

Fact Sheet 2008



PROFESSIONAL WOMEN: VITAL STATISTICS

General Statistics

- The number of working women has risen from 5.1 million in 1900, to 18.4 million in 1950,¹ to 67.8 million in 2007.² The number of working women is projected to reach nearly 76 million by 2014.³
- Women accounted for 18% of the labor force in 1900,⁴ and 46.4% in 2007.⁵ Women are expected to account for 46.8% of the labor force in 2014.⁶
- The number of women in the labor force is expected to increase by almost 10.9% between 2004 and 2014, while a smaller 9.1% increase is projected for men. This means men's share of the labor force will decrease, from 53.6% to 53.2% between 2004 and 2014.⁷
- While in 1900 only 20.4% of all women worked,⁸ between 1997 and 2007, almost 60% worked.⁹
- About 72% of working women had white collar occupations in 2007, a percentage that is expected to increase. Women employed in professional and related occupations accounted for 25.1% of all working women in 2007.¹⁰
- Women are the majority (56.2%) of workers in the occupational category expected to grow most rapidly: the professional and related occupations, which are expected to increase by more than 21.2% from 2004–2014.¹¹
- Labor force participation has increased most dramatically among married women.¹²
- Today most mothers—even those with the youngest children—participate in the labor force.¹³
- Nearly half of all multiple job-holders in 2006 were women, up from 22% in 1974. Women are the majority of temporary and part-time workers.¹⁴

Women Earn More Degrees

- 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. They are projected to earn 59% of all postsecondary degrees conferred in 2008.¹⁵
- Women are projected to earn more than 52% of the first professional degrees conferred in 2008, up from 2.6% in 1961.¹⁶

- Women are projected to earn 48.7% of all doctoral degrees in 2008, while in 1961 they earned only 10.5% of all doctoral degrees.¹⁷
- The proportion of women in law school increased from 3.7% in 1963 to 44% in academic year 2007–08.¹⁸
- The proportion of women in medical school increased from 5.8% in academic year 1960–61 to almost 49% in academic year 2007–08.¹⁹
- Between academic years 1959–60 and 2005–06, the percentage of degrees in dentistry earned by women increased from 0.8% to 44.5%.²⁰

Occupational Distribution Differs Between Men and Women

While women are the majority of professional employees, their occupational distribution remains different from men²¹:

- In 2007, 91.7% of registered nurses, 80.9% of all elementary and middle school teachers, and 97.3% of all preschool and kindergarten teachers were women.
- In comparison, only 11.5% of all civil engineers, 8.6% of electrical and electronics engineers, and 4.2% of all aircraft pilots and flight engineers were female.
- In 2004, only 37% of all Screen Actors' Guild television and theatrical roles went to women. Furthermore, only 27% of all female roles went to women over the age of 40, while men over 40 got 39% of all male roles.²²

Still, the different distribution of men and women among specific professional occupations was less pronounced in 2005 than in 1985:

- The percentage of technical writers who were female increased from 36% to 50% between 1985 and 2006.
- Women pharmacists increased from 30% in 1985 to 49% in 2006.
- The percentage of female chemists increased from 11% in 1985 to 34% in 2006.
- In 2007, women accounted for 32.6% of all lawyers and 30% of all physicians and surgeons.²³

The Wage Gap Persists

The wage gap between the sexes still plagues the American workforce. In 2004, median annual earnings for full-time year-round workers (which include self-employed workers and other sources of pay differences such as annual bonuses) demonstrate that women earned just 76.5% as much as men.²⁴ Out of 19 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, the United States has the largest gender earnings gap, save for Austria and Switzerland.²⁵

In 2007, median weekly earnings for women in the U.S. were 80.2% those of men. For most women of color, the earnings gap was even larger²⁶:

- African American women earned just 70 cents for every dollar earned by men in 2007.²⁷
- Hispanic and Latina women earned just 62 cents for every dollar men earned.
- Only Asian American women's earnings were closer to parity with men's: in 2007, they earned 95% that of all men. However, they earned 78% as much as Asian American men.

The wage gap is also more pronounced for older women: in 2007, women over 25 earned 78% that of men in the same age group while women aged 16-24 earned 92% as much as their male peers.²⁸

Equal pay is a problem in every occupational category, even in occupations where women considerably outnumber men. In 2007, certain professions showed a significant gap²⁹:

- Women in professional and related occupations earned over 27% less than their male counterparts, while women in sales and office occupations earned 23% less than similarly employed men.
- Female elementary and middle school teachers earned nearly 10% less than similarly employed men, despite comprising 82% of the field.
- Female registered nurses earned more than 10% less than their male colleagues, although 90% of nurses are women.
- Female physicians and surgeons earned a whopping 41% less than their male counterparts.
- Female college and university teachers earned over 25% less than those who were male.
- Female lawyers earned 23% less than male lawyers.

Women also earn less at every level of education. For full-time workers aged 18 and older in 2005³⁰:

- The median annual earnings of a female high school graduate was more than 34% less than that of her male counterpart;
- The median annual earnings of a woman with a bachelor's degree was almost 31% (or \$15,911) less than that of a similarly qualified man;
- Women are more likely to complete graduate education. A woman with a master's degree earned 32% (or \$21,374) less than a man with a master's degree;
- The median annual earnings for a woman with a professional degree were \$65,941 while men earned over \$100,000.
- A woman with a doctoral degree earned more than 29% (or \$22,824) less than a similarly qualified man.
- According to a recent report by the American Association of University Women, 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.
- Men and women remain segregated by college major, with women

making up 79% of education majors and men making up 82% of engineering majors. This segregation is found in the workplace as well, where women make up 74% of the education field and men make up 84% of the engineering and architecture fields.³¹

Because women are paid less when they work, they receive smaller Social Security benefits when they retire:

- Women represent 58% of all Social Security beneficiaries age 62 and older and approximately 70% of beneficiaries age 85 and older.³²
- In 2005, the average Social Security retirement benefit was 32% smaller for women than men. 72.3% of women receive a monthly benefit of under \$1,000 while 67.8% of men receive more than \$1,000 per month.³³
- Only 29.2% of women 65 and older received any form of pension or annuity income and the median amount was \$6,420. For men, 43.8% received pensions or annuity income and the median amount was \$12,000.³⁴
- The benefit structure disproportionately benefits married women. For unmarried women over 65, Social Security comprised 53.4% of their total income in 2006, but 38% of that of an unmarried elderly man, and only 33% of elderly married couples' income.³⁵
- In 2006, 43.4% of all elderly unmarried females receiving Social Security benefits relied on Social Security for 90% or more of their income.³⁶

Changes for American Families

On average, the families of working women lose out on \$9,575 per year because of the earnings gap. Over time, this adds up to a very significant loss. For instance, by 2004, women who were aged 24-29 in 1984 had lost over \$440 million in the intervening 20 years just because of the gender wage gap.³⁷ Working families lose \$200 billion in the United States annually.³⁸

- In 2006, 50.3% of women were not married and 60% of these unmarried women were in the labor force.³⁹
- The proportion of families in which the husband, but not the wife, worked outside the home declined from 66% in the 1940's and '50s to only 19% in 2005.⁴⁰
- The overall labor force participation rate of mothers with children under age 18 was 70.6% in 2006.⁴¹
- Whereas in 1970, 12% of all children lived in one parent families, in 2006 almost 28% lived with only one parent. About 83% of these children lived with their mothers.⁴²
- In 2005, over seven million families with children under 18 were headed by a single mother—almost 30% of all working families. The labor force participation rate of single mothers was nearly 77% in 2005.⁴³

- About 31% of families where children under 18 lived with their mother (with no father present) were below the poverty level in 2006. Among black single mothers, 39% were below poverty line.⁴⁴
- By contrast, married couple families with children under 18 had the lowest poverty rate: 4.9% in 2006.⁴⁵
- Reducing work-family conflict is an important goal which would benefit all working parents. According to a report by the American Association of University Women, survey results found that a majority of both men (74%) and women (83%) would choose a job that had lower pay but provided benefits such as family leave, flexible hours, and help with family care. The same study found that among college-educated adults, men are still more likely to have flextime options at their workplace—55.5% of men versus 39.7% of women. Flextime and similar options can be important supports for working mothers.⁴⁶

High Costs of Caregiving

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. U.S. policies fail to protect the role of women as mothers and caretakers:

- The U.S. guarantees no paid leave for mothers in any segment of the work force. Only four other nations studied share this quality: Lesotho, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, and Swaziland, and 168 guarantee leave with income in connection to childbirth.⁴⁷
- Women need time for parental involvement and to take care of sick family members. One hundred thirty-seven countries mandate paid annual leave, with 121 of these countries guaranteeing two weeks or more each year. The U.S. does not require employers to provide any paid annual leave and as a result, more women work long hours, nights, and weekends.⁴⁸
- The U.S. provides only unpaid leave for serious illnesses through the FMLA, which does not cover all workers. Moreover, the U.S. does not guarantee any paid sick days for common illnesses. One hundred and forty-five countries provide paid leave for short- or long-term illnesses, with 127 providing a week or more annually.⁴⁹

The availability of affordable childcare can have a huge impact on women's choices regarding work. Childcare can be prohibitively expensive: in 2002, the OECD estimated that the cost of center-based care for two children in the U.S. could amount to as much as 37% of a single parent's income. This is a considerably larger portion than almost all other OECD countries.⁵⁰ Even for two-parent families of all income brackets, childcare tends to be the second-largest household expenditure, after housing costs.⁵¹

In countries with a high degree of childcare support programs, the labor force participation rate of women with young children is much higher.

instance, in 2005 nearly 59% of all women with children under age three worked,⁵² while in Sweden in 2002, nearly 72% of women with children under age three worked.⁵³ Sweden offers families heavily subsidized childcare for which all children are eligible.⁵⁴

Women and the Union Advantage

Today, more than 6.9 million working women are union members and 7.7 million are represented by unions.⁵⁵

Many of the unions organizing in industries dominated by women, such as education and government, have consistently shown much higher win rates than those unions organizing in industries with fewer women members.⁵⁶ The union difference is quite apparent when you look at the median weekly wages in predominantly female and consequently lesser paid occupations: union preschool and kindergarten teachers earned a massive 130.5% more than their non-union counterparts, while for elementary and middle school teachers, the union wage advantage was 59.4%. In 2007, union librarians earned 32.6% more than their non-union counterparts, while union social workers and counselors earned 39.5 and 42.4% more, respectively. For registered nurses, the union difference was 15.6%.⁵⁷

Union women and men are more likely than nonunion workers to have health and pension benefits, and to receive paid holidays and vacations, and life and disability insurance.⁵⁸

- In 2007, 44% of all union members were women, up from 19% in 1962.⁵⁹
- In 2007, union women earned weekly wages that were more than 33% more than non-union women.⁶⁰ Thus, union membership narrows the gender wage gap.

The union difference is even more marked for African American and Hispanic or Latina women⁶¹:

- The median weekly earnings of African American union women were more than 35% more than their nonunion counterparts.
- Hispanic and Latina women who were union members had median weekly earnings that were more than 51% higher than their nonunion counterparts.

Endnotes

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