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—
Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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•(1220)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): Welcome, Madame Michaud and Mr. Bowlby, from Statistics Canada. Thank you for coming on such very short notice. We're sorry to have kept you waiting; it was unfortunate, but we just went a little bit long on our committee business.

What we will do is have a 10-minute presentation, and then we will open it up to questions from the members so we can get to the root of your statistics.

I just want to say that we congratulate Statistics Canada for being the most credible statistics-gathering organization in the world. Thank you very much for coming.

Begin.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Michaud (Director General, Labour and Household Surveys Branch, Statistics Canada): We would like to thank the committee for inviting us to appear before you today. As was mentioned, we had very little time to prepare. If you have some specific questions we cannot answer, we would be pleased to send you additional information after the meeting.

My colleague Geoff Bowlby will give you a general idea about recent trends in employment and unemployment data.

The presentation will be in English, but we will be happy to answer questions in either language.

[English]

Mr. Geoff Bowlby (Director, Labour Statistics Division, Statistics Canada): Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here in front of you today. I hope I can provide you with a very interesting overview of the labour market situation for women in Canada.

I will start off with the unemployment rate. We know, of course, the statistics that most of us are comfortable with. We hear about them quite a bit.

You can see, on the first graph in the presentation, the trend in unemployment going way back to 1976 for both men and women. The red line is the unemployment rate for women. You can see that for most of the last 20 years or so unemployment rates among women have been lower than they have been among men. It used to be, back in the 1970s and 1980s, that the unemployment rate was higher for women than for men, but during the 1990s recession, that switched. We now have an unemployment rate among women of 6.2%. That's the number for January 2009. The rate for men is 8%.

I'm going to talk a little later in the presentation about the current economic context we're in and the fact that unemployment is rising. I'll give you a flavour of that right now.

Over the last three months, we've seen an increase in unemployment. The increase in unemployment among women has been five-tenths of a percentage point. The unemployment rate has gone up from 5.7% in October 2008, just before the current economic problems began, to 6.2% now. It's gone from 6.8% to 8.0% for men. So there has been a bigger increase in the unemployment rate among men recently. We'll get into that a little later in more detail.

The next slide shows the employment rate. This is the share of the population that is employed. They have jobs or are self-employed. You can see that this, again, is the long-term trend. It goes way back to 1976. You can see the upward trend among women in their employment rates and a narrowing of the gap between men and women in their employment rates. Still, the employment rate for women is lower than it is for men. It's at 58.7% compared to 66.6% for men. Those are the latest numbers for January 2009.

The next slide shows how we're doing in an international context. The employment rate progression among women over time has left us now with one of the highest employment rates for women among all OECD countries. You can see, in fact, that only some Scandinavian countries—Norway, Denmark, and Sweden—and Switzerland have higher rates of employment for women than Canada does. You can see that the OECD average is well down the list and that there are many countries where employment rates among women are very low. In particular, as you can see on this graph, in Italy and Mexico employment rates among women are at their lowest.

You may notice that the numbers on this chart differ slightly from the previous chart. It's because the chart I showed you—the one that shows the employment rate over time—is for all women aged 15 and older. The OECD publishes this data for women aged 15 to 64. That's the reason there's a difference in the numbers.

You wanted to know a little bit about the patterns of employment among women as they compare to men. The next graph gives you a little overview of the situation we had in 2008.

Women are more likely to be working part-time. In fact, they are much more likely to be working part-time. We see that 26% of their employment is part-time as opposed to 11% of employment among men. Women, when they are working part-time, are more likely to be doing it for non-economic reasons—voluntary reasons, as it's labelled in the statistics—and 78.4% of female part-timers are working part-time for voluntary reasons as opposed to 75.4% of men.

Women are more likely to be working in temporary jobs, with 12.7% of female employees in temporary jobs as opposed to permanent positions. That compares to 11% for men.

• (1225)

Women are more likely to be working in sales, service, health care, finance, and administration. That probably doesn't surprise anybody. They're less likely to be working in trades, in management positions, or natural resource occupations like farming. Those tend to be rather sticky over time—women have made some moves into what you might term male-dominated occupations, at least traditionally, but there isn't a great progression into those areas. The flip side is true as well, where there are more men who are working in occupations like nursing, for example, which is predominantly a women's occupation, but that progression isn't significant enough to make a big shift in the distribution of occupations over time.

Women are less likely to be self-employed. Eleven percent of women who are employed are self-employed, versus 19% of men. For both men and women, the biggest category of the self-employed is the unincorporated self-employed who have no employees. So you have a business of your own and you are self-employed, but it's not registered, it's not incorporated like that, and you don't have employees. That's the biggest category for both men and women. When you look at the share of the self-employed, women represent a much greater share of the self-employed who are in that category. Among men, there's a bigger share who are in more formal business arrangements, incorporated and with employees. This has an impact on their earnings, and we can talk about that in a slide later.

Of course, there's much more I can say about the nature of employment among men and women, and maybe this will come out in the questions.

The next graph shows us the occupations men and women work in. This is some data to show you what I just mentioned, actually, so maybe we can skip over that given the tight timeline we're under. You can see in this graph that, as I said earlier, women are more likely to be working in sales and service occupations, health care, and those sorts of occupational groupings.

The next slide talks about earnings. These are census data from 2006, and these are estimates of earnings for people who are working all year long and full-time. Women make about 77% of what men make, according to the census. That means about \$35,000, almost \$36,000 per year, as opposed to men, who make almost \$47,000 per year on average. What we see in this graph is the ratio of female earnings to male earnings, and you can see it's about 77% with all occupations, as I said.

The rest of these occupations are the top 10, the biggest occupations we've got in the country. The largest occupation in the country for both sexes is truck driver, for example, and that falls under the category of motor vehicle and transit drivers. So we've got the top 10 right here, and you can get an idea of the earnings ratios between men and women. It's not the same for every occupation. That's the point of this graph. It differs from one occupation to the next.

You wanted to know something about social assistance application among men and women. Unfortunately, because of the time, we weren't able to pull a lot of that information. It's rather deep in our databases. We can say more than what's presented here, but this is what we can present today.

This shows the number of families where there's at least one individual receiving social assistance, by the family type or the household type. You can see, for example, that there are about 300,000 lone-parent families where there's some social assistance received in that household. Not all these lone-parent families are headed by women, but we know most of them are, right? The overwhelming majority of them are. So you can get a sense of social assistance receipt among women as it compares to men by looking at this graph, but it's not complete; I recognize that.

In the next one, the blue line shows the number of couples—that's the middle line—where there's some social assistance receipt. That's about 350,000. There's at least one woman there, right? I'm trying to give you a flavour for social assistance receipt among women. If required, if you want, we can provide you with more information than what's here.

• (1230)

Let's move on to employment insurance, because I understand that's the nature of your study.

These are data here for 2008. The latest December numbers were published a week ago by us at Statistics Canada. You can see on this graph that it shows the share of all EI recipients who are women and how that differs across the provinces.

In 2008, on average for the country, women made up 39.6% of all EI beneficiaries. I mean regular EI, by the way, not including parental maternity leave, special benefits. That means that in 2008 there were 192,000 women on average per month who were on employment insurance. There were 293,000 men.

These are important numbers. So 39.6% of EI recipients are women, but 43.4% of all unemployed are women. So there's a smaller share of EI recipients who are women than there are total unemployed people in the country who are women. There's a difference between employment insurance and the count that we have of unemployed people. In fact, the total number of unemployed is much greater than the number of people who are on EI.

What are some of the reasons for this?

We run a survey called the employment insurance coverage survey. The next graph shows some data from that survey. This looks at men versus women and what share of the unemployed are potentially eligible for EI. There are reasons that you're not going to be eligible for EI if you're unemployed. If you've never worked, for example, or if you haven't worked in the last year or there are other reasons that you haven't contributed to the program, you're not going to be eligible. It shows that less than half of all women who are unemployed are potentially eligible for EI, according to that survey source. That's lower than it is among men. For men, I don't have the exact number, but it's somewhere around 57% of unemployed men are potentially eligible for EI.

Why is there a difference between the men and the women? Well, more unemployed women have no recent work experience, and that seems to be the number one reason that there are fewer who are potentially eligible. For example, a woman having spent some time at home taking care of the children or going to school may have been out of the labour market for a long period of time. That's more likely to happen among women than it is among men.

I'll flip to the next chart. I wanted to talk a bit about the current economic conditions. We all hear about the fact that employment is decreasing and unemployment is rising. This shows in the blue and the green the drop in employment among men and women in the last two recessions, and the yellow is what has happened to us in the last four months, among men and among women. So the yellow is incomplete. This is not the end of the recession; we're just at the start of something here. But you can see that in the past two recessions the impact on men in terms of the overall drop in employment and the percentage decline in employment was greater than that among women. It's because the men tend to work in more cyclical industries like manufacturing and construction.

•(1235)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I'll open it up to questions.

Ms. Neville, for seven minutes.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. I think we're only going to get one round, so I'm going to share my time with Ms. Zarac.

There are lots of questions here.

On page 10, when you're looking at the labour market situation and the EI statistics, have you done further digging down? You made one reference as to why women are less eligible. Can you provide some information? Is it eligibility criteria? Have you done any disaggregation of the figures by region to show the eligibility by region?

What are the real causes? Is it largely because they're part-time? We heard last week that a full-time and a part-time worker doing the same job has a very profound impact on their EI eligibility.

I'd like a little more digging down on this one, if you can, please.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: To answer your first question, we have not yet looked at it by region. It's possible. It would be difficult, given

the sample sizes, to provide you with reliable information, but since the survey was run across the country, it would be possible to look into it.

You also asked if we've done any more digging into the reasons women are less likely to be potentially eligible for EI. The number one fact is the one that I mentioned: they haven't worked in the past year, or haven't ever worked. That's the main barrier to potential eligibility. It means that women are not contributing.

So that's one statistic we have here, the number of women who are contributing to that program. As to why they're not contributing and therefore not potentially eligible, the number one reason is the fact that they haven't worked in the past year.

Hon. Anita Neville: Have you any figures that show the length of time women collect EI as opposed to the length of time men collect EI?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: I don't have that number. We can see about getting it. I'm not sure if we have that in our database.

I will check on that and get back to you.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do you have any information on EI exhaustees? For instance, how many who were on EI are still unemployed and are now probably in the social welfare system of their jurisdiction?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Again, no, I'm sorry; we may have that information, but I don't have it on hand.

Hon. Anita Neville: If you do have that information, could we have it? I don't want to give you a make-work project, but it would be helpful.

Go ahead, Lise.

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): I'm still on the same diagram, because it worries me that women are definitely...

•(1240)

[*Translation*]

I will say it in French. Women are definitely more penalized. I would like you to tell us why they are penalized more.

[*English*]

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: I do have one chart that shows a little bit more disaggregation. As I mentioned, one big thing is that women are less likely to have worked in the previous 12 months. Just comparing this quickly with what we see among men...

One thing of note is that a reason why you may not have received EI is that you haven't accumulated enough hours. You may have worked, but you haven't accumulated enough hours. There doesn't seem to be a big difference between men and women in that regard.

So it would seem from these statistics that if you have worked, you're no less likely to not qualify for EI if you're a woman. The big thing is that you just might not have worked at all last year. That's the big barrier to eligibility, from what these statistics show.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So you might have worked for a long time but not accumulated enough hours.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: That's possible. That can happen among women and that can happen among men. It's no more likely to happen among women than it is among men.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So there's no difference there?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: There's no difference there. The big difference is the fact that women are much more likely to have not had any work experience in the past period.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: None at all.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: None in the last year; you had to have worked in the last year to have contributed to EI.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: And what would be the reasons for that?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: There's a whole number of reasons why women might not have been in the labour force. Women, of course, are more likely than men to be at home taking care of the kids, for example. We know that women are enrolled in school at a higher rate now than men are. That could have another impact. I'm guessing, though, that it's child-rearing that has the bigger impact on that.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Are there any statistics on the number of women who have a family and who've probably just had a baby?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: We have statistics on the number of women who are not employed, not unemployed, who are at home with children. We collect that regularly every month.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do you have the figures on both men and women who have paid into EI but are not eligible—their money is there but they have no claim on it?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Michaud: Yes, we do have the figures. According to the 2007 survey, 721,000 individuals had contributed to employment insurance: 446,000 men and 275,000 women. The breakdown in the number of individuals receiving benefits is as follows: 269,000 men and 153,000 women. In other words, 66% of men who had contributed to the plan received benefits, while the figure for women was 56%.

As Geoff said, the main difference has to do with the number of people who contributed to the plan. The number of people who did not contribute is higher among women than among men.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Demers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for being here today, Mr. Bowlby and Ms. Michaud.

Usually you publish an excellent report on the status of women in Canada every five years. Can we look forward to getting such a report soon?

Ms. Michaud, when you appeared before the committee in the context of our study on the economic security of women, you were asked whether the statistics on unemployment could be collected differently, to take into account individuals receiving welfare, those that were not eligible because of their assets, and those who had stopped looking for employment.

What has been done about this?

• (1245)

Mrs. Sylvie Michaud: The report on the status of women is generally a cost-recovery project. At the moment, we are looking for partners so that we can produce this report again.

Ms. Nicole Demers: It is usually an excellent report.

Mrs. Sylvie Michaud: We tried to put up some key statistics on Statistics Canada's website on an ongoing basis, so that there would always be an update on four key indicators. I cannot make any guarantees about a fourth report.

There are different ways of producing statistics on unemployment rates. As regards the type of information you are requesting, we did not do a survey on financial security. We were unable to provide more details, because of the size of the sample used for the existing financial security survey.

Ms. Nicole Demers: That means that at the moment the unemployment figures do not reflect the people who are not receiving a cheque, people who have stopped looking for a job and people on welfare. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Do you mind if I respond in English?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: No, that is all right.

[English]

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: They're independent things. The Labour Force Survey is the official source of the unemployment statistics you hear about every month. We ask people whether or not they have jobs. If they don't have jobs, were they looking for work and were they available to take jobs? Regardless of whether you're on employment insurance or some sort of social assistance, if you fit those criteria you're unemployed. So it's measured independently.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I will now turn the floor over to Johanne, Madam Chair.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): The chart on page 2 shows fluctuations in the new unemployment rate. We know, for example, that there was an economic recession between 1982 and 1984. There are obviously reasons for the high unemployment rate. In recent years, we see that it has been in free fall.

Do these statistics take into account that as of 1995, the act was amended and became the Employment Insurance Act?

Does the fact that the calculations are now based on the number of hours worked rather than the number of weeks worked mean that women are less eligible for EI?

[English]

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: No.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Michaud: I do not think so.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: You did not collect the statistics any differently when the program was changed in 1995, and as a result the situation looks good, the unemployment rate is very low. On the other hand, this could also be explained by the fact that weeks are no longer used, but rather the number of hours worked in determining benefits.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: We know that there is an impact on employment insurance data. We can see that the statistics tend to change because of changes to the plan. However, the unemployment rates presented here are not connected to the employment insurance plan. This measurement of the unemployment rate does not take into account the number of people on EI. This chart does not show any impact.

• (1250)

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I would like to talk about the chart on welfare. I do not know where you got your figures for this chart, but I do not think it reflects what is really happening. It probably reflects the situation in Quebec.

What data did you use in establishing the statistics on the labour market versus social assistance or welfare?

Mrs. Sylvie Michaud: The statistics on welfare come from income tax data. It is a combination of data for individuals and families. We took the data we had, but in an ideal world, we would have used only the individual data. A family is made up of at least two people. A lone parent family includes at least one adult and one child. It is possible that the number of individuals may be greater in the case of a family where there is a couple. If we have time and if you are interested, we could see whether we could do another calculation using data for individuals. We did not have to do that for today's presentation.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Hoepfner.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you for coming. This is very interesting.

I'd like to go back to something you said a couple of moments ago. So if we take men and women who pay into the EI system and compare the outcomes, they are relatively equal. Is that what you're telling us, that women collect EI at the same rate as men? Can you explain that a little more regarding men and women who are paying into EI and collecting benefits?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: What I was referring to earlier was the number and share of unemployed women who did not accumulate enough hours to be eligible for EI. So there are some people who don't get EI because they don't have enough hours.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Right, but of the women who do have enough hours?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Yes. In 2007 there were 39,000 women in that situation. There were 59,000, almost 60,000 men in that same situation. There are more men who are unemployed, so if you look at that 39,000 as the share of all women who were unemployed, it's the same as the share for men. About 9% of unemployed women have worked but didn't accumulate enough hours to receive EI, and that's the same as the share of the unemployed men.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: My other question has to do with one of the approaches that are used. My understanding is that the Employment Insurance Commission uses several measures to monitor and report on access to EI. One of them is the BU ratio. Now, my concern, again from my understanding—and I would like to hear what you have to say on it—is that it's not necessarily completely accurate because it takes into account basically everybody, not necessarily those who have worked and who have paid in.

Can you explain a little more for us how that works and who uses that system? Is it accurate? For this committee, which really wants to study EI and the impact on women—and I really appreciate the information you've provided on a host of issues—I'd like to see us really focus on EI and get the accurate information regarding that program. In relation to the BU ratio, can you explain that a little further?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: The BU ratio is a common comparison of two data points. The B stands for beneficiaries and the U stands for unemployed. As I was explaining earlier, they're different things, so the number of people who are on EI is not the same as the count of people who are unemployed. There are perceptions otherwise, but they are different things. The unemployed count is bigger than that of the number of employment insurance beneficiaries, and it always has been. For various reasons, not all unemployed people qualify for EI. The BU ratio is sometimes used to evaluate the success of the EI program. It's not our business at Statistics Canada to be doing that or assessing that program.

The beneficiary-to-unemployed count is a simple measure. One of the reasons I understand that HRSDC contracts us to run the Employment Insurance Coverage Survey is that they want to know more than just what's in the BU ratio. So the numbers I was giving you about potential eligibility and the reasons eligibility differs from men to women come from that survey, and it's that survey that provides you with a more in-depth understanding of why people don't qualify.

So I would turn to that survey to get an understanding of why there are differences in EI receipt among men and women, and I would try to stay away from the simple BU ratios.

• (1255)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Right.

If my understanding is correct, the EI outputs are different for men and women because the inputs are different for men and women. So we have to decide, do we change the program or do we change the inputs? Am I correct?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Yes. If you want to understand the whys, they are in that Employment Insurance Coverage Survey, where you're going to get the answers.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Yes, that's right.

So it doesn't have to do with the program. The program, according to your measurements, is equal. It's the inputs; it's the number of hours, or even the fact that there are no hours. As you said, some women are voluntarily deciding not to work, deciding to maybe raise their children, and so they're not paying into EI. But they've made that decision, and so unless there's some way to change that and to force them to go to work and pay into EI, those outcomes won't change.

Would you say that's correct?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Well, it's not my business to comment on the program itself. I really can't.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Right. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have—

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: But I can tell you what the statistics show, which is that one of the main reasons women are less likely to be potentially eligible for EI is that they haven't paid into it.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Okay, great. Thank you very much for that.

Do I have any time left, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have a minute.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I'll give that to Ms. Tilly O'Neill.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): When we're comparing numbers from one year to another, or groups from one year to another, we can't always end up with a conclusion according to the numbers. What outside factors should a person consider when evaluating statistics in regards to women and unemployment? What are some issues that we can consider? You mentioned that it's about their child, that they want to stay home and look after children. Are there other ideas that would...? Is it just on their own voluntary basis that they would want to remain at home?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: We always say not to look at the unemployment statistic on its own. So if you looked at that first

graph alone, you would see that unemployment rates among women were lower than those among men. On the face of it, you might think, great, labour market conditions for women must be better than those for men. But on the whole, you need to take into account other statistics. You need to be looking at the employment rate and at the earnings, the outcomes, and the nature of employment among women. That was the goal of those first four or five slides.

So if you want to know what's a good way to portray the labour market situation for men and for women, some of those key statistics are in those first five or six graphs. Unfortunately, there's no magic statistic. People look at the unemployment rate as the key indicator of the labour market. Probably it is the key, but it's not the one and only key. You should look at other things.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for coming here and presenting this information.

I want to pick up on what you were just speaking about in regard to nature of employment and labour market conditions. I'd like to mine that a little more fully.

Quite frankly, I'm troubled by the statement that women make that decision in regard to employment, because some women do not make the decision. It's something external: there's no child care, they have no support system, or they're caregiving for elderly parents. Any number of things impacts their ability to go out and seek that job.

I think it's important that when we look at unemployment rates among women and the impact of not being able to access benefits because they don't have enough hours, we need to be much broader in regard to our approach and not just say that they made a choice, because I know from many women in my community that they aren't given a choice.

I wonder if you could expand on what you were saying about labour market conditions. I want to be really clear there.

• (1300)

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Female unemployment rates are lower than those of males. That's a key thing.

Participation in the labour market is another thing that we look at. As I was saying, unemployment on its own is not enough. You need to look at participation rates, and that's the share of the population, male or female, whatever it might be, that is active in the labour market. Your activity in the labour market reflects upon your unemployment rate, so if you're out there looking, you get counted as unemployed; if you decide not to look, you don't get counted as unemployed.

We have to make a distinction between who is unemployed and who's at home because of other reasons. You don't want to count all women who are not working as unemployed, because some are at home taking care of kids or elderly relatives or going to school. The same is true for men.

A voice: It's true.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: We have statistics, but nothing is conclusive. We don't, at least on the Labour Force Survey, have questions that would help us understand what barriers women and men face. There are some suggestive things, but we don't ask directly, "Why are you not working?" We don't ask, "Why did you not find a job?" Other surveys show that. Those that I'm familiar with, and the Labour Force Survey in particular, don't have that question.

But here's what we do know. What I said was that participation impacts your rate of unemployment. Women are much less likely to participate in the labour market than men, the main reason being that they're at home taking care of children. For some older women that's not necessarily the case, because that was the lifestyle at the time: the man went out to work and the woman stayed at home. So it's expressed in our surveys as sort of a personal preference. That's how that comes out.

I could expand. I don't have the statistics on me, but we can show you, for example, what the share of women is who are not unemployed and what they are doing. Are they at home? Are they going to school? You can get an idea from that what it is that's keeping them at home. Labour force participation rates among women who have children under the age of five are very, very low. Well, I shouldn't say that, because they're higher than they've ever been, but they're much lower than they are among men who have children of the same age.

That's the best I can do on that question right now, but we can look into it a little bit more.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I know that labour force participation is higher in Quebec, and of course they have a child care program in place, so that's an interesting kind of correlation.

On asking the questions in regard to personal preference, do you think that sort of precludes some of the real information if it's categorized as personal preference that I didn't go out to seek employment rather than sort of digging away at some of the perhaps more accurate or real reasons why I didn't do that search?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: We do have some information on reasons why women work part-time. One of the biggest categories is personal preference. I suppose it's possible with the Labour Force Survey to try to bead down and find out a little bit more about that. We just don't have the answers. We don't have the question on the questionnaire to provide you with some of the information you might

like in order to have it beaded down a little further, but it's a possibility. These questionnaires are not easy to change.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: No, I'm sure, and I know that creating a questionnaire is a real science in terms of mining it for data.

I wonder, is Statistics Canada planning to collect any data on women and EI during this recession so you could say that this was a very difficult economic period, this is what was learned from it, and if so, could you say what's planned?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: We don't have any plans like that. If a policy department asked us, we would collect that sort of information.

• (1305)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Okay.

If, for some reason, the government said that they need lots of data, more information, that would be one of the things that could quite conceivably help government do its planning and anticipate.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Yes, that's why we're here.

It wouldn't be our role to decide ourselves what those statistical priorities should be. We would hear from the policy departments, and they would ask us to do it.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Last week we had a witness who was trying to find information. He said that he had \$100 and he was able to get some, but to get what he really wanted, it would cost him about \$3,000. I'm wondering, in terms of these fees, is there any opportunity in terms of making information more readily available to the public so that we can get a better picture?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: We're always trying to put more into the public domain at a cheaper price. In fact we've made great efforts in the last little while to increase our access-free data to the public. All our PDF and HTML documents, for example, are all available free of charge. There are parts of the website where you have to pay and you have to download, and that's a uniquely Statistics Canada thing. Other statistical agencies don't have that, where some of the data are available for free.

There's a long history. Statistics Canada's funding was cut many years ago, and we were told at the time to make up for it by collecting user fees. Making all data available for free would mean a big cut in revenue to the agency, and that's why there's still some data not available. But as I said, we're doing our best within the limits that we've got to make more data available for free.

Every single publication that comes Statistics Canada is now available on the website free of charge.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: It's wonderful bedtime reading, yes.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Thank you very much, Mr. Bowlby and Ms. Michaud. It was very kind of you to wait, as I said earlier on. I think we heard that there was some request for further statistical data out of this. We will be sending you a note and trying to see if you could give us some of that.

Thank you again.

Can I have a motion to adjourn the meeting?

An hon. member: Yes, so moved.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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