

M. T. O'CONNELL,
*Manpower Consultant, Department of
 Manpower and Immigration.*

WOMEN IN THE WORLD OF WORK

During World War II, when many women went to work for the first time, a group of learned analysts put out a pamphlet on the female employee. "Women," they said, "are simply little men." Other studies revealed only that women are like men but aren't, and that every woman is like every other woman but isn't. The old phrase, "the opposite sex," is more accurate. Women are different and most of them, including those who won't admit it, want to be treated as such. But whatever the definition, whether it be controversial, paradoxical, or autocritical, in this era of social-economic upheaval, the fact remains that the situation and influence of women in the world of work is one of the most discussed topics of the day.

THE CHANGING PATTERN

Women have always worked, but the increasing tendency to participate in the labour force during the greater part of their lives is now an established fact. According to the Census of 1891, one out of every eight paid workers was a woman, and the ten leading occupations were all closely associated with traditional household tasks. In 1901, only 13.3% of the labour force consisted of women, but in 1966 women made up 30% of Canada's work force and had entered a much wider range of occupations. Statistics now indicate that 32.8% of the total female population of working age is participating in the labour force and that eight out of every ten girls will work in paid employment during some part of their lives. Furthermore, indications are that the percentage of the labour force consisting of women, which has been rising at a rapidly accelerating pace during the past fifty years, will continue to increase.

There has been in the last two or three generations a revolutionary change in the life pattern of women in Canada, as in most comparable countries. There was a time when women working outside the home were looked upon with suspicion; today, society still insists that the place of the wife and mother is in the home unless widowhood or some other disaster dictates otherwise; however, the fact that more and more women have to work contributes to standardize new roles.

TRENDS IN WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Economic, social, and technological changes in the past half century have played a part in the growth in number of women workers. Also, increased labour-force participation by women is attributable largely to the improvement in job opportunities for their sex. The growth of producing industries in particular has increased job opportunities for women workers in almost all parts of Canada during 1966. The largest area of new demand for women workers has been in the clerical and service occupations, resulting from the growth of large business organizations and improved general prosperity.

In the early part of this century, the great majority of women workers were single or the sole support of families. It was not until World War II that employment of married women outside of home became common. In recent

years, the shortening of daily hours of work together with the prevalence of the five-day week have permitted women to hold jobs while fulfilling other responsibilities. Development of mechanical aids such as automatic washers and dryers, vacuum cleaners, floor polishers, and many other household appliances, together with the evolution of packaged prepared foods, have helped to reduce the time for household duties. There is now also a tendency for women to confine their childbirth to their twenties and early thirties. Finally there appears to be a growing willingness on the part of families to reallocate household work when the wife and mother takes a job outside the home, though most married women devote a large proportion of their working hours to their combined responsibilities.

OCCUPATIONS

Il y a au Canada plus de deux millions de femmes dans l'effectif ouvrier. La participation des femmes à la main-d'œuvre va s'accroître, c'est-à-dire, que plus en plus de femmes qui sont d'âge à travailler vont s'intégrer dans le marché du travail. En 1955, le quart des femmes travaillaient alors qu'on prévoit le tiers en 1970.

La majorité des femmes travailleuses peuvent être classées en cinq groupes occupationnels importants. Le schéma canadien de la main-d'œuvre féminine peut se traduire comme suit: pour chaque 100 femmes au travail, 30 sont dans des occupations cléricales, 22 dans les services personnels, 15 dans les services professionnels, 11 dans les industries de la fabrication, 8 dans la vente, et 14 peuvent être classées dans divers autres champs occupationnels.

Au Canada, les femmes mariées représentent 51% du chiffre total des femmes au travail, tandis que dans la Province de Québec, le pourcentage est de 32% et de 38% à Montréal.

Mais que font-elles, ces 152,000 femmes mariées qui travaillent dans la Province de Québec?

Le plus grand nombre sont des employées de bureau. La situation est semblable pour les célibataires sauf que la proportion des célibataires est plus élevée. Parmi les employées de bureau, les plus nombreuses sont les dactylographes et les commis-dactylographes.

En proportion égale, (bureau, 23% ; métiers, 22%) se trouvent les femmes mariées qui travaillent comme artisanes, ouvrières de métier, etc., surtout de métiers à l'aiguille, comme les opératrices de machine à coudre.

Les travailleuses dans les services et les activités récréatives viennent au troisième rang à titre de femmes mariées au travail. Les filles de table, les femmes de chambre, et les aides-infirmières sont les plus nombreuses dans ce dernier groupe. Ces trois groupes, le bureau, les métiers, et les services, représentent 64% des femmes mariées au travail dans la Province.

Chez les célibataires, la situation est semblable quand il s'agit des employées de bureau et des services, mais on compte une célibataire sur cinq dans les professions libérales et de techniciennes. Ce qui veut dire que les célibataires au travail représentent 69% de toutes les célibataires parmi les trois groupes ou divisions professionnelles mentionnés plus haut.

La différence entre les femmes mariées et les célibataires au travail est la suivante: chez les femmes mariées, nous avons substitué à la division des

ouvrières de métiers celle des professions libérales et de techniciennes: et de ce fait, les célibataires sont plus nombreuses dans ces trois groupes.

Parmi les célibataires qui appartiennent aux professions libérales et de techniciennes, presque la moitié se trouvent parmi le personnel enseignant, et le quart parmi les infirmières diplômées ou les étudiantes-infirmières. Il y a quatre fois plus de célibataires que de femmes mariées dans le groupe de professions libérales et de techniciennes, ce qui indique un niveau d'instruction plus élevé parmi les jeunes.

Pourquoi n'y a-t-il pas plus de femmes mariées dans l'enseignement? Est-ce surtout parce que parmi les célibataires il y a un plus grand nombre de jeunes qui ont bénéficié d'une meilleure instruction que leurs ancêtres? L'enseignement a depuis longtemps été considéré une profession enviable pour une femme et ce pour plusieurs raisons: les heures de travail; même quand une femme a des jeunes enfants qui fréquentent l'école, si elle est institutrice, ces heures de travail coïncident avec les heures où les enfants sont absents de la maison, et elle profite également de la période de vacances.

Une femme qui s'est déjà qualifiée dans l'enseignement peut souvent retourner à sa profession soit durant les heures normales ou encore à temps partiel. Considérant l'augmentation des cours du soir ainsi que ceux destinés spécialement aux adultes, il y aura plusieurs postes à remplir dans l'enseignement.

J'ai mentionné précédemment (schéma canadien) que pour chaque 100 femmes au travail 15% se trouvaient dans les services professionnels. Je voudrais élaborer un peu sur cet énoncé: le nombre de femmes professionnelles a augmenté considérablement dans les dernières années. L'importance accordée à l'instruction et à la formation supérieures a élevé le niveau d'étude aussi bien chez les filles que chez les garçons. Alors qu'il y a 20 ans ou même 10 ans, une faible minorité des femmes complétaient leurs études du baccalauréat, c'est devenu aujourd'hui chose courante et malgré l'expansion des collèges classiques pour filles, les demandes d'admission peuvent difficilement être satisfaites. Les femmes sont aujourd'hui représentées dans toutes les professions même celles qui étaient jadis réservées aux hommes comme le génie, la science, l'architecture et même la médecine vétérinaire.

Il n'en demeure pas moins que la grande majorité des femmes qui exercent une profession se rencontrent dans des domaines reconnus de tout temps "appropriés pour la femme." Les trois-quarts environ sont infirmières ou institutrices. Les autres professions dans lesquelles on trouve le plus grand nombre de femmes sont diététiciennes, bibliothécaires, travailleuses sociales, techniciennes de laboratoire et des Rayons-X dans les hôpitaux et les cliniques, physiothérapeutes et thérapeutes d'occupation.

WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE BY AGE GROUPS

The following statements taken from *Women at Work in Canada* (1964) clearly outline a striking picture of a rapidly increasing trend of certain age groups of women entering or re-entering employment:

The majority of the female labour force (as of the adult population) lies in the 25 to 64 year age range. Nevertheless, participation of women in this range shows substantially lower levels . . . than those displayed by women in the 20 to 24 year age group.

[Figures] indicate that the group aged 45 to 54 has shown the fastest-rising participation rates of any of the age groups Of all groups aged 25 and over, this one now shows the highest participation rate, whereas in 1950, it had one of the lowest. The rise in the participation rates of women aged 35 to 44 has been almost as striking. (p. 18)

Teen-aged girls have shown moderate declines in participation, which reflects both an extension of schooling and, to a slight extent, a redistribution of population within the 14-19 age group The group aged 55 to 64 has also almost doubled its participation rates since 1950, while the participation rates for women aged 65 and over have increased, but rather slowly. The lower rates for women aged 55 and over may well reflect lower demand for their services The occupations of older women are quite different from those of the younger age groups. Two of the problems of women in the older age group at present (from the standpoint of competitiveness in the labour market) are relatively low levels of education and training and lack of recent work experience. With the aging of the group now 45 to 54, these barriers should tend to disappear. (p. 19)

There can be little doubt that women are a growing manpower resource and certainly the greatest unused source of supply today. Most women are making but a limited use of their natural and acquired abilities. Progressive measures on the part of governments and other authorities and the development of enlightened public opinion can do much to remove or modify these causes.

That so revolutionary a change should result in contemporary problems for women, who must make a major adjustment in their traditional way of life, is readily understandable. Women have not been conditioned as men have been to look upon paid work as their chief role in life. They find themselves faced with the necessity of carrying a double responsibility—that of homemaker on the one hand, that of wage-earner on the other. Tradition, education, social attitudes, the general structure of the world of work which for generations has been planned and regulated to accommodate the male worker, all these facts, as well as the biological pattern of a woman's life, create problems for women who seek to participate in the labour force and for those who employ them.

In concluding this paper, I believe I can do no better than quote these recommendations from the *Manpower Policy and Programmes in Canada*:

Explicit recognition of the fact that women workers are an essential and, at the same time, a distinctive element in the manpower resources of the nation is the premise of policy development in this area.

Working from this premise there is need for a well-planned, imaginative programme of study and research to increase available knowledge regarding the effective development and use of womanpower, including for example:

- study of the utilization of women workers in reasonably controlled situations such as the public service;
- pilot projects in counselling, education, and training for adult women seeking re-entry into the labour market.
- encouraging girls and women to consider occupations in less traditional women's fields, while taking steps to stimulate opportunities of employment for them in such fields;
- efforts to expand areas of employment of both women and men, breaking down gender barriers in respect to feminine and masculine occupations.

Because of the increasing place of gainful work in women's lives, the development of suitable policies of adjustment to meet the special prob-

lems of women workers that arise from their maternal role and their changing civic, economic, and social status assumes new urgency. These include, on the one hand, such measures as more adequate day care services for children; provision for maternity leave; part-time work, adequately regulated to prevent exploitation whether by employers or workers; and on the other, equal pay for equal work; minimum wage legislation, providing the same minimum rates for workers of both sexes; endorsement of the principle of employment and advancement on the basis of qualifications in relation to the requirements of the job irrespective of the sex of the individual.

At the same time, a continuing programme of information and public education is required to bring about a climate of opinion conducive to more effective development and utilization of womanpower. (pp. 147-8)

REFERENCES

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