WHAT WORKS:

Career–building strategies for people from diverse groups
A COUNSELLOR RESOURCE

Gender

Statistics

Comparison of employed men and women with university degrees	+2.3% more women[1]
Rate of increase from 1998 to 2008 of employed women	25.6% with post-secondary certificates or diplomas 93.6% with university degrees[2]
Comparison of the average hourly wage of men and women in 2008	–$5.51 less for women[3]
Difference of average hourly wages of men and women in the Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services industries	–$10.38 less for women[4]
Employment rate of families with children under age 16 living at home in 2006	74% females in two-parent families 70% lone female parents[5]
Unemployment rate in 2008	3.5% for men 3.7% for women[6]

Context

This chapter focuses on both women and men, but the content is somewhat weighted toward women, which reflects the information available in the literature.

Gender concerns presented in this chapter are relevant because of trends in the increases in

- dual-income families
- working heads of single-parent families
- working women of all ages
- working mothers, particularly mothers of young children
- men with direct responsibility for family care
- workers caring for elderly parents or relatives
- workers in the sandwich generation with responsibility for both child care and elder care[7]

"If we view 'career' as encompassing all facets of our lives from birth until death, it is apparent that women will face decisions that are different from their male counterparts. This is not to say that men and women cope with totally different decisions, but rather that they may have different priorities, needs and life roles. These differences have been influenced by societal expectation and life experiences."[8]

"The contents of people's imaginings of the future are strongly influenced by sociocultural factors, such as sex role prescriptions and other norms and expectations that mark the particular context in which one lives…There is also evidence that peoples' future orientations reflect the roles and possibilities defined for them by their culture."[9]

Life goals

Women tend to pursue a greater diversity of goals compared to men. This finding may be related to the change in women's roles in recent decades. "Women continue to hold goals for marriage and family, yet it is also commonplace for them to pursue goals related to employment or a career, especially in modern Western cultures. In contrast, societal expectations for the male role have changed less dramatically and this may explain, in part, why men remain heavily focused on sex-typed goals related to employment and financial security."[10]

There are relative advantages and disadvantages of gender differences in the pursuit of goals. Women who tend to pursue simultaneously multiple goals may build resilience in the face of blocked or frustrated pursuit of individual goals. But women may also experience more conflict due to the perceived short time frame that they have to achieve numerous major life goals.[11]

Men, who are usually pursuing a smaller number of goals, may be more psychologically vulnerable due to the higher risk that some or many important goals may be simultaneously blocked. Men may also experience less conflict related to their perception of a longer time frame for attaining their major life goals.[12]

Gender and occupational choices

"The participation rates of women in occupations traditionally held by men have increased dramatically in the past three decades. However, these changes have been uneven. For example, many more women are becoming doctors and lawyers, but not engineers. Men have not flocked into the occupations traditionally held by women. While these differences undoubtedly persist for many reasons, one reason is a gender difference in values."[13]

"The differences in values held by females and males are due to the social context in which they develop."[14] Women tend to give altruistic reasons for their occupational choices, while men are more likely to relate these choices to their interests. Relational values (concern for others) were found to be important to female students in more traditional majors, such as nursing and social work. On the other hand, female students in non-traditional majors, including engineering and science, tended to value achievement, responsibility, independence and financial prosperity.

Self-assessment and occupational choices

"Self-assessments of task competence were found to influence career-relevant decisions…"[15] While the aptitudes of males and females are statistically very similar, males tend to choose occupational areas requiring mathematical competence (engineering, science, math) much more frequently than females. Shelley Correll, in examining this tendency, found that "males assess their own mathematical competence higher than their otherwise equal female counterparts. Males are more likely than females with the same math grades and test scores to perceive that they are mathematically competent."[16]

An important point made by Correll is that cultural beliefs influence the self-perception of competence in various areas. For example, males were not found to judge themselves as more competent than their otherwise equal female counterparts in verbal tasks.[17]

Family roles

"Women identify more with their family roles than do men. Indeed, married women tend to give priority to the family role and 'adjust their work identities to accommodate their family identities, but not vice versa.' "[18]

While women tend to identify strongly with their family roles, "over the past 30-plus years, women have increasingly been living with major changes in the construction of their gender roles. They have moved from a sole emphasis on the family and now juggle career and family concerns. In making this shift, they have combined traditional values, such as love, family, and caring for others, with newer values such as independence, career, and defining themselves through their own accomplishments. Many men have yet to make the equivalent changes."[19]

Women are still frequently required to perform in an array of life roles that may include, spouse, daughter, friend, mother, home manager and volunteer in the community, school and church. Many women feel pressured to live up to an external ideal of how these roles should be carried out. For "women entering or re-entering the workforce, the new role of 'working woman' is simply added to all of their other roles without any of these others being taken away or reduced in scope. This situation can often lead to role overload and burnout."[20]

Caregiving and household responsibilities

Contrary to much of the literature that reflects the view that women shoulder the bulk of family demands, Chris Higgins and Linda Duxbury found that the role of caregiver is not as strongly associated with gender as it was in the past. Mothers and fathers who engaged in child care spent essentially the same amount of time each week in child care-related activities. According to Higgins and Duxbury, one in three parents in dual-career families arranged their work schedule to allow sharing of child care with their partner.[21] Similarly, the men and the women in the sample with elder care responsibilities spent approximately the same amount of time per week in elder care activities."[22]

"The women in managerial and professional positions spend more time in child care per week than women in other types of jobs, or their male counterparts in managerial and professional positions…This would suggest that many professional women in Canada have bought into the concept of 'super mom' and place very high demands on themselves with respect to both work and family."[23]

> **Women and housework**
>
> "Women spend substantially more time in home chores per week than the men, regardless of sector, job type or dependent care status."[24]
>
> Chris Higgins and Linda Duxbury

Burnout

Burnout is a "state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion which is often found in those who are involved with people in emotionally demanding situations. Chronic daily stresses rather than unique critical life events are regarded as central factors in producing burnout. At severe levels, burnout overlaps with symptoms of depression."[25]

Burnout appears to be related to gender and the extent to which individuals are responsible for care of dependents, including children and seniors. For women, it is also related to job type. For men, on the other hand, burnout does not appear related to job type. When job type and care of dependents are controlled factors, women report higher levels of burnout than men.

- Of women in management and professional positions, 37 per cent reported burnout compared with 29 per cent of men in these positions.
- Of women with dependent care responsibilities, 36 per cent reported burnout compared with 30 per cent of men with these responsibilities.
- Of women without dependent care responsibilities, 32 per cent of women reported burnout compared with 26 per cent of men without these responsibilities.[26]

Dual-career families

Here are some trends to consider when working with clients within a dual career family:

- Men's involvement in housework and child care has increased as women's job attachment has increased.[27]
- Women in general experience more time-related stress than men, regardless of length of work or presence of children.[28]

Gender role theories

Women and men's lives, their relationships and their work have changed dramatically over the years. However, many views of gender roles, based on beliefs about gender differences, have not.

Good provider role

The good provider role, one that men with families have traditionally assumed, has given meaning and structure to men's lives for generations. Providing includes "men's experiences in offering financial and material support to their children and families. Providing is an essential and often taken-for-granted aspect of successful fatherhood."[29]

Ronald Levant describes a masculinity crisis that is the "result of the collapse of the pattern by which men have traditionally fulfilled the code for masculine role behaviour—the 'good provider' role. White middle-class men are no longer the good providers for their families that their fathers were and that they expected themselves to be. With the majority of adult women in the work force, very few men are sole providers, and most are co-providers."[30]

However, "most men still cling to the older definitions and emphasize work and individual accomplishment over emotional intimacy and family involvement. As a result, the pressures on men to behave in ways that conflict with various aspects of traditional masculinity…have never been greater."[31]

Given the pressure many men may feel related to the good provider role, counsellors will appreciate the distress that such men experience when they are laid off or become unemployed for any reason and how this job loss complicates the balance of relationships in their lives with partners and children. Counsellors may want to provide these clients with alternative views, such as the expansionist theory.

> **The successful father**
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> "The contradiction at the heart of fatherhood for successful providers was that providing was no longer equated with success as a parent or partner. Too much commitment to providing could limit and even harm paternal involvement. This realization was unacceptable to some successful providers."[32]
>
> Kevin Roy
> Purdue University

Expansionist theory

An alternative view of the good provider role is the expansionist theory, which has been considered more representative of the current situation of men and women. According to this theory, when both genders have multiple roles, there are psychological benefits. The theory is based upon these principles:

- Multiple roles are advantageous to both men and women's physical, mental and relationship health.
- Several aspects contribute to the beneficial effects of multiple roles, including social support and added income.
- Specific conditions predict the positive effects of multiple roles, for example, time restraints and the quality of roles.
- Psychological gender differences tend to be minor.[33]

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

Both women and men face challenges as they develop career-building strategies. Regardless of the client's gender, counsellors will want to take an accepting, flexible and bias-free approach.

Gender and ethnicity may affect your client's willingness to seek help. Men who hold the belief that they should be able to solve their own problems as an indication of perceived manliness, tend to be reluctant to visit counsellors. Having been taught from an early age that "big boys don't cry," they have difficulty discussing their concerns and are less likely than women to seek counselling.[34]

Wherever possible, allow clients to choose the counsellor with whom they wish to work.

- Recognize that there are circumstances in which clients may prefer a counsellor of the same or opposite sex.
- Whenever possible, ensure that the power relationship between you and the client approaches equality.
- Negotiate counselling objectives together.
- Encourage clients to be autonomous.[35]

Bias-conscious counselling

Bias-conscious counselling is defined as the interactive enabling process between professional helper and client where counsellors are highly aware of their own values, especially as they relate to expectations for women and men. In bias-conscious counselling, the counsellor views gender roles that differ from the social norm as an appropriate and valid expression of the client's individuality.[36]

While the following guidelines for bias-conscious counselling were created focusing on working with women, they apply equally well to working with men.

Here are some of the guidelines:

- Be aware of your own values, especially as they relate to gender-role expectations.
- Assess and monitor your own activities for gender-fair practices.
- Recognize that you are subject to the same biases as the rest of the culture.
- Take part in professional development programs and training to maintain and increase your awareness in this area.
- Continue to increase your understanding of the social, biological and psychological development of women and men.
- Stay informed about special issues that have an impact on both women's and men's career development, such as daycare, family violence, and training in non-traditional roles.[37]

Gender-fair counselling

Keep in mind the following when working with your clients:

- Offer the same range of skills training, upgrading and/or occupational choices regardless of gender.
- Don't assume what particular clients might or might not be interested in because of their gender—or because of their other life roles.
- Acknowledge non-traditional occupational choices and support clients in seeking jobs they're qualified for and training they're interested in.[38]

- Be aware of the assumptions that underlie the theoretical approaches to counselling. Recognize that these theories may apply differently to women and men.
- Avoid using test instruments that contain gender biases. Ensure that the materials you use in counselling are gender-fair.

Gender-fair language

Studies clearly show that people equate gender-neutral male terms with males, even when the term is intended to refer to males and females.[39]

Consider using inclusive language in all communications:

- man, men » person, people, humans
- salesman » sales representative, salesperson
- the best man for the job » the best person for the job
- manning the booth » staffing the booth
- housewife » homemaker, home manager
- foreman » supervisor
- businessman » businessperson
- you and your wife » you and your partner

Avoid using language that diminishes or trivializes a person:

- girl (referring to an adult) » woman
- the girls in the office » the women in the office
- the boys in the office» the men in the office

Avoid irrelevant distinctions, differential treatment or phrases that imply exceptions to the rule:

- Miss, Mrs. » Ms. (In many contexts, a woman's marital status is no more relevant than a man's. Some women still prefer Mrs. or Miss; when in doubt, ask.)
- lady construction worker » construction worker
- male nurse » nurse[40]

If you are unable to identify preferred terms, look for online resources that suggest more appropriate language. Develop the habit of using gender-neutral words and phrases.

Clients' beliefs and values

Exploration of values is equally important with male and female clients. Male clients with families, for example, may experience life-work conflicts related to their beliefs regarding the traditional role as provider rather than the contemporary role as hands-on family person. Women may experience similar conflicts regarding their life and work. Explorations of their beliefs and values may help clients make choices that will reduce work-life conflicts.

Here are some strategies to help clients explore their gender-related beliefs and values:

- guided self-explorations about what is important in their work and non-work roles
- narratives and storytelling with explorations of embedded meanings
- open-ended questions to encourage clients to prioritize their values
- future-oriented strategies that anticipate and contrast possible futures, such as lifelines, life stories, future autobiographies and guided fantasies[41]

Help clients recognize the impact of stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice based on gender. Clients will benefit to understand gender discrimination is part of the broader challenge of discrimination based on race, age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion. Actively work to counteract the negative effects of these attitudes on clients.

Recognize that clients' difficulties may rest in situations or cultural factors that limit their self-concepts, aspirations and understanding of available choices. Help clients realize that the best choices are made on the basis of what works best for them, not on the basis of "shoulds" or "should nots."[42]

Reconciling value conflicts

"As clients identify and prioritize their values, they may also realize that they hold conflicting values. Individuals may assign equal priority to the roles of work and family, potentially contributing to work-family conflicts."[43]

"Counsellors can assist clients in reconciling conflicting values or identifying strategies that reduce the potential conflict in their careers. Reconciliation of conflicting values may involve planning to meet these values sequentially…Strategies that reduce potential role conflicts include the choice of work settings that accommodate both work and the family through flexible work hours or on-site day-care facilities. It may also be helpful to have clients explore how values can be incorporated into a satisfactory lifestyle, not just in the work role."[44]

Introducing clients to mentorship

Mentorship is a valuable approach for both women and men.

"Mentoring is a powerful and popular way for people to learn a variety of personal and professional skills. In fact, mentoring is one of the oldest forms of influence…most adults can identify a person who, at some time in their life, had a significant and positive impact on them. Mentors can be friends, relatives, co-workers, teachers, as well as historic or contemporary personalities. Most often, a mentor is a more experienced or older person who acts as a role model, compatriot, challenger, guide or cheerleader."[45]

Here are some common examples of mentoring relationships:

- Women executives help other women to break the 'glass ceiling.'
- Business managers take new employees 'under their wings.'
- People managing life challenges provide support and wisdom to others.
- Successful business people help new entrepreneurs starting out.[46]

Finding a mentor

Clients may benefit from establishing mentoring relationships with experienced individuals that they can learn from. Counsellors can encourage clients to identify the type of assistance they might need or areas they would value learning more about and to locate an appropriate mentor. Peer Resources, a Canadian organization that has recognized expertise in mentoring, coaching and peer helping, offers tips on finding a mentor:

- Check with local businesses or organizations to determine whether they have a formal mentor program you can access or if they can provide you the names of any retired executives who might be willing to act as volunteer mentors.

- Ask your local Chamber of Commerce if they have created a mentor program or service.

- Visit a retirement or senior citizen's centre and let them know you are looking for a mentor.

- Connect with exhibit areas of conferences and conventions associated with your field; these are often free admission events staffed by experienced persons who could be potential mentors.

- Use your network of friends and relatives to let them know what kind of person you want as a mentor. Ask them to keep alert to someone who could help you.[47]

Tips for learning through mentors

Once a mentor relationship has been established, it is important to maximize the learning experiences available. The following tips may be helpful for clients:

- Prior to your first meeting with your mentor, write down at least three things you would like to achieve through mentoring. Rank the three items in order of importance to you. Also write down three things that concern you most about meeting with your mentor. Rank these three things in order of importance.

- If not included in either of the lists created above, write down at least three attitudes or perspectives you will be able to provide during the mentoring sessions. If possible, write down three things about yourself that might get in the way of you being able to make the most of the mentoring opportunity.

- If not included in your lists, write down at least three things you would like your mentor to provide.

- Prepare a brief autobiography based on the above lists that you can share with your mentor when you first meet. Be sure to also include your own vision, mission or life goals.

- It is likely that you selected your mentor or were matched with your mentor because of the mentor's resources. This typically means that your mentor has both considerable gifts and a tight time schedule. Dealing with time is a key aspect of the success of mentoring. Make sure you are clear about your needs.

- The focus of most successful mentoring is mutual learning. Feel free to explore what you have to offer the mentor. A sense of humour and a sense of enjoyment of your time together are essential as well. If your needs are not being met, discuss this with your mentor.

- Terminating a mentoring relationship or switching to a different mentor is not a sign of failure. Recognizing your changing needs and finding a respectful way to meet your learning goals are one of the keys to successful executive mentoring.[48]

Support for women

Women may face barriers in career planning and job search due to life circumstances, such as domestic abuse or late entry or re-entry into the workforce. These clients may require specialized supports.

Self-empowerment for women

According to Julia Melnyk, Wendy Fox and L. Stewart, counselling women in their career search includes helping them to take control of their lives, set their own goals and make decisions that reflect their needs. This well-tested approach continues to be valid.

Women who become empowered will be able to communicate their needs more effectively. They are also able to negotiate with others to meet these needs. Empowered women are also more likely to overcome barriers and to explore strategies for resolving problems.[49]

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The process of helping women empower themselves includes helping them to

- enhance self-esteem
- identify and acknowledge skills
- review past accomplishments
- reprogram negative self-talk with positive self-talk
- clarify values and priorities
- identify resources and sources of support
- learn more about decision making, goal setting and problem solving
- become an assertive communicator
- generate options
- obtain current information[50]

Developing the following skill sets will also be particularly beneficial in:

- decision-making/goal-setting
- self-presentation skills
- assertive communication[51]

Group programming for women

Women "are very adept at supporting each other and often find a great deal of comfort with other women." Women often benefit from group experiences, as they value a nurturing and supportive atmosphere in which to share their own stories and talk about themselves as a means of self-discovery and of building self-esteem. Groups can become the basis of a personal and professional network and a source of valuable support and information.

If job search clubs or career development groups for women don't exist in your area, consider working with other organizations to set them up.[52]

Late entry or re-entry women

The approach for women who are either re-entry or late entry to the workforce may depend on how long they have been out of the workforce or the length of time between end of formal education and entry into the workforce. Some may be recently widowed or divorced, and so they may also need supports with loss and grieving.

Edwin Herr and Stanley Cramer provide these suggestions:

- Reinforce their positive feelings about self-worth and ability to make contributions in the paid workforce.
- Provide information on effective career decision making.
- Help them explore changes in lifestyle that might be necessary to accommodate their plans.
- Help them to prepare to manage both covert and overt discrimination based on gender and age.
- Seek out specialized experiences as necessary in assertiveness training and self-awareness training.
- Assist them to identify, build and maintain support systems, as appropriate.[53]

Here are some additional suggestions:

- Identify transferable skills such as those skills related to homemaking and volunteer experiences.
- Provide referrals to volunteer opportunities in areas of interest.
- Suggest ideas for job shadowing options.
- Provide information on funding for training, training for work, or self-employment programs.
- Help them weigh the pros and cons of working in entry-level positions compared to training or upgrading.
- Provide referrals to equity employers.
- Provide referrals to entrepreneurial support services.[54]

Women and violence

Domestic violence has a tremendous impact on all aspects of the abused person's life, including the workplace. The perpetrator may call the abused woman at work or even come to the worksite. In some cases, employers may fear for the safety of their employees, clients and themselves. To protect themselves, the employers may ask an abused woman to leave her job. In these circumstances, the abused woman not only needs a new job, but she may also face challenges related to finding new child care, housing and transportation.

> **Barriers for abused women and children**
>
> "What amazes me are the systemic barriers that women face when they try to leave an abusive situation. She is at risk, her children are at risk, yet there is very little monetary support available. She may not be able to access any financial resources and may have very few other resources to draw on."
>
> Jan Reimer
> Alberta Council of Women's Shelters

Consider these guidelines when working with women who have experienced abuse:

- Believe the client. Women are often not believed. Support your client and don't judge.
- The woman's safety and her children's safety are always the most important issues.
- Give your client permission to talk about it through your accepting, non-judgmental attitude.
- Include reference to family violence in any stress management courses or discussions.
- Be aware of resources and help women to access them.

Referring for specialized supports

Recognize that encouraging clients to develop on their own may not be enough. Help them find personal support. Assist them to identify and analyze the emotional and social barriers between them and their goals.

Stay current and connected with support services that are available in your area. For example, be aware of the availability of child care, legal aid, health care, transportation and emergency services. Help clients gain access to the services they need.

If you see a gap in the services available to women and men in your community, initiate or act as a catalyst for the development of the needed services.

Focusing on Employment

The gendered workplace

The gendered workplace is an environment where traditional gender roles are upheld and the expectations of workers are rooted in assumptions that workers possess masculine qualities. This unconscious reinforcement of traditional gender divisions continues to support traditional roles.

Some of the spinoffs of the gendered workplace include the following:

- gender wage gap where males earn higher average salaries than females
- pooling of women in the lower ranks of the workforce
- glass ceiling where women are less likely to be promoted to upper management positions[55]

Equal pay for similar work

Men have traditionally received higher average earnings than women. "Even when women do 'all the right stuff' (e.g., getting a similar education as men, maintaining similar levels of family power, working in similar industries, not moving in and out of the workforce, not removing their names from consideration for a transfer more often), they still lag behind men in salary progression."[56]

Counsellors may be faced with the issue of equal pay for similar work and can best help clients by being as informed as possible about the issue. Knowledge of community resources will also be important. For example, counsellors need to be aware that "Alberta's *Human Rights Act* specifically ensures that men and women working in the same establishment and performing 'similar or substantially similar work' must be paid at the same rate. Any pay differentials must be based on factors other than gender."[57]

Sexism

Sexism affects women in the job search and workplace in a number of ways. Such views are often expressed attitudinally. Here are some examples:

"Certain jobs are more appropriate for men than for women, and vice versa."

In 2008, there were more women than men employed in Alberta in health care and social assistance, educational services, accommodation and food services and retail.[58] These industries have occupations such as teaching, nursing, administrative and sales and service —traditionally female-dominated fields of work. This employment trend continues to reinforce beliefs that some employers and workers still hold regarding the suitability of certain jobs for women and men.

"Women don't want responsibility or promotion."

Individually, it is to be expected that women and men differ in their desire to pursue higher levels of responsibility within organizations. As a group, however, there is no doubt that women are less likely than men to gain high levels of responsibility. "All else being equal, women are less likely to be promoted than men."[59]

"Women are more emotional than men, and this causes problems in the workplace."

Emotions are viewed subjectively, and how they are expressed may largely be a matter of kind rather than degree. For example, a man's anger may be seen as authoritative while a woman's crying may be viewed as a weakness. Yet both persons, in this case, could be reacting to the same situation.[60]

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment involves unwanted or unwelcome behaviour that is sexual in nature and has a negative effect on the client's job.[61] Sexual harassment is illegal. Although the majority of victims are women, some victims are men. Same-sex harassment also occurs.

Here are some examples of sexual harassment:

- unwelcome staring, comments or teasing
- questions or discussions about sexual activities
- offensive humour or language related to gender
- displaying or showing suggestive material
- unwanted sexual requests or demands
- unwanted physical contact or closeness, such as patting, pinching, rubbing, leaning over or standing too close
- physical assault[62]

If your client reports the situation or does not play along, the harasser may try to get even in a variety of ways. Revenge may include threats or acts, such as

- giving more work than can be handled
- lowering wages
- reducing hours of work
- refusing to grant raises or promotions
- firing the victim[63]

In all cases, it will be important to help clients anticipate the consequences of any actions they may choose to take and to identify and plan their responses. Counsellors might help clients brainstorm their own approaches. Clients may also be encouraged to weigh some or all of the following options:

- Document experiences of harassment—including specifics, such as date, time and description.
- Tell the harasser to stop—in person or in writing or both.
- Use the formal complaint process at the place of employment.
- Enlist the help of a same-sex manager.
- Keep copies of performance evaluations as proof of job performance.
- If safety is at risk, report harassment to the police.[64]

Work-life balance

Counsellors can help clients investigate work opportunities to help them find work that is not only satisfying but also supports all of their life roles. This exploration may be especially important for those clients who are most likely to experience work-life conflict.[66]

When exploring employment arrangements that offer better work-life balance, clients need to consider these areas:

- work environments, such as the relationships between employees and management
- workplace communication styles, such as the use of inclusive language
- overtime work arrangements, such as a requirement for advance notice and the opportunity to refuse overtime without penalties
- child care availability, either onsite or nearby
- work arrangements that are flexible, such as home offices and flexible arrival and departure times

Child care

Child care continues to be an issue for all working parents, but it seems widely accepted as particularly a woman's issue. When appropriate quality child care is not available, problems may surface at work, such as

- arriving later, leaving earlier than other workers
- scheduling difficulties
- missing work
- concentration problems
- turning down a promotion [67]

The lower a woman's income, the fewer her resources and the more her problems with child care are exacerbated. For single mothers, the effects of these issues are compounded.

Absenteeism

There appears to be conflicting information regarding absenteeism as related to gender. Since women are most often responsible for the family child care arrangements, a common fear of employers is that women may use their own sick leave to care for their sick children.

Research supports the view that patterns of sick leave are similar for men and women in the same occupations. In other words, in routine jobs, sick leave is higher for both men and women, whereas in more challenging jobs, the leave is still comparable, though considerably less. The conclusion is that patterns of leave are tied more closely to the type of job than to the gender of the worker.[68]

Alternatives to full-time employment

Some clients may prefer part-time work. On the other hand, many may be working part-time, even though their preference is full-time.

Part-time work may be less attractive for the following reasons:

- lower wages than full-time jobs
- lack of benefits such as paid holidays, pensions and job security
- little or no union protection
- few opportunities for training or promotion

Counsellors may have clients with part-time employment who would prefer to work full-time if they could find such employment. Counsellors might help clients consider

- the option of combining two or more part-time jobs
- funding and/or training opportunities that may enhance their skills and make them more competitive for full-time work
- entrepreneurial opportunities, including home-based businesses, to supplement their part-time work
- expanding their part-time work
- developing proposals for these options and presenting the proposals to their employers

Non-traditional occupations

"Whereas women who choose to enter male-dominated occupations are generally viewed as making a positive career move that offers increased opportunities for pay, advancement, and status, the same perceptions do not hold true for men who enter female-dominated or non-traditional occupations. Men who enter traditionally female occupations face lower status and lower financial rewards; they may also find their abilities, masculinity, and even sexual orientation questioned."[69]

Men choosing non-traditional occupations give some of the following reasons for their choice:

- opportunities for less stressful occupations
- increased options for other life choices
- personal fulfillment
- greater economic stability of non-traditional jobs chosen
- increased opportunities for advancement to authority positions that are perceived as not available in male-dominated occupations.[70]

Men who choose non-traditional occupations place less value on the achievement of status through a prestigious job than men in traditional occupations. In general, they demonstrate a lower adherence to traditional masculine gender roles.[71]

Women in non-traditional occupations

If less than a third of workers in an occupation are women, it's officially non-traditional. The trend of women choosing non-traditional occupations continues.

Many such non-traditional occupations for women in Alberta fall into categories such as:

- engineering
- science
- technology
- university-level academics
- entrepreneurship
- logistics
- aviation
- construction
- trades[72]

Women in the trades

One of the major hurdles for those who want to enter the trades is that the industry is not really interested in hiring starters. The industry wants more journeymen, not more apprentices. This hurdle is a challenge for both women and men trying to enter the industry.

Women are still significantly under-represented in the trades. The rate of retention for women in trades is low, and women most frequently leave the trades due to the work environment. For women who stay, work in the trades instills a sense of pride and confidence.

Women considering the trades need to be aware that apprenticeship is a hierarchical system, with the journeymen supervising the work and training of the apprentices. The work environment is a traditional, male-dominated environment with related communication styles. For example, communication tends to be blunt, with no chit-chat or signs of weakness shown. The trades are physically challenging and can be a rough environment.

Women interested in the trades may want to investigate programs offered by Women Building Futures, an organization that provides support and training for women who want to complete an apprenticeship in the trades. JudyLynn Archer of this organization suggests these strategies:

- Read about the trades. Check industry newsletters—most trades have them.

- Connect with workers in the industry.

- Go on site, check out the environment and talk directly with workers and managers.

- Be aware that safety training is critical and very costly to provide. Employers are more likely to hire candidates who have completed safety training.

- Have a solid background in mathematics and science. Seek tutoring assistance, if necessary.

- Consider enrolling in a credible trades preparation course.

- Be aware of what you are facing in the trades and be prepared to handle it.

- Explore alternatives if work in the trades is not realistic at this particular time of life.

For women accepted into apprenticeship, she suggests these approaches:

- Find a support system. A strong support system is critical.

- Find a mentor. Woman-to-woman mentoring is particularly helpful.

- Ensure safety courses are included, such as St. John's First Aid, CPR, Construction Safety Training Practice (CSTP), Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), fall protection/fall arrest and safe forklift operation.

Finally, she cautions that the trades are not for everyone. No matter how strong a woman is, it is not always possible to gain successful entry into the trades. But for those women who have withstood the rigours of training and can work in a compatible workplace, a career in the trades can be rewarding.

In Conclusion

Gender issues in the workplace will continue to present both clients and counsellors with challenges. Women's issues continue to be acknowledged and will remain a focus for career counsellors. Meanwhile, emerging issues for men related to changing roles provide an additional focus and new challenge for counsellors.

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