



WORKPLACE JUSTICE

FAQS ABOUT THE WAGE GAP

Women who work full time, year round in the United States were paid only 80 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts in 2015. For some groups of women, the gaps are even larger. This document provides details about the wage gap measure that the Census Bureau and the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) use, factors contributing to the wage gap, and how to close the gap.

What's behind NWLC's wage gap figure?

The wage gap figure that NWLC reports at the national level is the same as that reported by the Census Bureau—the median earnings of women full time, year round workers as a percentage of the median earnings of men full time, year round workers.¹ Median earnings describe the earnings of a worker at the 50th percentile—right in the middle. Earnings means wages, salary, and net self-employment income—so basically the money people see in their paychecks.² Working full time is defined as working at least 35 hours a week and working year round means working at least 50 weeks during the last twelve months.³

The national wage gap data come from the Current Population Survey and include workers 15 and older.⁴ The wage gap is not broken down by occupation or industry, though data on earnings by industry and occupation for women and men are available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.⁵

Why does NWLC use this wage gap figure?

The 80 cent figure reflects the many discriminatory barriers to equal pay—including lower pay for women in the same job; the overrepresentation of women in lower-paying jobs and the underrepresentation of women in higher-paying, non-traditional jobs; bias against women with caregiving responsibilities; and lack of workplace policies to allow workers to

care for families without paying a stiff economic penalty. The 80 cent figure demonstrates just how strongly these many factors impact the economic security of women workers.

We also use this Census Bureau data because comparable figures for the 80 cent figure are also available in earlier Census Bureau data sets, allowing for a longer historical comparison and permitting the data to be tracked over time. As a result, we are able to discern trends, like the fact that the wage gap has not budged in nearly a decade.

How does the wage gap impact women of color?

The wage gap is even more substantial for some groups of women, with African American women typically making only 63 cents, Latina women only 54 cents, and Native American women only 58 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. While Asian American women experience a smaller wage gap, they still make only 85 cents for every dollar made by white non-Hispanic men. In calculating these wage gaps, we compare the wages of women of color to the wages of white, non-Hispanic men because women of color carry a double burden of both sexism and racism—so it's important to take those both into account when we look at their economic security.

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How do factors like education and occupation affect the wage gap?

The wage gap occurs at all education levels, after work experience is taken into account, and it gets worse as women's careers progress.⁷ A 2014 NWLC analysis found that in only three occupations out of 111 are the median weekly



earnings of women working full time not lower than those of men: computer occupations; wholesale and retail buyers; and bakers.⁸ Skeptics of the wage gap may also insist that the wage gap exists because of the occupational choices that women make. However, this argument ignores the fact that “women’s” jobs often pay less precisely because women do them, because women’s work is devalued,⁹ and that women are paid less even when they work in the same occupations as men. Cases of company-wide pay discrimination are further evidence that discrimination contributes to the wage gap.¹⁰

Women are underrepresented in higher-paying jobs that are often dominated by men, and overrepresented in low-paying jobs—women are two-thirds of workers in occupations that typically pay \$10.50 or less per hour, as well as close to two-thirds of minimum wage workers.¹¹ Isolation, active discouragement, harassment, outright exclusion, and lack of information about alternative job options are all barriers to women’s entry into higher-wage jobs that are nontraditional for their gender. In contrast, women are clustered in low-paying jobs like home health aide, child care worker, and maid and housekeeping cleaner.¹²

A study by labor economists Francine Blau and Lawrence Kahn also demonstrates the effects of a variety of factors that influence the wage gap, like race, region, unionization status, education, occupation, industry, work experience, and more. However, Blau and Kahn found that when you look at all of these factors combined, 38 percent of the wage gap still remained unexplained.¹³

How does caregiving affect the wage gap?

Another factor that plays into the wage gap is the role of women as caregivers and the persistent discrimination against women workers with caregiving responsibilities. A study by Shelley Correll, Stephan Benard, and In Paik found that, when comparing equally qualified women candidates, women who were mothers were recommended for significantly lower starting salaries, perceived as less competent, and less likely to be recommended for hire than non-mothers.¹⁴ The effects for fathers in the study were just the opposite—fathers were actually recommended for significantly higher pay and were perceived as more committed to their jobs than non-fathers.¹⁵

What can be done to shrink the wage gap?

Here is a commonsense set of solutions to help finally close the wage gap:

- Strengthen our equal pay laws so that women have the tools they need to fight back against pay discrimination.¹⁶
- Build ladders to higher-wage jobs for women by removing barriers to entry into male-dominated fields.¹⁷
- Lift up the wages of women in low-wage jobs by raising the minimum wage and ensuring that tipped workers receive at least the regular minimum wage before tips.¹⁸
- Increase the availability of high-quality, affordable child care.¹⁹
- Help prevent and remedy caregiver and pregnancy discrimination against women workers.²⁰
- Provide fair schedules, paid family leave, and paid sick days so that workers with caregiving responsibilities are not unfairly disadvantaged.²¹

1 Bernadette D. Proctor, Jessica L. Semega, & Melissa A. Kollar, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2015* at 6 (Sept. 2016), available at <http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p60-256.pdf>.

2 U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY (CPS) – Subject Definitions, “Earnings,” available at <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/technical-documentation/subject-definitions.html> (last visited September 11, 2016).

3 *Id.* See definition for “work experience.”

4 *Id.* See definition for “income measurement.”

5 See further data available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, available at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/> or <http://www.bls.gov/bls/cpswomendata.htm>.

6 Wage gap figures for African American women, Asian women, and Latina women as compared to white, non-Hispanic men are based on Current Population Survey, 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, available at <http://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty.html>. Figures for Native American women as compared to white, non-Hispanic men are based on 2015 American Community Survey, available at <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>.

7 NATIONAL WOMEN’S LAW CENTER (NWLC), 50 YEARS & COUNTING: THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF ACHIEVING FAIR PAY 9 (June 2013), available at http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/final_nwlc_equal_pay_report.pdf; NWLC, THE WAGE GAP: THE WHO, HOW, WHY, AND WHAT TO DO (Apr. 2016), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/the-wage-gap-the-who-how-why-and-what-to-do/>.

8 Joan Entmacher, Katherine Gallagher Robbins & Lauren Frohlich, NWLC, *Six New Facts on Why We Must Raise the Minimum Wage and Advance Equal Pay* (March 2014), available at <http://www.nwlc.org/our-blog/six-new-facts-why-we-must-raise-minimum-wage-and-advance-equal-pay>.

9 Philip N. Cohen, “Devaluing and Revaluing Women’s Work,” *The Huffington Post* (May 25, 2011), available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/philip-n-cohen/devaluing-and-revaluing-w_b_444215.html; Clair Cain Miller, “As Women Take Over a Male-Dominated Field, the Pay Drops,” *The New York Times* (Mar. 18, 2016).



- 10 For example, a recent experiment revealed that when presented with identical resumes, one with the name John and one with the name Jennifer, science professors offered the male applicant for a lab manager position a salary of nearly \$4,000 more, additional career mentoring, and judged him to be significantly more competent and hireable. Corrine A. Moss-Racusin et al., *Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students*, PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (Aug. 2012), available at <http://www.pnas.org/content/109/41/16474.abstract#aff-1>.
- 11 Anne Morrison & Katherine Gallagher Robbins, NWLC, *Chart Book: The Women in the Low-Wage Workforce May Not Be Who You Think*, (Sept. 2015), available at <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/chart-book-women-low-wage-workforce-may-not-be-who-you-think>; NWLC, *WOMEN AND THE MINIMUM WAGE, STATE BY STATE* (Aug. 2016), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/women-and-minimum-wage-state-state/>.
- 12 NWLC, *SET UP TO FAIL, WHEN LOW-WAGE WORK JEOPARDIZES PARENTS AND CHILDREN'S SUCCESS 4* (Jan. 2016), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/set-up-to-fail-when-low-wage-work-jeopardizes-parents-and-childrens-success/>.
- 13 Francine D. Blau & Lawrence M. Kahn, *The Gender Wage Gap: Extent, Trends and Explanations*, NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH (Jan. 2016), available at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w21913.pdf>.
- 14 Shelley J. Correll, Stephan Benard & In Paik, *Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty*, 11 AM. J. SOCIOLOGY 1297 (Mar. 2007), available at http://gender.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/motherhoodpenalty_0.pdf.
- 15 *Id.*
- 16 NWLC, *HOW THE PAYCHECK FAIRNESS ACT WILL STRENGTHEN THE EQUAL PAY ACT* (May 2015), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/how-paycheck-fairness-act-will-strengthen-equal-pay-act/>.
- 17 See generally NWLC, *WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION, STILL BREAKING GROUND* (June 2014), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/women-construction-still-breaking-ground/>.
- 18 Julie Vogtman & Katherine Gallagher Robbins, NWLC, *Fair Pay for Women Requires a Fair Minimum Wage* (May 2015), available at <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/fair-pay-women-requires-fair-minimum-wage>.
- 19 See generally NWLC, *TURNING THE CORNER; STATE CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE POLICIES 2014* (Oct. 2014), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/turning-corner-state-child-care-assistance-policies-2014/>; NWLC, *SET UP FOR SUCCESS: SUPPORTING PARENTS IN LOW-WAGE JOBS AND THEIR CHILDREN: AN AGENDA FOR ACTION 17-22* (July 2016), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/set-up-for-success-why-early-care-and-education-policies-must-address-low-wage-working-parents-needs-2/> [SET UP FOR SUCCESS].
- 20 NWLC, *IT SHOULDN'T BE A HEAVY LIFT: FAIR TREATMENT FOR PREGNANT WORKERS* (June 2013) available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/it-shouldnt-be-heavy-lift-fair-treatment-pregnant-workers/>.
- 21 NWLC, *THE SCHEDULES THAT WORK ACT: GIVING WORKERS THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO SUCCEED* (June 2015), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/schedules-work-act-giving-workers-tools-they-need-succeed/>; NWLC, *PAID LEAVE IS CRUCIAL FOR WOMEN AND FAMILIES* (Dec. 2013), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/paid-leave-crucial-women-and-families/>; SET UP FOR SUCCESS, *supra* note 18.

