

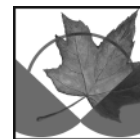
# WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN BC

Effects of Government Downsizing and  
Employment Policy Changes 2001–2004



By Sylvia Fuller  
and Lindsay  
Stephens

DECEMBER 2004



CCPA  
CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
BC Office

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# Summary

Women in Canada and BC face significant barriers to equitable employment, despite gains made in recent decades. Government policy continues to play an important role in shaping the conditions under which women are employed, the broader social context in which paid work is carried out, as well as the types and quality of jobs available to women.

Since its election in 2001, the current provincial government has implemented deep cuts to public services as well as policy and regulatory changes in a wide range of areas. Key programs have been weakened or eliminated and the availability and generosity of social supports have been significantly reduced.

This study examines the effects of this restructuring on women's economic security and equality in BC, with a focus on how policy changes affect women's employment. It considers the impacts of spending cuts on women as recipients and providers of public services—because women make up both the majority of public sector workers and those who rely on public services, they are especially likely to be affected by cuts. Thus, while recent policy changes are outwardly gender-neutral, their effects are not.

## KEY FINDINGS

Recent provincial cuts to public services and changes in employment policies and regulation disproportionately affect women and undermine their economic security.

### Job Losses in the Public Sector

Job losses in the public sector affected women most because the majority of terminated positions were held by women, and because public sector cuts eliminate an important source of secure, equitably paid employment from the broader labour market. In 2002, 71 per cent of provincial public sector workers were female, and 19 per cent of employed women in BC worked in the broad public sector.

- Spending cuts and privatization since 2001 have resulted in a total loss of approximately 20,447 public sector jobs. Nearly 75 per cent of these (15,086) were held by women.

- The female-dominated sectors of health support services, education and the direct public service have been particularly hard hit. Those workers who retained their jobs have faced wage freezes and rollbacks, in several cases through contracts imposed unilaterally by the government.
- Substantial downsizing of the public sector is especially harmful to women, a finding that is supported by original statistical analysis in this study. Government employment is a source of relatively secure and equitably paid employment. Overall wages in the public sector are higher than in the private sector. However, as detailed statistical analysis conducted in this study reveals, this is not because the public sector overpays workers in general, but rather, it is because the public sector does not underpay women. In contrast, women in the private sector are systematically paid less than men with similar characteristics and working in similar jobs.
- The fact that public sector workers tend to be more educated and have higher rates of unionization only partly accounts for higher overall public sector wages. When these and other characteristics are accounted for, men's wages in the public and private sectors are nearly identical. For women, however, a significant wage advantage remains, indicating that the public sector offers more equitable wages for women.
- As a result, significant public sector job losses affect the overall degree of wage inequality between men and women in BC. Jobs in the broad public sector (direct provincial government employees and those employed by organizations funded and controlled by the province, such as hospitals and schools) have been cut by almost 10 per cent since 2001. The estimated impact of a 10 per cent job loss is a 2.6 per cent increase in BC's overall gender wage gap. Further cuts would result in larger increases in wage inequality.

## **Cuts to Public Services and Employment Supports**

Provincial cutbacks and policy changes in areas such as childcare and education have undermined a number of key employment supports and educational opportunities required for women's equitable participation in the labour force.

- Education and training are crucial paths to economic well-being. The gender wage gap between men and women is smaller among more educated workers. BC women with less than eight years of education earn only 63 per cent of what men at the same educational level earn, whereas women with a Bachelors degree earn 85 per cent of their male counterparts' income, and for women with graduate degrees earnings rise to 95 per cent of men's.
- Recent changes make access to post-secondary education especially problematic for students with fewer financial resources. Non-repayable student grants were eliminated. The tuition freeze was lifted in 2001, resulting in dramatic tuition fee increases at BC's colleges and universities. These changes disproportionately impact women because their lower earnings make it harder to pay fees up front and to repay higher loan levels after graduation.

- The provincial government has made full-time students ineligible for income assistance (with the exception of people with disabilities). This reflects a shift in focus to job readiness training for immediate work placement. By closing the door to more meaningful education and training opportunities, the government has made it considerably harder for vulnerable women to secure stable, well-paid employment and to escape and remain out of poverty.
- The Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission (ITAC) has been eliminated, and with it, the mandate to include more women, aboriginal people and visible minorities in training opportunities for well-paying trades and technical jobs.
- Women perform the majority of unpaid “care work,” such as childcare and elder care. Provincial government cuts in these areas increase many women’s work burden, which in turn affects their ability to participate in the labour market. Women who undertake unpaid care-giving are more likely than men to change their work patterns (work part-time, change jobs, reduce their hours, turn down career opportunities, etc.) in order to accommodate family responsibilities.
- In April 2002, the provincial government cut \$24 million from the budget for childcare and implemented a suite of changes that made childcare less affordable for many lower income parents. The income threshold for subsidies was lowered, making it more difficult to qualify; the partial subsidy available to some families above the threshold was reduced in size; families whose subsidy was \$50 per month or less lost this support altogether; and the \$7 per day cap on before and after school programs was revoked.

As a result, the number of low-income children in the regulated childcare system has dropped, and many centres in low-income neighbourhoods have been forced to close. The province has since reversed its cuts to the childcare subsidy, however, the damaging impacts on the availability of childcare remain.

- Recent health care restructuring in BC has reduced the availability of hospital and long-term care beds as well as home care services. This has shifted what was paid work (performed mainly by women) to unpaid care work by women in the home.

### **Changes to the *Employment Standards Act***

Changes to the *Employment Standards Act* made in 2002 have reduced legal protections for workers. These minimum standards are especially important for women, who are over-represented in low-paid and precarious jobs. Women make up the majority of minimum wage and low-wage workers in BC. They are more likely to hold part-time and temporary jobs and to work in small, difficult to organize private sector workplaces that tend to pay low wages and where employment standards are especially important.

These changes include:

- The minimum shift length was reduced from four to two hours.
- A \$6 per hour “training wage” was introduced for the first 500 hours of work (a cap which may be difficult for individual workers to enforce).

- Those who have not worked 15 of the last 30 calendar days before a statutory holiday are no longer entitled to these holidays.
- The introduction of “averaging agreements” allows employers to avoid limits on hours of work in any given day or week without having to pay overtime, provided hours in the overall period average 40 hours per week or less. These agreements are made between the employer and individual workers, however, their “voluntary” nature is questionable, particularly for workers with little power in the workplace.
- Pregnancy leave must now be taken in consecutive weeks, making it difficult for women who experience complications early in pregnancy to schedule needed time off.
- Farm workers are now excluded altogether from regulations related to hours of work, overtime and statutory holiday pay. In BC, 61.5 per cent of harvesting labourers are women, and 77.8 per cent are immigrants. This change is especially disturbing in combination with the deregulation of child labour.
- Unionized workers are now excluded from provisions on hours of work, overtime, statutory holidays, vacations and termination of employment. This change makes it harder to negotiate wages and working conditions that go beyond the minimum standards for non-union workers, particularly for unions in low-wage sectors.

Monitoring and enforcement of the regulations that do remain has been weakened. Employers are no longer required to post employment standards rules in the workplace, and the time limit for making a complaint has been reduced from two years to six months. Complaints can no longer be made to the Director of Employment Standards, who was previously obligated to investigate. Workers must now use a complicated self-help kit that is only available in English. The Director is no longer required to investigate these complaints. These changes are especially problematic for vulnerable workers who are likely reluctant to confront their employer.

THE CURRENT PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT has emphasized the importance of employment as the only legitimate route to economic well-being. It is unfortunate—and ironic—that this increased emphasis on labour market participation has been accompanied by policies that undermine women’s employment prospects.



# Introduction

Since coming to power in 2001, the BC government has embarked upon an ambitious program of restructuring with the stated goals of limiting government expenditures and enhancing the competitiveness of the provincial economy. The government has dramatically cut public service employment and spending and made changes across a number of policy domains including education and training, childcare, income assistance, and employment. Overall, the availability and generosity of social supports and entitlements has eroded as the government weakens or eliminates key public services and increasingly emphasizes the necessity of individual self-reliance and participation in a de/re-regulated labour market as the only legitimate route to economic security.

Taken together, such changes have potentially important implications for the labour market opportunities and experiences of a significant number of BC workers. Because women comprise the majority of both public-sector workers and service recipients, they are particularly likely to be affected by the kinds of restructuring being implemented. Gendered labour market dynamics and patterns of household labour also mean that changes to employment supports and regulations may have different implications for women and men. Thus, while recent policy changes are outwardly gender-neutral, their effects often are not.

This paper examines the impacts of reforms to BC's public services on women's economic security and equality, focusing on how policy changes shape women's employment. In so doing, we consider not only policy changes that directly affect employment regulations and the availability of particular kinds of employment for women (such as the loss of public-sector jobs and changes to the provincial *Employment Standards Act*), but also changes that alter the conditions under which women access employment (such as changes in post-secondary education and childcare policies). It is important to take such a broad focus and look at the overall configuration of policies because policy changes in different areas may have offsetting or cascading effects on women's employment opportunities and economic security.

The report is organized in four major sections. The first provides the broad background to the study, discussing how the general thrust of recent policy reforms make paid employment increasingly central to women's economic well-being and providing an overview of women's employment in British Columbia. The second section documents policy changes in two areas that reshape the conditions under which many women access employment: training and educational opportunities, and services related to caring for children, the disabled, and seniors. In the third section, we inventory policy changes affecting the regulation of employment relationships, including changes to the *Employment Standards Act* and the human rights system. The last major section consists of an original statistical analysis of the impact of public-sector job loss on women's employment opportunities and equality in BC.

# Women's Paid Employment in BC

Since the Second World War, there has been a relatively steady upward trend in Canadian women's participation in paid employment. The labour force participation rate of women in Canada is now one of the highest among OECD countries (Jackson 2003). Paid employment has become the norm for most women most of the time, and women's earnings are central to both their individual and families' well-being. Indeed, the once normative single-earner family with one male 'breadwinner' represented only 9.8 per cent of BC families in 2002 (Statistics Canada 2002).

The importance of participation in paid labour for women's economic security is also underlined by recent changes to income assistance policies in British Columbia that make it increasingly difficult to access state benefits as an alternative source of income. Historically, income assistance policies have provided an important safety net to those in need. Because their overall income levels are substantially lower than men's, women are more likely to rely on income assistance, and are therefore more affected by changes in its provision (Lochhead and Scott 2000). However, both federal and provincial governments in Canada have largely come to view welfare systems as problems rather than solutions, arguing that welfare creates "dependency" and "disincentives" to work that are harmful to both welfare recipients and the economy as a whole. Ideologically, this represents a shift from seeing social programs as an important component of citizenship, toward a more limited notion of citizenship that emphasizes personal responsibility and the economic independence of individuals. Practically, the overarching goal has become to place welfare recipients in employment, regardless of whether the job provides decent work at a living wage.

To this end, already miserly<sup>1</sup> income assistance provisions have been reduced for almost all recipients (but particularly for single parents), ensuring that those on welfare will view almost any job, no matter what the pay or conditions of work, as preferable to remaining on assistance. In addition, the government has restricted eligibility for social assistance in a number of ways, including:

- instituting a “two-year independence test” that prohibits individuals who have not been financially independent for two consecutive years from receiving benefits;
- implementing a three week waiting period before an individual can receive income assistance;
- restricting the number of years an “employable” individual can receive income assistance to two years out of every five years of unemployment unless they comply with formal employment plans;
- requiring mothers of young children to seek employment when the youngest child turns three, rather than seven as was previously the case; and
- making individuals who leave work “voluntarily” or who are fired for cause ineligible for assistance.

The Ministry of Human Resources has claimed that the primary goal of these policy changes is to make British Columbians more ‘independent.’ However, even if policy changes force more welfare recipients into the paid labour force, this is no guarantee that the work they will be able to access will provide them with true independence, stable employment or economic security.

Achieving economic security through employment is predicated on good wages, job security, and having some control over the conditions of work. Over the past several decades, women have made major gains in the labour market. In addition to increasing their participation rate, and attachment to the labour force, women have also gained in skills, education, and experience, and have entered many previously male-dominated occupations (Drolet 2001). Women have also increased their level of unionization, which is strongly associated with better wages and employment security, as well as a smaller gender-wage gap (Doiron and Riddell 1994). Yet, despite such gains, the paid work that many women do is neither well paid, nor prestigious, nor secure (Hadley 2001, Morris 2002, Vosko 2002, Jackson 2003). Processes of economic restructuring have helped expand employment opportunities for women insofar as high growth has occurred in the service sector where many jobs have been commonly defined as “women’s.” But such jobs often pay relatively low wages, and are more likely to be part-time and insecure. Some men have also suffered from this trend, given the concomitant erosion in “good” jobs in core industries. While this has led to a deterioration of the position of some men, or a gendered “harmonizing down” (Armstrong 1996), substantial occupational and income polarization between men and women remains. Women continue to participate in the labour market on gendered, and often unequal, terms.

Achieving economic security through employment is predicated on good wages, job security, and having some control over the conditions of work. Yet, the paid work that many women do is neither well paid, nor prestigious, nor secure.

No matter how you define earnings (e.g. annual income vs. hourly wages, mean vs. median), a gap between women and men’s wages persists, even among men and women in the same occupations, and with the same educational credentials. In Canada, the average woman earns only 81.6 per cent of what the average man earns<sup>2</sup> (Jackson 2003). Lower paid jobs and gendered barriers to full labour market participation (such as women’s disproportionate responsibility for unpaid domestic labour) limit many women’s ability to earn enough to raise them above the poverty line, and women are more likely than men to be poor. Overall, 19 per cent of women in Canada earn wages below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) compared with 16 per cent of men, and women are also more likely than men to be persistently below the LICO (Lochhead et al. 2000). Because the LICO is based on measures of household income, this likely understates the extent to which economic insecurity is gendered. Women with very low income do not fall below the LICO unless their family income is below the LICO.<sup>3</sup>

More women than men work in small, difficult to organize workplaces in the private sector that tend to pay low wages, and women are also less likely than men to be engaged in standard (full-time, full-year) employment (Drolet 2001, Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford 2003). Workers in nonstandard employment relationships, such as part-time or temporary workers, tend to have more precarious employment, not only because they generally earn lower wages, but also because they are more easily let go, less likely to qualify for non-wage benefits, generally have less power in the workplace, and are also less likely to qualify for Employment Insurance in times of layoff (Canadian Council On Social Development 1996, Cranford and Vosko 2003).

While white women are more likely than men to be at the lower end of the labour-market hierarchy, racialized<sup>4</sup> women and immigrant women face even greater barriers to achieving economic security through employment (Galabuzi 2001). Immigrant and visible minority women are relegated to the lowest paid and lowest status jobs in the paid labour market despite the fact that visible minority immigrants have higher levels of education compared with the labour force as a whole (Jackson 2003). In 1996 only 36 per cent of visible minority women with university degrees in Canada worked in professional occupations, compared to 55 per cent of their non-visible minority counterparts. During the same period, 44 per cent of visible minority women with university degrees worked in clerical, sales, or service jobs, compared with 25 per cent of other women with a university degree (Almey et al. 2000). Visible minority, aboriginal, and immigrant women also have rates of unemployment that are significantly higher than the average unemployment rate in Canada (Vosko 2002).

These differences contribute to considerable differences in income. Table 1 uses data from the 2001 Census to document average earnings for British Columbians by sex, visible-minority status, and immigration. The first row of the table shows the mean annual income for the various groups. The second row calculates the percentage by which each group's annual income exceeds or falls short of native-born white men's earnings. Looking at the table, we see that white women's wages remain considerably below those of white men. Immigrant white women earn only 64.2 per cent of what native-born white men earn, and native-born white women earn 63.3 per cent of native-born white men's income. However, white women in turn fare considerably better than visible minority women, regardless of immigrant status. Native-born women who are part of a visible minority group earn only 56.7 per cent of native-born white

	Native-born White		Native-born Visible Minority		Immigrant Visible Minority		Immigrant Non-visible Minority	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Average Income \$	38,038	24,082	27,242	21,576	27,282	19,220	38,967	24,423
% of Native-born White Men's Wages	100.0	63.3	71.6	56.7	71.7	50.5	102.4	64.2
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census.								

men's annual income, and immigrant visible minority women earn only half (50.5 per cent) what native-born white men earn.

Because access to work that is secure and well-paid is still problematic for many women, a lessening of "dependence" on the state may in fact be replaced by continued hardship and/or increased economic dependence on family members. Jobs that fail to provide economic security are a particular problem for women heading single-earner families and for those partnered with men with low earnings. Women's wages are also important for women's security and equality in families where men earn an adequate "family wage" because women's wages relative to their husbands can affect the balance of power in marriages (England and Kilbourne 1990, Lundberg and Pollak 1996). Without decent work, such dependence can make it more difficult for women to leave violent or unhappy family situations.

It is notable that, unlike *BC Benefits*, the legislation it replaced, the new *Employment and Assistance Act* makes no mention of the larger employment or childcare context, or the province's obligation to preserve "a social safety net that is responsive to changing social and economic circumstances" (as stated in the preamble to the *BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act*). But government actions play a significant role in setting the larger context in which employment relations are forged and can influence the conditions of women's paid employment in a number of ways.

For example, government policies play a significant role in determining the ease with which differently situated individuals can access the education and training that allow them to participate in paid employment on more favourable terms. Women's disproportionate involvement in "care work," such as child and elder care, also means that their ability to participate in the paid labour market on equal terms is strongly influenced by the degree to which these services are publicly available and accessible (see e.g. Pulkingham and Ternowetsky 1997, Morris, Robinson and Simpson 1999).

The kind of regulatory protection offered by government also strongly influences the degree to which attaining a secure job with good wages and control over one's working conditions is possible. Employment standards and labour relations legislation can expand or restrict employer power, thus providing workers with more or less protection from employer actions that are arbitrary and discriminatory. Policy can also entrench or ameliorate discrimination. Given the historical devaluation of women's work and discriminatory barriers to women's equal participation in the labour market, this is particularly important for women.

Finally, government has played an important direct role as a significant employer of women. The size of the public sector, and the nature of employment opportunities within it, also affect many women's employment opportunities and experiences, and hence their economic security.

In this respect, it is ironic that the increased emphasis on labour market participation as the only legitimate route to economic security has been accompanied by policy and regulatory changes that undermine women's employment prospects in a number of ways. In what follows, we explore the implications of provincial government policy changes in education and training, childcare and elder care, the regulation of employment, and public-sector employment.

Because access to work that is secure and well-paid is still problematic for many women, a lessening of "dependence" on the state may in fact be replaced by continued hardship and/or increased economic dependence on family members.

# Employment Supports

## Education and Training

Education and training are crucial paths to economic well-being. The education that workers receive prior to entering the labour force, together with the training opportunities they have to enhance existing skills and learn new ones, can significantly shape the kind of employment opportunities to which they have access.

Post-secondary education, particularly a university degree, has historically been one of the best investments a worker can make to assure their future economic well-being. In BC, 2001 Census data shows that not only do workers with higher levels of education earn more (particularly those with university degrees), but that the gap in earnings between those with and without post-secondary credentials is widening (BC Stats 2003). Post-secondary education has also been important in terms of fostering gender equity, as evidenced by the fact that the gender wage gap between men and women is smaller among more educated workers. Table 2 reports average hourly wages for BC men and women with different levels of education, as well as the ratio of women's earnings relative to men at each educational level. The table shows that while BC women with less than eight years of education earn only 63 per cent of what men at the same educational level earn, women with a bachelor's degree earn 85 per cent of what men in the same group earn, and women with graduate degrees earn 95 per cent of their male counterparts' income.

Higher levels of education are also associated with both higher levels of employment, and a smaller gap in men and women's labour force participation rates, as documented in Table 3. Women in BC with fewer than eight years of education have only 57 per cent of the employment level of men with the same education, while those with an undergraduate degree are employed at 93 per cent of the level of their male counterparts.

Ensuring women's access to university education is therefore extremely important both for women's employment outcomes in absolute terms, as well as from a gender equity perspective. Unfortunately, a number of recent policy changes make such access increasingly problematic for students with fewer financial resources. Non-repayable grants have been eliminated, which will almost double the debt of the neediest students (Canadian Federation of Students 2004). The tuition freeze implemented between 1996 and 2001 was lifted. As a result, tuition has increased dramatically. Between the 2001/02 and 2004/05,

average undergraduate tuition in BC rose by 87 per cent (in nominal dollars—adjusted for inflation, tuition has increased by 76 per cent) (Statistics Canada, Centre for Education Statistics).

High tuition is a problem for all students, but it is a larger barrier for less affluent individuals. It is not surprising that the large increases in tuition in the 1990s that occurred outside of BC (126 per cent nationally between 1990/91 and 2000/01) were accompanied by a widening gap between the participation rates of young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those from high or middle socio-economic backgrounds (Bouchard and Zhao 2000). Because women’s lower earnings provide them with fewer resources to pay fees up front and make repayment of higher loan levels after graduation more onerous, increased tuition rates also have a gendered impact. Single mothers, low-income women, immigrant women, and women with reduced labour market opportunities such as women with disabilities will be particularly affected (BC CEDAW 2003).

To make matters worse, the provincial government has made full-time students in programs eligible for BC Student Financial Assistance (loans) ineligible for income assistance, with the exception of people with disabilities. Instead, the focus is on immediate job placement and, at best, short-term training (with courses in things like resume writing). While this approach may help women find jobs more quickly, the quality of such jobs often does not support long-term economic security and independence for former welfare recipients with low levels of education (Klein and Long 2003). Moreover, such short-term programs tend to work best for recipients who are most likely to secure employment without the help of job-placement agencies. Research suggests that these programs are mostly ineffective for workers facing employment barriers such as low levels of education or heavy domestic responsibilities (Lochhead et al. 2000). By closing the door to more substantial education and training, the government has made it considerably harder for vulnerable women to escape and remain out of poverty.

Post-secondary education has also been important in terms of fostering gender equity, as evidenced by the fact that the gender wage gap between men and women is smaller among more educated workers.

**Table 2: BC Workers' Hourly Wages by Sex and Educational Attainment**

Level of Education	Hourly Wage (\$)		Women's Wage as % of Men's Wage
	Men	Women	
0–8 Years	16.59	10.44	63.0
Some Secondary	17.53	12.42	70.8
Grade 11–13	18.65	14.96	80.2
Some Post-secondary	18.32	15.62	85.3
Post-secondary Certificate or Diploma	22.18	17.97	81.0
BA	25.92	22.23	85.8
MA; PhD	27.82	26.37	94.8

Source: Authors' compilation from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey pooled microdata November 2002, May 2002.



Employment bridging programs for women facing multiple barriers to employment, such as relationship violence or past abuse, have been cut, as have a number of training programs including Job Start and Skills for Employment (BC Coalition of Women’s Centres 2003). Overall, there has been a move toward funding training for income-assistance recipients and other vulnerable workers on a market-oriented, outcome-based model. This approach creates financial incentives for trainers to place individuals in new jobs quickly, and to focus their attention on the most easily-placed (and hence most easily profitable) workers. Community-based, non-profit providers have increasingly lost out in the competition for government training contracts to large, for-profit companies—three of the four agencies contracted to provide job placement programs to income assistance recipients are for-profit companies. In some cases, limited “job readiness training” is supplanting more general skills-improvement programs, such as literacy training. Nora Randall, an instructor at the Reading and Writing Centre at Malaspina University College writes:

*The other thing that is happening at the reading and writing centre is that students who are already in school trying to improve their basic skills are being told that they have to take job readiness courses. We’ve had six or seven students so far who have had to quit coming to the centre while they do a three-week course somewhere else to keep their welfare, or they’ve had to go around and do a job search or write a resume. These are all fundamental (beginner) students who need to improve their reading and writing before they’re employable. (Smythe and Niks 2003a)*

Finally, the Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission (ITAC) has been eliminated, replaced by an industry-led training model responsible only for standards and credentials. The mandate to include more women, aboriginal people, and visible minorities in training opportunities in well-paying trades and technical areas, which are notoriously exclusionary of women and racialized workers, disappeared with ITAC.

Level of Education	Employment Rate (%)		Women’s Employment as % of Men’s
	Men	Women	
0–8 Years	50.4	29.0	57.4
Some Secondary	66.4	48.9	73.7
Grade 11–13	78.2	67.6	86.5
Some Post-secondary	79.0	68.5	86.7
Post-secondary Certificate or Diploma	83.7	74.0	88.4
BA	85.3	79.4	93.1
MA; PhD	86.5	79.5	91.9
Total	79.0	68.3	86.5

Source: Authors’ compilation from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey pooled microdata November 2002, May 2002.



Prior to these changes, BC's training system was already vulnerable to criticism that it often served to reproduce existing class, race, and gender hierarchies (Cohen 2003, Wong and McBride 2004). Far from addressing this problem, recent changes will likely make matters worse.

## Care Work

Paid employment and unpaid domestic labour are not separate spheres, but are intertwined activities necessary to sustain households and ensure the day-to-day and generational survival of the population (Luxton and Corman 2001). Policy changes that affect unpaid domestic labour have very gendered impacts. Women's disproportionate involvement in "care work," such as child and elder care, implies that provincial government cuts in these areas will increase many women's unpaid work. Women who cannot afford to purchase these services will be forced to provide more care in the home, which will in turn affect their ability to participate in the labour market on equitable terms.

### Childcare

Changes to the income assistance program now require mothers to find paid employment once their youngest child turns three, rather than seven. In part, this reflects changing social norms and expectations around motherhood and employment. The majority of mothers in BC, including those with young children, work for pay. In 2002, among women under 50, 75.1 per cent of those with children under the age of 16 and 63.4 per cent of those with children under the age of three were in the labour force (Statistics Canada 2002). Although the policy changes reflect the increased frequency of women working for pay, they were not initially accompanied by enhanced supports to make balancing home and work any easier.

Because the majority of both fathers and mothers of young children in British Columbia work for pay, access to affordable childcare has become a key issue for BC families. Indeed, in presenting its budget for 2003, the BC government indicated that 278,000 children in the province require childcare, a number that represents 45 per cent of all children under the age of 13 (Ministry of Finance 2003). Given gendered patterns of household labour, the availability and accessibility of quality childcare is particularly important for women. Indeed, women's employment equity depends upon it, since it is generally mothers who find their employment options most constrained by its absence. In BC, as in the rest of Canada, women in dual-parent households still spend more time caring for their children, and women head 81 per cent of lone parent households (Statistics Canada 2001). Even when both parents hold full-time jobs, Canadian mothers perform significantly more childcare than fathers (Pupo 1997, Zukewich 1998).

Moreover, women are much more likely to suffer employment disadvantages as a result of having children. Mothers are more likely than fathers to change jobs to accommodate family responsibilities, work fewer hours (even among full-time workers), be absent from work, and to search for jobs closer to home, all of which contribute to a significant wage penalty for motherhood (Zukewich 1998, Morris 2001, Statistics Canada 2002). Women are also much more likely than men to work part-time (and hence lower their earnings) to accommodate childcare responsibilities. Only 1.8 per cent of BC men who worked part-time in 2002 did so to take care of their children, compared to 21.2 per cent of women (Statistics Canada 2002). These accommodations not only lower women's present income, but also undermine their

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pension accumulation, promotional opportunities, future earnings possibilities (by affecting their work experience), and eligibility for benefits (Morris et al. 1999, Drolet 2001, Morris 2001, Vosko 2002).

Women may voluntarily alter their employment to take care of children, but they do so in a context of limited choices. The fact that men tend to out-earn their female partners is one reason that it is more often mothers who change or reduce their employment. The high cost and limited availability of quality childcare are also factors for many women. In this respect, it is ironic that even while some policy reforms in BC embrace the importance of women's employment, changes to childcare policies made such employment less accessible for many women.

The childcare subsidy program is a monthly payment available to low and moderate income families to help pay for childcare in BC. Because childcare is expensive, this program has been a crucial employment support for many women with limited financial resources. In April 2002, the BC government cut \$24 million from the budget for childcare subsidies by reducing the monthly income threshold to qualify for subsidies by \$285, pushing the threshold below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Off (LICO). In addition, the partial subsidy available to some families above the income threshold was reduced in size. Together, these changes resulted in a substantially smaller subsidy for many lower income parents. Families whose subsidy was \$50 or less per month were denied it altogether.

In 2002 the government also revoked legislation that capped parents' costs for before and after school programs to \$7 per day. This program was widely used. In its absence, childcare workers surveyed report that many primary school-aged children are being left on their own (Chudnovsky 2003).

A year later the provincial government changed the direction of its policy and increased the childcare subsidy threshold by \$100, but it remained substantially below what it had been prior to the first change. Finally, in October 2004, in a complete policy reversal, the government increased spending in the subsidy program by \$33 million, raising the income threshold by \$200 and increasing the amount of the subsidy for families with children under six and for families with special needs children. While this is a very welcome change and may remedy some of the problems caused by the initial cuts, the period of lowered levels of funding was not without significant costs.

Increased costs as a result of changes to the subsidy program forced many families to withdraw their children from care. As a result, the number of low income children in the regulated childcare system dropped. A study undertaken by the City of Vancouver Social Planning Department suggests that in more affluent areas, places previously filled by children from lower income families were taken by children whose families could afford childcare fees without subsidy. In poorer neighbourhoods, vacancies remained unfilled because there were fewer local families who could afford the full fees. Its survey of licensed facilities, mainly in the east side of Vancouver, found that these changes resulted in an 88 per cent drop in subsidized children in preschools from April to December 2002.

Out-of-school care providers were also hard-hit, reporting drops in enrolment due to parents' inability to pay fees, and loss of provincial revenue at rates between 50 and 66 per cent. In response, many passed on significant fee increases to those parents whose children did remain enrolled (Young 2003). The existence of such vacancies ultimately threatens the availability of childcare even for those who can afford it because the provincial government also tied funding for childcare centres to enrolment. Childcare facilities in low-income neighbourhoods, where parents were most likely to remove their children from care because their subsidies were lost or lowered, have been hardest hit. Many centres in these areas were forced to close because of reduced enrolment (Young 2003).

Related policy and program changes also made finding quality childcare more difficult. The Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services has reduced funding for Child Care Resource and Referral programs, which provide parents with a database of childcare spaces; eliminated the One Stop Access

Program, which provided support for families accessing childcare subsidies; and reduced funding to Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre, which provides information and resources for families and caregivers across the province.

Fewer childcare spaces, elimination of funding for before and after school programs, and fewer and more meagre subsidies compromise women's ability to engage in paid work on favourable terms. Although the government is now beginning to invest in childcare again, during the period of reduced subsidies more women may have been forced to be absent from work, or made decisions to take time out of the labour force or opt for part-time work, all of which harm lifetime earnings, pension entitlements, and opportunities for career advancement. Alternatively, families may have placed their children in unregulated care, or left them alone or in the care of older siblings, which may reduce the availability of regulated childcare spaces and carry greater social risks and costs.

Government decisions have also harmed paid childcare workers. Just as women perform a disproportionate share of unpaid care work, so too is paid care work predominantly a woman's job in BC—women do 97 per cent of the paid childcare and home-support work in the province. These workers have been hurt by the government's decision to end negotiated top-ups to the wages of childcare workers with appropriate higher education. This has resulted in a \$2 to \$6 decrease in the hourly wages of some workers (Young 2003). Even with this top-up, childcare was one of the lowest paying occupations in the province (Statistics Canada 2002).

#### Elder Care

Just as women tend to be primarily responsible for childcare, so too do they assume a disproportionate burden for the care of other dependent family members, such as the sick, disabled, and elderly (Morris et al. 1999, Morris 2002).

Recent health care restructuring in BC has reduced the availability of hospital and long-term care beds, and funding cuts have eliminated housekeeping services from the home care services received by the disabled and frail elderly in some areas of the province. Such changes can impose serious hardships on those requiring these services. They also create a heavier burden for the women who find themselves forced to increase their unpaid care work in the face of reduced social support for the care of sick, disabled, or elderly relatives. Effectively, what was once paid work (performed mainly by women), is transformed into unpaid care work by women in the home.

Women who undertake unpaid caregiving work often curtail or change their labour market activities in order to do so. A Statistics Canada study of informal caregivers of seniors based on the 2002 General Social Survey found that more than one-quarter (27 per cent) of female caregivers aged 45 to 54 had to change their work patterns to accommodate providing this care (as compared to only 14 per cent of male caregivers). Twenty per cent of women and 13 per cent of men in this age group reported having to reduce their hours of paid work, resulting in lost income for approximately one out of every 10 women and slightly fewer men (11 per cent of women and 9 per cent of men aged 45 to 54, and 9 per cent of women and 4 per cent of men aged 55 to 64). Women who undertake the care of seniors also sometimes have to turn down opportunities at work (3 per cent of caregivers) or quit their job (2 per cent of caregivers) to do so, which can also have negative effects on their income (Cranswick 2003).

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# Regulation of Employment

## Changes to the *Employment Standards Act*

In BC, the *Employment Standards Act* protects workers' rights by setting minimum standards for employment practices such as rates of pay and hours of work. Employment standards are particularly important for workers in low-paid or precarious jobs who are vulnerable to exploitation. Such workers are disproportionately women, immigrants, the disabled, and/or visible minorities. However, in Canada, employment regulations have been criticized as frequently poorly matched to the needs of workers in employment situations that differ from the post-war "standard" employment relationship of permanent, full-time, full-year work (Fudge 2001, Thomas 2003).

A number of changes to employment standards legislation in BC were passed on May 30 and November 30 of 2002. The government has portrayed these changes as modernizing the system of employment standards to make them more consistent with the realities of more "flexible" employment relationships. However, the changes do little to improve the protections available to non-standard workers. Instead, they focus on fostering increased flexibility for *employers* by giving them a freer hand in their dealings with workers. In so doing, the level of regulatory protection available to workers has been substantially reduced. In what follows, we briefly discuss the changes to employment regulations particularly likely to have gendered effects.<sup>5</sup>

### Minimum Shift Length and Minimum Daily Hours

Because more women than men work part-time, one change in employment standards that has a strongly gendered effect is the change in minimum shift length and minimum daily hours from four to two hours. Two-hour shifts may barely compensate for workers' travel time and costs, let alone childcare. They also make it increasingly difficult for women who are affected to control and manage their time in a way that allows them to balance work and family commitments, since finding childcare for such short periods is difficult (BC CEDAW 2003).

### Statutory Holidays

Many part-time workers have lost all statutory holiday pay, as those who have not worked 15 of the last 30 calendar days before the holiday are no longer entitled to these holidays (unless they have signed an averaging agreement). Once again, this affects more women than men because women are much more likely to work part-time.

## Training Wage

The introduction of a “training wage” for workers with less than 500 hours of work experience that is \$2 an hour less than the standard minimum wage is another significant recent change to the *Employment Standards Act*. The stated purpose of the lower wage is to make youth and new labour market entrants more attractive to employers. However, there has been no notable positive effect on youth unemployment in the province since the introduction of this measure. Moreover, while young workers and those just entering the workforce are the primary targets of this change, immigrants and some non-standard workers will also be affected to the extent that they have difficulty providing the required T4s, pay stubs or employment letters to document their employment history.

Because the *Employment Standards Act* does not prevent an employer from dismissing an employee at any time without a stated cause, there is little preventing them from firing new workers after 500 hours, effectively implementing an ongoing minimum wage that is significantly below the standard minimum. This will reduce opportunities for more experienced workers in minimum wage employment. Because changes to the *Employment Standards Act* have also substantially deregulated child employment, the pool of workers with less than 500 hours of paid work experience has expanded, making this strategy increasingly feasible. Such displacement will have a gendered effect since women make up the highest percentage of minimum wage and low-wage workers. Over half of minimum wage workers in BC are women (55.8 per cent), and among workers over 25, women comprise 58.3 per cent of minimum wage earners. Overall, 4.7 per cent of female workers earn minimum wage, compared with 3.2 per cent of male wage earners (Statistics Canada 2002).

## Averaging Agreements

To promote flexibility, amendments to the *Employment Standards Act* now allow for the creation of “Averaging Agreements” whereby individual workers and employers “agree” to average scheduled work hours over a period of one to four weeks. This enables the employer to avoid limits on hours of work in any given day or week without having to pay overtime, so long as the hours in the overall period average to 40 hours per week or less (Ministry of Skills Development and Labour 2003). By reducing the costs of overtime, such agreements encourage the use of overtime and discourage employers from hiring additional full-time workers or providing a more equitable distribution of work hours (Thomas 2003).

Such agreements particularly disadvantage women with children insofar as workers who need to use childcare find such “flexibility” difficult to manage. Evening, overnight, and weekend childcare is rarely offered by licensed, centre-based childcare facilities. The 2001 provincial childcare survey revealed that evening care was offered by only 1.5 per cent of such facilities, weekend care by 1.3 per cent, and overnight care by only 0.3 per cent (Ministry of Community Aboriginal and Women’s Services Childcare Policy Branch 2001). Full-time women workers work fewer hours, on average, than full-time male workers in Canada (Drolet 2001), in part because they assume a larger burden of unpaid labour in the home. Expanding requirements to work overtime can therefore present an employment barrier for women, narrowing their employment opportunities relative to men.

Moreover, the “voluntary” nature of such agreements is questionable. Under the old legislation, ‘flexible’ work schedules had to be made and maintained over 26 weeks, were made collectively with all workers, and required approval of 65 per cent of those affected. By changing to a system where individual workers and employers negotiate schedules, the collective strength of workers is removed. Low-income and

Employment standards are particularly important for workers in low-paid or precarious jobs who are vulnerable to exploitation. Such workers are disproportionately women, immigrants, the disabled, and/or visible minorities.

non-unionized workers, many of whom are women, are at a distinct disadvantage when “negotiating” with their employers (BC Coalition of Women’s Centres 2003). As the Ontario Federation of Labour noted when describing a similar policy change in Ontario, “employment agreements assume an equality of power in the workplace when, in fact, no such equality exists” (Ontario Federation of Labour 2000). Women working in part-time or temporary positions have less leverage and influence in the workplace and are particularly likely to be disempowered and disadvantaged by these changes. A representative of a community group representing homeworkers in the garment industry in Toronto argues:

[The Minister of Labour] *may think that the employer and employee can have the same power. But, in fact, it's not. You cannot say that you don't want to work this long, these kind of hours. If you don't want to work for this kind of pay, then you can't talk with the employer and asked him for more, or talk to them and say that this is too long...The employer will say "you can stay, or you can go." If I'm a worker and I'm dependent on the money for my living, what can I do? Even though I know I am being exploited...even though I know I am being taken advantage [of], it doesn't seem that I have any other choice. I have to stay there.* (quoted in Thomas 2003)

### Pregnancy Leave

Employment standards regulations around pregnancy leave now require that it be taken in consecutive weeks. Women who experience complications early in pregnancy no longer have the right to take some leave early and the rest after the child’s birth.

### Farm Workers

Changes to employment standards justified on the grounds of increasing the competitiveness of BC agriculture have significantly lessened the regulatory protection available to farm workers, excluding them from regulations related to hours of work and overtime and statutory holiday pay. This means there is no limit to the number of hours these workers can be asked to work in a day, nor do they qualify for overtime pay. This exacerbates the vulnerability of harvesting labourers and is particularly disturbing when viewed in tandem with the relaxation of rules surrounding child labour. Members of racialized groups and women are once again particularly likely to be affected. In BC, 77.8 per cent of all harvesting labourers are immigrants, 76.8 are members of a visible minority, and 61.5 per cent are women (Statistics Canada 2004).

### Unionized Workers

Unionized workers are also now excluded from provisions related to hours of work, overtime, statutory holidays, vacations, and termination of employment under the *Employment Standards Act*. At first glance, it may appear that unionized workers do not require such protection since their unions presumably provide adequate protection. However, this is questionable, particularly for women workers.

Unions bargain for fair wages, equal employment opportunities, reasonable hours of work, safe working conditions, regulations around termination of employment, vacation leave, and leave for family responsibilities, among many other things. As a result, unionized workers do tend to have higher wages and greater job security than their non-unionized counterparts. Gender and racial inequalities also tend to be reduced by unionization. For example, only among unionized workers is the percentage difference between the earnings of racialized workers and non-racialized workers less than 10 per cent in Canada (Galabuzi 2001). Jackson (2003) reports that although visible minority women are much less likely to belong to a union, in 1999 such membership increased their wages by 31 per cent.

Nevertheless, loss of employment standards protection presents new risks. Although most union contracts set out working conditions that exceed the minimum standards specified in the *Employment*



*Standards Act*, unions may have a more difficult time bargaining for wages and working conditions without the floor of employment standards, particularly for relatively weak unions that tend to represent more vulnerable workers. Women are more likely than men to be located in the smallest and lowest paid bargaining units and establishments (Currie and Chaykowski 1995, Drolet 2002). In Ontario, the exclusion of unionized employees from employment standards legislation has led to employers tabling proposals during contract negotiations for mandatory 60 hour work weeks (Thomas 2003). Freeing employers to ask for such concessions clearly poses a threat to unions' ability to improve standards of work. This may in turn undermine efforts to unionize workers, particularly in sectors vulnerable to such demands. Cross-national comparisons reveal that countries with lower overall earnings inequality also tend to have smaller gender pay gaps (Blau and Kahn 1992). Since unions generally help to compress overall wage distributions (Gornick and Jacobs 1998), measures that weaken the strength of unions may have an adverse effect on the gender earnings gap.

## Enforcement

Changes to the statutory provisions of the *Employment Standards Act* will have a significant impact on economic security for many women workers. Somewhat less visible, but equally important in this respect, are changes in the practices by which employment standards are enforced in BC.

One significant change is the elimination of the regulation requiring employers to post employment standards rules in the workplace. This makes it less likely that workers will know when their rights have been violated. In addition, the time limit for making a complaint is now only six months, down from two years.

There is also significantly less support for making a complaint. Previously, complaints about employment standards violations could be made to the Director of Employment Standards, who was obligated to investigate them. No longer. Instead, workers with a complaint are directed to first use a complicated multi-page "self-help" kit and address the issue directly with their employer. The Director is now only required to "accept and review" the complaint after this step has been taken. He or she has no obligation to investigate them ("Employment Standards Amendment Act" 2002). In line with the reduced role of enforcement, the budget allocated to policing employment standards has been sharply reduced and more than half the province's employment standards offices have been closed.

Expecting employees to confront their employers is extremely unrealistic, and many employees will no doubt quit or put up with violations of their rights rather than do so. As with the changes to employment standards provisions, the most disenfranchised and precarious workers will be most affected by the reduction in enforcement. Part-time and temporary workers have less leverage and job security when negotiating with employers, and are most likely to be bullied, ignored, or face punitive measures for "causing problems." Racialized women in Canada are still disproportionately concentrated in low paid and precarious work, face greater barriers to employment, and therefore also have less leverage and fewer options for alternative employment. These are also the workers most likely to be working in conditions where employment standards violations are common (Galabuzi 2001). Workers with disabilities and immigrant women are also marginalized in the labour market, making them especially vulnerable to exploitation. The fact that self-help kits are available only in English presents a further barrier for workers for whom English literacy may be a problem.

Expecting employees to confront their employers is extremely unrealistic, and many employees will no doubt quit or put up with violations of their rights rather than do so. As with the changes to employment standards provisions, the most disenfranchised and precarious workers will be most affected by the reduction in enforcement.

Combined, these changes to employment standards legislation increase economic precariousness for BC women. Working conditions become more demanding as women work irregular hours under averaging agreements, compensation is insufficient as they work longer hours for less pay and are paid for shorter shifts. Particular groups of women, such as new workers or those with undocumented employment histories, immigrants, farm workers, or those involved in trades apprenticeships face specific hardships that may increase their workload, decrease their income, or make employment conditions less tolerable. Finally, monitoring and enforcement of the regulations that do remain are weaker and especially problematic for disenfranchised and precarious workers who may choose to not make a complaint rather than confront their employers alone.

## Discrimination and the Human Rights System

In British Columbia, women experiencing discrimination in employment may seek remedy from the human rights system. However, a number of recent changes make obtaining such assistance considerably more difficult.

One significant change is that complainants now face the possibility of having to pay costs if their complaint is not upheld. Previously, cost awards were not permitted in human rights cases except where there was egregious misconduct. The possibility of having to pay substantial legal costs to one's employer makes complaining extremely risky for all but affluent workers. Ironically, the vulnerable workers most likely to face discrimination will be least able to afford to challenge it, exacerbating the power imbalance between women workers and their employers.

The Human Rights Tribunal is also now allowed to require the parties to a complaint of discrimination to undergo mediation to resolve the complaint. As human rights lawyer Shelagh Day notes:

*Complainant advocates have had many reservations about mandatory mediation in the human rights setting because it can cause psychological trauma to complainants, or turn into an occasion for the repetition of the abusive behaviour for which complainants are seeking a remedy. Mandatory mediation, with the threat ever-present that a complaint can be dismissed if a claimant refuses a reasonable settlement offer [another change to the human rights code], does not provide a supportive environment for the resolution of human rights complaints. (Day 2002)*

For mediation to work, there should not be a large power imbalance between the parties, but this is typical between employers and employees.

Complainants also face new barriers in the form of shortened timeframes (reduced to six months from a year) in which they can file a complaint. Moreover, complainants no longer have guaranteed access to support and legal representation through the Human Rights Commission, which has been abolished, making BC the only jurisdiction in Canada without a Human Rights Commission. Once again, this seriously exacerbates the power imbalance between workers and their employers, since employers are much better placed to afford legal representation.

The loss of the commission means there is no public body mandated to deal with systemic discrimination on the basis of sex or other matters, to initiate complaints, or to join with complainants in order to argue on behalf of the broader public interest for interpretations of law that will eliminate discrimination (Day 2002). Effectively, complaints are treated as a purely individual matter, with no real concern for the broader social consequences of discrimination. Not only do workers have access to less employment protection because of changes to the employment standards act, but they face greater barriers to enforcing the few rights they still have.



# Women and Public-Sector Employment

The public sector is an important employer of women in British Columbia. In 2002, 71.1 per cent of provincial public-sector workers were female, and fully 19.3 per cent of employed women in BC worked in the broad provincial public sector, as compared to only 6.8 per cent of BC working men. Because women are overrepresented among provincial public sector employees, changes in levels of public sector employment or conditions of work disproportionately affect women.

Such changes have been extensive in the past three years. The provincial government's efforts to reduce expenditures have resulted in substantial layoffs of public-sector workers and the contracting out or privatization of many public-sector jobs to reduce wage costs. Provisions in *The Health and Social Services Delivery Improvement Act*, which was passed on January 18, 2002, overrode previously negotiated contracts with public-sector workers in these areas. Key provisions of this act reduced unions' ability to resist the contracting out of even more of their members' jobs in the future, as it prohibits collective agreements from regulating the use of contracted services. Many collective agreements had previously contained such protections. This same act also prohibits a collective agreement from restricting an employer's ability to lay off an employee.

Those workers who retained their jobs have faced wage freezes and rollbacks, in several cases through contracts imposed unilaterally by the government. The predominantly female sectors of health support services and community social services have been particularly hard hit, as the government's pursuit of wage suppression and contracting out have forced unions to accept concessionary contracts.

Existing research suggests that women who lose their jobs in the public sector will find it difficult to find equivalent employment opportunities in the private sector. Research on the wages of public and private-sector workers in Canada have consistently found that women tend to earn higher wages in the public sector than in the private (Gunderson, Hyatt and Riddell 2000, Mueller 2000). While the fact that public-sector workers tend to be more educated and have much higher levels of unionization accounts for some of this difference, a public-sector pay advantage remains for women even after researchers adjust for these and other differences. Moreover, this differential is particularly large for those at lower levels

in the occupational spectrum, providing such women with a degree of economic security that most simply could not enjoy if working in the private sector (Gunderson et al. 2000).

It is also notable that gender pay differences tend to be lower in the public sector, suggesting that women employed by the government enjoy a less discriminatory employment environment (Gunderson et al. 2000, Mueller 2000).

These facts suggest that any substantial downsizing or degrading of public-sector employment will be particularly harmful for women. Not only will more women than men be affected individually, but women's overall economic standing relative to men may also suffer from the loss of a substantial share of more equitably compensated jobs.

While existing research strongly implies that the loss of public-sector jobs will harm women's economic security and equality, it has been based on data analyzed at the national level. As such, it is not sufficiently detailed to allow direct estimation of what downsizing in the provincial public sector will mean for women workers in BC. Due to earlier data limitations, past research has also necessarily been based on a narrow definition of the public sector that includes only direct government employees. This excludes many organizations in the broader provincial public sectors of health, education, transportation, and utilities that are funded and to some degree controlled by the provincial government and which are generally regarded as part of the public sector (such as schools, hospitals, and crown corporations). The health and education fields in particular are major employers of women, and calculations of women's public-sector pay premiums using the narrower public sector definition therefore exclude important areas of female employment.

In what follows, we take advantage of microdata from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey to estimate the implications of changes in provincial public-sector employment for women's economic security in BC (for details on data and methods see Appendix A). In so doing, we focus directly on women in BC's provincial public sector, including both direct government employees and those employed by organizations funded and controlled by the provincial government (such as hospitals and public schools). We compare the characteristics of these workers and the wages they earn to private-sector workers to explore what the loss of public-sector jobs implies.<sup>6</sup> Because we are interested in the effects of recent government restructuring, we use data from 2002 to provide a baseline prior to most major changes imposed by the current government.

## Public vs. Private-Sector Workers

Past research has suggested that part of the reason public-sector workers tend to earn higher wages than their private-sector counterparts is that they are more likely to possess traits that are associated with higher wages. Most obviously, the nature of much of the work in the public sector requires a relatively high level of education. This, in turn, is related to the mix of occupations prevalent in the public sector, including a number of highly skilled female-dominated professions such as teaching and nursing. Public-sector workers are also much more highly unionized than private-sector workers, and unionization is consistently tied to higher overall wages.

Table 4 illustrates a number of potentially relevant differences between women working in the provincial public sector versus women in the private sector in BC. In addition to education, occupation, and unionization, we include a number of other measures generally related to wage levels: geographic residence (Vancouver or elsewhere), age (roughly divided into categories for younger, prime-age, and older workers), hours of work (full-time or part-time), employment status (permanent or temporary), the number of years the person has worked for their current employer (tenure), and the size of the firm in which they work. The two columns under the heading "per cent of workers" report the distribution of the female

**Table 4a: Characteristics of the Female Public and Private Sector Workforce in BC – by Category**

	% Distribution of Women Workers in Sector		Mean Hourly Wage* (\$)
	Private	Public	
<b>Area of Residence</b>			
Vancouver	56.1	49.6	19.87
Outside Vancouver	43.9	50.4	18.98
<b>Age</b>			
15–24	11.0	2.6	11.68
25–49	66.9	64.4	19.96
50–64	22.0	33.0	21.84
<b>Education</b>			
High School Uncompleted	10.3	2.1	15.15
High School Graduate	40.5	20.8	16.83
Post-secondary Diploma	33.0	37.6	20.16
Undergraduate Degree	11.6	26.9	23.96
MA, PhD	4.6	12.6	27.17
<b>Work Hours</b>			
Part-time	29.8	25.7	15.85
Full-time	70.2	74.3	20.19
<b>Tenure (Years)</b>			
<1	20.7	8.0	14.90
1–5	37.8	28.1	17.69
6–10	18.4	16.7	20.43
>10	23.1	47.3	23.80
<b>Unionization</b>			
Collective Agreement	17.4	87.1	22.30
Not Covered by Collective Agreement	82.6	12.9	17.85
<b>Employment Status</b>			
Permanent	89.3	87.7	19.86
Temporary	10.7	12.3	16.28
<b>Size of Firm (# Employees)</b>			
< 20	32.9	5.2	15.95
20 to 99	19.0	9.0	18.36
100 to 500	12.3	19.9	21.03
> 500	35.8	65.9	21.25
Source: Authors' compilation from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey pooled microdata November 2002, May 2002			

**Table 4b: Characteristics of the Female Public and Private Sector Workforce in BC – By Occupation**

Occupation	% Distribution of Women Workers in Sector		Mean Hourly Wage* (\$)
	Private	Public	
Senior Management Occupations	0.3	0.1	33.66
Other Management Occupations	7.8	2.8	27.47
Professional Occupations in Business and Finance	3.5	0.5	24.55
Financial, Secretarial and Administrative Occupations	9.0	4.7	18.72
Clerical Occupations, Including Supervisors	14.0	12.4	16.82
Natural and Applied Sciences and Related Occupations	2.5	1.5	26.51
Professional Occupations in Health, Nurse Supervisors and Registered Nurses	2.4	18.7	27.11
Technical, Assisting and Related Occupations in Health	3.8	11.7	20.71
Occupations in Social Science, Government Service and Religion	4.2	5.5	22.98
Teachers and Professors	0.6	24.0	27.00
Occupations in Art, Culture, Recreation and Sport	3.1	1.6	19.45
Wholesale, Technical, Insurance, Real Estate Sales Specialists, and Retail, Wholesale and Grain Buyers	4.1	0.0	19.00
Retail Salespersons, Sales Clerks, Cashiers, Including Retail Trade Supervisors	11.4	0.4	12.68
Chefs and Cooks, and Occupations in Food and Beverage Service, Including Supervisors	6.2	1.2	12.70
Occupation in Protective Services	0.2	0.5	20.20
Childcare and Home Support Workers	5.2	7.6	15.24
Sales and Service n.e.c. including Travel and Accommodation, Attendants in Recreation and Sport, and Supervisors)	13.3	6.5	13.32
Contractors and Supervisors in Trades and Transportation	0.3	0.0	25.04
Construction Trades	0.2	0.0	19.06
Other Trades Occupations	1.0	0.0	21.94
Transport and Equipment Operators	0.5	0.1	18.79
Trades Helpers, Construction, and Transportation Labourers and Related Occupations	0.5	0.0	16.94
Occupations Unique to Primary Industry	2.2	0.0	15.89
Machine Operators and Assemblers in Manufacturing, Including Supervisors	2.9	0.0	17.93
Labourer in Processing, Manufacturing and Utilities	0.6	0.0	15.39

Source: Authors' compilation from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey pooled microdata November 2002, May 2002

workforce in the private sector (the first column) and public sector (the second column) across various groups. By comparing across these two columns we can see the degree to which women in the public sector differ from their private-sector counterparts. The next column reports the average hourly wage earned by all BC workers (both women and men) in the different sub-groups. We can compare this to the previous two columns to see where differences in the make-up of the female public and private-sector workforces should lead to higher wages for public or private-sector workers.

The table reveals that only two differences favour private-sector workers—women in the private sector are more likely to live in Vancouver and are slightly more likely to be permanent employees, both of which are associated with higher average wages than the alternative. Every other difference favours women in the public sector. Women workers in the public sector tend to be older, have higher levels of education, be more likely to work full-time, and have longer tenure with their employer, all of which are associated with higher wages. Female public-sector workers in BC are also far more likely to be covered by collective agreements and to work for large employers, both of which are also correlated with higher wage levels.

The kinds of occupations in which women public-sector workers are employed also tend to pay higher wages than occupations typical for women in the private sector. While women in some occupations, such as clerical workers, are employed in significant numbers in both the public and private sectors, other major occupations employing women are largely restricted to one sector or the other. It is notable that of these, those employing women primarily in the private sector, such as retail sales workers and cashiers, tend to have among the lowest wages, while those in the public sector, such as professional health workers and teachers and professors, have among the highest.

Taken together, these differences suggest that on average, women in the public sector should earn higher wages than their private-sector counterparts by virtue of their more favourable employment characteristics. But does this account for *all* of the difference? To provide an initial answer to this question it is necessary not only to look at pay differences between public and private-sector workers as a whole, but also to see whether a difference persists when we compare similar workers in both sectors.

Research suggests that women who lose their jobs in the public sector will find it difficult to find equivalent employment opportunities in the private sector. Also, gender pay differences tend to be lower in the public sector. These facts suggest that any substantial downsizing of public sector employment will be particularly harmful for women.

## Public-Sector Pay Differences

Table 5 provides a first look at differences in wages for female public and private-sector workers. The first two columns report average hourly wages for women in the private and public sectors for different sub-groups. The third column reports women's average wages in the private sector as a percentage of women's public-sector wages.

Looking at the table, we see first that, overall, women in the BC public sector do earn considerably more than female private-sector workers, as expected. Women in the public sector average \$23.65 per hour, compared to just \$15.11 per hour for women in the private sector. In other words, female private-sector workers' hourly wages are only 63.9 per cent of their public-sector counterparts.

Reading down the table reveals that a gap between the two groups remains even when we compare women with similar characteristics. This tells us that differences in any one kind of characteristic, such as education, cannot account for all of the wage difference between female workers in the two sectors.

It is notable, moreover, that the public-sector wage advantage varies considerably in size for different

**Table 5: Hourly Wages for Women in the Private and Public Sectors in BC by Group**

Group	Hourly Wage in Sector (\$)		Private Sector Wages as % of Public
	Private	Public	
All	15.11	23.65	63.9
<b>Age</b>			
15–24	10.59	16.90	62.6
25–49	16.18	23.26	69.5
50–64	15.81	25.29	62.5
<b>Education</b>			
<=High School	13.57	19.75	68.7
Post-secondary Diploma	15.97	22.81	70.0
Undergraduate Degree	19.13	26.07	73.4
MA, PhD	23.55	28.99	81.2
<b>Work hours</b>			
Part-time	16.09	23.73	67.8
Full-time	13.45	23.85	56.4
<b>Employment Status</b>			
Permanent	15.64	24.09	64.9
Temporary	13.15	21.46	61.3
<b>Tenure (Years)</b>			
<1	12.61	21.45	58.8
1–5	14.24	23.03	61.8
6–10	17.14	22.50	76.2
>10	18.85	25.04	75.3
<b>Place in Sector's Wage Distribution</b>			
95%	34.62	38.46	90.0
90%	29.00	34.62	83.8
75%	23.00	29.49	78.0
50%	16.48	22.58	73.0
25%	11.00	19.00	57.9
10%	8.60	16.80	51.2
5%	8.00	14.10	56.7

Source: Authors' compilation from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey pooled microdata November 2002, May 2002.

groups. In particular, the pay advantage for working in the public sector is largest for women who tend to be more disadvantaged in the labour force generally: there is less difference between sectors for “prime age” workers than for younger or older women; women with less education benefit more from public-sector employment, as do part-time workers and those with less tenure with their employer.

Comparing the earnings of higher and lower paid employees within the public and private sectors also shows that the earnings of public-sector women are particularly favourable on the lower end of the earnings distribution. For example, women who are at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of the private sector earnings distribution (i.e., their earnings are in the top 10 per cent) earn almost as much (83.3 per cent) as women in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of the earnings distribution in the public sector (and women in the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile of the earnings distribution earn 90.0 per cent of their public-sector counterparts’ wages). However, women in the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile in the private sector earn only half (51.2 per cent) what women in the bottom 10 per cent of the public sector earn.

## Adjusted Public-Sector Pay Differences

Since public and private-sector pay differences persist even when we compare similarly situated workers, none of the characteristics we have considered so far can independently explain women’s higher wages in the public sector. This implies the possibility that the public sector pays a “premium” to its workers above and beyond what their higher qualifications and more favourable wage-determining characteristics might require. But is this a general advantage, as conservative commentators decrying “privileged” public-sector workers suggest, or is it particular to women? This is a crucial question, because if the pay difference is particular to women, it suggests not that the public sector *overpays* women, but rather, that the private sector is more likely to *underpay*—or discriminate against—women.

The fact that pay differences tend to be larger, on the whole, for more disadvantaged women suggests that working in the public sector may be particularly positive for women compared to men as well. Researchers have argued that the public sector is more isolated from market pressures to minimize costs than is the private sector, which allows it greater scope to pay above-market wages if social considerations make this desirable. Political considerations, such as a preoccupation with fiscal austerity and deficit reduction, can provide a powerful incentive for governments to keep labour costs low. However, concern with maintaining governments’ appearance as a “fair” employer may work to the advantage of more vulnerable public-sector workers, including women. In addition, strong professional organizations and high levels of unionization and the relative formalization and regulation of employment relationships in the public sector also increase the chances of enforcing a non-discriminatory employment atmosphere (Whitehouse 1992, Gunderson et al. 2000, Mueller 2000).

In BC, women workers in the direct public sector, crown corporations, and education sector have benefited from both employment equity initiatives and a pay equity framework introduced in 1995, the *Public-Sector Employers Council on Pay Equity Policy Framework*. This framework was designed to address the historic devaluation of female dominated work in the public sector, and required the sectors covered to develop pay equity plans, file them with the government, and pay adjustments for pay equity of up

Concern with maintaining governments’ appearance as a “fair” employer may work to the advantage of more vulnerable public-sector workers, including women. Strong professional organizations and high levels of unionization and the relative formalization and regulation of employment relationships in the public sector also increase the chances of enforcing a non-discriminatory employment atmosphere.

to 1 per cent of payroll. Although the health sector was not included under this agreement, the female-dominated Hospital Employees' Union bargained successfully for pay equity over a period of years (Cohen and Cohen 2004). Unlike their counterparts in a number of other provinces, women working in the private sector in BC are not covered by pay equity laws.<sup>7</sup>

Table 6 reports the results of a statistical analysis estimating the relative advantage male and female workers earn by virtue of working in the public sector. The rows in the table report the percentage by which wages in the public sector exceed private-sector wages. As we read down the table, each row reports the result from a model that accounts for progressively more potential differences between public and private-sector workers. The full models with values for all regression coefficients and details of estimation procedures are reported in Appendix B.

Model 1 estimates the pure public-sector wage advantage, without accounting for any potential differences between workers in the two sectors, and confirms that there is a substantial overall difference between wages in the public and the private sectors for both men and women. As expected, the public-sector wage advantage is larger for women (61.2 per cent higher) than for men (33.9 per cent higher). Model 2 estimates the public-sector wage advantage after accounting for individual differences between public and private-sector workers (where they live, their average age, level of education, amount of time they have worked for their current employer and their marital status). Once we account for these differences, the public-sector pay advantage shrinks to 35.5 per cent for women, and only 7.7 per cent for men. Model 3 also accounts for differences in the average job characteristics in the two sectors (full or part-time status, permanent, seasonal/casual or contract position, size of firm in which the worker is employed, whether they are unionized, and their occupation). In this estimation, women's public-sector advantage is again much reduced, although it is still a substantial 15.3 per cent. For men, however, the wage difference between public and private-sector workers becomes not only smaller, but statistically insignificant. What this means is that we cannot discount the likelihood that there is in fact *no* underlying advantage for male workers in the public versus the private sectors in BC once we account for differences in their characteristics. However, while there is no statistical evidence that men earn more in the public sector after accounting for differences between workers in the two sectors, for women, a statistically significant public-sector 'pay premium' remains.

On average, then, the BC public sector does not pay above-market wages to workers in general, but only to women. This finding suggests that rather than viewing women as "overpaid" in the public sector, it may be more accurate to see them as relatively *underpaid* in the private sector. After all, if employers in the private sector tend to engage in hiring, promotion, or wage-setting practices that are more discrim-

Model	Control Variables Included in Estimation	% Public Sector Pay Premium	
		Men	Women
1	None	33.9	61.2
2	Individual Characteristics (Age, Education, Tenure, Marital Status)	7.7	35.5
3	Individual and Job Characteristics (Hours of work, Employment status, Firm size, Unionization, Occupation)	3.5 <sup>^</sup>	15.3

<sup>^</sup> Not statistically significant  $p \leq .05$ .  
Source: Author's calculations from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey pooled microdata November 2002, May 2002.



inatory against women, this would account for women’s relatively higher wages in the public sector.

One way to explore this possibility is to compare the wage gap between male and female workers within the public and private sectors. Studies of sex differences in wages typically seek to estimate the size of this difference after accounting for a range of possible differences between women and men’s average characteristics, as we did when estimating the wage gap between public and private-sector workers. The wage disparity that remains after controlling for as many relevant factors as possible is often attributed to gender-based labour market discrimination (Drolet 2001). While it is not possible for us to control for all potentially relevant differences between men and women, differences in the size of the gender wage gap that is unexplained in the public and private sectors can provide a reasonable index of the relative level of gender discrimination. If the gap is smaller in the public sector, this will suggest that women’s wage advantage in the public sector is indeed tied to a lower prevalence of discriminatory labour practices in this sector.

Running such analyses (the full results of which are documented in Appendix C) for workers in the private and provincial public sectors in BC reveals that men earn 15.7 per cent more than women in the private sector, even after we account for differences in their individual and job characteristics. However, while men do earn more than women in the public sector overall, once we account for differences in men and women’s wage-related characteristics, this gap is no longer statistically significant. These results therefore support the assumption that women’s public-sector wage advantage results largely from a less discriminatory working environment in the public sector.

These results therefore support the assumption that women’s public-sector wage advantage results largely from a less discriminatory working environment in the public sector.

## Variation in the Public-Sector Pay Advantage

So far, we have calculated wage differences between the public and private sector for all women, and all men. However, it is possible the size of this difference will vary for different groups of women and men. For example, we know that the hourly wage offered to workers hired to replace the (largely female) hospital cleaners who lost their jobs due to contracting out in the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority is little more than half of what the in-house cleaners used to make (Cohen and Cohen 2004). This wage cut is clearly substantially more than what the average figures for wage differences between the private and public sectors suggest.

Compared to BC workers as a whole, hospital cleaners and other Health Employees’ Union members disproportionately belong to traditionally vulnerable groups. The majority are women (85 per cent), 27 per cent are visible minorities (as compared to 19 per cent of the BC population), and 31 per cent are immigrants (as compared to 20 per cent of the population in BC) (Cohen and Cohen 2004). Recall that the overall pay difference between workers in the public and private sectors tends to be larger for more disadvantaged women (as demonstrated in Table 5), which would be consistent with relatively larger wage losses for hospital support workers. The question is, does this relatively greater advantage for more vulnerable workers remain generally true when we simultaneously control for a range of possible differences in characteristics between those employed in the two sectors?

Regression analyses (detailed in Appendix D) confirm that more vulnerable workers do generally enjoy a relatively greater advantage when working in the public sector. Although men working full-time do not enjoy a wage premium in the public sector, male part-time workers do, earning 17.6 per cent higher wages in the provincial public sector than in the private sector, all else being equal. Part-time women enjoy a relatively higher wage advantage in the public sector compared to their full-time counterparts as well. Region of residence also affects the size of public and private-sector pay differences for women,

with such differences larger among those living outside Vancouver. This likely reflects women's relatively more limited job opportunities and lower pay in the private sector outside the Vancouver area. Finally, among both men and women, the public-sector wage advantage is stronger for those employed in occupations with lower average pay overall.

Unfortunately, the labour force survey does not include measures of "race," immigrant status, or disability, so we cannot determine whether differences along these lines would affect the public-sector pay premium. However, insofar as the smaller gender wage gap in the public sector indicates a less discriminatory employment environment, we would also expect that women facing greater discrimination in the broader labour market, such as immigrant and visible minority women and those with disabilities, might also fare relatively better in the public sector than other women.

## Public-Sector Job Loss and Gender Equity

The combination of a large number of women employed in the provincial public sector and higher wages in the public sector for women means that a significant reduction in public-sector employment can have a negative impact on the quality of women's employment opportunities. The smaller gender wage gap in the public sector means that public-sector job losses may also affect the overall degree of gender wage inequality in BC, undermining women's economic standing relative to men.

To get a sense of the magnitude of men and women's job losses in the public sector, Table 7 presents best estimates of public-sector job losses to date. As the table shows, the largest reductions in public-sector employment have been among HEU workers, where employment losses were approximately 21.2 per cent. Public Service Agency employees (i.e., direct employees of the provincial government) also experienced large job losses, with women's employment reduced by 17.9 per cent and men's by 18.9 per cent between August 2001 and May 2004, a figure that still falls short of the government's original 30 per cent goal. Although many women in the education sector also lost their jobs, in percentage terms the reduction was smaller. In total, approximately 15,000 women and 5,300 men have lost jobs in the public sector since 2001.

**Table 7: Public Sector Job Losses by Area and Sex**

	Job Losses					
	Women		Men		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Public Service Agency Employees <sup>1</sup>	3,699	17.9	2,768	18.9	6,467	18.3
Liquor Distribution Board and BC Mental Health Employees <sup>1</sup>	255	8.5	142	6.6	397	7.8
Other BCGEU Members <sup>2</sup>	519	3.3	0	0.0	615 <sup>^</sup>	2.7
BCTF Members <sup>3</sup>	1,765	7.7	793	7.7	2,558	7.7
HEU Members <sup>4</sup>	8,848.5	21.2	1,561.5	21.2	10,410	21.2
Total	15,086.5		5,264.5		20,447 <sup>^</sup>	

Note: Sex breakdown of job losses for HEU and BCTF based on estimates of total sex composition of relevant union membership. There have also been some CUPE job losses in the education and community social services sectors, but the exact number is not available.

<sup>^</sup> Total includes 96 people of undetermined sex. There have been slight job gains for men among other BCGEU members.

Sources and timeframe for numbers: <sup>1</sup>BC Public Service Agency employee data files, August 2001–May 2004; <sup>2</sup>BCGEU, Feb 2001–Feb 2004; <sup>3</sup>BCTF, Sept. 2001–Sept. 2003 (figure represents full-time equivalent teachers); <sup>4</sup>HEU, 2001–Dec. 2004.

Data limitations make it difficult to perfectly assess whether changes in public-sector employment will in fact substantially affect the size of the gender wage gap in BC. However, it is possible to estimate impacts under different scenarios given what we now know about the size of the BC labour force, the average characteristics of male and female private and public-sector workers, and regression estimates of the relationship of these characteristics to wages.<sup>8</sup>

Table 8 describes the results of these calculations under three scenarios—a 30, 20, or 10 per cent reduction in the size of the broad provincial public-sector labour force. Although the provincial government has aimed for a 30 per cent reduction in direct government service employment, the 10 per cent figure is closest to the actual impact in the overall public sector (roughly estimated at 8.1 per cent). We include the two scenarios with larger reductions simply to illustrate how the size of the impact changes as the size of the public sector declines.

Looking at the first two columns, “Decline in Mean Hourly Wage” and “Per Cent Decline in Wage,” we see that each of these scenarios creates a greater decline in women’s average wage in the province as compared to men’s, both in absolute and percentage terms. Under the scenario of the broad 10 per cent public-sector reduction, changes are small, but are greater for women than men (as they are in the scenarios with larger cuts). Men’s hourly wages drop by only a cent, while women’s decline by 9 cents. This disproportionate impact is, of course, what we would expect given that a much higher share of women are employed in the provincial public sector and that women earn a relatively greater wage advantage in this sector.

The table also reveals that the differential effect of public-sector downsizing on men and women’s average wages does create a measurable, although small, increase in overall gender wage inequality in the province as measured by the percentage difference in men’s average hourly wages versus women’s. Under this scenario, the gender wage gap widens by 0.6 percentage points, a 2.6 per cent increase. This is a small increase, and the decline in public sector employment is actually somewhat lower than 10 per cent, but the assumptions used to calculate these scenarios were conservative.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the considerable employment losses that have occurred in the health sector at least have been concentrated among relatively low-paying occupations, suggesting that our measure of the wage premium of female public-sector workers may actually understate the premium previously earned by many of the workers who must now seek private-sector work. Numerous workers in this sector have experienced wage restraint, which is also not accounted for in the estimates.

**Table 8: Predicted Effect of Reductions in Public-sector Employment on Men and Women’s Average Wages and the Gender Wage Gap in BC**

Reduction in Provincial Public-sector Employment (%)	Decline in Mean Hourly Wage (\$)		% Decline in Wage		Increase in Gender Wage Gap	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	% pts	%
30	0.06	0.35	0.3	2.3	1.6	7.4
20	0.04	0.18	0.2	1.2	1.1	5.0
10	0.01	0.09	0.1	0.6	0.6	2.6

Source: Author’s calculations from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey public use microdata pooled from November and May 2002.

# Conclusions

Paid employment is crucial to most women's economic well-being, but women's ability to achieve economic security and equality through employment depends upon equitable access to decent work. Many community and women's organizations have warned of the negative impacts of the policy changes outlined in this report for women in particular. However, both the direction of recent policy changes and the general silence about their gendered impact suggests that sufficient attention is not being paid to issues of gender equity in provincial policy development in BC.

Although the current provincial government's push to reduce sources of income outside employment is ostensibly gender-neutral, it fails to adequately account for family/household dynamics that create particular employment barriers for women, or for labour market dynamics that result in lower wages for women as a group. Moreover, numerous policy changes enacted in the past few years will not only degrade the employment conditions for many women, but also magnify existing gender-based disparities in the labour force.

The substantial downsizing of public-sector employment that has occurred, together with the wage freezes or cuts affecting many working in this sector, threaten a particularly important source of good jobs for women. Not only does this affect the particular women who lose their jobs, it will also magnify existing gender-based disparities in the labour force, albeit to a relatively small degree. Moreover, to the extent that women's wages in the public sector set a standard with which the private sector must compete, the loss of public-sector positions may also ultimately undermine women's wages in the private sector, which may itself contribute to a widening gender wage gap.

Women's employment opportunities in the private sector have also been negatively affected by other policy changes. Less affluent women's opportunities to obtain or enhance skills valuable in the labour market through post-secondary education have been reduced by large tuition increases, the elimination of grants for needy students, and the loss of eligibility for welfare for those pursuing post-secondary education. Decreased state support for care work increases the unpaid work that falls disproportionately on women, often necessitating sacrifices (such as reduced hours of work) in the realm of paid employment that can undermine women's ability to participate in the labour market on equal terms. Finally, changes in employment regulations have reduced the rights and protections available to vulnerable workers. Taken individually, each of these changes undermines women's employment. Together, the impact on gender inequalities is compounded.

# Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Under the previous government, income assistance rates were already far below the federal government's low-income cut-off. The Social Planning and Research Council of BC estimates that rates covered only 65 per cent of minimum living costs, inadequate to meet the costs of rent in Vancouver in particular (Goldberg 2001). The Dieticians of Canada and the Community Nutritionists Council of BC report that welfare rates are also inadequate to provide nutritious food (Dieticians of Canada and The Community Nutritionists Council of BC 2003).
- <sup>2</sup> Research has consistently shown that the greatest part of the wage gap cannot be explained by gender differences in education levels or job experience (Jackson 2003).
- <sup>3</sup> In this respect, it is also worth noting that recent research does not support the assumption that family income is shared equally by spouses when men are higher earners (Acker 1998, Woolley 1998).
- <sup>4</sup> The term 'racialized group' is currently being used to describe groups previously categorized as 'visible minorities.' This term is preferable because it recognizes the social action involved in determining race, acknowledging that race is a social and historical construct rather than an objective biological fact. 'Visible minority' is also used in this report, as most data was collected under this label (Smith and Jackson 2002).
- <sup>5</sup> A complete inventory of recent changes to employment standards regulations can be found in (Drevland 2004).
- <sup>6</sup> Employees of the federal or municipal governments are excluded from the analysis.
- <sup>7</sup> The NDP government passed an amendment to the Human Rights Code that would have allowed private sector workers to bring forth pay equity complaints, but it was passed very late in its term and there was not time to implement it before it was repealed by the incoming Liberal government. The BC Liberal government appointed a task force to study pay equity for the private sector, but has taken no action on the recommendations of the task force.
- <sup>8</sup> In estimating the effect of public sector downsizing on changes in women's overall wages in BC, we make a number of simplifying assumptions. First, we assume that workers who lose their jobs in the BC public sector successfully find employment in the private sector. In fact, many workers in the direct government service took voluntary departure programs or early retirement. However, in estimating the effects of public sector downsizing, it is the loss of the positions to the private sector (as in the case of outsourcing), not simply where individual workers end up that is relevant. We also assume that these workers' personal characteristics (i.e. their level of educational attainment, marital status, etc.) remain the same, that they do not move to another area of the province, and that they continue with the same hours of work and employment status in the private sector as they had in the public sector. On the other hand, we assume that the character of private sector employment (i.e. the level of unionization and occupational distribution of private-sector workers) does not change with the incorporation of former public sector workers into the private sector labour force. This means that a substantial number of former public sector workers will no longer be unionized and will change occupations. Finally, we need to account for the fact that former public-sector workers are starting over with no tenure with their new employers in the private sector and thus lose the wage premium they received for whatever seniority they had accumulated in the public sector. This will change workers' overall tenure distribution and hence their overall average wages as well. In reassigning former public sector workers' place in the tenure distribution, we work from the assumption that layoffs occur according to seniority, so that as seniority rises progressively fewer workers shift sectors. Each of these assumptions is conservative. If anything, they understate likely downward shifts in the wages and employment circumstances of those displaced from public sector jobs (i.e. it is likely that some previously permanent, full-time workers will be able to find only temporary or part-time work, that some more highly tenured workers may lose their jobs with the closing of public sector offices or facilities, etc.).
- <sup>9</sup> With an 8.1 per cent decrease in public sector employment, the change in the gender wage gap is estimated to be 2.2 per cent.

# APPENDIX A: Data and Methods for Calculating Public-Sector Employment and Wages

## Data and Sample

Analysis of the characteristics of public and private-sector employment in BC is based on public-use microdata from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), a monthly household survey conducted by Statistics Canada. This survey includes fairly comprehensive representative data on the personal and labour market characteristics of working-age Canadians. It is the best data source available for our purposes because, in addition to information on the industry and occupation in which respondents work, it includes a variable specifically designating whether the person is a public or private-sector worker. Such a variable is not included in other commonly used sources of information on workers' labour market characteristics such as the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) and the Census. An unfortunate aspect of the LFS that limits our ability to fully explore the relationship between public-sector employment and wages for differently situated groups is that it does not include information on whether workers are immigrants, disabled, or members of a visible minority group.

The LFS is based on a six-month rotating panel design. To maximize the number of independent observations available for analysis, data are pooled from November 2002 and May 2002, which are six months apart and therefore do not overlap in their sample of research subjects. We exclude workers who are not currently in the labour force and unpaid family workers, those who are over 65 years old, and full and part-time students. This leaves us with a sample size of 10,653. Because we are primarily interested in comparisons between BC provincial public-sector workers and private-sector workers, most analyses also exclude federal or municipal employees, which reduces the sample size to 9,949. The exceptions are the models run to analyze the effect of changes in public-sector employment ratios on the gender-wage gap, which include other public-sector workers. Labour Force Survey weights are used in all analyses.

## Estimation Methods

We use a combination of ordinary least squares (OLS) and multi-level regression to estimate average differences in private and public-sector pay levels net of a variety of factors. The most basic OLS equation, which is used to estimate gross, or unadjusted public/private-sector pay differentials, simply treats (logged) hourly wages as a function of membership in the private or public sector:

$$\ln(WAGE) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(PUBLIC) + r$$

We estimate the parameters of the wage equations for women and men separately. To estimate the regression-adjusted effects of public-sector employment on hourly wages net of differences in other variables related to wages, we add a vector of control variables to the equations.

$$\ln(WAGE) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(PUBLIC) + \beta_2\chi + r$$

Control variables included in OLS regressions include both individual characteristics (area of residence, age, educational attainment, and tenure), and job characteristics (full or part-time status, unionization, permanent, seasonal, or casual employment status, size of firm).

Although OLS regression is the standard approach for estimating these types of wage equations, using OLS regression for models that include controls for occupation is problematic. It is possible to do this with OLS by using dummies to code the effects of different occupations, but using adequately detailed

occupational breakdowns entails a high number of dummy variables, which can be problematic in situations with relatively small sample sizes. Moreover, this approach assumes independence of errors for different individuals in the same occupation, which is unrealistic. Because observations within occupations are likely to be more similar to each other than observations across occupations, least squares estimation procedures result in unreliable estimates of standard errors (Snijders and Bosker 1999).

Multi-level regression techniques provide an alternative approach that explicitly accounts for the effects of such clustering, and are used in all models in which the effects of occupations are estimated. Essentially, measurements are conceptualized as having a hierarchical structure in which observations on wages for different individuals are seen as nested within occupations. The data thus has a two-level structure: individuals are the level-1 units while occupations are level-2 units. Taking a hierarchical approach allows each occupation to have its own slope for wages, accounting for variation in wage effects across occupations. This allows us to efficiently account for the relationship between occupational membership and wages using the more disaggregated occupational categories in the LFS (47 categories) without sacrificing numerous degrees of freedom. The overall variance in wages represented by the error term “ $r$ ” in the OLS equation is decomposed into variance among individuals ( $i$ ), and among occupations ( $j$ ). The model can be expressed in terms of two linked models. At the individual level, we express an individual’s wage outcome as the sum of an intercept for the individual’s occupation ( $\beta_{0j}$ ), slope terms for the effects of working in the public sector ( $\beta_{1j}(PUBLIC)_{ij}$ ) and the vector of other wage determining characteristics ( $\beta_2 X_{ij}$ ), and a random error associated with the  $i$ th worker in the  $j$ th occupation ( $r_{ij}$ ). At the occupational level, the occupation-level intercepts are expressed as the sum of an overall mean ( $\gamma_{00}$ ) and a series of random deviations from that mean ( $u_{0j}$ ). The occupation-level slopes for public-sector membership are similarly expressed as the sum of the overall mean slope among occupations ( $\gamma_{01}$ ) and the random deviations from that mean ( $u_{1j}$ ).

$$\begin{aligned} \ln(WAGE)_{ij} &= \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(PUBLIC)_{ij} + \beta_2 X_{ij} + r_{ij} \\ \beta_{0j} &= \gamma_{00} + u_{0j} \\ \beta_{1j} &= \gamma_{01} + u_{1j} \\ r_{ij} & \end{aligned}$$

Where  $r_{ij} \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$  and  $\begin{bmatrix} u_{0j} \\ u_{1j} \end{bmatrix} \sim N \begin{bmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \tau_{00} & \tau_{01} \\ \tau_{10} & \tau_{11} \end{bmatrix}$

In reading the equation, note that wherever a coefficient has a  $j$  subscript it varies between occupations. In other words, we allow the intercept term to vary across occupations, as well as the effect of public-sector employment, but not our vector of other control variables.



## APPENDIX B: OLS and Multi-level Regression Estimates

OLS and Multi-level Regression Estimates of Determinants of Men's Logged Hourly Wages in BC									
Variable	Model 1 (OLS)			Model 2 (OLS)			Model 3 (Multi-level)		
	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t
Intercept	2.907	0.008	<.0001	2.335	0.021	<.0001	2.420	0.038	<.0001
Public Sector	0.292	0.025	<.0001	0.074	0.023	0.001	0.034	0.035	0.325
Vancouver				-0.017	0.013	0.186	-0.019	0.012	0.103
Age [15 to 24]									
25–49				0.308	0.022	<.0001	0.224	0.020	<.0001
50–64				0.324	0.026	<.0001	0.251	0.024	<.0001
Education [High School or Less]									
Post-secondary Diploma				0.148	0.014	<.0001	0.077	0.013	<.0001
Undergraduate Degree				0.276	0.021	<.0001	0.128	0.020	<.0001
MA, PhD.				0.309	0.027	<.0001	0.164	0.026	<.0001
Tenure [<1]									
1–5				0.114	0.018	<.0001	0.094	0.016	<.0001
6–10				0.219	0.021	<.0001	0.154	0.020	<.0001
>10				0.363	0.019	<.0001	0.247	0.019	<.0001
Married				0.077	0.014	<.0001	0.051	0.012	<.0001
Part-time							-0.075	0.022	0.001
Employment Status [Permanent]									
Seasonal or Casual							0.007	0.026	0.789
Contract							0.009	0.028	0.750
Firm Size [<20]									
20 to 99							0.057	0.017	0.001
100 to 500							0.103	0.019	<.0001
> 500							0.112	0.016	<.0001
Collective Agreement							0.117	0.015	<.0001
Covariance Parameters									
Intercept Variance							0.042	0.010	<.0001
Intercept/Public Sector Covariance							-0.021	0.008	0.005
Public Sector Variance							0.019	0.008	0.011
Residual							38.930	0.895	<.0001
Fit Statistics									
R-Square	0.035			0.312					
Adj R-Sq	0.034			0.310					
-2 Res Log Likelihood							3484		

Source: Authors' calculations from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey public use microdata November and May 2002.



OLS and Multi-level Regression Estimates of Determinants of Women's Logged Hourly Wages in BC									
Variable	Model 1 (OLS)			Model 2 (OLS)			Model 3 (Multi-level)		
	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t
Intercept	2.641	0.007	<.0001	2.186	0.020	<.0001	2.422	0.046	<.0001
Public Sector	0.477	0.015	<.0001	0.303	0.014	<.0001	0.143	0.030	<.0001
Vancouver				0.051	0.011	<.0001	0.030	0.010	0.002
Age [15 to 24]									
25-49				0.214	0.020	<.0001	0.140	0.017	<.0001
50-64				0.186	0.023	<.0001	0.129	0.020	<.0001
Education [High School or Less]									
Post-secondary Diploma				0.147	0.013	<.0001	0.042	0.011	0.000
Undergraduate Degree				0.280	0.017	<.0001	0.083	0.016	<.0001
MA, PhD.				0.431	0.025	<.0001	0.179	0.024	<.0001
Tenure [<1]									
1-5				0.108	0.016	<.0001	0.048	0.014	0.001
6-10				0.222	0.019	<.0001	0.139	0.017	<.0001
>10				0.327	0.018	<.0001	0.201	0.016	<.0001
Married				-0.003	0.012	0.789	0.003	0.010	0.782
Part-time							-0.009	0.011	0.426
Employment Status [Permanent]									
Seasonal or Casual							-0.031	0.020	0.122
Contract							-0.022	0.024	0.360
Firm Size [<20]									
20 to 99							0.015	0.015	0.318
100 to 500							0.064	0.016	<.0001
> 500							0.067	0.013	<.0001
Collective Agreement							0.124	0.014	<.0001
Covariance Parameters									
Intercept Variance							0.072	0.016	<.0001
Intercept/Public Sector Covariance							-0.038	0.011	0.001
Public Sector Variance							0.023	0.009	0.007
Residual							27.750	0.630	<.0001
Fit Statistics									
R-Square	0.208			0.403					
Adj R-Sq	0.208			0.401					
-2 Res Log Likelihood							2357		

Source: Authors' calculations from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey public use microdata November and May 2002.

# APPENDIX C: OLS and Multi-level Regression Estimates

OLS and Multi-level Regression Estimates of Determinants of Logged Hourly Wages in the BC Private Sector									
Variable	Model 1 (OLS)			Model 2 (OLS)			Model 5 (Multi-level)		
	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t
Intercept	2.641	0.008	<.0001	2.125	0.016	<.0001	2.356	0.041	<.0001
Sex	0.266	0.011	<.0001	0.246	0.009	<.0001	0.146	0.024	<.0001
Vancouver				0.025	0.010	0.009	0.011	0.008	0.201
Age [15 to 24]									
25–49				0.255	0.016	<.0001	0.176	0.014	<.0001
50–64				0.240	0.019	<.0001	0.178	0.017	<.0001
Education [High School or Less]									
Post-secondary Diploma				0.153	0.011	<.0001	0.067	0.009	<.0001
Undergraduate Degree				0.288	0.016	<.0001	0.111	0.015	<.0001
MA, PhD.				0.400	0.024	<.0001	0.171	0.022	<.0001
Tenure [<1]									
1–5				0.106	0.013	<.0001	0.066	0.011	<.0001
6–10				0.237	0.016	<.0001	0.156	0.014	<.0001
>10				0.389	0.015	<.0001	0.244	0.014	<.0001
Married				0.035	0.010	0.001	0.028	0.009	0.002
Part-time							-0.057	0.012	<.0001
Employment Status [Permanent]									
Seasonal or Casual							-0.014	0.018	0.430
Contract							-0.014	0.021	0.507
Firm Size [<20]									
20 to 99							0.034	0.012	0.004
100 to 500							0.067	0.014	<.0001
> 500							0.092	0.011	<.0001
Collective Agreement							0.136	0.011	<.0001
Covariance Parameters									
Intercept Variance							0.063	0.014	<.0001
Intercept/Sex Covariance							-0.016	0.007	0.020
Sex Variance							0.017	0.005	0.001
Residual							34.4	0.614	<.0001
Fit Statistics									
R-Square	0.082			0.341					
Adj R-Sq	0.082			0.340					
-2 Res Log Likelihood							4912		

Source: Authors' calculations from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey public use microdata November and May 2002.

**OLS and Multi-level Regression Estimates of Determinants of Logged Hourly Wages in the BC Public Sector**

Variable	Model 1 (OLS)			Model 2 (OLS)			Model 5 (Multi-level)		
	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t
Intercept	3.119	0.011	<.0001	2.577	0.059	<.0001	2.584	0.069	<.0001
Sex	0.080	0.020	<.0001	0.039	0.019	0.040	0.042	0.027	0.116
Vancouver				-0.034	0.017	0.047	-0.026	0.017	0.112
Age [15 to 24]									
25-49				0.254	0.057	<.0001	0.241	0.054	<.0001
50-64				0.309	0.060	<.0001	0.284	0.057	<.0001
Education [High School or Less]									
Post-secondary Diploma				0.133	0.024	<.0001	0.034	0.024	0.154
Undergraduate Degree				0.248	0.025	<.0001	0.085	0.030	0.004
MA, PhD.				0.329	0.029	<.0001	0.172	0.033	<.0001
Tenure [<1]									
1-5				0.103	0.034	0.003	0.072	0.034	0.034
6-10				0.078	0.037	0.036	0.051	0.037	0.174
>10				0.158	0.034	<.0001	0.109	0.035	0.002
Married				0.028	0.019	0.132	0.029	0.017	0.103
Part-time							0.057	0.022	0.008
Employment Status [Permanent]									
Seasonal or Casual							-0.070	0.037	0.057
Contract							-0.026	0.037	0.477
Firm Size [<20]									
20 to 99							0.050	0.046	0.277
100 to 500							0.151	0.042	0.000
> 500							0.099	0.040	0.013
Collective Agreement							0.033	0.026	0.208
Covariance Parameters									
Intercept Variance							0.016	0.006	0.002
Intercept/Sex Covariance							0.001	0.004	0.694
Sex Variance							0.004	0.005	0.204
Residual							27.5	1.052	<.0001
Fit Statistics									
R-Square	0.011			0.168					
Adj R-Sq	0.010			0.162					
-2 Res Log Likelihood							959		

Source: Authors' calculations from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey public use microdata November and May 2002.

# APPENDIX D: OLS and Multi-level Regression Estimates

Multi-level Regression Estimates of Determinants of Men and Women's Logged Hourly Wages in BC						
Variable	Men			Women		
	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t	Coeff	SE	Pr >  t
Intercept	2.424	0.038	<.0001	2.422	0.046	<.0001
Public Sector	0.020	0.040	0.614	0.159	0.033	<.0001
Vancouver	-0.006	0.012	0.135	-0.069	0.011	<.0001
Public Sector *Vancouver	-0.074	0.038	0.874	0.007	0.022	0.002
Education [High School or Less]						
Post-secondary Diploma	0.077	0.013	<.0001	0.041	0.011	0.000
Undergraduate Degree	0.127	0.020	<.0001	0.082	0.016	<.0001
MA, PhD.	0.168	0.026	<.0001	0.185	0.024	<.0001
Tenure [<1]						
1–5	0.092	0.016	<.0001	0.047	0.014	0.001
6–10	0.152	0.020	<.0001	0.137	0.017	<.0001
>10	0.246	0.019	<.0001	0.200	0.016	<.0001
Age [15 to 24]						
25–49	0.222	0.020	<.0001	0.138	0.017	<.0001
50–64	0.250	0.024	<.0001	0.129	0.020	<.0001
Married	0.051	0.012	<.0001	0.001	0.010	0.923
Part-time	-0.095	0.024	<.0001	-0.030	0.013	0.020
Public Sector *Part-time	0.163	0.066	0.013	0.089	0.026	0.001
Employment Status [Permanent]						
Seasonal or Casual	0.006	0.026	0.827	-0.035	0.020	0.077
Contract	0.008	0.028	0.782	-0.028	0.024	0.240
Firm Size [<20]						
20 to 99	0.056	0.017	0.001	0.012	0.015	0.414
100 to 500	0.102	0.019	<.0001	0.057	0.016	0.000
> 500	0.113	0.016	<.0001	0.065	0.013	<.0001
Collective Agreement	0.117	0.015	<.0001	0.124	0.014	<.0001
Covariance Parameters						
Intercept Variance	0.042			0.070		
Intercept/Public Sector Covariance	-0.021			-0.036		
Public Sector Variance	0.020			0.023		
Residual	38.9			27.6		
Fit Statistics						
-2 Res Log Likelihood	3486			2344		

Source: Authors' calculations from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey public use microdata November and May 2002.

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