

Utah Women at Work: A 2023 Labor Force Update

Julene Reese

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In 2016, the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) at Utah State University published research on labor force participation among Utah women. This week, the UWLP published a 2023 research update focusing on demographics, state and national trends, and recommendations for increasing Utah women's employment success. The update also includes information on the unique impact of COVID-19 on female employment, both nationally and in Utah.

Not surprisingly, the research showed a sharp decline in labor force participation for both U.S. and Utah women in the first few months of 2020, but Utah women's labor participation rate rapidly recovered as a whole. Utah women who were 35 and older increased their labor force participation from January 2020 to December 2022, whereas women 16 to 34 decreased their participation rates.

"Numerous factors play a role in determining Utah women's general likelihood of participating in the labor force, including age, parental and marital status, ethnicity, and location," said Susan Madsen, UWLP founding director.

She said Utah women continue to participate in the labor force at a higher rate than their U.S. counterparts during their late teens and early twenties. However, beginning at age 25, when many Utah women are having children, their participation rate dips below the national average, and the lower participation rate continues through age 54. The report also showed that Utah women are more likely

to work part-time than their U.S. counterparts at 36.4% compared to 28.7%.

Robyn Blackburn and April Townsend, UWLP research fellows and authors of the report along with Madsen, share statistics about how marital status has an impact on employment, as Utah women who are separated, divorced, or widowed are more likely to be in the labor force than married U.S. women.

Statistics showed those in the labor force include 59.5% of Utah married women (vs. 68.5% U.S.), 74.6% of Utah women who have never been married (vs. 68.6% U.S.), 74.6% of Utah women who are separated (vs. 66.6% U.S.), 67.2% of Utah women who are divorced (vs. 59.8% U.S.), and 21.8% of Utah women who are widowed (vs. 18.7% U.S.).

Recent estimates calculated by the U.S. Census Bureau show the labor force participation rate of women in the state by ethnicity: 66.2% of Asian women, 65.3% of Black or African American women, 62.7% of Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander women, 61% of White women, and 57.2% of American Indian women.

Where women live also impacts their labor force participation rates. The Utah counties with the highest female labor force participation rates are Grand (67%), Summit (66%), Tooele (64%), and Wasatch (64%). Those with the lowest rates are Piute (42%), Rich (46%), Duchesne (49%), and Emery (49%).

A growing number of Utah women are employed in professional or managerial positions (39.6%), often requiring four-year degrees and accompanying higher wages and better benefits. However, Utah women continue to make up a high percentage of all workers in certain occupations, many of which require lower skills and provide lower pay.

"More Utah women are entering the workforce, whether it is because they want to or out of necessity," said Blackburn. "As they do so, public entities, organizations, corporations, and schools can work together to support the advancement of women in Utah's labor force. Utah women's success can be increased by addressing challenges such as childcare, the gender wage gap, and supporting women-owned businesses."

She said Utah decision-makers and residents can also work to increase educational participation and completion for all Utahns, with a focus on disadvantaged populations. Increasing support, particularly for women of color and

mothers, will expand opportunities for those who have been underserved.

“Finding ways to improve various factors for Utah women in the labor force will not only better their lives but will also strengthen the positive impact of women in communities and the state as a whole,” said Blackburn.

[Click here](#) to view the full report, including a list of citations. For further information on UWLP programs and projects, visit utwomen.org.

Contact

Melinda Colton

Melinda.Colton@usu.edu

801-631-7770

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