

Women in the Labor Force: A Databook

Introduction

The past several decades have been marked by several notable changes in women's labor force activities compared to men's, including rising labor force participation, employment growth in higher-paying occupations, and earnings increases. In 1970, about 43 percent of women age 16 and older were in the labor force. By the late 1990s, the labor force participation rate of women had risen to 60 percent. Though it is still well above the rates that prevailed throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and much of the 1990s, the rate has receded slightly since 1999, to 59.3 percent in 2005. During the past several decades, women were increasingly employed in higher-paying occupations. In 2005, more than half of all the workers in management, professional, and related occupations were women. Women's earnings relative to men's also were substantially higher in 2005 than in previous decades. In 1979, among full-time workers, women's earnings were 62 percent of men's; by 2005 the ratio had grown to 81 percent. The movement of women into the labor force and into higher-paying occupations has gone hand in hand with their pursuit of higher education. For example, in 1970, about one-tenth of women age 25 to 64 in the labor force had completed 4 or more years of college; by 2005, one-third held at least a bachelor's degree.

This report presents historical and current labor force and earnings data for women and men from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS is a national monthly survey of approximately 60,000 households conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Unless otherwise noted, data are annual averages from the CPS. For a detailed description of the source of the data and an explanation of concepts and definitions used, see the Technical Note at the end of this report.

Highlights

- In 2005, just over 59 percent of women age 16 and over were in the labor force. Their unemployment rate declined to 5.1 percent in 2005 compared with 5.4 percent a year earlier. Although still a percentage point higher than it was in 2000, the unemployment rate for women remained low by historical standards. The unemployment rates for
- white and Asian women were much lower than those of their black and Hispanic counterparts. (See tables 1, 2, and 3.)
- Since the early 1980s, women's and men's unemployment rates have been roughly similar. In 2000, the jobless rates for women and men were 4.1 and 3.9 percent, respectively, and were at 30-year lows. The rates rose from 2000 to 2003, but then declined in the next 2 years. The unemployment rates for women and men were equal in 2005 at 5.1 percent. (See table 2.)
- From 1975 to 2000, the labor force participation rate of mothers with children under age 18 rose from 47 to 73 percent. By 2005, the rate had receded slightly to about 71 percent. In general, mothers with older children (6 to 17 years of age) are more likely to participate in the labor force than are mothers of younger children (under 6 years of age). Unmarried mothers have higher participation rates than married mothers. (See tables 6 and 7.)
- The educational attainment level of working women age 25 to 64 rose substantially from 1970 to 2005. About 3 in 10 women in the labor force held college degrees in 2005, compared with about 1 in 10 in 1970. About 8 percent of women in the labor force in 2005 were high school dropouts, compared with 34 percent in 1970. (See table 9.)
- In 2005, half of all persons employed in management, professional, and related occupations were women. The share of women in specific occupations within this broad category varied. For example, 6 percent of mechanical engineers and 32 percent of physicians and surgeons were women. In contrast, 95 percent of dietitians and 86 percent of paralegals and legal assistants were women. (See table 11.)
- Employed Asian women were more likely than employed white, black, and Hispanic women to work in management, professional, and related occupations (about 45 percent compared with 39,

30, and 22 percent, respectively). Hispanic and black women (31 and 27 percent, respectively) were more likely than white and Asian women (19 and 18 percent, respectively) to work in service occupations. (See table 12.)

- By industry, in 2005, women accounted for more than half of all workers within financial activities, education and health services, and leisure and hospitality. However, women were substantially underrepresented (relative to their share of total employment) in mining, construction, manufacturing, and transportation and utilities. (See table 14.)
- Women who worked full time in 2005 had median weekly earnings of \$585. Asian and white women earned more than their black and Hispanic counterparts (\$665 and \$596 compared with \$499 and \$429, respectively). In 2005, women's median weekly earnings were 81 percent of men's. Women's-to-men's earnings ratios were higher among black and Hispanic women (89 and 88 percent, respectively) than among white and Asian women (80 and 81 percent, respectively). (See table 16.) (Users should note that the comparisons of earnings in the report are made on a broad level and do not control for many factors that can be significant in explaining earnings differences.)
- In 2005, female college graduates age 25 and over earned about 79 percent more than women with only a high school diploma. This difference in earnings by education has increased sharply since 1979, when female college graduates earned 43 percent more than female high school graduates. Female college graduates who were full-time wage and salary workers had median weekly earnings that were 76 percent of those of their male counterparts in 2005, \$883 versus \$1,167. (See table 17.)
- In 2005, approximately 25 percent of employed women usually worked part time—fewer than 35 hours a week. Comparatively, only about 11 percent of employed men usually worked part time. Since 1994, the proportion of employed women and men who usually work part time has remained little changed. (See table 20.)
- From 1976 to 2005, the average workweek of women in nonagricultural industries increased by about 2 hours to 36.1 hours. Men's average workweek remained relatively unchanged over the same period and was 41.7 hours in 2005. (See table 21.)
- Of all women who worked at some point during calendar year 2004, nearly 6 in 10 worked full time and year round, compared with about 4 in 10 in 1970. During the same 35-year period, the proportion of men who worked full time and year round grew from 66 to 74 percent. (See table 22.) These data were collected in the 2005 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the CPS and refer to work experience during the prior calendar year.
- Both the wife and husband had earnings from work in 57 percent of married-couple families in 2004, up from 44 percent in 1967. (See table 23.) These data also were collected in the 2005 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the CPS and reflect earnings and work experience of the prior calendar year.
- In 2004, working wives' contributions to family income accounted for 35 percent (median) of their families' incomes, up by 8 percentage points from 1970, when wives' earnings accounted for 27 percent of the family total. The proportion of wives earning more than their husbands also has grown. In 1987, the first year data became available for wives' earnings compared to their husbands', 18 percent of working wives whose husbands also worked earned more than their spouses; in 2004, the proportion was 25 percent. (See tables 24 and 25.) These data, also collected in the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the CPS, reflect the earnings and work experience of the prior calendar year.
- In 2005, about 1.2 million women workers paid at an hourly rate had earnings at or below the Federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour; about half of these women were age 16 to 24. Among workers age 25 years and over who were paid hourly rates, 2 percent of women had earnings at or below the minimum wage, twice the rate for men. (See table 26.)
- Women were slightly less likely than men to have flexible schedules on their jobs in May 2004. White women were more likely to have flexible schedules than either their black or Hispanic counterparts. Women without children under age 18 were more likely to have flexible schedules than women with children under age 18, although the reverse was true for men. (See table 29.) Data are from the May 2004 Work Schedules supplement to the CPS.
- About 15 percent of both women and men reported working at home at least once per week as part of

their main job in May 2004. Working at home was more common for parents than for persons who were not parents. Women were slightly more likely than men to have a formal arrangement with their employer to be paid for the work they did at home than were men. While self-employment was fairly common among those who worked at home, women were less likely to be self-employed than were their male counterparts; about 29 percent of women working at home were self-employed versus 38 percent of men. (See table 30.) Data are from the May 2004 Work Schedules supplement to the CPS.

- About 1.7 million women and 2.1 million men experienced job displacement between January 2003 and December 2005. Women who were displaced were almost twice as likely as men to have left the labor force by January 2006 (21 percent versus 13 percent). (See table 31.) Data are from the January 2006 Displaced Worker supplement to the CPS.
- Among 2005 high school graduates, young women were slightly more likely than young men to enter college (70.4 versus 66.5 percent). (For information on the labor force status of recent high school graduates and dropouts by school enrollment and sex, see table 32.) Data are from the October 2005 School Enrollment supplement to the CPS.
- About 48 percent of women age 16 to 24 who were enrolled in either high school or college in October 2005 were in the labor force. Men enrolled in school had a lower labor force participation rate (42.3 percent). Among those not enrolled in school, women were less likely to be in the labor force than men (74.6 versus 87.5 percent). Young women who had not completed high school and were not enrolled in school were significantly less likely to participate in the labor force (53.5 versus 73.2 percent) and nearly twice as likely to be unemployed (21.2 versus 11.5 percent) as were women 16 to 24 years of age who had a high school diploma only. (See table 33.) Data are from the October 2005 School Enrollment supplement to the CPS.
- From 1970 to 1995, the rate of multiple jobholding among women nearly tripled, from 2.2 percent of employed women in 1970 to 6.5 percent in 1995. Since 1995, however, the multiple jobholding rate for women has trended downward, falling to 5.2 percent by 2005. The multiple jobholding rate for men also has trended downward over the past decade, from 6.3 percent in 1995 to 4.6 percent in 2005. (See table 34.) Data were collected in the May 2005 CPS.
- Over the past 30 years, the percentage of employed women who were self-employed has increased slightly, from 4.4 percent in 1976 to 5.4 percent in 2005, while the percentage of employed men who were self-employed has decreased slightly, to 7.8 percent in 2005 from 8.4 percent in 1976. In 2005, about 37 percent of all self-employed persons were women compared with 27 percent in 1976. (See table 35.)
- Foreign-born women were less likely to be in the labor force in 2005 than native-born women (53.8 versus 60.0 percent). Of those in the labor force, foreign-born women were more likely to be unemployed (6.3 percent) than their native-born counterparts (5.3 percent). The reverse was true for men for both labor force participation and the unemployment rate. (See table 36.)
- In 2005, about 13 percent of female wage and salary workers were represented by unions, compared with about 15 percent of men. Union attachment for both groups has fallen since 1983, when unions represented 18 percent of female wage and salary workers and nearly 28 percent for men. (See table 37.)