

Mark R. Killingsworth, *The Economics of Comparable Worth*

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Volume 46, numéro 2, 1991

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050682ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/050682ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Agarwal, N. C. (1991). Compte rendu de [Mark R. Killingsworth, *The Economics of Comparable Worth*]. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 46(2), 478–480. <https://doi.org/10.7202/050682ar>

questions techniques liées à l'implantation d'un programme d'équité salariale) sans s'embarasser de considérations théoriques. On remarque cependant certaines lacunes: une présentation non uniforme des différentes méthodes d'évaluation, un traitement assez général de l'étape d'évaluation elle-même, la mise de côté de certaines approches de correction des écarts salariaux et la quasi-absence de considérations sur la situation d'entreprises qui voudraient entreprendre des comparaisons d'emplois entre des familles différentes (comparaisons inter-familles) qui peuvent être syndiquées et à des syndicats différents. En effet, les discussions portent presque uniquement sur les comparaisons intra-familles, base de la législation ontarienne, par ailleurs fort critiquée car on sait que les écarts inter-familles contribuent pour beaucoup au maintien des écarts discriminatoires de salaires.

Il est aussi dommage que les auteur-e-s n'aient pas toujours su présenter les impacts importants de certaines décisions techniques (choix du seuil de prédominance par exemple) sur le type d'équité salariale qui sera réalisé. Enfin, les auteur-es insistent très peu sur les différences qui existent entre une démarche ad hoc de correction des écarts sexistes (utilisation ponctuelle d'un processus non-sexiste incluant le plan d'évaluation) et une démarche intégrée d'équité salariale (changement permanent du processus d'évaluation).

Comme ce livre «colle» plus spécifiquement à la situation de l'Ontario, il sera surtout utile aux praticien-nes de cette province ou d'autres provinces qui devront sous peu préparer et afficher des programmes d'équité salariale selon le modèle mis en place par la législation ontarienne.

**Esther DÉOM**

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**The Economics of Comparable Worth**, by Mark R. KILLINGSWORTH, Kalamazoo, Michigan, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1990, 225 p. ISBN 0-88099-086-4  
ISBN 0-88099-085-6 (pbk.).

The issue of comparable worth/equal value has evoked considerable debate in the U.S. and Canada in recent years. The primary objective of the present book is to contribute to the two areas in which the author claims this debate "has been sadly deficient". "First, in much of the controversy, both proponents and opponents have failed to define terms and concepts clearly — even the concept of comparable worth itself. Relatively little effort has been devoted to describing, in concrete terms, what would be involved in implementing and enforcing a policy of equal pay for jobs of comparable worth. [...] A second problem with public debate on comparable worth is that protagonists have often been preoccupied with essentially ideological and normative issues to the almost total exclusion of important conceptual and empirical questions. [...] Both sides in the debate seem to agree that comparable worth is intended to serve as a means of redressing some of the economic effects of discrimination against (or labor market segmentation of) women. The likely effects, however, of actual or potential comparable worth policies on labor market outcomes for women — on wages, employment, etc. have received relatively little attention."

Excluding the introductory chapter, the book consists of six chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to a theoretical treatment of various definitional, analytical and methodological issues concerning comparable worth. Next three chapters provide detailed case studies of three jurisdictions (Minnesota, and San José in the U.S. and Australia) which have already implemented comparable worth policies. In the final chapter, the author draws some conclusions from his analyses in the preceding chapters and offers, very briefly, two alternatives to comparable worth policies.

Killingsworth begins his analysis by distinguishing between two possible definitions of comparable worth. The first definition looks at comparable worth from the perspective of "value to the employer". It implies that jobs A and B would be of comparable worth if the increase in output that the employer would derive by assigning a given group of homogeneous workers to either job is equal. In economic jargon, jobs of comparable worth under this definition are jobs in which the marginal product of given type of labor is the same — the author labels it as the MP definition of comparable worth. The second definition of comparable worth looks at the concept from the perspective of "desirability to the employee". Under this definition, two jobs are said to be comparable worth if they are comparable in terms of a composite of four kinds of factors: skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions. The author calls this as the compensating wage differentials of the CD definition of comparable worth. It is this definition which as been used by the proponents of comparable worth. The MP and CD definitions, the author argues, are quite different from each other and have different implications. "To determine whether jobs are comparable in the MP sense, one would need to measure the contribution each makes to the employer's output; whereas an assessment of the comparability of two jobs in the CD sense requires an evaluation of the jobs in terms of skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions, or what the jobs ask of workers". One might suggest here that the author perhaps makes too much of this distinction. Ideally, the worth of a job should be measured in MP terms. But, practically, is such measurement possible in real organizations? For example, a university can consist of — just to name a few — these diverse jobs: professors, research assistants, student counsellors, janitors, administrative personnel, laboratory assistants, cafeterial attendants, librarians, etc. Is it possible to measure directly the MP contribution of each of these jobs to a university's output? Even if the answer is somehow yes, are these MP contributions measurable in common units so that comparisons of worth can be made among these diverse jobs? Perhaps, the CD definition represents a practical way of measuring what the MP definition ideally purports to measure.

In addition to definition of comparable worth, the author goes on to argue that discussions of comparable worth have tended to neglect such issues as **coverage** (e.g. would coverage be limited to employers with at least some specified number of employees, as under the provisions of fair labor standards law?; would the same comparable worth standard be applied to all establishments of a given employer, regardless of geographic location or industrial classification?), **compliance** (e.g. how would wages be adjusted if two jobs covered by comparable worth and deemed to be comparable nevertheless pay different wages?), and **determination of job comparability** (e.g. what type of job evaluation schemes would be most appropriate for establishing job comparability?). These are important questions but, because these are essentially operational in nature no general answers can be given which will be appropriate to all situations. Thus, in the matter of legislation on comparable worth (or equal value in Canada), different jurisdictions may decide differently on coverage and compliance provisions depending on their respective contexts. Similarly, operational issues relating to job evaluation (e.g. which factors to use and what relative weights to assign them) tend to be organization specific. Thus an employer in the garbage collection business may decide to assign a higher weight to working conditions than skill. Just the opposite is likely to be true for an employer in the research and development industry.

Killingsworth points out that comparable worth is a double-edged weapon. Precisely to the extent it raises pay in predominantly female jobs, comparable worth will make it more expensive to employ workers in these jobs. Thus, as a result of comparable worth, some workers may enjoy higher wages but others may be unemployed. The net result, of course, will depend upon demand elasticities, i.e. on whether the gains from higher wages will offset the losses from reduced employment. Killingsworth attempts to provide an answer based on a detailed

study of three jurisdictions in which comparable worth policies have been implemented: Minnesota, San José and Australia. Minnesota adopted a **Pay Equity Act** in 1982 under which comparable worth has been implemented for state government employees. Thus far, these employees have received three sets of comparable worth pay adjustments. In San José, as part of the two-year contract that settled a July 1981 municipal employees' strike, the city agreed to make comparable worth pay adjustments for certain predominantly female city jobs. Subsequent contracts included additional adjustments. Australia adopted comparable worth (equal pay for work of equal value) policy in 1972 covering employees in the public as well as private sectors.

Based on a detailed study of these three jurisdictions, the author reaches the following conclusions with regard to the wage and employment effects of comparable worth. The results for Minnesota and San José suggest that, **other things being equal**, the comparable worth adjustments adopted there raised pay of women relative to men by about 9.9 and 5.8 percentage points, respectively. While these wage gains are substantial, they did not eliminate all sex differences in pay. In Australia also, the initial wage gains for women were as large (about 10 percentage points). However, the effect wore off rather rapidly so that, in the long run, the wage gains have been negligible. The author finds the same experience to be true concerning the employment effects of comparable worth. **Other things being equal**, the comparable worth adjustments reduced employment in predominantly female jobs relative to predominantly male jobs by about 3.5 and 6.7 percent in Minnesota and San José, respectively. However, these adverse effects were offset by the underlying trend in employment growth. Thus, the author points out that it is unlikely that anyone actually lost his or her job as a result of the comparable worth adjustment. Again in Australia, the immediate adverse employment effect of implementing equal value was of a similar magnitude but tended to be negligible in the long run.

Overall, the most interesting and useful contribution of the book consists of the detailed and methodologically sound case studies in Chapters 4 through 6. The analysis in these chapters points to rather inconsequential effectiveness of comparable worth policies for reducing the male/female wage gap in long run. At the conceptual level, the book does devote three chapters to applying the conventional economic theory to comparable worth. But, in this regard, it breaks no new grounds.

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**Les règles du jeu. L'action collective et la régulation sociale**, par Jean-Daniel REYNAUD, Paris, Armand Colin, 1989, 306 p., ISBN 2-200-31256-3

Le dernier ouvrage de Jean-Daniel Reynaud est le couronnement d'une réflexion originale et vivifiante qui s'avère sans conteste l'une des contributions majeures des trois dernières décennies dans le domaine des relations industrielles. Cet auteur prolifique, adepte de la sociologie de Crozier, est connu surtout pour ses analyses sur la négociation collective et le syndicalisme. L'analyste brillant qu'est Reynaud se fait ici essayiste: à travers une lecture critique des classiques de la sociologie (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Parsons), il développe une analyse de la régulation sociale qui renvoie dos à dos les explications déterministes d'inspiration marxiste et structuro-fonctionnaliste.

L'objet de cet essai sociologique sur la régulation sociale n'est pas étranger à la problématique d'un Dunlop qui veut expliquer l'origine des règles générées par les systèmes de relations industrielles. Toutefois, à l'instar des tenants d'une approche pluraliste des relations