

# After CERB

Understanding the Inadequacy of Paid Sick Leave Provisions in Canada

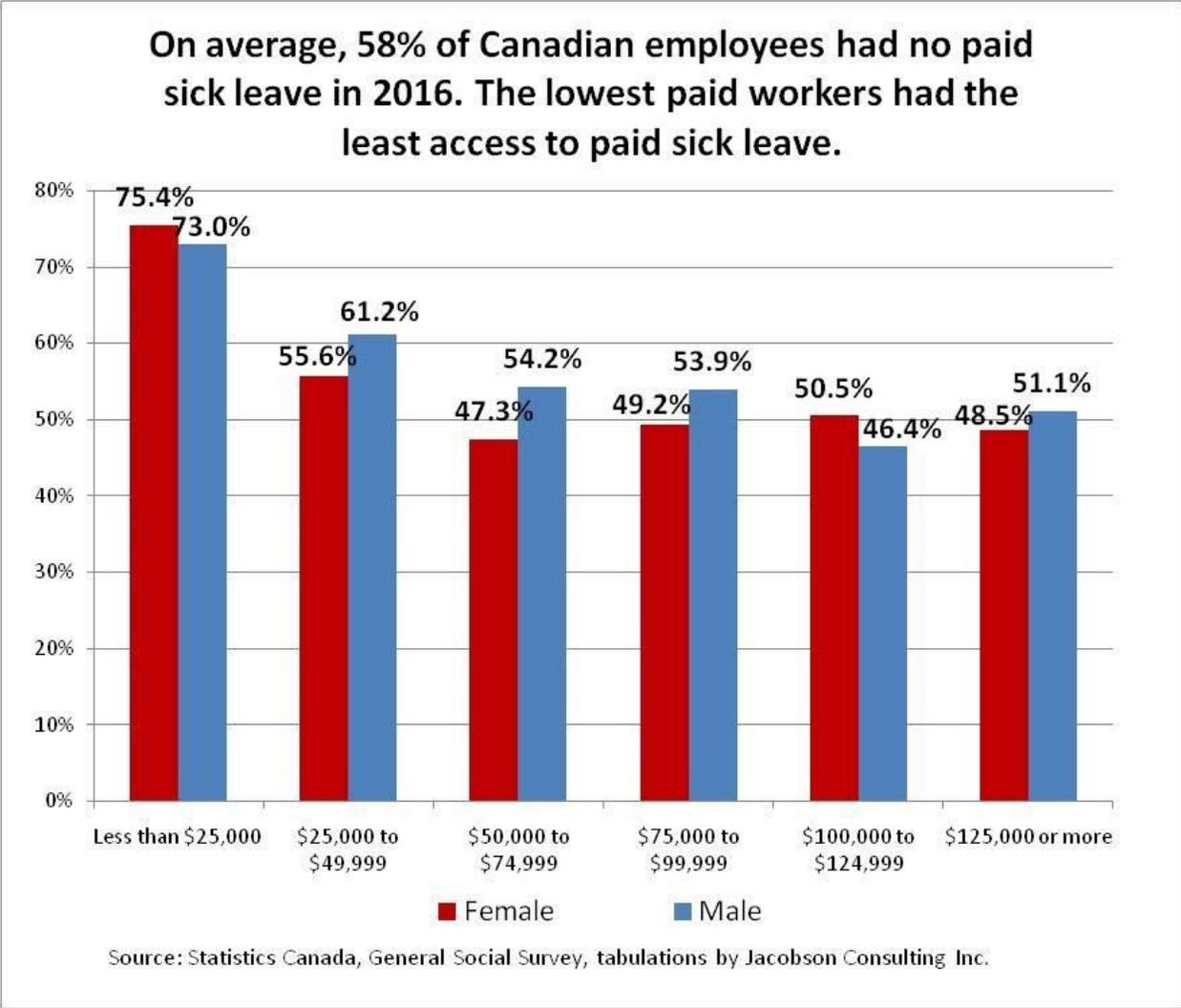
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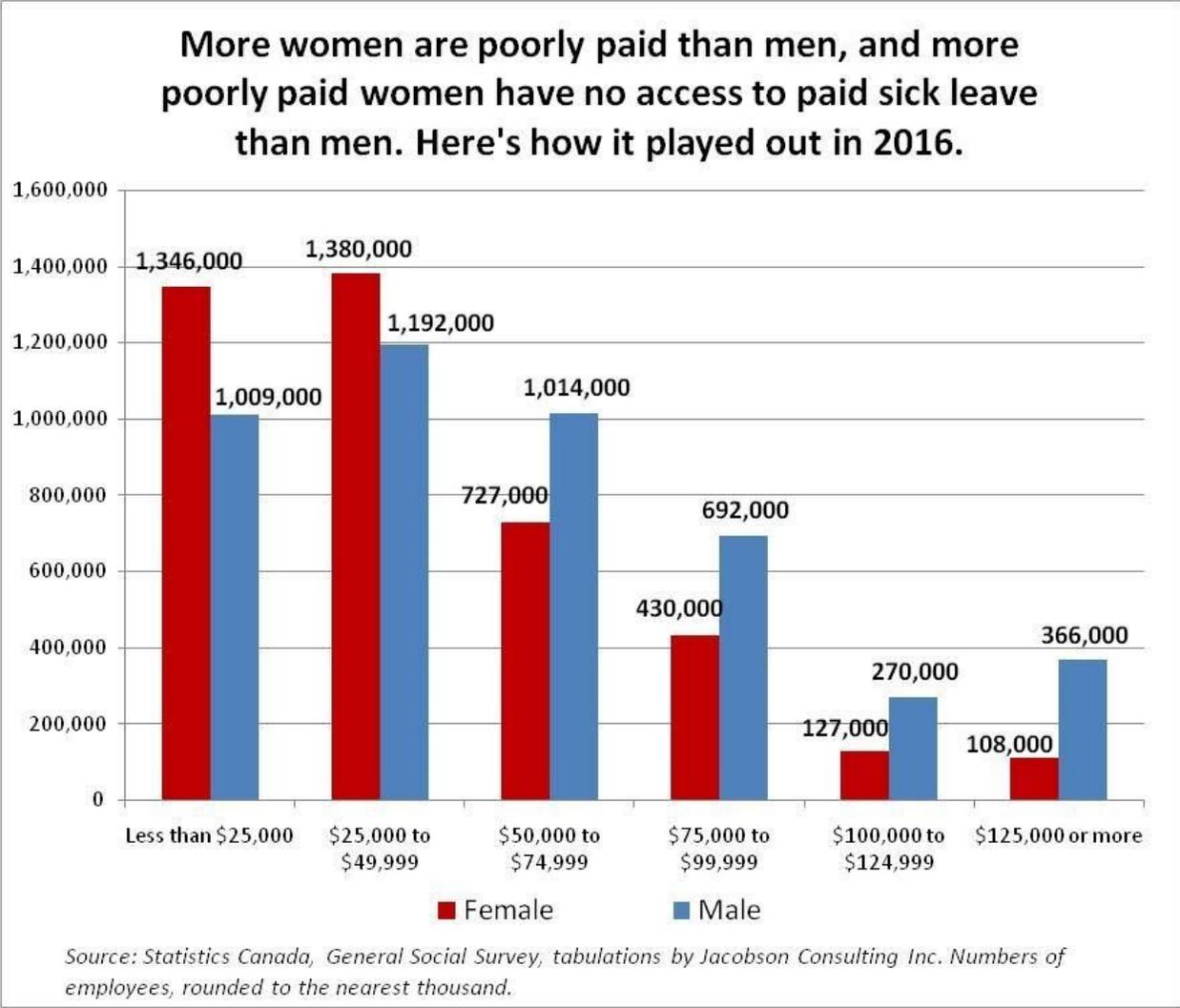
Based on the latest Statistics Canada General Social Survey that collects such information, 58% of Canada’s 15 million employees had no paid sick leave.<sup>1</sup> In total, almost 8.7 million Canadian employees had no access to paid sick leave in 2016. The numbers will be greater today.

Most of the people who did not qualify for EI, but did qualify for CERB were low-paid workers. Among those earning less than \$25,000 a year, almost three quarters had no access to paid sick leave in 2016.

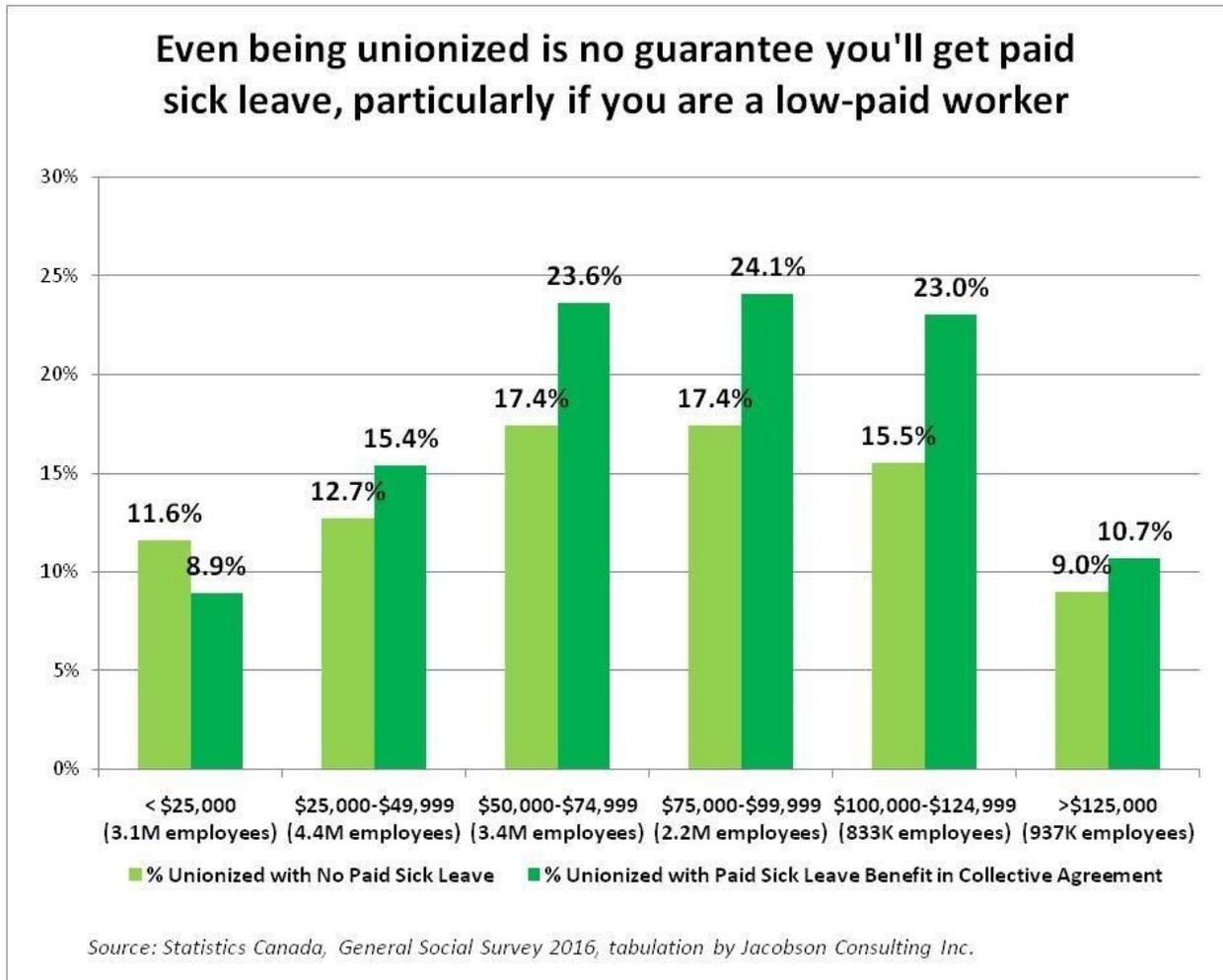


<sup>1</sup> Data were provided in spreadsheet prepared by Paul Jacobson of Jacobson Consulting. These charts were prepared by Armine Yalnizyan, economist and Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers. His charts are available here: <https://www.jacobsonconsulting.com/index.php/downloads-2/availability-of-paid-sick-leave-gss-30/viewdocument/78>

More women than men are low paid, so these percentages play out even more starkly when tallying the proportion of Canadians with no access to paid sick leave in 2016, by income class: 2.7 million female and 2.2 million male employees earning less than \$50,000 a year had no access to paid leave if they got sick. (Over 4.25 million female and 3.33 million male employees earned less than \$50,000 that year.)



Unionization is also no guarantee of provision of paid sick days in the private sector, though such benefits were more widely available in the public sector. The lowest paid workers had low rates of unionization, but even when unionized, had the worst access to paid sick leave.



By 2020, employees in only three jurisdictions had some access to statutory paid sick leave: Quebec (2 paid days of sick leave); federally regulated business (3 paid days); and, since March, Yukon (10 paid sick days, which the employer must pay but is rebated by the territory upon request).

Millions of workers remain without access to paid sick leave, through workplace plans, collective agreements or statutory protections. The people least able to be able to afford to recuse themselves from the job when ill in order to contain contagion -- be it during a pandemic or to limit the spread of the common flu -- are low paid workers, particularly

women. Ironically these are the workers who most frequently deal with the public. Without paid sick days, we are structurally increasing the vectors of transmission and disease to the general public via workers providing personal care for the elderly, children, and people with episodic or chronic health problems; workers in grocery stores; people providing delivery and transit services, cleaning services, and food production and preparation services. These are the people deemed essential in a crisis, and who will be no less essential after the crisis has passed; but who will be essentially unprotected when CERB ends, which may occur before the pandemic has fully passed. We should learn the lessons of COVID: our collective health is only as good as our ability to limit transmission. That means anyone who is sick, and contagious, should be able to stay home until they are better, without incurring a financial penalty to do so. The prescription for what ails us is: ten paid sick days for anyone who needs it, stat!