

Will you still bleed me when I'm 64?

Women and Pensions

Women are at a significant disadvantage to men when it comes to pensions. Women not only earn less than men for comparable work but are also expected to shoulder unpaid caregiving responsibilities. Women are also concentrated in non-standard, poorly-paid jobs, which offer little hope for a decent pension.

THE GOOD NEWS:

More Pensions & Fewer Retirees Living in Poverty

Canadian women have made important pension gains in recent decades, particularly women workers in the public sector and women retirees accessing public pensions.

In recent decades, women also fought for better pension legislation. They won part-time worker access to workplace pensions and better pension vesting rights. They won fairer Canada Pension Plan (CPP) rules for those who stopped work to help raise children. They won a battle to index CPP and Old Age Security benefits to inflation, so the value of public pensions would hold steady over the course of one's working life.

These victories are the major reason fewer seniors today live in poverty.

In 1980, retiree poverty was twice the rate of the working-age population. By 2004, retiree poverty was half the rate of the working-age population.

NUMBER OF PENSIONS HAS TRIPLED IN 30 YEARS!

The number of women in workplace pension plans tripled from 1974 to 2004.

During this period, almost all the increase in workplace pension plan membership came from women joining unions and gaining decent pensions.

THE BAD NEWS:

Pension Income Gap Remains

Despite these positive developments, research also shows a major gap in pension income between women and men. Between 1991 and 2001, for example, retired women still earned 60% in pension income compared to retired men.

Retired women living alone, whether they are single, divorced or widowed, face a much worse financial reality. A 2004 study found an astounding 45.6% of women in these circumstances still lived in poverty.



Equality
once and for all!



Canadian Labour Congress

Congrès du travail du Canada



Why are women worse off when it comes to pensions?

The stubborn persistence of a gender gap in pension income is easy to explain.

First, most currently-retired women faced a labour market that offered limited possibilities for those wanting jobs. Many women were unable to establish substantial pension incomes beyond their entitlement to public pensions.

Some think times have changed now that the majority of working-age women are on the job, comprising 46% of the Canadian labour market. But that isn't true at all.

Women still don't earn equal pay for work of equal value. Even today, women who work full-time full-year still only earn a 70.5 cents for each dollar of men's wages. As a result, they won't receive the same pension income as men.

Secondly, women's caregiving responsibilities have not changed. Women still shoulder the bulk of unpaid caregiving work for children and seniors. In 2002, over 2 million Canadians, three-quarters of them women, offered personal care for seniors.

The absence of affordable, publicly-funded child care and elder care has put working women in stressful and frustrating circumstances. Equally stressful is the dominant role of women in low-quality, unstable work. Forty percent of women work in these kinds of jobs and won't be able to accumulate much, if any, retirement income.

Also, the vast majority of workers today (over 60%) don't have access to a workplace pension. That won't change until the quality of work improves.

THE UNION ADVANTAGE!

There is a way to improve women's pension rights and the quality of work. That way is union membership and union activism.

Over the last three decades, unions have led the fight for women's equality in pensions. There's no doubt about it, unions make a difference in women's lives. The labour movement needs more women activists if we are to achieve equality in pensions.

As an old adage goes, women make the union strong!

What you can do

If you are looking for a better pension – find out about joining a union.

Support campaigns to defend and improve public pensions.

Join this campaign, find more information on pensions and other equality issues on our web site at:

www.onceandforall.ca

Check it out!