

Women entering the workforce expect less than men, study finds

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Women have lower career expectations than men, anticipating smaller paycheques and longer waits for promotions, according to a new study involving a University of Guelph researcher.

When comparing career expectations of Canadian female and male university students, Prof. Sean Lyons discovered that women predict their starting salaries to be 14 per cent less than what the men forecast. This gap in wage expectations widens over their careers with women anticipating their earnings to be 18 per cent less than men after five years on the job.

As for their first promotion, the study found women expect to wait close to two months longer than men for their first step up the corporate ladder.

"It's a bit of a chicken-and-egg-situation," said the business professor, who worked on the study with Carleton University professor Linda Schweitzer and Dalhousie University professor Ed Ng. "Women know that they currently aren't earning as much as men so they enter the workforce with that expectation. Because they don't expect to earn as much, they likely aren't as aggressive when it comes to negotiating salaries or pay raises and will accept lower-paying jobs than men, which perpetuates the existing inequalities."

The study, to be published in the journal *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, involved surveying more than 23,000 Canadian university

students about salary and promotion expectations as well as career priorities.

The reality is there is a gap in salary with university-educated women earning only 68 per cent of the salaries of equally qualified men, according to a 2008 Canadian Labour Force Survey.

"This study shows that women aren't blissfully ignorant and know the [gender gap](#) exists," said Lyons.

However, the researchers were surprised by the results considering the students are part of the "millennial" generation characterized as more egalitarian.

Lyons said the [disparity](#) in career expectations between genders partly reflects inflated expectations of young men.

"Overall we found the male students' expectations are way too high. These results may indicate that women are just more realistic about their salary expectations."

[Gender](#) gaps in salary expectation and career advancement were widest among students planning to enter male-dominated fields such as science and engineering and narrowest for those preparing for female-dominated or neutral fields such as arts and science.

Another factor influencing women's lower career expectations could be the gender differences in career priorities, Lyons said. The study found that women were more likely to choose balancing their personal life with their careers and contributing to society as top career priorities. Whereas men preferred priorities associated with higher salaries, such as career advancement and building a sound financial base.

"It may be that women expect to trade off higher salaries for preferences in lifestyle."

Women's lower expectations might also reflect their seeking career information from other working women, added Lyons.

"If these students are asking their mothers or other older women for their experiences, they will be getting a reflection of the historical inequality."

Despite differing expectations, the study found women and men have the exact same levels of self confidence and self-efficacy.

"Our study shows women don't feel inferior to men and view themselves as every bit as capable as their male counterparts."

Current strategies to improve workforce equality aim to increase the number of women in male-dominated fields. However, Lyons said post-secondary students need to be receiving accurate salary information before they begin working.

"Professors and career counselors should make it a priority to provide [students](#) with accurate information regarding actual salaries and expected promotion rates for university graduates in their field," he said.

"Awareness is essential to empowering these young [women](#) to think differently about the way they value themselves relative to their male colleagues."

Provided by University of Guelph

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