



## GET THE FACTS: On the Wage Gap for Women

In the United States, the average working woman earns about three-quarters as much money as the average man. Left-leaning Feminist groups point to this statistic as evidence of sexism in the work force and have called upon the government to push measures to equalize pay for the two sexes. But importantly, discrimination in the work place is already against the law. An analysis of the wage gap shows that many factors other than discrimination drive differences in earnings. There is little that government can or should do to close this gap.

### What Determines How Much Men and Women Earn?

Many factors contribute to the wage gap, including choices women make about what to study, what jobs to pursue, and how much time to spend working.

- The average full-time female worker spends 7.81 hours per day on the job, compared to 8.3 hours for the average full-time working male. One would expect that someone who works more hours would also earn more.<sup>1</sup>
- Fifty-five percent of workers logging more than 35 hours a week are men. In 2007, 25 percent of men working full-time jobs had work weeks of 41 or more hours, compared to 14 percent of full-time women.<sup>2</sup>
- Men are more likely to work in dirty or dangerous conditions, and they suffer the overwhelming majority of workplace injuries and deaths.<sup>3</sup> These additional risks often warrant higher compensation.
- College women tend to major in less remunerative fields of study because, according to research,<sup>4</sup> they often consider "non-pecuniary" issues like parental approval and enjoyment of future work when choosing a major, while their male colleagues are more concerned with salaries and status.
- When women take weeks, months or even years off from work to raise children, this reduces their earnings because their male counterparts often accrue more experience.

### What Can Be Done – Or Should Be Done – to “Correct” the Wage Gap?

- Pay discrimination is already illegal in the U.S. Both the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 make pay discrimination illegal, and women can and do sue their employers when they feel they have been wronged. Only about 12 percent of job-discrimination plaintiffs win their case.<sup>5</sup>
- Other measures advanced under the name of “closing” the wage gap would come with substantial costs for women and the economy. For example, proposals to create rigid compensation guidelines for women and men would lead to less flexibility, more compliance costs, and shady judicial standards.<sup>6</sup>
- In the private sector, and in our families and communities, we can educate women about the tradeoffs involved in choices about college majors, areas of study, job selection, salary negotiation, and family formation. Armed with this knowledge, women will be empowered to make the decisions that are right for them, and will avoid the victim mentality that employers are out to shortchange women.

Are equal salaries really the best way to gauge women's and men's success? A better measure of success is whether women and men are free to pursue happiness on their own terms. This may result in unequal outcomes, but those outcomes are broadly the result of choices people make, not discrimination. The goal shouldn't be to get rid of the wage gap, but to make sure that there are plentiful job opportunities so that individuals can negotiate compensation packages that are best for them.

For more information, visit [www.iwf.org](http://www.iwf.org).

1. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/atus.pdf>
2. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303592404577361883019414296.html>
3. <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/cfoi/cfch0009.pdf#http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/cfoi/cfch0009.pdf>
4. [http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/staff\\_reports/sr364.pdf](http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/staff_reports/sr364.pdf)
5. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123500883048618747.html>
6. <http://iwf.org/publications/2787936/FACT-SHEET:-Paycheck-Fairness>