

WOMEN IN PREDOMINANTLY FEMALE WORKPLACES - THE “PROXY SECTOR”

The “Proxy Sector”:

Predominantly female public sector workplaces where there are few or no male job classes. These workplaces use the proxy method of comparison to identify the wage adjustments needed for female job classes in order to allow them to achieve pay equity.

Government Services:

Proxy Sector workplaces provide vital public services to those most in need. For eg.

- child care centres,
- nursing homes caring for the aged,
- associations for community living working with the developmentally disabled,
- home care and community health agencies
- women’s shelters and rape crisis centres,
- and many more.

Women Service Providers

The staff at these workplaces are overwhelmingly women. For example, 98% of the staff in child care centres are women. 88% of nurses aides are women.

Lowest Paid Workers in the Public Sector.

Women in the proxy sector receive discriminatory wages which make them amongst the lowest paid in the public sector. For example, in 1998, assistant teachers in child care centres were paid on average less than \$20,000 per year, less than the average wage of a parking attendant.

“Women’s Work”

This work is low paid because women do it and this work is most associated with the “caring and support functions” of classic “women’s work. They are perceived as caregivers who nurse the ill, clean, cook, and perform other “female tasks” which are vitally important to Ontario citizens but which have been undervalued comparable to tasks performed by men. The high levels of skill, education, responsibility, and the high demands of their work has often been ignored or minimized. For example, child care workers in provincially regulated child care centres must hold an Early Childhood Education Diploma, a two year program. Although not required, 50% of women working as counsellors in group homes for the developmentally disabled have completed course work on working with people with developmental disabilities. The *Pay Equity Act* was passed with the goal of remedying this gender based discrimination.