

Fact Sheet 2011



PROFESSIONAL WOMEN: A GENDERED LOOK AT OCCUPATIONAL OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The past century has seen working women take a commanding place in the labor market, especially in professional occupations. Today, women are quickly outdistancing men in achieving higher education and are filling many occupations, which, years ago, would have been mainly restricted to men. Although today's professional women are rapidly deconstructing outdated gender norms in society, the workplace, and the home, many obstacles still remain in the way of gender equality.

This fact sheet explores: general information about women in the workplace, gender occupational differences, the gender wage gap, women in education, the effects of the gender wage gap on working families and retirement benefits, the high cost of caregiving in the U.S., and the union advantage for women.

General Statistics

- The number of working women in the United States has risen from 5.1 million in 1900, to 18.4 million in 1950, to 65.7 million in 2010.¹
- Women accounted for 18 percent of the labor force in 1900 and 47.2 percent in 2010.² From 2008 to 2018, the number of women in the civilian labor force is projected to increase by nine percent, or 6,462,000.³
- While in 1900 only 20.4 percent of all women worked, between 2000 and 2009 almost 60 percent of women worked.⁴
- From 1993 to 2010, education and health services ranked first in employment of women, followed by trade, transportation and utilities, and local government. About 73 percent of working women were in professional occupations in 2010, a percentage that is expected to increase.⁵
- In 2010, women made up the majority of workers in professional and related occupations and service occupations, 57.4 percent and 56.8 percent, respectively. These fields are expected to grow by 16.8 percent and 13.8 percent, respectively, from 2008 to 2018.⁶
- Labor force participation has increased most dramatically among married women.⁷
- Today, most mothers, even those with young children, participate in the labor force.⁸
- About half of all multiple job holders in 2010 were women, up from 22 percent in 1974. Women are the majority of temporary and part-time workers.⁹

Occupational Distribution Differs Between Men and Women

Although women constitute the majority of professional employees, their occupational distribution remains different from men.

- In 2010, 74.2 percent of health care practitioner and technical occupations, and 73.8 percent of education, training, and library occupations were held by women.¹⁰

- In comparison, only 25.8 percent of computer and mathematical occupations, and 12.8 percent of architecture and engineering occupations were filled by women in 2010.¹¹

Still, the different distribution of men and women among specific professional occupations was less pronounced in 2010 than 25 years prior.

- The percentage of technical writers who were female increased from 36 percent to 54.3 percent between 1985 and 2010.
- Women pharmacists increased from 30 percent in 1985 to 53 percent in 2010.
- The percentage of female chemists increased from 11 percent in 1985 to 33.5 percent in 2010.¹²

The Gender Wage Gap Persists

The wage gap between sexes still plagues the American workforce. In 2010, women's median weekly earnings in the U.S. were only 81.2 percent of men's median weekly earnings.¹³ The gender wage gap has high costs for women over the course of their careers. The Center for American Progress (CAP) found that the average female worker loses approximately \$434,000 in wages over a 40-year period as a direct result of pay inequities.¹⁴

For most minority women, the earnings gap was even larger. In 2010:

- African American women earned 72 cents for every dollar earned by men.
- Hispanic and Latina women earned just 62 cents for every dollar men earned.
- Only Asian American women's earnings were closer to parity; in 2010, they earned 94 cents for every dollar earned by men. However, they earned 81.8 percent as much as Asian American men.¹⁵

Equal pay remains a problem in every occupational category, even in occupations where women considerably outnumber men. In 2010, certain professions showed a significant gap.

- While comprising 57.4 percent of the field, women in professional and related occupations earned 23 percent less than their male counterparts.
- Female elementary and middle school teachers earned nine percent less than similarly employed men, despite comprising over 80 percent of the field.
- Female postsecondary teachers earned over 22 percent less than equivalent men.
- Female physicians and surgeons earned nearly 29 percent less than their male counterparts.
- Female lawyers earned almost 23 percent less than male lawyers.¹⁶

Women also earn less at every level of education. For full-time workers aged 25 and older in 2010:

- Women without a high school diploma earned \$388 in median weekly wages, while men earned \$486.
- Women with a bachelor's degree or higher earned \$986, while men with a comparable education earned \$1,330.¹⁷
- A recent report by the American Association of University Women found that women who attended highly selective colleges earn less than men from either highly or moderately selective colleges, and about the same as men from minimally selective colleges.¹⁸

- According to CAP, women at all educational levels suffer long term effects from the wage gap. The differences are even larger as educational attainment grows. Over a 40-year period, women with a high school degree will earn, on average, \$392,000 less than their male counterparts, while women with a bachelor's degree or higher will earn \$713,000 less than their male counterparts.¹⁹

Women and Education: Leaping the Gap

- Women have been earning more bachelor's degrees than men since 1982 and they have been earning more master's degrees than men since 1981. Women earned 57.9 percent of all postsecondary degrees conferred in the 2008–09 school year.²⁰
- Women earned 52.3 percent of all doctoral degrees in 2008–09, while in 1961 they earned only 10.5 percent of all doctoral degrees.²¹
- The proportion of women in law school increased from 3.7 percent in 1963 to 44.3 percent in the academic year 2009–10.²²
- The proportion of women in medical school increased from 5.8 percent in the academic year 1960–61 to 47.9 percent in the academic year 2008–09.²³
- Between academic years 1959–60 and 2008–09, the percentage of degrees in dentistry earned by women increased from 0.8 percent to 46.3 percent.²⁴
- However, men and women remain segregated by college major, with women making up 79 percent of education majors and men making up 82 percent of engineering majors. The support and opportunity for women to pursue careers in fields like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics are important for achieving pay equity. In science and engineering, for example, women are still paid less than men but tend to earn more than similarly educated women in other sectors of the workforce.²⁵

The Gender Wage Gap Costs Working Families

- More than 12 million families with children rely primarily on women's earnings.²⁶
- Over a third of mothers in working families in every state, except Wyoming and Utah, are the family's primary breadwinner, either as single working mothers, or by providing at least half of a family's earnings.²⁷
- The gender wage gap has taken on added importance as men have been more likely than women to lose jobs during the recent recession. This drop in male employment forces millions of families to rely mainly on a woman's paycheck to make ends meet. In the economic downturn, the persistent gender pay gap further stresses working families, as it costs U.S. women \$200 billion annually.²⁸
- The overall labor force participation rate of mothers with children younger than 18 was 71.2 percent in 2008. The labor force participation rate of single mothers was 75.5 percent in 2008.²⁹
- In 2007, almost 26 percent of children lived with only one parent (up from 12 percent in 1970), with about 86 percent of these children living with their mothers.³⁰ About 28 percent of families where children younger than 18 lived with their mother, with no father present, were below the poverty level in 2007. Among Black single mothers, 36 percent were below the poverty line.³¹

- A report by the AFL-CIO and the Institute for Women's Policy Research found that if the wage gap were eliminated, the income of single women would rise 13.4 percent, single mothers would earn 17 percent more, and married women would earn six percent more. These increases would lead to reductions in poverty of 84 percent for single women, 50 percent for single mothers, and 62 percent for married women.³²

The Gender Wage Gap Significantly Affects Retirement Benefits

- Women represent 57 percent of all Social Security beneficiaries age 62 and older and approximately 68 percent of beneficiaries age 85 and older.³³ While Social Security does not discriminate based on gender, lower income histories affect women's benefits.
- In 2009, the average annual Social Security income received by women 65 years and older was \$12,155, compared to \$15,620 for men.
- In 2009, 45 percent of unmarried women receiving Social Security benefits relied on Social Security for 90 percent or more of their income.³⁴
- Elderly women are less likely than elderly men to have significant family income from pensions other than Social Security. In 2008, only 23 percent of unmarried women aged 65 or older were receiving their own private pensions (either as a retired worker or survivor), compared to 28 percent of unmarried men.³⁵
- With longer life expectancies than men, women tend to live more years in retirement and have a greater chance of exhausting income outside of Social Security. Women who reached age 65 in 2009 are expected to live, on average, an additional 20.4 years, compared with 18 years for men.³⁶
- The American Association of Retired Persons estimates that unmarried women receive approximately \$8,000 less in annual retirement income than their male counterparts. Two-thirds of this disparity is directly attributable to the wage gap and employment segregation.³⁷

International Perspectives: High Costs to Care Giving in the U.S.

- The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) consists of 34 high-income countries and provides an international platform to compare economic and policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, and coordinate international efforts. Out of 26 reviewed OECD countries, the U.S. has the seventh largest gender earnings gap. The gender wage gap in the U.S. is 18.8 percent, above the OECD average of 17.6 percent.³⁸
- The U.S. also has the highest proportion of children living with a single parent at over 25 percent, compared to the OECD average of 16 percent.
- According to a recent study conducted by the Project on Global Working Families, the United States ranks low on a list of 173 nations when it comes to protecting workers' family lives.
- While 169 countries guarantee leave with income in connection to childbirth, the U.S. guarantees no paid leave for mothers in any segment of the workforce. Only three other nations studied shared this distinction: Liberia, Papua New Guinea, and Swaziland.³⁹
- The availability of affordable childcare can have a large impact on women's choices regarding work. Childcare can be prohibitively expensive: the annual cost of full-time care can range from \$4,650 to \$18,200 for an infant-based care center, and the annual

cost for a four year-old ranges from \$3,900 to \$14,050. In the U.S. about 90 percent of childcare is paid for by the parents.⁴⁰

- For a majority of two-parent families of all income brackets, childcare is the second-largest household expenditure, after housing costs.⁴¹
- The U.S. ranks 23rd of 26 OECD countries on public expenditures on family benefits and ranks 21st on childcare expenditures.⁴²
- In countries with a high degree of childcare support programs, the labor force participation rate of women with young children is much higher.⁴³

Women and the Union Advantage

- In 2010, 11.1 percent of working women belonged to unions.
- In 2010, 45.6 percent of all union members were women, up from 19 percent in 1962.⁴⁴ The gap between organized men and women has narrowed since 1983, when the rate for men was about 10 percent higher than the rate for women.⁴⁵
- Education and government, fields dominated by women, had the highest unionization rate in 2010 at 37.1 percent.⁴⁶
- In union organizing elections, occupations dominated by women have consistently shown much higher win rates than those unions organizing in industries with fewer women members.⁴⁷
- In 2010, union women earned weekly wages that were 28 percent more than non-union women.⁴⁸
- The union difference is apparent in the median hourly wages of predominantly female, and consequently lesser paid, occupations. Union preschool and kindergarten teachers earned 64 percent more than their non-union counterparts, while for elementary and middle school teachers, the union wage advantage was 32 percent. In 2010, union librarians earned 28 percent more than their non-union counterparts, while union social workers and counselors earned 31 percent and 41 percent more, respectively. For registered nurses, the union difference was 21 percent.⁴⁹
- Union women and men are more likely than non-union workers to have health and pension benefits, and to receive paid holidays and vacations, and life and disability insurance.⁵⁰

African American and Hispanic or Latina women also benefit from union membership:

- The median weekly earnings of African American union women were 22 percent more than their non-union counterparts.
- Hispanic and Latina women who were union members had median weekly earnings that were 38 percent higher than their non-union counterparts.⁵¹

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³ Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Spotlight on Statistics: Women at Work,” March 2011. <http://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2011/women/>.

⁴ “Perspectives on Working Women: A Databook,” 1980; Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Spotlight on Statistics: Women at Work,” March 2011.

⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Spotlight on Statistics: Women at Work,” March 2011; “Employed persons by occupation, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and sex,” Table 10, 2010.

⁶ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Table 11, “Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity,” 2011; Lacey, T. Alan and Benjamin Wright. “Occupational Employment Projections to 2018,” U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Monthly Labor Review*, November 2009.

⁷ Roberts, Evan, “Labor Force Participation by Married Women in the United States, Results from the 1917/19 Cost-of-Living Survey and the 1920 PUMS,” Presented at the 28th Social Science History Association Conference. November 2003. <http://users.pop.umn.edu/~eroberts/evanrobertssshpaper.pdf>.

⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Women in the Labor Force: A Databook,” Table 23, March 2007. <http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-table23-2008.pdf>; “Women in the Labor Force: A Databook,” Table 6, <http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-table6-2008.pdf>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Table 8, “Employed and unemployed full- and part-time workers by age, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity,” 2010. <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lf/aat8.txt>.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Table 9, “Employed persons by occupation, sex, and age,” 2011. <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lf/aat9.txt>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey. Table 11, “Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity,” 2011.

¹³ Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Spotlight on Statistics: Women at Work,” March 2011.

¹⁴ Jessica Arons, “Lifetime Losses: The Career Wage Gap,” *Center for American Progress*, December 2008. http://www.americanprogressaction.org/issues/2008/pdf/equal_pay.pdf.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Table 37, “Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by selected characteristics.” <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lf/aat37.txt>.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Table 11, “Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity,” 2011; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Table 39, “Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by selected characteristics.”

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³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Cited in: "Lifetime Losses: The Career Wage Gap," *Center for American Progress*, January 6, 2009.

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⁵¹ *Ibid.*

For more information on professional and technical workers, check DPE's website:
www.dpeaflcio.org.

The Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE) comprises 22 AFL-CIO unions representing over four million people working in professional and technical occupations. DPE-affiliated unions represent: teachers, college professors, and school administrators; library workers; nurses, doctors, and other health care professionals; engineers, scientists, and IT workers; journalists and writers, broadcast technicians and communications specialists; performing and visual artists; professional athletes; professional firefighters; psychologists, social workers, and many others. DPE was chartered by the AFL-CIO in 1977 in recognition of the rapidly growing professional and technical occupations.

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