Women in the Entrepreneurial Economy

June 27, 2003 – The 1990s saw extraordinary growth of small business and self-employment in Canada. In the 1980s, only 20% of job growth came from this quarter. By contrast, in the period 1990-1997, a time of public sector retrenchment, small business and self-employment accounted for almost 60% of employment growth.

Women were at the forefront of this change, starting small and micro-businesses in record numbers, says Karen Hughes, CPRN Work Network Research Associate and Professor of Sociology at the University of Alberta.

In ***How are Women Faring in the Entrepreneurial Economy?***, a presentation she made to the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences' "Breakfast on the Hill" in Ottawa last month, Hughes finds that women's share of self-employment in Canada today (more than one-third) is the highest of the OECD countries. What's more, women now represent just over 25% of employers, compared to only 11% in the mid-1970s.

Some have questioned whether this shift involves a qualitative improvement for women. Hughes' findings are interesting in that respect. Growth has taken place in upper-tier occupations like management services, educational services and professional, sciences and technical services – hardly traditional for women. Women also seem highly satisfied with their greater independence, their authority to make decisions, and personal fulfillment from their work. Hughes does find, however, significant dissatisfaction with extrinsic rewards, like pay, benefits and job security.

She concludes her presentation with a resumé of policy issues arising from this growing entrepreneurship by women, among them issues of training needs, economic insecurity and work-family balance.

You can access or download a copy of her presentation by clicking here.

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