

# CAUT Submission to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women

## Study on the Economic Security of Women in Canada

March 15, 2017

## Summary

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) is the national voice of academic staff, representing the interests of 70,000 professors, academic librarians, researchers, and general staff at over 100 universities and colleges across the country.

Post-secondary education (PSE) is increasingly an integral component of economic well-being. Women are now completing post-secondary education at higher rates than men. However, barriers to economic security exist for women at all levels of educational attainment. Our brief provides an overview of three of these barriers and the impacts on our members. Specifically, we highlight the increasing casualization of work, pay inequality, and gaps in professional advancement - the glass ceiling. We propose five specific federal actions that, if taken, will improve women's economic security and leadership, not only in academia, but across all of Canadian society.

We call on the federal government to:

1. Work with the provinces and territories to expand and increase protections for workers in precarious employment;
2. Enhance the social safety net for precarious workers, by improving the Employment Insurance Program and getting a national child care framework signed and funded;
3. Introduce immediately proactive pay equity legislation;
4. Improve the federal employment equity program, including the federal contractors program; and,
5. Restore federal funding levels to basic research to 2007 levels and ensure its equitable distribution.

## Introduction

Post-secondary education is increasingly a necessity for obtaining a good job in Canada. Women are still less likely than men to be employed, however the gaps are narrowest among women with higher levels of education.<sup>1</sup> The past decades have seen a surge of women in post-secondary education and in the workforce. Women now represent 57% of undergraduate students, and 44% of PhD graduates. The academic sector reflects these trends with an increase in the number of tenure-track and tenured female faculty. Whereas this is positive for PhD graduates entering academia, three barriers threaten their economic security – the casualization of the academic job market, persistent pay inequality, and limited professional advancement.

## Casualization

Over the past two decades, the hiring of poorly paid and precariously employed contract academic staff (CAS) has far outpaced those hired into stable, well-paid positions. A major factor behind the increase in precarious employment in the post-secondary education sector has been the reduction in cash transfers from the federal government to the provinces that began in the 1990s. Whereas government operating grants made up 80% of total university operating revenues in 1990, by 2014 that percentage has fallen to just less than 50%.

Current labour force survey estimates show that one out of every three university professors is on a temporary or part-time contract. As in the general labour market, women academic staff are over-represented among the ranks of precarious workers. We suspect this disparity is more pronounced for racialized women academic staff, women with disabilities and Aboriginal women,

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1. Ferrao, Vincent. *Paid Work. Women in Canada: A Statistical Report*. Statistics Canada, 2009.

although there is a paucity of employment and diversity data. A recent study into precariously employed academic workers at 12 Ontario universities suggests a typical ratio is two women for every man.<sup>2</sup>

More government funding for PSE may increase the complement of permanent faculty, but governments can also create incentives for employers to create more stable employment. The federal government can work with the provinces to improve labour codes and employment standards legislation. Governments can develop monitoring and enforcement regimes to discourage employers from using temporary or part-time work arrangements to undercut permanent full-time jobs, or from unduly exploiting precarious workers. The federal government could also use its significant procurement clout to require contractors accessing public money to demonstrate that they provide decent work.

The federal government can also improve the social safety net for precarious workers. Some CAS report challenges accessing federal support programs, such as Employment Insurance, even though they pay into them. The EI system should be improved to better reflect the rise of precarious employment. The 35-hour work week does not reflect the work week of CAS. CAUT members are negotiating with employers to record all hours worked by a CAS as insurable – not only teaching, but preparing, marking, meeting with students, research and service. Lower eligibility requirements across the country would help ensure that precariously employed workers can access benefits while seeking their next contract.

CAS, like other precarious and low income workers, are negatively affected by the lack of affordable early childhood education and care (ECEC). CAS with children often find themselves in an untenable situation. Unable to afford adequate child care they are forced to

give up on their career, in which they have invested years of their lives, in order to support their families. A study by the Council of Canadian Academies cites the lack of a national child care program as a significant barrier for women academic staff and finds that child care is one of women's biggest challenges in academia.<sup>3</sup>

Although many universities and colleges have ECEC spaces on campus, they are often not accessible, nor affordable for CAS. For example, the average cost for a space at a U15 (Canadian research universities) campus for one pre-school child ranges from \$431-\$925/month, with the exception of Quebec, where child care costs are much cheaper.<sup>4</sup> The average contract for a CAS ranges from \$1250-\$2000/month.<sup>5</sup>

CAUT joins many others representing working women to recommend that the federal government proceed without delay to build a system of affordable, high-quality, flexible and fully inclusive child care.

## Pay inequality

Reflecting the situation in the general labour market, the gender pay gap persists in the academy, even between men and women with the same level of education and those with the same jobs.

In the academy, full-time female faculty earn 11% less than the average salary of their male counterparts. Some of this is accounted for by rank and age, but when controlling for all extenuating factors, women still earn less than men in the academy.

We are pleased that the government has committed to developing pay equity legislation. We strongly recommend that it be introduced this year to ensure its passage during this mandate. We also recommend the scope go beyond the exclusive focus on the gendered wage gap and to take up the 2004 Pay

2. Field, C. and Jones, G. *A Survey of Sessional Faculty in Ontario Publicly-Funded Universities*. Report to the Ontario Ministry of Education and Advanced Skills Development. OISE, 2016.

3. The Council of Canadian Academies. *Strengthening Canada's Research Capacity: the Gender Dimension*. 2012.

4. Friendly, Martha and Lindsay Macdonald. *Childcare in Canadian Universities*. September 2014.

5. CAUT Salary Comparison for Contract Academic Staff, 2017.

Equity Taskforce's recommendation to look at the intersecting ways in which racialization, Aboriginality, sexual orientation, and disability status affect women's earnings.

## Closing the gap in professional advancement

Equity in compensation is vital to the realization of women's economic security. But economic security isn't only about job security or income security; it is also about career advancement and leadership opportunities. For women academic staff, this includes administrative positions, chair appointments, and research opportunities.

Biases in research funding can discriminate against women and other equity-seeking groups, depriving the research community and Canadians as a whole of valuable perspectives, experiences, and knowledge. It is reasonable to conclude that women researchers access less federal research dollars than their male counterparts, particularly at a time when the overall pie has shrunk considerably. A federal investment of \$450 million in the granting councils is needed just to move beyond 2007 levels of research funding, when adjusted for inflation.

CAUT recognizes that the federal government has committed to a gender-based analysis (GBA) of all budgetary measures, as well as a commitment to GBA+. We recommend that all federally-funded research programs should be subject to a gender and equity impact analysis with the addition of equity targets. Few research programs currently have targets and those that do have failed to be fully inclusive. The Canada Research Chairs program, for example, has a target for the number of women holding initial CRCs (Tier 2), yet it has fallen short for women and the gap is wider for women from other designated groups. For the more senior and prestigious Tier 1 research chairs, just 17% of chair holders are women. Strikingly, of the 27 Canada Excellence Research Chairs, just one is a woman.

The equitable distribution of research dollars, combined with the increased investment in basic research will assist in ensuring women's economic security, not only for those receiving the grants but through the enhancement of the research itself, by better leveraging the strength of diversity within the academia.

To tackle the systemic barriers to advancement, CAUT also recommends a legislative review of the Employment Equity Act, including improvements to the Legislated Employment Equity Program (LEEP) and the Federal Contractors Program (FCP). The Employment Equity Act calls for a mandatory legislative review every five years, yet the last was completed in 2002. Changes to the FCP made in 2013 raised the threshold for federal contractors from \$200,000 to \$1 million. As a result, the number of universities and colleges impacted has plummeted from fifty to just a handful in 2016.

These changes stand in sharp contrast to the U.S. federal government program where a threshold of a \$50,000 contract is set in order for employment equity requirements to apply. In the United States, a country ten times the size of Canada, employers with 50 employees are subject to federal employment equity, whereas in Canada only employers with 100 employees are covered. As a result of these lower thresholds, an estimated one-fifth of the U.S. labour force is covered by federal employment equity. CAUT recommends a significant strengthening of the FCP to ensure that as many Canadian workplaces are covered.

## Conclusion

There are a number of gendered gaps in the academy that reflect challenges in other sectors, inequality in pay, research funding, senior positions, and the feminization of precarious and low-paid positions. While the size of the gaps has diminished over time, they persist. We thank the Committee for taking on this important issue of women's economic security. Whereas there is momentum, bold federal action is required. The outcomes of these actions will help achieve equality goals and achieve a stronger future for all Canadians.