

[Pay Equity, and the New Glass Ceiling](#)

CLC Report

Tomorrow is [International Women's Day](#), and in commemoration the Canadian Labour Congress released a [report](#) on gender equity in the workforce with some surprising findings,

Strikingly, the pay gap has grown rather than narrowed even as women have become more highly educated than men, and even as most women have decided to have fewer children, later in life. Fully half of women aged 25 to 44 now have a post secondary qualification, compared to 40% of men, and the education gap is even bigger among young people. Women are participating in the paid labour force at higher levels than ever before, and very few women now drop out of paid work for very extended periods of time. But, the pay gap persists and grows.

Some Key Reasons

[Andrew Jackson comments](#) on the report on The Progressive Economics Forum,

...I see the key reasons as follows:

- Men still hugely predominate in the very best-paid, mainly private sector jobs - where wage growth has been highly concentrated. Likely one factor excluding women here has been the pressure to very long work hours, which works against women who take even short leaves from work or want to work more social hours.
- The entry of a much higher proportion of women into professional jobs is very tightly bound up with the growth of the public sector. Meanwhile, precarious, low paid private services work remains heavily gendered.
- [It's hardly] a new finding, but the failure to develop affordable child care and other caring services in Canada combined with few 'family friendly' workplace practices militates strongly against the equality of women in the work force. Canada is one of the worst countries in the OECD in terms of the pay gap.

And in Law?

Many of these factors are highly characteristic of law practice as well. Although the majority of students in law schools these days continue to be women, the older generation of lawyers is still overwhelmingly male.

Compensation, however, tends to be rather structured, and pay inequity in law usually comes in the form of lack of promotion.

The long hours in private firms often drive women into the public sector or other jobs where the pay is not comparable to their male counterparts. And quite often lifestyle choices in general make them [opt out](#) to spend more time elsewhere.

There has been progress in the legal industry in Canada, and there are much more female partners than in the past. But as a result, some other interesting effects have been observed.

A New Glass Ceiling

At the [Black Law Students Association of Canada \(BLSAC\) conference](#) in Vancouver, B.C. this past month, a new phenomenon has resulted from having more female lawyers.

The increase in women, who are still primarily white, has created a new tight clique within law and other industries. Joined together by similar cultural interests and socio-economic backgrounds, they can frequently inadvertently exclude minority women of colour, who often experience feelings of isolation as a result.

And although the old glass ceiling of the “old boys club” still exists, a new one has been inserted immediately under it, an “old girls club” of sorts.

But there is yet another demographic group that is affected by this effect - minority males. This effect goes back to [colonial times](#), where minority women could be exploited for sexual purposes, but the minority male was always deemed a threat and held in an even lower position than the minority female in social stratifications.

But [change is in the air](#), and anything is possible for the future.

So as everyone works together on this International Women’s Day to promote a more flexible and accommodating workplace for women who would choose to balance family and other needs, let us also not forget others who still face adversity and barriers in the workplace.