

Fifty years ago, the majority of women workers were employed as seamstresses, milliners or domestic servants. Today, women at work are concentrated in the following occupations: typists and stenographers, 97 per cent; nurses, 96 per cent; teachers, 70.7 per cent; service occupation, 58 per cent; household workers, 96 per cent. (1)

Married Women at Work

The "average" Canadian woman marries when she is 22.6 a man who is three years her senior. She will have an average of 3.8 children. Very often, particularly in towns and cities, the young wife continues to work "until the baby comes". Unless there is grave financial necessity, most Canadian women prefer not to take paid jobs outside the home while their children are of pre-school age. Every year, however, more and more "mechanized" households have helped make it possible for women to work both inside and outside the home. By 1967, over half the women in the labour force were married. The greatest number of working wives are between the ages of 35 and 49; they are women whose children are at school or have grown up and left home.

Working Conditions

In general, both men and women are protected by the same laws on minimum wages, maximum hours, unemployment insurance, holidays, vacations, workmen's compensation and fair-employment practices that forbid discrimination on grounds of race, colour, religion or national origin. There are, however, some health and safety welfare provisions that apply particularly to women workers. For example, women working in factories are required to wear a suitable head-covering to prevent their hair from catching in moving machinery. In all provinces, except British Columbia, women are prohibited from working underground in mines.

There is considerable diversity in labour laws as, under the British North America Act, the written part of the Canadian Constitution, most labour legislation comes under provincial jurisdiction.

By and large, though the working woman is now recognized as making a great economic contribution to Canadian society, women are, in general, still paid less than men, even when they perform work of comparable value. This is partly the result of the tradition that women are found in the less well-paid occupations, partly owing to the fact that they are less active in unions than men, and partly because the majority of them are unorganized white-collar workers. This situation has been improving slowly in recent years. More unions demand equal-pay clauses in their contracts. Eight provinces and the Federal Government have passed equal-pay laws. Women receive equal pay for equal work in the Public Service and in the Armed Services.

(1) For further details see Occupational Trends in Canada, Report II, 1963, Department of Labour.