

issues in Labor Statistics



Summary 06-03 / March 2006 • U.S. Department of Labor • U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Women Still Underrepresented Among Highest Earners

Women's median usual weekly earnings were 81.0 percent of men's in 2005, among full-time wage and salary workers. While this proportion has risen over the last several decades, women still are underrepresented among the highest earners and overrepresented among the lowest. These findings are based on data from the Current Population Survey.

In 2005, 103.6 million Americans were full-time wage and salary workers; of these, 56.4 percent were men, and 43.6 percent were women. Yet, women made up only 31.0 percent of workers in the highest earnings category (the top fourth or fourth quartile of workers by earnings). Moreover, women made up a slight majority of the lowest earnings category (the bottom fourth or first quartile), 53.2 percent, compared with 46.8 percent for men. (See chart.)

The industries in which women and men worked differed both overall and among lowest and highest earning workers. For example, more than a third of women, but only 10 percent of men, worked in education and health services. About 12 percent of men worked in construction, compared with 1.5 percent of women. Women and men in the lowest earnings category were twice as likely to work in leisure and hospitality and somewhat more likely to work in wholesale and retail trade than were women and men overall. Despite these similarities, differences surfaced in where women and men in the lowest earnings category worked. Education and health services had the largest portion of women with lowest earnings (29.0 percent), while manufacturing and construction combined accounted for that portion of men with lowest earnings. (See table.)

Education and health services attracted the greatest proportion of women with the highest earnings, 40.4 percent. Professional and business services and financial activities also accounted for relatively large shares of highest earning women. Combined, these three industry groups accounted for more than 60 percent of highest earning women, as well as for a relatively large share of men with the highest earnings. Two industries that accounted for more men than women among the highest earners were construction and manufacturing. More than 1 in 4 highest earning men worked in these industries, compared with 1 in 10 women.

From 2000 to 2005, the number of women in the lowest earnings quartile was little changed, 14.1 million in 2000 and 13.8 million in 2005. However, the number of men in that quartile rose from 11.2 million in

2000 to 12.1 million in 2005. As a result, the percentage of lowest earners who were women decreased slightly. In the highest quarter of the earnings spectrum, the same 6-year period saw the number of women workers increase—from 7.2 million in 2000 to 8.0 million in 2005—while the number of men was little changed: 18.1 million in 2000, compared with 17.9 million in 2005. These shifts caused an increase in the percentage of highest earners who were women.

In summary, more women than men were in the lowest earnings category, and women were underrepresented among the highest earners. Both men and women with lowest earnings worked in industries typically thought of as low wage—for example, wholesale and retail trade, and leisure and hospitality. Education and health services accounted for large concentrations of both high-

est and lowest earning women. The highest earners were concentrated in industries including financial activities and professional and business services.

For additional information on women's and men's earnings and a technical description of the Current Population Survey from which the data used in this summary were derived, contact Sara Kline, an economist in the Division of Labor Force Statistics, Office of Employment and Unemployment Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington, DC 20212. Telephone: (202) 691-6386. E-mail: kline.sara@bls.gov.

Information in this summary will be made available to sensory-impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: (202) 691-5200. Federal Relay Service: 1-800-877-8339. This report is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission. □

Continued on back



Table 1. Employed full-time wage and salary workers by selected quartiles of usual weekly earnings and major industry, 2005 annual averages

Item	All workers		Lowest earning workers (first quartile)		Highest earning workers (fourth quartile)	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Number of workers (in thousands)	45,154	58,406	13,761	12,129	8,028	17,864
Industry (in percent):						
Agriculture and related industries	0.4	1.3	0.8	3.1	0.1	0.3
Nonagriculture and related industries	93.6	92.8	95.8	94.4	92.1	91.7
Mining1	.9	.1	.4	.3	1.2
Construction	1.5	12.3	1.3	14.0	1.3	8.4
Manufacturing	9.6	18.1	10.3	15.0	9.0	18.9
Wholesale and retail trade	12.7	15.1	18.3	18.4	7.2	11.9
Transportation and utilities	3.0	8.1	2.3	5.8	2.6	8.0
Information	2.6	2.6	1.7	1.4	3.8	3.9
Financial activities	9.8	5.9	6.3	3.4	11.8	8.8
Professional and business services	8.8	9.9	7.3	9.6	11.9	13.4
Education and health services	34.6	9.7	29.0	6.9	40.4	11.9
Leisure and hospitality	6.9	6.4	13.1	14.7	2.1	2.5
Other services	4.0	3.9	6.3	4.9	1.9	2.7
Public administration	6.0	5.9	3.4	2.6	7.8	8.0

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.