



Highlights of [GAO-09-621T](#), a testimony before the Joint Economic Committee, U.S. Congress

Why GAO Did This Study

Previous research has found that, despite improvements over time, women generally earned less than men in both the general and federal workforces, even after controlling for factors that might explain differences in pay. To determine the extent to which the pay gap exists in the federal workforce, GAO addressed the following question: To what extent has the pay gap between men and women in the federal workforce changed over the past 20 years and what factors account for the gap? This testimony is based on a report that GAO is releasing today (GAO-09-279).

To answer this question, GAO used data from the Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) Central Personnel Data File (CPDF)—a database that contains salary and employment data for the majority of employees in the executive branch. GAO used these data to analyze (1) “snapshots” of the workforce as a whole at three points in time (1988, 1998, and 2007) to show changes over a 20-year period, and (2) the group, or cohort, of employees who began their federal careers in 1988 to track their pay over a 20-year period and examine the effects of breaks in service and use of unpaid leave. GAO is not making any recommendations.

OPM and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reviewed the report on which this statement is based. They generally agreed with our methods and findings and provided technical comments that we incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-09-621T](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Andrew Sherrill at (202) 512-7215 or sherrilla@gao.gov.

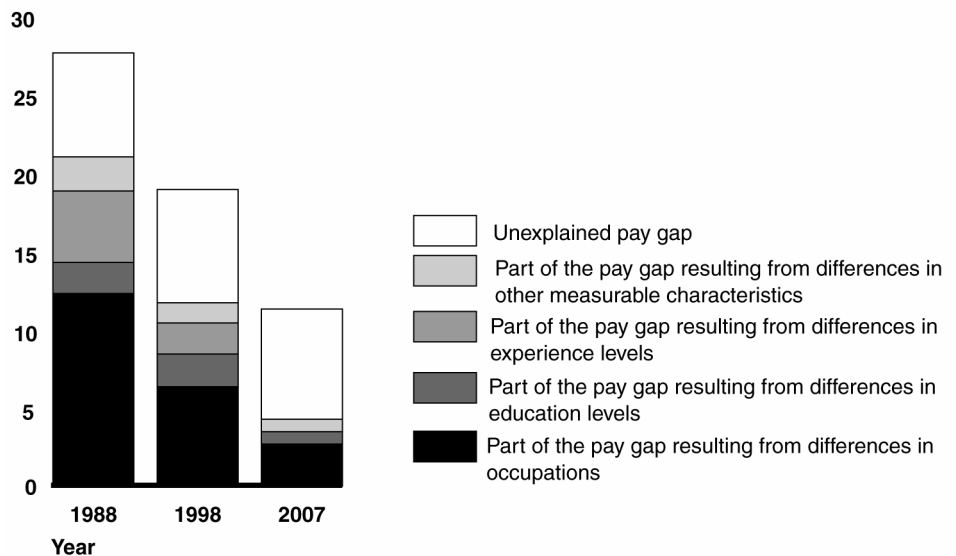
WOMEN'S PAY

Converging Characteristics of Men and Women in the Federal Workforce Help Explain the Narrowing Pay Gap

What GAO Found

The gender pay gap—the difference between men’s and women’s average salaries—declined significantly in the federal workforce between 1988 and 2007. Specifically, the gap declined from 28 cents on the dollar in 1988 to 19 cents in 1998 and further to 11 cents in 2007. For the 3 years we examined, all but about 7 cents of the gap can be explained by differences in measurable factors such as the occupations of men and women and, to a lesser extent, other factors such as education levels and years of federal experience. The pay gap narrowed as men and women in the federal workforce increasingly shared similar characteristics in terms of the jobs they held, their educational attainment, and their levels of experience. For example, the professional, administrative, and clerical occupations—which accounted for 68 percent of all federal jobs in 2007—have become more integrated by gender since 1988. Some or all of the remaining 7 cent gap might be explained by factors for which we lacked data or are difficult to measure, such as work experience outside the federal government. Finally, it is important to note that this analysis neither confirms nor refutes the presence of discriminatory practices.

Pay gap between men and women (in cents)



Source: GAO analysis of CPDF data.

GAO’s case study analysis of workers who entered the workforce in 1988 found that the pay gap between men and women in this group grew overall from 22 to 25 cents on the dollar between 1988 and 2007. As with the overall federal workforce, differences between men and women that can affect pay explained a significant portion of the pay gap over the 20-year period. In particular, differences in occupations explained from 11 to 19 cents of the gap over this period. In contrast, differences in breaks in federal service and use of unpaid leave explained little of the pay gap. However, the results of this analysis are not necessarily representative of other cohorts.