

**"WOMEN'S WORK: A CASE STUDY OF THE PAID HOUSEWORK WOMEN DO IN
SUPPORT OF A COMMUNITY-BASED HEALTH CARE AGENCY"**

A thesis submitted to the School of Social
Work, University of Manitoba in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Social Work.

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BY

PATRICIA STEELE

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a case study of the paid housework women do in support of a community-based health care agency. Its purpose is to demonstrate that Home Help work performed by women for The Agency is essential to The Agency's mission and has economic and social value unacknowledged by commensurate pay and working conditions. The Home Help Program supports a community-based health care policy which is more effective and less costly than institutional care. By providing light housekeeping and meal preparation services to clients in their own homes, The Home Help Program supports The Agency's health care services in the community to clients, who, lacking their own home support services would otherwise require care in hospital.

This paper examines the Home Helpers' work from three theoretical perspectives, Neo-classical Theory, Dual Labour Market Theory and Radical Theory to explain these workers' disadvantaged position in a sex segregated secondary labour market. Drawing primarily upon a socialist feminist perspective, the paper offers recommendations for improving the working conditions of these women.

INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose of the Study

Despite women's ever increasing labour force participation, despite their increasing visibility in male dominated occupations, despite the protections intended for them in employment standards and pay equity legislation, and affirmative action policies, women continue to experience inequality in the labour force. Women's labour force inequality, evident in the unequal working conditions they face in the labour market, is perpetuated by ineffectual legislation and policies and reinforced by deeply engrained societal values upholding women's primary commitment to their domestic role.

The work of the Home Helper employed by The Agency* typifies the workforce inequality experienced by women doing women's work in the secondary labour market. This work is performed by a female staff, organized on a part-time basis, paid a low wage, is non-unionized and insecure. The conditions of employment for these employees illustrate how women who work in the expanding sexually segregated services sector of the labour force, remain minimally protected by legislation and unrepresented by a union.

This study will show that the work performed by these Home Helpers is important work performed by marginalized workers. Its function is essential to the fulfillment of The Agency's mission which

*The Agency is the designation of the subject organization of the case study. All references to it in this paper will be The Agency rather than its actual name.

is to provide health care to clients in their own homes rather than in hospitals. The Home Help Program supports a community-based health care policy which aims to provide health care on a more effective and less costly basis than institutional care for certain clients.¹ "The Homemaker plays a vital role in the overall care of a client by providing the support necessary to maintain family life and enable people to remain in their own homes."² By providing light housekeeping and meal preparation services to clients in their own homes, the Home Help Service supports the extension of The Agency's health care services in the community to clients who would otherwise require institutional care. Just as private unpaid housework is essential to the maintenance of families, so is the paid housework of the Home Help Program essential to the fulfillment of The Agency's mission.

If the findings of this study corroborate those of existing research, its recommendations may contribute to an improved understanding and increased valuation of Home Helpers' work in The Agency and a consequent improvement of the conditions of their employment within it, and of conditions of employment of employees doing similar work in other agencies.

The study aims to inform participants in the system of the problems faced by Home Helpers. As Horton and Leslie point out, this is a necessary condition for social change. "No condition no matter how dramatic or shocking to someone else, is a social problem unless and until the values of a considerable number of people within the

society define it as a problem."³ Not until improvements in this area are made incrementally, agency by agency, workplace by workplace, will improvement become generalized.

Justification

The workforce situation of Home Helpers typifies the issue of employment inequity experienced by women in the secondary segment of the workforce; it persists despite recent heightened awareness of the issue. Concern for employment inequity has been expressed at the national level in The Report of the Commission on Equity in Employment, (Abella, 1984), and targeted in provincial legislation by the Manitoba Pay Equity Act, 1985. Employment inequity persists despite the considerable body of theory and research investigating problems of occupation segregation and the wage gap, part-time women's work and non-unionized women's work. No policy has been implemented to progress toward employment equity for this group of women in the workforce.

This study also responds to recommendations made to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council by the Institute of Social and Economic Research at its 1982 conference on "Women and Work." Of the thirty recommendations, two called for the support of "case studies on all aspects of Women in the Canadian Economy" and "case studies of firms which would explore the extent and causes of occupational segregation within and between firms."⁴

Three other relevant recommendations were: "that fringe benefit

data be collected in connection with part-time, as well as full-time work; that data be developed to measure household work; and that data be developed to support a study of women's proportional contribution to household income." The call for case studies and data development of this nature by two Canadian research institutions clearly identified the need for investigation of women's segregated work in the Canadian economy, its nature, value and organization. This study aims to contribute to this body of knowledge.

Background

Recent experiences of the 1,900 Home Support Workers employed by the Continuing Care Program of Manitoba Health had prompted my interest in conducting a case study of their working conditions. Their large number, combined with developments in the Civil Service and the Manitoba Government Employees' Association (M.G.E.A.), had brought into sharp focus the issues of their low salaries, lack of benefits and part-time scheduling. Their plight became more visible for two main reasons. First, within the Civil Service, Pay Equity Legislation was being implemented. Second, the M.G.E.A. was negotiating a first contract with the Home Care Attendants, another group of employees in the Continuing Care Program. The Home Helpers employed by The Agency face employment conditions similar to the Home Support Workers employed by Manitoba Health. Both groups do similar work for provincially funded community-based health care agencies, providing assistance with household maintenance, food preparation and activities of daily living. I, therefore, selected this group of

workers for the subject of this case study.

With the expansion of the Manitoba community-based health care policy, employment of home support work has grown since 1960. Home Care workers' schedules must be flexible to respond to the individual health-related client need, accommodating meal times, twelve and twenty-four hour supervision services, as well as usual household maintenance. Work schedules are determined primarily by client-need. However, the shift-like nature of the demand for homemakers has resulted in management's use of cost-efficient part-time scheduling.

The dominant management practices pertaining to this category of part-time employees in health and social service agencies contributed in large part to bringing their conditions of employment to the writer's attention.

For example, in the Continuing Care Program part-time Home Support Workers are defined by the Civil Service Act as "casual employees" who "normally work less than the full normal daily, weekly or monthly hours of work, as the case may be, and whose work is irregular or non-recurring or does not follow an ongoing predetermined schedule."⁵ They are paid on a hourly bi-weekly basis. As casual employees, they are not Civil Servants and are not represented by the M.G.E.A. as a bargaining agent.

The Continuing Care Home Support Workers had remained quiescent as a workforce component until two events in 1987 highlighted their workforce identity.

On September 1, 1987, employees affected by the implementation of

the Pay Equity Act received their first pay cheques reflecting the first phase of their salary increases over a four year period.

Amidst the publicity and bravura accompanying this achievement, the Continuing Care Home Support Workers as a group realized they were excluded from Pay Equity eligibility. The Legislation applies only to Civil Servants, which excludes Home Support Workers. Even as a female dominated class of provincial government employees they were ironically excluded from the benefit of legislation inspired by an ethos and intent which ought to have included them. Nineteen hundred Continuing Care Home Support Workers felt the sting of legislative discrimination.

The second event was a reception for Manitoba Homemakers given by Manitoba Health and Community Services at the Legislative Building. An article featured on the front The page of the Winnipeg Free Press reported that "Home Care Workers Claim Government Blocking Union Bid" (See Appendix B) It claimed government administrative practices deterred M.G.E.A. representatives from identifying, contacting and signing the members of this decentralized workforce for the purpose of becoming their bargaining agent. The Manitoba Government stood accused of depriving these workers of employment benefits in the interest of containing program costs.

The Manitoba Government's employment practices influence the standard for non-governmental organizations. Consequently, when the issues of pay equity and conditions of employment came into sharp relief for the Home Support Workers employed by the Manitoba

Government, so too did they for the Home Help Service staff of The Agency.

B. Methodology

1. Research Design:

This is a cross sectional, descriptive case study of the work and workers in the Home Help Service within a community-based health care agency in Winnipeg. The study is also supported by a review of home maker services in Canada.

A case study, the "observation of a single group at one point in time, usually subsequent to some event that allegedly produced change,"⁶ is intended to yield subjective information about a particular situation to the researcher. It is the investigator's task to shape this information into a theory testing or theory building presentation.

The intent of this study is to follow a principle of good research design encouraged by Chadwick, Bahr and Albrecht, 1984, which is "triangulate when possible."

Generally, triangulation refers to the search for consistency of - findings from different observers, observing instruments, methods of observation, times, places, and research institutions ... Triangulation embraces theory triangulation which is Denzin's (1970, pp. 303-306) term for the assessment of a single observation or data set from the standpoint of several theoretical perspectives. In essence, one investigator approaches a data set with multiple conceptual perspectives, or several investigators, each with a distinctive perspective, may view and interpret the same data set.⁷

A questionnaire was administered to the Home Help Staff of The Agency to develop profiles of them as workforce members (See Appendix C).

Information regarding The Agency and work-setting was gathered by interviews with the Executive Director of The Agency and the Assistant Director of the Home Help Service (See Appendix D). Applying the method of theory triangulation, this information will be interpreted through the perspectives of Neo-Classical Theory, Dual Labour Market Theory, Radical Theory and Feminist Theory.

2. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis:

a) The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to elicit individual profiles of the Home Help staff, showing demographic characteristics, workforce histories, family and household responsibilities and attitudes toward their current job (See Appendix C).

Responses to the questionnaire were analysed using the STAT PAC system.

b) Sample and Method of Data Collection

It was important for the validity of the study that as large a number as possible of the ninety-two Home Help staff respond to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was distributed in two phases. The first phase took place at a regular bi-monthly staff development meeting, March 21, 1988, attended by twenty-four Home Helpers. The group in attendance was prepared to complete the questionnaire which had been announced previously in the agency newsletter.

Following the March meeting, sixty-nine questionnaires were mailed to all remaining Home Help staff. Of these, forty-five

completed the questionnaire and returned it by mail in the pre-addressed and stamped envelope. A total of 69 (75%) completed questionnaires comprised this part of the primary data.

c) Interviews

This primary data consists of interviews by the researcher of the Executive Director of The Agency and the Assistant Director, Home Help Service (See Appendix D).

Advantages of the Research Design

The case study, an "intensive examination" of a single unit, serves a dual function, contributing to general knowledge while aiming to "make a practical improvement in the specific instance examined."⁸

The advantage of the case study approach is its potential as a "tremendous producer of ideas, suggestions and hypotheses about behaviour,"⁹ particularly in the exploration of a relatively new subject.¹⁰ Although the case study does not lead to well established conclusions, it may lead to "empirically developed hypotheses."¹¹

The descriptive approach which involves "painting a picture" rather than "ferreting out so-called cause and effect relationships"¹² suits the objective of this case study. After gathering and analyzing the data, "the final stage of the descriptive study is making inferences, and perhaps, recommendations for whatever action is implied by the results of the analysis of the data gathered."¹³

A primary advantage of the questionnaire study is its directness. "Perhaps the simplest way to obtain descriptions of people and their behaviour is to ask them to provide you with the necessary information

either by personal interview or mail survey."¹⁴ Another major advantage of the questionnaire survey is its economy, yielding the greatest number of facts or research data per research dollar" (and implied time). However, the price of this economy is the inherent limitation on the depth of the data obtained. A second advantage of this type of survey is that "mail questionnaires produce fewer responses biased in the direction of social desirability than do interviews."¹⁵

Limitations of the Research Design

The case study is recognized as the weakest quasi experimental design, offering no baseline measure of the study group or control group with which to compare. In this case study the "non-event", which produce change within the group, was their ineligibility for a salary increase under the Pay Equity Act. The empirically developed hypotheses of the study itself however, may become baseline data for a future study.

In preparing for this study, my intent was to develop primary data by two methods: individual interviews of individual Home Help staff and completion of a self-administered questionnaire by the Home Help staff. However, the Executive Director of The Agency would agree only to allowing the self-administered questionnaire.

Furthermore, as sources of secondary data, I requested access to The Agency's annual report, and Agency records to document data which were relevant to the operations of the Home Help Service. In this case, The Agency Executive Director suggested that I submit specific

questions to the Assistant Director of the Home Help Service and gather the secondary data in this way.

Denial of the opportunity to develop qualitative primary data through individual interviews was a major disappointment. So too was the limited access to agency operations information. These limitations on access to The Agency were justified by the Executive Director in the interest of Agency confidentiality. I decided to approach the study and develop the data within the constraints imposed by the host agency.

The Executive Director and the Assistant Director of Home Help were exceedingly helpful in administering the questionnaire and accessing agency data and information within these constraints.

This study of the Home Helpers and their working conditions with The Agency occurs in the context of today's rapidly changing workforce. Described below is a profile of the current workforce and women's position in it.

C. Recent Trends in Women's Labour Force Participation

The primary incentive for most women entering the labour force, is a wage. For some women, a wage means maintaining a minimum standard of living. For others, a wage means achieving economic independence. Since World War II, the ever increasing women's labour force participation rate has been the outcome of married women entering the labour force. Most married women "going out to work" have been those who need a second wage to supplement their husbands'

low wage (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1975; Weeks, 1977; Connelly, 1978; Fox, 1980). A growing proportion of self-supporting women living alone participates in the labour force. With the increasing number of marriages ending in separation and divorce, the proportion of women who are single parents is also rising. During the eighties, families headed by women have incomes which "average half those headed by men." Over forty percent of these women aged 15-64 had incomes below Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut-Offs.¹⁶

Most women need their wages to maintain a minimum standard of living. Industrialization has revolutionized the standard of living making the luxuries of the past the necessities of today. Women need their wages to keep up with "domestic technology and inexpensively produced consumer goods, particularly in times of high inflation."¹⁷ Women are responding to the strong demand for their labour in the expanding tertiary sector of the economy, filling the clerical, sales and service occupations.

Societal attitudes towards women working are changing gradually. Gallup polls taken in 1960 and 1982 compared the attitudes towards women working, showing that in 1960, only 65% agreed that women without children should work outside the home, while in 1982, 82% agreed that they should. In 1960, the Gallup polls showed only 5% of the Canadian population approving of working mothers, while, in 1982, 38% did.¹⁸

These changing attitudes are reflected in women's choices to postpone child-bearing and to have smaller families. Statistics

Canada shows the dramatic decline of fertility among Canadian women since 1970. In 1982, there were just over 1,000 more births than in 1970, although there were over one million more women of child bearing age.¹⁹

More women preparing for careers in the labour force, are pursuing post-secondary education at the university and community college level. In 1982, while women were just over 50% of all university students, an increase from 37% in 1970, they were over-represented in part-time studies and under-represented in graduate studies.²⁰ At both the university and community college level, slightly over sixty percent of women are choosing fields traditionally dominated by women: education, fine arts, nursing, social sciences, and secretarial science.

Despite gradual societal acceptance of women's labour force participation, women still face a labour market offering them low skill jobs and poor pay.

Women's Labour Force Participation Rates

In Manitoba, the existing pay equity legislation and affirmative action policies were established in response to the dramatic influx of women into the paid labour force. Currently women account for over 40% of the Canadian and Manitoba labour force with a participation rate of over 55%. By the year 2000, should current trends continue, women will account for 50% of the labour force²¹ (See Appendix A-1). Comparative Labour force statistics for 1981 and 1986 released in March 1988 by Statistics Canada indicate trends which analysts

consider astonishing. Womens' overall labour force participation rate increased from 51.6% to 55.9%, for all women with children, it rose from 51.1% to 61.2%; for married women with children under six years it shot from 49.5% to 62.1%²²

In Manitoba, between 1975 and 1985 the largest labour force participation rate increases occurred among women between 25-44, married women of all ages, women regarded as members of a family, and all women with more than eight years of education.²³ Evident in these patterns is the break from women's traditional employment pattern determined by marriage and child bearing. Before this time, labour force participation rates were highest for young women before marriage, showing a sharp decline when they left the labour force to marry and raise children, rising only slightly when children entered school and then declining before retirement. The recent pattern of women's labour force involvement, though peaking earlier than men's, does not decline with child bearing age as noticeably as in the past.²⁴

Women entering the labour force fall into several main categories: married women who contribute a necessary second income to provide families with an adequate standard of living - often keeping families out of poverty; married women who prefer a career in the paid labour force, and women who are single, divorced or widowed, "sole-support" women responsible for themselves, and often their children and other family members. The reasons which bring women into the labour force are keeping them there. Not only have women become permanent participants in the labour force, their numbers are

predicted to increase. National statistics show that more women remain in the labour force after marriage and child bearing, and of those who do leave, many return when their children enter school. The work life expectancy of women who do leave, and return to the work force is 25 years despite their break in employment; for those who never leave, forty five years, the same as for men.²⁵

The Wage Gap

A measure of women's persistent labour force inequality is the wage gap, the indicator which expresses the difference between men's and women's earnings as a percentage of men's earnings. The Census is the most comprehensive source of information on female and male average earnings for determining the female/male wage gap. The most recent wage gap data for full-time employment reported by Statistics Canada based on the 1981 Census are for 1982, when the national average earnings of women employed full-time were 64% of earnings of men employed full-time; \$16,000 compared with \$25,000 resulting in a wage gap of 36%. In Manitoba the average earnings of women employed full-time were 66% of earnings of men employed full-time; \$14,792 compared to \$22,427, resulting in a wage gap of 34%.²⁶ According to Statistics Canada, for Manitoba Women, this represents a modest increase since 1970, when women working full-time, full year, made only 60% of the income of men.²⁷

The Survey of Consumer Finances conducted by Statistics Canada since 1951, provides the most current information source on male/female employment earnings. Since 1971, the earnings ratio for