

# Women in the Labor Force: A Databook

## Introduction

The past several decades have been marked by notable changes in women's labor force activities. Women's labor force participation is significantly higher today than it was in the 1970s, particularly among women with children, and a larger share of women work full time and year round than in past decades. In addition, women have increasingly attained higher levels of education: among women age 25 to 64 who are in the labor force, the proportion with a college degree roughly tripled from 1970 to 2009. Women's earnings as a proportion of men's earnings also have grown over time. In 1979, women working full time earned 62 percent of what men did; in 2009, women's earnings were 80 percent of men's. The women's-to-men's earnings ratio peaked at 81 percent in 2005–06, edging down to 80 percent in 2007, where it has remained through 2009. Three additional data tables are being introduced to the 2010 edition of *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook*; the new tables provide information on women by employee tenure (table 29), employment status of veterans (table 36), and persons with a disability (table 37).

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 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Unless otherwise noted, data are annual averages from the CPS. Users should note that the comparisons of earnings in this report are on a broad level and do not control for many factors that may be significant in explaining earnings differences. 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 2009, 59.2 percent of women were in the labor force, and this share has been relatively stable over the past several years. Women's labor force participation rate peaked at 60 percent in 1999, following several decades of growth in women's labor market participation. (See tables 1 and 2.)
- In 2009, the overall unemployment rate for women was

8.1 percent, but rates varied by race and Hispanic ethnicity. Asian women had the lowest rate (6.6 percent), followed by White (7.3 percent), Hispanic (11.5 percent), and Black (12.4 percent) women. (See tables 1, 2, and 3.)

- From March 1975 to March 2000, the labor force participation rate of mothers with children under 18 years of age rose from 47.4 percent to a peak of 72.9 percent. (These data were collected each March by the CPS.) By 2005, the participation rate for mothers had receded to 70.5 percent. From 2005 to 2009, the labor force participation rate edged back up, to 71.6 percent. (See tables 6 and 7.)
- In general, mothers with older children (6 to 17 years of age, none younger) are more likely to participate in the labor force than mothers with younger children (under 6 years of age), and unmarried mothers have higher participation rates than married mothers. In March 2009, 75.8 percent of unmarried mothers were in the labor force, compared with 69.8 percent of married mothers. (See tables 6 and 7.)
- The educational attainment of women in the labor force age 25 to 64 rose substantially from 1970 to 2009. Thirty-six percent of these women held college degrees in 2009, compared with 11 percent in 1970. Only 7 percent of women were high school dropouts in 2009, down from 34 percent in 1970. (See table 9.)
- In 2009, women accounted for 51 percent of all people employed in management, professional, and related occupations, somewhat more than their share of total employment (47 percent). The share of women in specific occupations within this broad category varied. For example, 6 percent of construction managers and 32 percent of lawyers were women, while 62 percent of accountants and 82 percent of elementary and middle school teachers were women. (See table 11.)
- Employed Asian women were more likely to work in the higher paying management, professional, and related occupations in 2009 than were employed White, Black, or Hispanic women. Forty-seven percent of Asian women worked in managerial and professional jobs compared with 41 percent of White women, 34 percent of Black women, and 25 percent of Hispanic women. Meanwhile,

Hispanic (32 percent) and Black (29 percent) women were more likely than White and Asian women to work in service occupations (20 and 21 percent, respectively). (See table 12.)

- In 2009, women accounted for more than half of all workers within several industry sectors: financial activities, education and health services, leisure and hospitality, and other services. However, women were substantially underrepresented (relative to their share of total employment) in agriculture, mining, construction, manufacturing, and transportation and utilities. (See table 14.)
- Women who worked full time in wage and salary jobs had median weekly earnings of \$657 in 2009. This represented 80 percent of men's median weekly earnings (\$819). Earnings of Asian (\$779) and White (\$669) women were substantially higher than the earnings of their Black (\$582) and Hispanic (\$509) counterparts. Women's-to-men's earnings ratios were higher among Blacks (94 percent) and Hispanics (90 percent) than among Whites (79 percent) and Asians (82 percent). (See table 16.)
- In 2009, female full-time wage and salary workers age 25 and older who only had a high school diploma had median usual weekly earnings of \$542. This represented 80 percent of the earnings for women with an associate's degree (\$674), and 56 percent of the earnings for women with a bachelor's degree or higher (\$970). (See table 17.)
- In 2009, 27 percent of employed women usually worked part time—fewer than 35 hours per week. In comparison, 11 percent of employed men usually worked part time. (See table 20.)
- Women in nonagricultural industries worked an average of 35.3 hours per week in 2009. The average workweek for men in nonagricultural industries was 40.1 hours. (See table 21.)
- Of all women who worked at some point during calendar year 2008, 59 percent worked full time and year round, compared with 41 percent who did the same in 1970. During the same period, the proportion of men who worked full time and year round grew from 66 to 71 percent. (See table 22.) (These data were collected in the 1971 and 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplements 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 2008, an increase of 13 percentage points from 1967 (the first year data were available). Couples in which only the husband worked represented 18 percent of married-couple families in 2008, compared with 36 percent in 1967. (See table 23.) (These data were collected in the 1968 and 2009 Annual

Social and Economic Supplements to the CPS and reflect earnings and work experience of the prior calendar year.)

- In 2008, working wives contributed 36 percent of their families' incomes, up by 9 percentage points from 1970, when wives' earnings accounted for 27 percent of their families' total income. The proportion of wives earning more than their husbands also has grown. In 1987, 18 percent of working wives whose husbands also worked earned more than their spouses; in 2008, the proportion was 27 percent. (See tables 24 and 25.) (These data were collected in the 1971, 1988, and 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplements to the CPS and reflect earnings and work experience of the prior calendar year.)
- In 2009, approximately 2.2 million women who were paid at an hourly rate had earnings at or below the prevailing Federal minimum wage. This represented 6 percent of all women paid at an hourly rate. Among women 25 years and older who were paid hourly rates, 4 percent had earnings at or below the minimum wage, compared with 15 percent of women age 16 to 24. (On July 24, 2009, the Federal minimum wage level rose from \$6.55 to \$7.25 an hour. Data in this report reflect the average number of workers who earned \$6.55 or less per hour from January 2009 through July 2009 and those who earned \$7.25 or less from August 2009 through the end of the year.) (See table 26.)
- Among workers who were in the labor force for at least 27 weeks in 2008, nearly the same number of women and men lived in poverty (4.5 and 4.4 million, respectively). The working-poor rate, however, continued to be higher for women than for men—6.5 percent compared with 5.6 percent. Black and Hispanic women who were in the labor force for 27 weeks or more were significantly more likely than their White or Asian counterparts to be among the working poor. The poverty rates for Black and Hispanic working women were 12.7 percent and 12.1 percent, respectively, compared with 5.5 percent and 4.9 percent, respectively, for White and Asian women. (See table 27.) (Data are from the 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the CPS and reflect earnings and work experience of the prior calendar year.)
- From January 2007 through December 2009, 6.9 million workers were displaced from jobs they had held for at least 3 years; men accounted for about 60 percent of those displaced. Women were as likely as men to have found a new job at the time of the survey in January 2010: the reemployment rate for both men and women was 49 percent. However, women were less likely to be unemployed than men, 31 and 39 percent, respectively. Women were almost twice as likely as men to have left the labor force, 20 versus 12 percent. (See table 28.) (Data are from the January 2010 Displaced Worker Supplement to the CPS.)

- In January 2010, the median number of years that female wage and salary workers had been with their employer was 4.2 years, compared with 4.6 years for their male counterparts. Among both women and men, tenure at a job was greater for workers age 45 and older. (See table 29.) (Data are from the January 2010 Displaced Worker Supplement to the CPS.)
- Among 2009 high school graduates, young women (74 percent) were more likely than young men (66 percent) to be enrolled in college in October 2009. (See table 30.) (Data are from the October 2009 School Enrollment Supplement to the CPS.)
- In October 2009, 41.6 percent of women age 16 to 24 who were enrolled in either high school or college were in the labor force. Young men of the same age group who were enrolled in school had a lower labor force participation rate (35.2 percent). Among those not enrolled in school, women were less likely to be in the labor force than men (72.3 percent compared with 83.8 percent). (See table 31.) (Data are from the October 2009 School Enrollment Supplement to the CPS.)
- Among 16- to 24-year-old women who were not enrolled in school, those who did not have a high school diploma were significantly less likely to participate in the labor force than those who had a high school diploma but no additional education (49.6 percent compared with 68.7 percent). Of those in the labor force, high school dropouts were more likely to be unemployed than high school graduates (31.0 percent compared with 22.2 percent). (See table 31.) (Data are from the October 2009 School Enrollment Supplement to the CPS.)
- In 2009, 5.6 percent of employed women held more than one job; this proportion has remained unchanged since 2002. The 2009 multiple jobholding rate for men was lower, at 4.8 percent. Multiple jobholding rates for both women and men have been stable in recent years and remain below the rates recorded in the mid-1990s. (See table 32.)
- The percentage of working women who were self-employed in nonagricultural industries was 5.3 percent in 2009, compared with 7.7 percent for men. In 2009, 39 percent of all self-employed workers were women, compared with 27 percent in 1976. (See table 33.)
- In 2009, foreign-born women were less likely than native-born women to be in the labor force (55.4 percent compared with 59.8 percent). Of those in the labor force, native-born women were less likely to be unemployed than their foreign-born counterparts (7.9 percent versus 9.2 percent). Among men, the opposite was true. Foreign-born men were more likely than native-born men to be in the labor force (80.5 percent compared with 70.4 percent) and somewhat less likely to be unemployed (10 percent and 10.3 percent, respectively). (See table 34.)
- Thirteen percent of female wage and salary workers were represented by unions in 2009, about the same as the percentage for men (14 percent). Union representation for both sexes had been on a long term downward trend, reaching a low of 13.1 percent in 2006. In 2009, 13.6 percent of all workers were represented by unions. (See table 35.)
- In 2009, there were 12.1 million veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces in the labor force. Nine percent of these veterans were women. Among female veterans in the labor force, a little more than half (54 percent) served in the Gulf War-era I and II service periods (August 1990 to present). (See table 36.)
- Of the 14.8 million women with disabilities in 2009, 2.8 million, or 19.1 percent, were in the labor force. Almost half of women with disabilities were age 65 and older; 4.9 percent of them were in the labor force, compared with 32.5 percent among those ages 16 to 64. (See table 37.)