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Abstract

Statistics Canada, the statistical bureau of the government of Canada, routinely disaggregates data by sex. Hence, a broad range of statistics is available for analysis of gender-related issues. This paper begins with a brief presentation of gender issues and concerns as described in the *Federal Plan for Gender Equality*. This is followed by a discussion of the production, dissemination and use of gender statistics in Canada. The paper concludes by emphasizing the role of gender-based analysis in a gender statistics program aimed at illuminating issues of public policy concern.

Introduction

In the wake of the Beijing Platform for Action signed at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995, there has been an increased demand for research and information related to gender in Canada. All federal government departments have a responsibility to implement gender-based analysis, as outlined in *The Federal Plan for Gender Equality* (1995). In the *Federal Plan*, the government of Canada outlined its contributions to advances in gender equality, strengthened its commitments to equality and set a course to

¹ Paper prepared by Statistics Canada. The paper represents a report on progress in the field of gender statistics in Canada with respect to production, dissemination and use of gender statistics.

accelerate progress. A continuing priority is the achievement of women's economic equality by enhancing women's economic autonomy and well being.

Gender issues and concerns

Eight objectives were outlined in the *Federal Plan for Gender Equality*. They are as follows:

1. Implement gender-based analysis throughout federal departments and agencies;
2. Improve women's economic autonomy and well-being;
3. Improve women's physical and psychological well-being;
4. Reduce violence in society, particularly violence against women and children;
5. Promote gender equality in all aspects of Canada's cultural life;
6. Incorporate women's perspectives in governance;
7. Promote and support global gender equality; and
8. Advance gender equality for employees of federal departments and agencies.

The remainder of this report discusses the progress in the field of gender statistics in Canada, covering aspects of the production, use and dissemination of gender statistics and gender-based analysis.

I. Production of gender statistics

Institutional mechanism

Canada has a centralized statistical agency, Statistics Canada, responsible for collecting national statistics. Under federal legislation known as the *Statistics Act*, Statistics Canada is required to collect, compile, analyse, abstract and publish statistical information on virtually every aspect of the nation's society and economy. Although Statistics Canada data are generally produced from surveys, they are also generated as a by-product of administrative activities, such as the processing of income tax files.

In many respects, gender has been successfully mainstreamed in Statistics Canada. Data from household surveys are routinely disaggregated by sex, and much expertise in gender analysis exists across the agency. However, there is room for improvement in coordination and collaboration of data collection and research activities in order for Statistics Canada to better respond to the increased demand for information in this domain.

Improvements in gender statistics and availability over past years

Canada has been a leader in the field of gender statistics since the 1950s because of the long history of household surveys, principally labour force surveys and their supplements. However, important advances in the collection of gender statistics have been made even in the past decade. Examples include the measurement and valuation of unpaid work, the measurement of violence and the development of longitudinal surveys. The first estimates of the volume and value of household work were published by Statistics Canada as early as 1978. In 1986, national level time use information was collected for the

first time through the General Social Survey (GSS). One use of this data is the measurement and valuation of unpaid work activities. Depending on the valuation method used, it was estimated that unpaid household work was equivalent to 32% to 54% of Gross Domestic Product in 1992. The time use survey was repeated in 1992 and in 1998. A series of questions on unpaid work were also added to the 1996 and 2001 Census of Population. Respondents were asked to report the number of hours spent in the week prior to the Census doing unpaid housework, unpaid childcare and unpaid care or assistance to seniors. In 1993, Canada conducted the first national Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS). This survey found that half of adult women had experienced at least one incident of assault or sexual assault in their lifetime. In 1999, the GSS on Victimization included questions about spousal abuse, modeled on those used in the VAWS. These questions were asked of both men and women, providing for the first time comparable figures on spousal abuse by sex. In 1999, 8% of women and 7% of men with a partner had experienced spousal violence in the past five years. However, the nature and consequences of the violence were found to be more severe for women.

In recent years, Statistics Canada has also implemented a number of longitudinal surveys. These include the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID), the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, the Youth in Transition Survey, the National Population Health Survey, and the Workplace and Employee Survey. Longitudinal surveys support gender statistics in ways that were previously unattainable. Cross sectional surveys can describe what the situation is (the state) whereas longitudinal surveys allow one to explain how it came to be (the process). For example, a recent study using the longitudinal file of the SLID (Marshall 1999) demonstrated the strong labour force attachment of women with children. Of the employed women who gave birth in 1993 or 1994, 86% returned to work in the labour force within one year, and within two years, a full 93% were once again working for pay.

Main data gaps/Key areas for improvement

Statistics Canada is working to improve its ability to monitor changes in Canadian society through new data collection activities and efforts to enhance the use of its unique data holdings.

The General Social Survey has traditionally been a key vehicle for gathering information on specific social policy issues of emerging interest. Recent cycles of the GSS have increased Statistics Canada's range of gender statistics, covering topics such as time use, social support, victimization, access and use of information communication technology and family history. In addition, three post-censal surveys are being planned for 2001 to cover gaps in information about Aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities and ethnic diversity in Canada. Population ageing is yet another area of emerging policy interest with an important gender focus. Statistics Canada is working in collaboration with other federal government departments to improve the scope of population ageing data.

Furthermore, the agency also conducts surveys for external clients on a cost-recovery basis. This is an important way of ensuring relevance of statistical outputs, since willingness to pay

is a clear indication of the need for new statistical information. However, it is important to note that cost-recovery surveys do not provide any privileged access to the client. Any information collected under the *Statistics Act* must be placed in the public domain.

There is an increasing demand for evidence-based decision making at all levels of government in Canada. Statistics Canada has a wealth of gender statistics that are critical to monitoring and understanding economic and social trends in society. However, a great deal of this data is under-utilized. Statistics Canada has made efforts to improve access to its public-use microdata files by university researchers through the Data Liberation Initiative. A further initiative to promote research and training in the application of social statistics, the Canadian Initiative on Social Statistics (CISS), has recently been launched. It is hoped that the CISS will also improve public access to longitudinal data files.

This move toward evidence-based decision making has also resulted in the demand for data at sub-national levels and for sub-populations of public policy interest. In an effort to meet this need, sample sizes have been expanded for surveys like the GSS. In the area of health, for example, the new Canadian Community Health Survey has flexible survey components that can be tailored to the needs of different health regions in Canada.

II. Dissemination and use of gender statistics

Main users

Gender statistics are widely used by the Canadian public. Primary users of the data include other federal government departments such as Status of Women Canada and Human Resources Development Canada. Gender statistics are an important tool for policy makers at all levels of government, for academic researchers, as well as other members of civil society and non-governmental organizations including social workers, community, health and welfare organizations, unions, teachers, libraries and resource centres.

Cooperation and communication mechanism with users

Statistics Canada strives to illuminate significant public policy issues, regardless of where the demand for statistical information comes from. In the interest of maintaining non-political objectivity, efforts are made to consult with all major stakeholders. Statistics Canada employs a range of communication mechanisms to gather information about the needs of both government and non-government user communities.

One of the most effective high-level mechanisms for obtaining input about broad policies and priorities is the National Statistics Council of Canada. The Council was established in 1986 to advise Statistics Canada on the activities and priorities it should set to ensure its statistical programs remain relevant to the country's needs. The 30-some members of Council are drawn from many backgrounds, including business, universities, research institutions, labour unions, the media and government. Selected on the basis of individual excellence, they reflect the diversity of Statistics Canada's data users.

In addition, the agency strives to maintain close working relationships with key federal government policy departments and with provincial governments, particularly in the areas of major provincial jurisdiction (health, education and justice). In order to stay in touch with a wide range of non-government users, Statistics Canada seeks advice from professional subject-matter advisory committees, monitors client feedback, consults with stakeholders in the development of survey content, and participates in professional associations.

Gender statistics available on website

Statistics Canada has been operating a World Wide Web site on the Internet since March 1995. The "Talon" site, www.statcan.ca, was developed for the broadest possible audience. The World Wide Web service has become one of the most important access points to Statistics Canada for the general public. Currently over 300,000 hits are made on the site each day.

A broad range of statistics, including gender statistics, is available on the Talon Website. Through the website, Statistics Canada serves the general public interest by providing free information concerning Canada and its people and information on the products, services, metadata and documentation produced by the agency. The site also provides paying clients with a gateway for the provision of selected products and services.

The official release bulletin of Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, is also available for free on the website. It is the agency's first line of communication with the media and the public. *The Daily* issues news releases on the current social and economic conditions and announces new products. It provides a comprehensive one-stop overview of new information available from Statistics Canada. *The Daily* also plays an important role in ensuring objectivity, neutrality and transparency in Statistics Canada's outputs. All of the agency's outputs remain strictly confidential until their availability is announced in *The Daily*, at which time they become available to everyone outside of Statistics Canada. *The Daily* is released at 8:30 a.m. (Eastern Standard Time) each working day with the exception of data from the Labour Force Survey and the Consumer Price Index, which are made available at 7 a.m. *The Daily*, published since 1932, has been posted on the Web since June 1995.

Main gender statistics outputs/Uses of gender statistics

Every five years since 1985, Statistics Canada has produced a statistical compendium called *Women in Canada*. This report paints a comprehensive gender-based portrait of the Canadian population by integrating relevant statistical series from Statistics Canada and other sources. The most recent edition was released in September 2000.

Statistics Canada also works in close collaboration with Status of Women Canada, the federal government department responsible for promoting gender equality. In 1998, the two departments produced a reference document, *Finding Data on Women: A Guide to Major Data Sources at Statistics Canada*. This document is available for free on the Status of Women Website at www.swc-cfc.gc.ca. The federal, provincial and territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women also commissioned a report from Statistics Canada in 1997 entitled *Economic Gender Equality Indicators*. This set of indicators was designed to

contribute to public policy discussion on social indicators, an understanding of women's realities and the promotion of gender equality.

The use of sex-disaggregated data for the purposes of employment equity is another example of how gender statistics can be used to promote women's economic equality. The term "employment equity" was coined in the 1984 Royal Commission Report, *Equality in Employment*. It is defined as "a strategy designed to obliterate the present and residual effects of discrimination and to open equitably the competition for employment opportunities to those arbitrarily excluded". In 1986, the federal government of Canada passed the *Employment Equity Act* with the objective of achieving equal employment opportunities in the workplace.

The intent of the employment equity legislation is to identify and remove barriers to the employment of four groups of people - women, Aboriginal peoples, persons in a visible minority, and persons with disabilities - and to ensure that they achieve a level of employment that is at least proportionate to their representation in the work force, as defined by qualification, eligibility and geography. In order to develop and evaluate employment equity programs, data are required on the size and characteristics of the population in each of the four designated groups. The Census of Population and post-censal surveys are the primary data source for this information, although many surveys now collect information about membership in employment equity designated groups.

Conclusion

Statistics Canada, the statistical bureau of the government of Canada, routinely disaggregates data by sex. Hence, a broad range of statistics is available for analysis of gender-related issues. In recent years, Canada has also made important advances in the collection of gender statistics, such as the measurement and valuation of unpaid work, the measurement of violence and the implementation of a series of longitudinal surveys.

Since 1985, the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* has given legal force to the notion of gender equality as equality of outcomes. This recognizes that equal treatment may not result in equal outcomes. A key function of a program of gender statistics is to provide the data necessary for gender-based analysis. Gender-based analysis is a process that assesses the differential impact of policies, programs and legislation on women and men, taking into account their different socio-economic realities. The basic requirements for gender-based analysis are:

- gathering qualitative and quantitative data;
- questioning basic assumptions; and
- developing an understanding of how social and economic factors affect women and men differently.

Producing sex-disaggregated data is but a first step. A key challenge for improving gender statistics at Statistics Canada is to continue to question basic assumptions about the way data are collected, analyzed and disseminated.

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