekly and annual rates offer a more accurate picture of real income as they take into account the actual time worked. On the other hand, the hourly rate tells us more about market value, and that is why I have chosen to focus on hourly rates here. So please keep in mind that this represents the smallest pay gap.

In Québec, men's hourly pay rate was greater than women's throughout the period 1998-2008, but the difference shrank by 3.8 percentage points (Table 7). While hourly rates rose for both sexes over that time, the increase was higher for women (33.2%) than for men (27.4%). This consistent trend can be explained by the propensity of employers to invest in training and raise pay when employees are more stably employed.

**TABLE 7**  
**Gaps in Hourly Pay between Men and Women, Québec, 1998–2008**

HOURLY	1998	2003	2008	CHANGE 1998-2008
<b>All men</b>	<b>\$16.79</b>	<b>\$18.82</b>	<b>\$21.39</b>	<b>+ 27.4%</b>
<b>All women</b>	<b>\$14.01</b>	<b>\$15.93</b>	<b>\$18.65</b>	<b>+ 33.2%</b>
<b>Gap men-women</b>	<b>\$2.78</b>	<b>\$2.89</b>	<b>\$2.74</b>	
<b>Gap in %</b>	<b>16.6%</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>12.8%</b>	<b>- 3.8 pp</b>

Source: Special compilation by the ISQ

The gaps are narrowing and the general trend is toward equity, but here we are talking about an aggregate gap.

But what happens to the difference between men's and women's rates of pay if the level of education required for jobs is taken into account?

### 3.2. Pay of Least-Educated Male and Female Workers

Extensive studies of the relationship between education and pay, both in the general population and among women in particular, have shown how the gap in pay between men and women can be reduced if the gap in education is also reduced, and the same applies for skills acquired outside of the educational system (Blau, Ferber & Winkler, 2002; Blau & Kahn, 2000; Drolet, 2001; Gunderson, 2006; Gunderson & Muszynski 1990; O'Neill & Polachek, 1993). According to the theory of human capital, a worker's level of pay can be explained, at least in part, by his/her productivity factors, including education and skills.

Table 8 shows that while women's hourly rates of pay are lower than men's for all levels of education, women's rates rose more than men's over the period from 1998 to 2008.

**TABLE 8**  
**Hourly Pay, by Sex and Level of Education,**  
**Québec, 1998–2008 (current dollars)**

YEAR	NO HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA		HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA		POST-SECONDARY		UNIVERSITY DEGREE	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
1998	\$13.08	\$9.75	\$15.22	\$12.27	\$16.15	\$13.63	\$24.04	\$20.16
2008	\$15.73	\$11.93	\$18.88	\$15.82	\$20.76	\$17.69	\$29.97	\$25.94
<b>Change 1998-2008</b>	+ 20.3%	+ 22.3%	+ 24%	+ 29%	+ 28.5	+ 30%	+ 24.7%	+28.7%

Source: Special compilation by the ISQ.

Despite the solid findings of these studies, they all ignore one obvious fact: there can be a huge difference between the pay levels of predominantly male and predominantly female occupations requiring the same level of education. In other words, the return on education investment can differ for men and women, and the return on lack of education as well. The effect of low education on pay is not the same for women and men.

In Table 9, it can be seen that the ratio of women's average hourly rate to men's average hourly rate varies with level of education. The lowest ratio for women is among the least educated workers, where women earn just 75.8% of what men with the same level of schooling earn.

**TABLE 9**  
**Women's hourly Rate of Pay as Percentage of**  
**Men's by Level of Education, Québec, 1998–2008**

LEVEL OF EDUCATION	1998	2008
<b>No High School Diploma</b>	<b>74.5</b>	<b>75.8</b>
High School Diploma	80.6	83.8
Postsecondary	84.4	85.2
University Degree	83.9	86.5

Source: Special compilation by the ISQ.

Chart 1 illustrates the percentage differences between the hourly rates of pay of men and women (in men's favour, in all cases) by level of education (no high school diploma, high school diploma, junior college or postsecondary, and university degree) between 1997 and 2008. In other words, each point on the chart represents a percentage difference between an average rate of pay for men and a corresponding rate for women, for a given year and a given level of education, like the following.

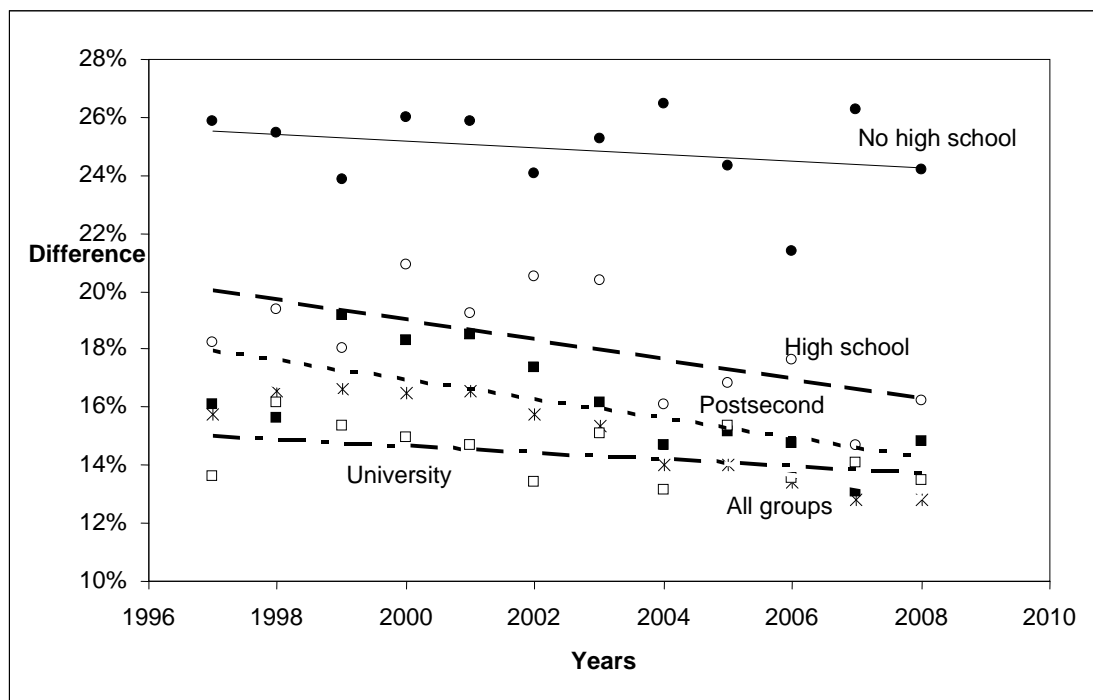
AVERAGE HOURLY RATE OF PAY	2008
No High School Diploma – <b>MEN</b>	<b>\$15.73</b>
No High School Diploma – <b>WOMEN</b>	<b>\$11.93</b>
Difference between <b>MEN</b> and <b>WOMEN</b>	<b>\$3.80</b>
<b>Difference in %</b>	<b>24.16%</b>

Trend lines (linear regression) through the scatters of distinct points for each level of education indicate the general trend; they take into account all the points, even extreme values.

The chart clearly shows a downward trend in the mean differences between men's and women's average hourly rates of pay, between 1997 and 2008, for all levels of education combined (from 15.77% to 12.81%). The smallest differences were among the better educated and indicated a similar decline (from 16.12% to 14.79% for the junior college/post secondary group, and from 13.58% to 13.45% for the university degree category). The differences for high school graduates were greater but also fell from 18.22% to 16.21%.

What is striking, however, is the huge distance between the gender gap of men and women having no high school diploma and that of men and women in the most educated group. Furthermore, the gap for the least educated shows only a slight downward trend (from 25.83% to 24.16%).

**CHART 1**  
**Percentage Differences in Average Hourly Compensation**  
**of Men and Women (Employees) by Level of Education,**  
**Annual Means, Québec, 1997–2008 (in current dollars)**



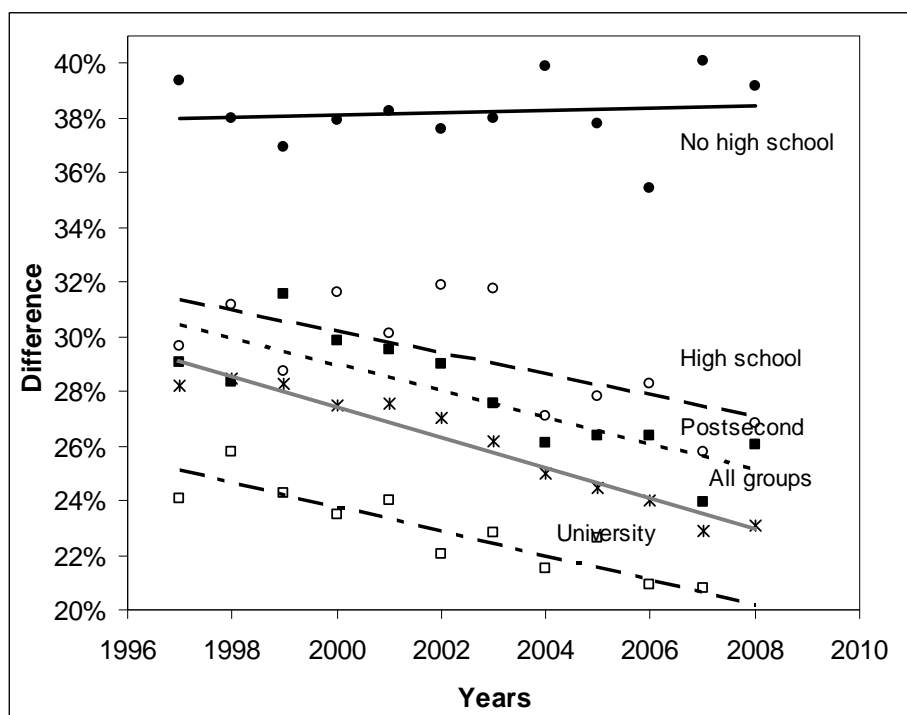
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey. Processing: *Institut de la statistique du Québec, Direction du travail et de la rémunération*. February 14, 2008, and August 17, 2009. Average hourly compensation excludes the self-employed and concerns a worker's primary job, the one in which he or she works the greatest number of hours, for workers who hold down more than one job.

What happens if we examine the same differences between men and women, but this time in terms of average weekly pay? Chart 2 below shows the percentage differences in weekly rates of pay between men and women, by level of education.

It is clear from the chart that the average differences between men and women, between 1997 and 2008, for all levels of education taken together, were much higher, but were still following a downward trend (from 28.21% to 23.07%). The smallest differences were among the most educated and showed the same falling trend (from 29.03% to 26.06% for junior college/postsecondary education and from 24.04% to 19.76% for university graduates). Differences were greater for those with only a high school diploma, but they too were dropping (from 29.62% to 26.81%).

Yet what is even more striking in this case is the huge distance between the gender gap of men and women having no high school diploma and that of men and women in the most educated category. Moreover, the gap for the least educated does not appear to be falling, but rather remaining more or less stable (from 39.39% to 39.16%).

**CHART 2**  
**Percentage Differences in Average Weekly Compensation**  
**of Men and Women (Employees) by Level of Education, Annual Means,**  
**Québec, 1997-2008 (in current dollars)**



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey. Processing: Institut de la statistique du Québec, Direction du travail et de la rémunération. February 14, 2008, and August 17, 2009. Average weekly compensation is for employees only. It concerns a worker's primary job, the one in which he or she works the greatest number of hours, for workers who hold down more than one job.

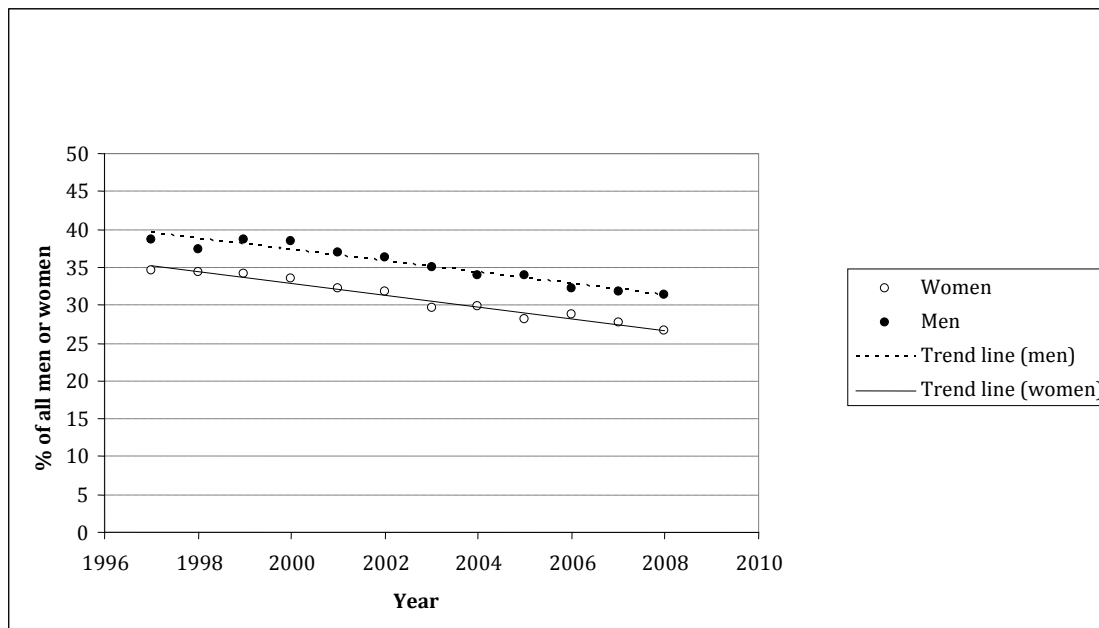
In both cases, it should be noted that the pay differences in favour of men, while generally declining, are much higher and more stable among the less educated than among junior college graduates and university graduates.

The occupations held by the least educated men and women are those that are the most divided by sex. (Due to space limitations, I must ask you to take this assertion on faith.) While women in this group predominantly hold down the lowest paid jobs in the service sector: sales clerks, cashiers, servers, office clerks and nurse aides, as we saw earlier, men occupy the better-paid jobs: construction trades, truck drivers, and automotive service technicians, truck and bus mechanics and mechanical repairers.

In other words, for the same level of education, the predominantly male occupations are much better paid than the predominantly female occupations. It is also in these jobs that occupational segregation by sex is the most stable and where equal access programs are the most ineffective.

How many women are affected by this situation? In 2008, women who had no high school diploma made up 11.2% of the labour force, whereas those who had graduated from high school accounted for 15.4%. All in all, 494,000 working women and 682,000 men were in this group. Is there a decline in the size of the group of women with a high school education or less? Yes, but it is slow, as can be seen from Chart 3 below, in which I have combined high school graduates and non graduates together.

**CHART 3**  
**Percentage of Men and Women with**  
**High School Diplomas or Less, Québec, 1997–2008**



Source: 2006: Special compilation by the ISQ.



Of course, pay is not only one aspect of job quality, nor is it the sole criterion on which job seekers base their choice, as they must take a number of different factors into consideration. I would also like to discuss job quality on the basis of gender and level of education: the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* has developed a typology of job quality that can be used to compare all salaried jobs (self-employed workers are excluded) within a given economic territory with one another and over time, and to compare groups of workers having specific characteristics (sex, age, unionized status, ethnic origin) from the point of view of the quality of their jobs (Cloutier, 2008).

### 3.3. Job Quality Index

The typology classifies all jobs into 12 categories based on the result of a combined index of four indicators:

- **Pay (5 levels):**  
The indicator used is the hourly rate of pay, which has the advantage of not being influenced by the duration of work (part-time or full-time, periods out of work) (Cloutier, 2008, p. 30).
- **Qualifications (3 levels):**  
A combination of the skills required by the position (management, technical or professional; semi skilled or unskilled) and the worker's competency (level of education) make up this indicator (Cloutier, 2008, p. 31).
- **Stability (2 levels):**  
The indicator used is employment status, either permanent (unspecified duration) or temporary (specified duration) (Cloutier, 2008, p. 32).
- **Working hours (4 levels):**  
Regular working hours, overtime hours (paid or not) and whether holding a part-time job (under 30 hours a week) voluntarily or not (Cloutier, 2008, p. 32).

The various combinations of the indicator levels give 120 possible configurations of job quality. According to this model, the best quality job pays \$25 or more an hour, requires a high level of qualifications, and offers good stability and regular working hours (full-time: 30-40 hours). At the other end of the spectrum, a job paying under \$10 an hour, held by an overqualified worker, offering little stability and involuntary short working hours (involuntary part-time) would be one with the lowest job quality rating.

Poorer-quality jobs are to be found in the following categories:

- **Category 1:**  
Involuntary part-time, stable employment, variable qualifications, under \$15 an hour. Involuntary part-time work is here put in its own separate category, as it reflects the mismatch between the worker's aspirations and the opportunities available in the job market. The fact that workers cannot work more hours may be a significant indicator of precariousness; their earnings will necessarily be lower than they would like. Involuntary part-time work also hampers the integration of workers into the economy, as they cannot capitalize fully on their skills, even in cases where they hold positions commensurate with their qualifications.
- **Category 2:**  
Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; high qualifications; under \$15 an hour.
- **Category 3:**  
Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; low qualifications; under \$15 an hour.
- **Category 4:**  
Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; overqualified workers; under \$15 an hour.
- **Category 8:**  
Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; low qualifications, with jobs held by qualified or overqualified workers; \$15 an hour or more.

When there is a higher proportion of women than men working in these categories, or when the percentage gap between them is positive, it means that women are disadvantaged, because there are more of them in these kinds of jobs and, in many cases, in a larger proportion than in the labour force as a whole, men and women taken together.

Good jobs are to be found in the following categories:

- **Category 5:**  
Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; high qualifications; between \$15 and \$20 an hour.
- **Category 6:**  
Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; high qualifications; between \$20 and \$25 an hour.
- **Category 7:**  
Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; high qualifications; \$25 or more an hour.

When there is a higher proportion of women than men working in these categories, or when the percentage gap between them is positive, it means the opposite of above: that women are advantaged, because there are more of them in these kinds of jobs and, in many cases, in a larger proportion than in the labour force as a whole, men and women taken together.

The intermediate categories, comprising a priori unclassifiable jobs, are the following:

- **Category 9:**  
Variable working hours without involuntary part-time; unstable; low qualifications and overqualified workers; under \$15 an hour.
- **Category 11:**  
Workweek of 41 hours or more; stable; variable qualifications; under \$15 an hour.
- **Category 10:**  
Variable working hours without involuntary part-time; unstable; high qualifications; \$15 or more an hour.
- **Category 12:**  
Workweek of 41 hours or more; stable; high qualifications; \$15 or more an hour.

Table 10 shows that aggregate statistics that do not make any distinctions based on factors such as level of education reveal a gap to women's disadvantage in good jobs (indicated in yellow), although the gap narrowed between 1997 and 2007. In contrast, a gap in their favour can be seen in two categories of good jobs (categories 5 and 6) as well as in one category of poorer-quality jobs (Category 8). Poorer jobs are indicated in grey.

**TABLE 10**  
**Breakdown of Wage-earners by Job Quality Index and by Sex,**  
**Québec, 1997–2007**

CATEGORY	% of TOTAL		% MEN		% WOMEN		Gap in Percentage Points (between W and M)	
	1997	2007	1997	2007	1997	2007	1997	2007
<b>1</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>+ 6.6</b>	<b>+ 3.2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>+ 5.9</b>	<b>+ 3.1</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>+ 6</b>	<b>+ 3.4</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>+ 3.7</b>	<b>+ 4.8</b>
5	8.6	9.9	7.0	8.9	10.4	11	+ 3.4	+ 2.1
6	7.3	7.2	7.2	6.8	7.3	7.6	+ 0.1	+ 0.8
7	9.8	11.7	11.7	13.2	7.6	10.1	- 4.1	- 3.1
<b>8</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>- 4.5</b>	<b>- 1.5</b>
9	4.2	4.2	3.8	3.9	4.7	4.6	+ 0.9	
10	4.0	5.0	4.2	4.8	3.9	5.1	- 0.3	
11	7.9	5.3	10.7	7.3	4.6	3.3	- 6.1	
12	11.6	11.8	17	16.5	5.4	6.8	- 11.6	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>		

Source: Table 3.2, Cloutier, 2008, p. 40.

When the men's and women's groups are broken down by level of education (highest diploma/degree earned), the overall picture becomes clearer regarding the effect of education on moving up the job quality scale.

Table 11, which provides a breakdown of the labour force with no high school diploma, shows that women are at a definite disadvantage. In 1997, 80.5% of them were stuck in poor jobs, in contrast to only 52.8% of the men. Has the situation improved by 2007? No, as 81.4% of women with this level of education still had such jobs, as opposed to 56.7% of the men. The gap between women and men has remained roughly stable, and the only consolation is to be found in the fact that the total number of men and women in this educational group has declined, although the group is still large, as we saw earlier.

Conversely, it can be seen that in 1997, 3.8% of women with this education held good jobs, whereas 11.2% of the men did. In 2007, 4.9% of the women and 12.6% of the men held such jobs. The situation of both women and men improved in this respect.

**TABLE 11**  
**Breakdown of Wage-earners with no High School Diploma,**  
**by Job Quality Index and Sex, Québec, 1997–2007**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>MEN (NO HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA) (Thousands)</b>	<b>BREAKDOWN (%)</b>	<b>WOMEN (NO HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA) (Thousands)</b>	<b>BREAKDOWN (%)</b>
<b>Total 1997</b>	<b>283.5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>185.2</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>11.8</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>70.6</b>	<b>24.9</b>	<b>88.6</b>	<b>47.9</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>2.4</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>0.9</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.5</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>46.3</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>7.8</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>6.8</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>11.9</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>0.8</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>42.1</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>33.2</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>Total 2007</b>	<b>224.9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>140.4</b>	<b>100</b>

## IS THERE SUCH THING AS EMPLOYMENT AND PAY EQUITY FOR THE LESS EDUCATED IN QUÉBEC?

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>MEN (NO HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA) (Thousands)</b>	<b>BREAKDOWN (%)</b>	<b>WOMEN (NO HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA) (Thousands)</b>	<b>BREAKDOWN (%)</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>8.4</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>14.9</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>65.6</b>	<b>29.2</b>	<b>73.2</b>	<b>52.1</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.7</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>32.6</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>6.3</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>1.7</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>4.4</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>23.1</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.3</b>

Source: Special compilation, Institut de la statistique du Québec.

In the labour force that has a high school diploma, shown in Table 12, women are still disadvantaged, but their proportion and the gap separating them from men are less significant. In 1997, 67.4% of the women with this level of education held poor jobs, in contrast to only 48.4% of the men. Has the situation improved by 2007? No, as 69.4% of women with this level of education still had such jobs, as opposed to 51.4% of the men. The gap between women and men remained roughly stable, but while the total number of women and men with high school diplomas rose, the increase affected women and men in proportion to their representation in the group.

Conversely, in 1997, 19.2% of the women with this level of education held good jobs, as did 19.3% of the men. In 2007, 17.1% of the women and 19.3% of the men held such jobs. From being virtually non-existent, the gap grew to 2.2 percentage points, to women's disadvantage, at the same time as the total number of high school graduates increased.



**TABLE 12**  
**Breakdown of Wage-earners with High School Diplomas,**  
**by Job Quality Index and Sex, Québec, 1997–2007**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>MEN</b> (High School Diploma) (thousands)	<b>BREAKDOWN</b> (%)	<b>WOMEN</b> (High School Diploma) (thousands)	<b>BREAKDOWN</b> (%)
<b>TOTAL 1997</b>	<b>218.7</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>211.4</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>9.8</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>14.4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>41.1</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>67.4</b>	<b>31.9</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>18.5</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>25.9</b>	<b>12.2</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>5.3</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>40.8</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>11.3</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>4.0</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>1.6</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4.7</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>3</b>

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>MEN</b> (High School Diploma) (thousands)	<b>BREAKDOWN</b> (%)	<b>WOMEN</b> (High School Diploma) (thousands)	<b>BREAKDOWN</b> (%)
<b>TOTAL 2007</b>	<b>227.4</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>244.2</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>16.9</b>	<b>6.9</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>31.8</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>47.3</b>	<b>20.8</b>	<b>83.8</b>	<b>34.3</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>8.5</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>4.7</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>3.9</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>43.2</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>15.2</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>4.0</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>2.0</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>3.6</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>29.1</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>4.0</b>

Source: Special compilation, Institut de la statistique du Québec.

In the labour force that has a university degree, shown in Table 13, women are still at a disadvantage, and the proportion of them in poor jobs is double that of men. In 1997, 25.9% of these women were employed in poor jobs, in contrast to only 14.2% of the men. Has the situation improved by 2007? Slightly, as 22% of the women with this level of education still had such jobs, as opposed to 16% of the men. The gap between women and men narrowed. The total number of women and men with university degrees rose, but the number of women increased more than the number of men.

Conversely, in 1997, 44.2% of women with this level of education held good jobs, as did 43.4% of the men. In 2007, 47.5% of the women and 45.2% of the men held such jobs. The gap was favourable to women, while the total number of university graduates rose.

**TABLE 13**  
**Breakdown of Wage-earners with University Degrees,**  
**by Job Quality Index and Sex, Québec, 1997-2007**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>MEN</b> (University Degree) (thousands)	<b>BREAKDOWN</b> (%)	<b>WOMEN</b> (University Degree) (thousands)	<b>BREAKDOWN</b> (%)
<b>TOTAL 1997</b>	222.5	100	220.2	100
<b>1</b>	5.7	2.5	17.7	8
<b>2</b>	10.3	4.6	18.5	8.4
<b>3</b>				
<b>4</b>	8.4	3.8	11.9	5.4
<b>5</b>	10.7	4.8	22.3	10.1
<b>6</b>	17.8	8.0	23.8	10.8
<b>7</b>	68.1	30.6	51.4	23.3
<b>8</b>	7.3	3.3	9	4.1
<b>9</b>	5.9	2.6	8.9	4
<b>10</b>	13.9	6.2	20	9.1
<b>11</b>	13.7	6.2	7	3.2
<b>12</b>	60.8	27.3	29.7	13.5

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<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>MEN</b> (University Degree) (thousands)	<b>BREAKDOWN</b> (%)	<b>WOMEN</b> (University Degree) (thousands)	<b>BREAKDOWN</b> (%)
<b>TOTAL 2007</b>	<b>301.4</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>336.8</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3.3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>7.7</b>
<b>3</b>				
<b>4</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>21.4</b>	<b>6.3</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>21.7</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>37.4</b>	<b>11.1</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>21.4</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>36.3</b>	<b>10.8</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>93.1</b>	<b>30.9</b>	<b>86.1</b>	<b>25.6</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>4.7</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>3.4</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>35.3</b>	<b>10.5</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>76.0</b>	<b>25.2</b>	<b>46.5</b>	<b>13.8</b>

Source: Special compilation, Institut de la statistique du Québec.

To sum up, the ISQ's job quality index shows a gap, to the disadvantage of women, in the proportions of men and women in good jobs, although the gap narrowed between 1997 and 2007. When men's and women's groups are broken down by level of education (highest diploma/degree earned), it can be seen that the gap chiefly affects the least-educated women. In the labour force that has no high school diploma; women are at a distinct disadvantage. The gap between women and men has remained roughly stable, and the only consolation is to be found in the fact that the total number of men and women with this level of education has declined, although the group remains large. In the labour force that has a high school diploma, women are still disadvantaged, but their proportion and the gap separating them from men have fallen. Lastly, in the labour force that has a university degree, the gap between women and men is narrowing. While the total number of men and women in the group is rising, the number of women is increasing more than the number of men.

## 4. WHY IS THIS INEQUITY A PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE?

### 4.1. The Vicious Circle of Poverty

The situation of women with little education is of particular concern, because their chances of getting ahead are minimal. It is hard for adults in low-paying jobs to move up the employment ladder. One U.S. study has shown that over a six year period beginning in the early 1990s that saw very strong economic growth, only 27% of these adults managed to increase their earnings and exceed, on a sustainable basis, the poverty line defined for a family of four (Hölzer, 2004). Another more recent U.S. research project, using data from the Panel Study on Income Dynamics, reached a similar conclusion. Investigating low-wage workers over the period 1995–2001, the researchers discovered that 6% of those who were employed full time and 18% of those employed part time, regardless of what year was taken as the reference period, found themselves out of work the following year. Of those who did manage to remain employed, 40% had to get by on the same or lower wages (Theodos & Bednarzik, 2006). Over a third of low-wage employees work in the retail, food and beverage, or hotel industries, where there are few employment or training programs (Osterman, 2008), although one interesting experiment has been documented (San Francisco Multiemployer Group and Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees [HERE], Local 2; see Lynch, 2004, p. 301).

Women's relative position in terms of pay has generally been improving, when all educational levels are considered together. According to an analysis that aggregated three sources of U.S. national data, at least half of the improvement in women's relative position is due to the improvement in their educational level and qualifications and to their accumulated work experience (O'Neill & Polachek, 1993). The remainder of the advancement, say the authors, is attributable firstly to the marginal returns on schooling and work experience (in other words, the benefits in terms of pay for each level of education completed — the “sheepskin effect” — or accumulated work experience), which, while positive for both sexes, is greater for women, and secondly to the decline in manufacturing jobs among men. Returns on accumulated work experience have been improving because as women are staying longer in the labour market, they and their employers have been investing more in on-the-job training, and employers have been less reluctant to reflect these investments by increasing women's wages accordingly. These explanations amount to very good news for women who have access to training, but are of little comfort to women who do not.

#### **4.2. On the Job Training is not well Developed in Women's Occupations Requiring Little Education**

Women who hold jobs, requiring few skills, but would like to improve their situation through on-the-job training face a further obstacle. According to a U.S. survey of managers (Black & Lynch, 2001), in 53% of non-manufacturing companies and 46% of manufacturing firms, the skills required for relatively unspecialized production work or for front-line service work expanded in the 1990s as a result of increased computerization and reduced supervision, giving employees greater responsibility for problem solving and decision making. While these jobs are still among those requiring the least qualifications, the level they do require has risen somewhat. Yet 38% of job candidates do not have sufficient command of basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills, and 31% of employers say they cannot find enough workers with the necessary qualifications for low-skilled jobs (Lynch, 2004, p. 294). A quarter of all workers also say they are not sufficiently prepared (Leuven & Oosterbeek, 1999).

Given this situation, on-the-job training could be an attractive option, since it would give workers access to better-paid jobs through internal mobility. Surveys show that on-the-job training opportunities increase with the level of qualification already attained (qualified workers stand a better chance of being offered further training), with unionization and with the size of the organization (16% of small businesses offer training, compared with 80% of large companies) (Lynch, 2004, pp. 294–5). An employer's interest in such training declines as a worker's mobility in the job market increases, since the employer runs the risk of losing its investment. But the least-qualified and poorest-paid employees are the most mobile, and what is more, any training they get may add to their mobility (Lynch, 2004, p. 295). The jobs held by the least-qualified women are the ones in which employers invest the least in on-the-job training: sales clerk, cashier, server, receptionist, office clerk, hairstylist, industrial sewing machine operator, visiting homemaker, teacher's assistant and school aide, babysitter, aesthetician, etc. As a result, women have limited recognition for on the job training (Consultation Group on Employment Equity for Women 1995).

#### **4.3. Unionization is not as Helpful as Usually Known to Be**

It's currently read and heard that unionization is a powerful factor in reducing the gender pay gap and, thus, in enhancing pay equity:



The (average hourly) wages of unionised workers in Canada continue to be greater than those of non-unionised workers (\$19.86 per hour versus \$16.58 in 2000) and full-time unionised women workers' earnings are 90% of those of their male equivalents (Akyeampong, 2001, p. 48). That said, we acknowledge the ongoing concern that unionization might actually impede equity because of the sanctity of 'seniority principles' and other traditions that basically favour men (White, 1993) [...] The women who do best under the legislation are more likely to be unionized and in occupations with formal accreditations. Women who are not unionized or who work in small, private sector businesses do less well. (England & Gad, 2002, p. 291-2)

That being said, the importance of seniority principles is not the only factor hindering the pay equity bargaining process in a unionized environment. Overall the labor market, but for the least educated in particular, practices of job discrimination are often intertwined with those of pay discrimination. Pay equity bargaining follows the same pattern, because blue and white collar workers are usually in separate bargaining units, and blue collar unions do not want to be used as a comparator for clerical jobs. They feel this would violate the "fair comparison" principle. Interestingly, under Québec's new legislation, pay equity is done for the entire organization... unless a union makes a request that it be able to do a separate pay equity plan for the jobs it represents! There's an ongoing resistance from male unions to be used as comparators for female jobs (Forrest, 2007; Haiven, 2007), that can be easily understood – though not excused – as soon as you know how wages are influenced by the gender of the workforce (crowding effect, Sorensen, 1990).

#### **4.4. Employment Equity Programs are Not Very Successful in These Sectors**

While some employment equity programs have led to significant progress in achieving a mixed-gender workforce in certain occupations, the Québec government's incentive based approach has produced feeble results in terms of desegregation (Agocs, 2002, Chicha, 2001, England & Gad, 2002) moreover among those with the least education. Analysts have come to the same conclusion regarding U.S. programs of the same type (Leonard, 1989, 1990).

The two most recent assessments of Québec programs date from 1998 (Chicha, 2001; CDPDJQ, 1998), but we will have to make do with them, as the information supplied by companies under this program is not accessible to researchers. Moreover, as inadequate as may be such an outdated assessment, it's just a quantitative assessment of the percentage of representation (and wages, when pay equity is part of the operation) of target groups; yet, we would need to know about employment systems to assess the progressive eradication of systemic discrimination:

obstacles in recruitment, selection, promotion; culture, relations among colleagues, power relations, decision making, etc. Though these are important underlying causes and factors of the quantitative results (representation, wages), they are understood but rarely assessed (Agocs, 2002, p. 289).

Between December 1989 and today, 295 companies have been required to participate in the contractual obligation program (CDPDJQ, 2008), under which they must implement an equal access program before they may receive a contract or grant worth \$100,000 or more from the Government of Québec.

Few companies have fulfilled their obligations and completed development of the program, but 60 are in the implementation phase. This means they haven't finished carrying out their program and so haven't obtained any results. Only 14 companies have been sanctioned (preventing them from bidding for a contract or applying for a grant from the government until they have fulfilled the terms of their undertaking) and have therefore suffered the consequences (CDPDJQ, 2008, pp. 81-82). Same poor results, pointing towards lack of political will, poor funding, enforcement and surveillance, insufficient stringency in application, lack of sanctions have been observed at the Canadian level programs (Agocs, 2002).

The number of women employed in the organizations subject to the contractual obligation rose 3.4% between 1989 and 1996, while total employment in them declined 4.9%. But women made progress in particular in professional and technical positions and, though to a lesser degree, in managerial and supervisory positions. Blue-collar jobs represent the last frontier; in 1998, the CDPDJQ estimated that the number of women employed in these occupations would have to rise by 13% in order to meet the objectives of the programs set up under the contractual obligations. The fact that men from cultural communities are making inroads in blue-collar employment indicates that the real problem here is women's access to predominantly male occupations, especially in the private sector.

On the Canadian federal level, the Employment Equity Act (EEA) applied to 1,121,770 public- and private-sector workers that came under federal jurisdiction and to 636 employers (with 100 or more employees) in 2008 (HRSDC, 2009). According to the annual reports on the application of the EEA, women's representation in the private sector went from 40.9% of the total workforce in 1987 to 42.7% in 2008 (HRSDC, 2009). This very small increase did not even meet the low EEA standard, as women's availability for the jobs offered in these companies was 48.1% of the labour force. Women are the group making the most progress but still, their representation sits under their availability (Agocs, 2002).

In 2005, the highest proportions of women were still found in administrative and senior clerical personnel (75.5%), clerical personnel (66%), and intermediate sales and service personnel (64.3%). Women remain underrepresented in senior management (21.9%) and among semi professionals and technicians (19.4%) (HRSDC, 2009, Table 1.3).

Among manual workers in low-wage occupations requiring few qualifications (not requiring a recognized, exclusive skill — last column of Table 14), women's representation has been going up and down. Among semi skilled manual workers, women's representation has increased, while among skilled crafts and trades workers it has risen only slightly, remaining extremely low. This latter occupational group is very significant in assessing the progress women are making in blue collar employment, as recognized certification is required to practice these trades and ensures exclusivity. What is more, these occupations are the best-paid in relation to the level of education required and are the most often unionized.

In the workforce to whom the EEA applies, the improvement in women's representation in blue-collar jobs has been small and unsteady among skilled crafts and trades workers and among other unskilled manual workers.

**TABLE 14**  
**Percentage of **WOMEN** in Three Major Blue Collar Occupational Groups**  
**in the Federally Regulated Private Sector**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>SKILLED CRAFTS AND TRADE WORKERS</b>	<b>SEMI SKILLED MANUAL WORKERS</b>	<b>OTHER MANUAL WORKERS</b>
1987	1.4	4.4	8.3
1992	2.6	6.0	11.7
1993	2.9	4.5	11.4
1994	2.9	6.9	8.5
1995	3.1	7.4	8.7
1996	3.2	5.7	10.2
1997	4.6	6.8	10.4
1998	2.4	6.7	16.3
1999	2.6	11.8	13.6
2000	2.8	6.7	10.4
2001	3.0	11.4	8.9
2002	3.3	11.4	7.3
2003	3.7	10.9	4.7
2004	3.0	11.6	10.7
2005	3.3	11.8	11.2
2006	3.4	11.9	11.7
<b>2007</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>10.3</b>

Source: HRDC, 1988-2002; HRSDC, 2003-2008.

In short, in purely quantitative terms, progress has been rather slim in the blue-collar occupational groups.

Equity programs, in place in Canada for the past 25 years, have failed time and again in blue collar sectors, although they are working well in white- and pink-collar sectors. There are many factors to such a situation. Since the mid-nineties, Canada, and its provincial governments as well, are retreating from policy response to systemic discrimination, under both the influence of the neo-conservative ascendant and an important American backlash movement against affirmative action and their “reverse discrimination” effect; this last movement is embodied in three major court decisions ruling out affirmative action in education: California Civil Rights Initiative (Proposition 209), November 1996, followed by Washington State Civil Rights Initiative (Proposition 200), November 1998 et de Michigan Civil Rights Initiative (MCRI, Proposal 2, Michigan 06-2). We must also note that the compliance review process is inadequately resourced and insufficiently stringent; significant sanctions simply do not exist for employers who fail to implement their requirements. Those same requirements are set very low, given that employers just have to hire minorities as much as the market does; there are no sanctions for failing to remove job barriers identified in the employment systems review, or for hiring members of a designated group into a job ghetto. An employer who fails to implement the requirements can lose the opportunity to bid on future federal contracts as a sanction but... this is never applied. There is no surprise, as the Human Rights Commission is under-funded and does not have the needed budget for conducting audits (Agocs, 2002).

#### **4.5. Pay Equity Law Does No Better in These Sectors**

Moreover, pay equity legislation seems ineffective for women’s jobs requiring the least education, as we can here see after 15 years of implementation. Moreover, though quite effective in unionized sectors, it has remained ineffective in addressing wage disparities in many workplaces, particularly for non unionized women in small businesses and female job ghettos, who need it most (Beeman, 2004). Not the least problem is aiming at a gender-neutral, non sexist job evaluation process:

Prejudices regarding women’s work still abound: that it is non productive (not generating profits for firms), that it is based on qualities that are innate for women as opposed to developed through training, that it is not physically or mentally demanding, and that it carries few responsibilities (Beeman, 2004, p. 97).

At the core of these prejudices are the definitions of effort and working conditions; strong sexist bias lead to big scores at these dimensions in male jobs, based on received ideas.

One major source of potential gender bias is the use of different job evaluation systems for female and male job families (e.g., clerical, manual). As noted in Weiner and Gunderson (1990, pp. 38-43), there are numerous ways that gender bias can enter into job evaluation factors including:

- valuing a factor when it is found in male jobs but not in female jobs (e.g., giving credit to male meter readers for danger when they go into peoples' homes, but not giving credit to female public health nurses who go into peoples' homes; give credit to mechanics and garbage collectors for having to deal with dirt but not recognize the "dirt" in nursing work, such as pus, blood, and other bodily fluids).
- confusing job content with stereotypes of inherent female attributes (e.g., assuming all women are nurturing, therefore not valuing caring skills found in many traditional female jobs, such as ranking animal shelter attendant higher than childcare workers).
- ignoring aspects of work that are typically found in women's jobs (e.g., interruptions, multi tasking, caring, responsibility for confidential information).
- insufficient range of a compensable factor (e.g., not having enough levels to adequately differentiate between jobs that are truly different).

In addition to the *criteria* (referred to as factors or sub-factors), job evaluation systems also require accurate, complete, and up-to-date job information. Job evaluation criteria can be applied to job descriptions; however, women's jobs are often poorly described in comparison to men's jobs, and this has introduced gender bias into the process.

Other problems pertain to the mechanics of the process and, ultimately, to the political compromises government managed in adopting the legislation:

[Because of the prejudices in job evaluation, the participation of women] is crucial. Unfortunately, in the Québec Pay Equity Act, for businesses with less than 100 employees, verification of women's involvement is done through the information postings, which can scarcely be qualified as genuine participation. Further, non unionized women workers can find participation on a pay equity committee very challenging given their lack of expertise in a highly technical field and the power relations that can exist within the committee.

In Québec, a full one quarter of the female workforce is employed in businesses with less than ten employees (who are not subject to the law). Another 22 percent are in businesses with 10 to 40 workers which are required to produce results in pay equity but are not imposed any regulations on how this is to be achieved (Bienvenu, 1999) Furthermore, the act does not require employers to send the results of their process to the Pay Equity Commission, so there is no official oversight of the results or gathering of information on who has undertaken the process and what it has changed for women. [...](Beeman, 2004, p. 97)

Where no male counterparts can be found, women are not offered better than a fictional comparison with non-existing jobs:

2. The pay equity committee, or the employer in the absence of a pay equity committee, must determine the hourly rate of remuneration that would be paid for each job class identified under section 1 on the basis of the job descriptions set out in Schedules I [foreman] and II [maintenance worker] if there were such job classes in the enterprise. To that end, the pay equity committee, or the employer in the absence of a pay equity committee, must consider the following factors: the sector of activity, the size of the enterprise, and the region in which the enterprise operates. (*Regulation respecting pay equity in enterprises where there are no predominantly male job classes*, c. E-12.001, r.2, *Pay Equity Act*, (RSQ, c. E-12.001).

Not that we do not know better ways to proceed; for instance, the pay equity process can hardly redress inequities in organizations that are totally staffed with female jobs, e.g., primary schools, childcare centres, social service organizations, but also in the garment industry, retail stores, big offices, personal service, private home care and health organizations. Obviously, the women employed in such female-dominated organizations are underpaid since similar jobs in organizations that employ men and women (e.g., municipalities) tend to find that the female jobs are underpaid. For that reason, proxy comparison allows predominantly female organizations to compare with a public sector organization that employs similar female jobs (and male comparators) such as a municipality or hospital. This radical approach overcame in Ontario the lack of pay equity coverage for female jobs in sectors of the economy most likely to require it. Still, proxy comparison was limited to the public sector only because it was felt to be too intrusive to require private sector organizations to share wage information with their competitors (Weiner, 2002). It has not been considered in Québec's pay equity act. In the light of the above findings, such a political compromise should be reconsidered.

Though it may be surprising, there is still pay inequality, although the disappearing of the slogan “Equal pay for equal work” may suggest that the only remaining problem is pay inequity:

Another major flaw in the legislation is that it does not address the problem of pay inequality that is unequal pay between men and women occupying the same job (with the same qualifications and seniority). (Beeman, 2004, p. 98)

For the least educated manufacturing workers, practices of job discrimination are often intertwined with those of pay discrimination, whereas most of the pay equity evaluation literature focuses on the effect of firm’s size and unionized status on pay equity, rather than studying the effect of job segregation and workers’ skills.

There is a persistent gender segregation in job titles that is used to justify higher wages for men, whereas in practice there is little difference between jobs. In these environments, women comprise the majority of workers in low level jobs, not because they want, but because they are not being offered career choices and professional training – whereas men are (Beeman, 2004, p. 99). However at the bottom of the scale, these women are the least informed about their rights:

More than half the [non unionized] women we met earned minimum wage or just slightly more[...] Wage increases were rare and for the workers who did receive them, ranged from five cents to 25 cents an hour. None of the workers were eligible for benefits such as health benefits or pensions associated with their jobs. According to the women interviewed, the situation regarding their wages is made nebulous by the fact that wage systems are not codified or transparent. The majority of the women workers had witnessed arbitrary treatment and unjustifiable differences in wages between men and women in their workplaces [...] Furthermore, many of their employers had explicitly prohibited their employees from discussing their wages with each other. (Beeman, 2004, p. 98)

And, last but not least, the Québec Pay equity commission does not verify employers to ensure that pay equity processes are carried out according to the spirit as well as the letter of the law and does not require employers whose processes are deemed inadequate to redo them according to strict criteria (Beeman, 2004, p. 103).



## 5. WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

How does this issue relate to responsible employment practices? Leck and Sanders (1996) found that the presence of formalized equity programs, those characterized by goals, timetables, plans, audits and a responsible was related to increases in the representation of minorities in both management and non-management jobs; same in universities (Stewart and Drakich, 1995). More, where employment equity programs are formalized, wage gaps between the target groups and the main group are lowering (Agocs, 2002). Another success factor is the implementation of actions designed to remove discriminatory barriers and systemic obstacles, among others an anti-harassment policy (Agocs, 2002), very important in male-dominated blue collar environments. Such a level of requirements means nothing without surveillance, which in return requires funding. There's a cruel lack of funding in the Canadian employment equity policy.

For women with a high school diploma or less, blue collar jobs, far better paid than what they are accustomed to, represent an attractive option, but one that is hard for them to gain access to. That is why employment equity policies are a major issue.

According to one recent publication (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2003, pp. 103–4), these policies are even *the* major contemporary employment issue for women in Europe and North America. Internationally, women have been making significant progress in education and employment, and as a result great strides in the professions and in managerial and white-collar occupations. But few countries have really solved the problem of poorly educated women gaining access to decent jobs. For men with the same level of schooling, the situation is very different; jobs in the skilled crafts and trades and in semiskilled manual work are much better paid than the predominantly female jobs held by women with the same education.

Employment equity has been cruelly dropped in the last decades in Canada, Québec and North America both by the authorities and women's movement, in favour of balancing life and family and pay equity. Nevertheless, it has allowed interesting progress for the most qualified and educated women. Why not for the least educated?

Though employment equity is strategic, pay equity is also important to enhance less educated women's income. Some remedies to the above mentioned problems would allow meaningful progress in this direction and they are utterly and urgently needed.



## CONCLUSION

Despite widespread popular belief, the labour market is still deeply segregated by gender, and the material consequences of this segregation are much more serious in occupations that require less education, where women pay dearly for the sexual division of labour. In contrast to occupations requiring higher qualifications, there is a very significant pay gap in favour of men in those requiring few qualifications, where many jobs are either predominantly male or predominantly female. This pay gap to the disadvantage of women is a very broad phenomenon in occupations requiring a high school diploma or less. It has been narrowing only very slightly, whereas the equivalent gaps between men and women in jobs requiring a higher level of education have been shrinking considerably. This situation affects close to 500,000 of the 1.8 million women in the Québec labour force, in other words, between a quarter and a third. The question of equitable access to work is all too often regarded as a problem that has already been solved, but that is far from being the case. Moreover, the market rarely works in ways that help poor workers to improve their lot; and employers rarely invest in on-the-job training in the occupational groups in which poorly educated women are concentrated, although the situation is very different for men with the same educational level.

Won't there be a heavy price to pay for losing interest in this issue now, when the most-educated and most-qualified women have made great gains, often thanks to these same affirmative action measures?

It looks as though we have given up too early on employment equity programs, because in the least-skilled jobs, pay inequity is still deeply rooted in employment segregation.



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