

Women in the Workforce: Impact on Girls

Introduction

Through the process of actively listening to girls, Girl Guides of Canada (GGC) has identified key challenges teenage girls in Canada face today. We have learned that the same inequalities and stereotypes that women face in the workforce, impact girls in school – well before the workplace. Specifically, the persistent gender wage gap, lack of work opportunities for women and lack of female role models for girls have surfaced as key concerns.

These findings are based on a nationwide survey of girls aged 15-17 in September 2017, which built on what we heard at our girls' conference in April 2017 – *Ignite. Inspire. Innovate.* It was at this conference that 150 teenage girls from across Canada came together to discuss their lives, concerns and priorities and what they need from organizations like Girl Guides.

GGC commissioned this survey because the issues facing girls are integral to who we are as a girl-driven organization. Given how quickly the world is changing for girls today, it is more important than ever to actively listen to girls' voices and use the information we hear to be responsive and develop relevant programs. We need to understand what girls in Canada are facing so we can be the support and advocate a girl needs to be *everything she wants to be.*

This report focuses on findings related to the gender wage gap and women's representation and the gender leadership gap, and the everyday sexism facing teenage girls in Canada.

Women's experiences at work impact girls – before they even enter the workplace

The experiences and realities of working women today impact girls before they even enter the workplace. Girls specifically identified two areas of impact:

- 1) Gender wage gap
- 2) Women's representation and the gender leadership gap

Gender Wage Gap

"It's hard to strive for excellence if you know that no matter how much work and effort you put in and how great you are, a man will always be paid more." – Conference participant

In 2014, women working full-time earned 74.2 cents for every dollar that full-time male workers made¹ – and the gap is even wider for women of colour.² While it's clear how this issue impacts women in the workforce, what GGC has found is that the realities of unequal pay and messages about women's economic worth in the professional world impact teenage girls before they even enter the workforce.

Our survey revealed that one in four (24%) girls aged 15-17 do not feel motivated to pursue their dream career because they are concerned they will be compensated less than their male counterparts.

¹ Grant, Tavia. "Who is minding the gap?" *The Globe and Mail*, November 12, 2017:

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/gender-pay-gap-a-persistent-issue-in-canada/article34210790/>

² Williams, Melayna. "For women of colour, there's a gap within the pay gap" *Macleans*, February 7, 2018:

<http://www.macleans.ca/opinion/for-women-of-colour-theres-a-gap-within-the-pay-gap/>



“As a student in the throws [sic] of university and program selection it is very important to me to ensure that my career choices remain open and fair and that compensation upon graduation is reasonable and fair.” – Conference participant

Women’s Representation and the Gender Leadership Gap

Although 82% of women aged 25 to 54 participate in Canada’s workforce, they are still underrepresented in certain industries and leadership roles.³

For example, women remain outnumbered in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields. In 2015, 24% of those employed in professional scientific occupations were women, while 76% were men.⁴ The limited representation of females in fields such as STEM impacts the motivation and behaviour of girls to pursue such career paths. One conference participant expressed: *“As a confident girl who is very interested in all aspects of STEM, I still walk into coding events and science and math events and find myself intimidated by the lack of people like me in a room.”* More broadly, one in four (25%) girls aged 15-17 in Canada report that they do not know any female role models who have their dream job.

When it comes to leadership, women hold only 25% of vice-president positions, 15% of CEO positions, and 27% of the seats in the House of Commons.⁵ The fact that 50% of the population is underrepresented in leadership positions in Canadian society is something that has not gone unnoticed by teenage girls. As one conference participant astutely noted: *“Without female leaders in our government, girls do not have a role model to look up to, which leads to fewer girls attempting to gain a position within our government.”*

Girls experience sexism before they even enter the workforce

Before they even enter the workplace, teenage girls encounter gender-based discrimination at school – the very place where they are preparing for their professional lives.

Girls are acutely aware that the gendered norms and stereotypes that society creates and perpetuates are the underlying causes of sexism, and in turn inequality.

Two in ten girls (19%) agree that their teachers treat them differently in class because they’re a girl. Girls who identify as Asian are significantly more likely to say this has happened to them (33%). This is especially poignant in subject areas that are less traditionally female, such as STEM. One conference participant explained: *“[In my coding class where I was the only girl], over and over again they were suggesting, and my teacher was agreeing with them, that the only reason I was able to be successful was because of the guys I was sitting next to, and every time I asked a question they assumed that meant I didn’t know what I was doing and not that I was inherently curious.”*

Gender-based discrimination extends beyond the classroom. One in ten girls (12%) surveyed agree that an adult – whether it’s a coach, teacher or parent – has excluded or prevented them from joining a club or team specifically because they’re a girl. A conference participant shared this experience of

³ “The Facts about Women and Leadership in Canada” *Canadian Women’s Foundation*: <https://www.canadianwomen.org/the-facts/women-and-leadership-in-canada/>

⁴ “Women and Paid Work” Statistics Canada, March 9, 2017: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.htm>

⁵ “The Facts about Women and Leadership in Canada” *Canadian Women’s Foundation*: <https://www.canadianwomen.org/the-facts/women-and-leadership-in-canada/>



trying to organize a girls' basketball team at her school: *"I went to the coach and I said 'we have nine girls, that's good' and he said 'well I don't know how committed you are,' and I said 'well the boys have six guys, why can they have a team and we can't?' and he said 'well the boys, they can commit. Girls – you have other stuff, you like to do other stuff.' And so we didn't end up having a basketball team."*

These experiences may be negatively influencing how girls view their potential and how they participate in society. The survey revealed that some girls avoid certain activities or interests because of their gender. For example, three in ten (30%) girls aged 15-17 agree they have avoided or considered stopping an activity or sport they like because not many girls participate. This is especially the case for girls who identify as Asian, Indigenous or Black (40%), compared to one in four (26%) girls who identify as white.

These experiences can also impact their professional pursuits, as two in ten (19%) teenage girls report that they are not motivated to pursue their dream career over concerns they will be treated worse, *simply because of their gender.*

As the #MeToo movement has revealed, sexual harassment is a critical issue facing women in the workplace. It is worth noting that this continues to be an issue among teenage girls, with 41% saying that they know a girl who reported being touched or harassed in an unwanted way and was not believed, rising to 53% among Indigenous girls. This is consistent with Statistics Canada's overview *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women* which indicates that Aboriginal women in Canada are at a higher risk of experiencing violence than non-Aboriginal women, and that a disproportionately high number of Aboriginal women have also been murdered or have gone missing.⁶

"My friends would report a serious crime that happened to them or a sexual assault and people would say, 'Oh, you're just making that up for attention.'" – Conference participant

Concluding Thoughts

Gendered stereotypes and social norms are deeply embedded in Canadian society. 59% of girls aged 15-17 feel pressure from society more broadly (teachers, parents, media) to conform to unrealistic expectations of what it means to be a girl – in terms of how they should look and act, or which interests they should pursue.

Without a doubt, social media plays a role in perpetuating gendered stereotypes and social norms, given that 93% of teenage girls are using more than one social media platform on a regular basis. The constant flow of images of how females should look, act and behave – including in the workplace – sets a standard for girls to live up to. In other words, the messages girls receive become normalized as the expectation.

However, while girls feel pressure to conform and experience gender-based discrimination, there is resistance and resilience among girls today. Overall, girls are pursuing their interests and dreaming about their futures. Most girls are motivated to pursue their career aspirations (75-80% according to our survey), even if there is limited female representation, and even if they are considered 'male' realms.

At a time when girls are constantly inundated with negative messages and pressures to conform to gendered stereotypes and social norms, girls need safe spaces and supports in society to build their

⁶ Arriagada, Paula. "First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women" *Statistics Canada*: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14313-eng.htm#n46>



confidence and overcome these challenges. Girls need to see women in positions of leadership, and in traditionally male fields. Girls need to know that they will be fairly treated and compensated in their chosen profession. Girls need to know that they can pursue their careers and dreams, free from harassment, and that their lived experiences will be believed and respected.

About the Survey

Survey respondents included a range of ethnicities, household incomes and geographic regions and communities to reflect the overall population of girls aged 15-17 in Canada and a range of lived experiences.

The survey was conducted by Ipsos through an online poll of 523 girls in Canada aged 15-17 between August 31 and September 14, 2017. Weighting was employed to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the overall population of girls in this age group according to Census data.

The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll is accurate to within ± 4.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all girls in Canada aged 15-17 been polled.

About Girl Guides of Canada

Girl Guides of Canada—Guides du Canada (GGC) empowers every girl in Guiding to discover herself and be *Everything she wants to be*. In Guiding, girls from 5-17 meet with girls their own age in a safe, inclusive space to explore what matters to them. With programming options ranging from innovative STEM activities to outdoor adventures and discussions on mental health and healthy relationships, girls in Guiding can customize their experience to dive into the topics relevant to them. GGC is where girls take the lead, put their ideas into action and jump into engaging activities – all with the support of engaged Guiders who are committed to positively impacting their lives. Guiding is all about supporting girls as they take on challenges and grab hold of every opportunity that comes their way. For International Women's Day 2018, GGC developed a program to enable girls ages 5-17 to develop their entrepreneurial spirit through activities inspired by the stories and lessons of female role models.

