

USU Research Compilation Shows Utah Gender Wage Gap Among Highest in the Nation

Julene Reese

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The gender wage gap is the difference between what women and men earn for performing full-time, year-round paid work. Nationally, women earn 16 to 18% less than men. Although the gap has substantially narrowed from 41% when the Equal Pay Act was passed in 1963, varying reports estimate that it may take from 40 to 130 years to close the gap.

Utah State University's Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) recently released a report that is a compilation of research pulled from 60 sources regarding the gender wage gap. The report shows that Utah women earn approximately 30% less than men, ranking close to last in most state comparisons.

The report also showed that although the pay gap is substantial among all American women, it is even higher for women from specific racial and ethnic groups. For example, compared to the earnings of non-Hispanic White men, women who are Black, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander make 63%, Native American women make 60%, and Hispanic/Latina women make 55%. Furthermore, all women nationally earn less than men in their same racial or ethnic group. Along with race/ethnicity, other factors – such as sexual orientation, gender identity and disabilities – compound to widen the gap.

According to Susan Madsen, founding director of the UWLP and one of four study authors, another concern is research indicating that “work done by women” simply isn't valued as highly.

“A national study ranked Utah as the second most sexist state and another found that sexist attitudes are associated with lower pay for women,” Madsen said. “Research also suggests that an association between the wage gap and religiosity, regardless of specific religion, is partially connected to social differentiation between genders. This is quite concerning information that must be addressed.”

According to Rebecca Winkel of the American Petroleum Institute and a study author, unconscious, socialized norms and biases may influence employers' hiring, pay and promotion decisions in ways that perpetuate the gender wage gap. They may also impact women's educational and occupational decisions. And unfortunately, these norms and biases are compounded for women of color and other marginalized groups or identities.

Governor Spencer Cox's One Utah Roadmap calls on Utah to improve life outcomes for people with historically and systemically less access to opportunity, including women, and identified narrowing the gender wage gap as an important course of action.

“To ensure Utah's vibrant economic future, it is critical to extend the prosperity and opportunity many Utahns enjoy to everyone,” said Emily S. Darowski, assistant librarian at Brigham Young University and a study author. “This will come, in part, through concerted efforts by many stakeholders – including educators, employers, legislators, religious leaders and individuals – to help close the gender wage gap.”

Madsen said the reality of the Utah labor force is that most women will be employed for much of their lives. Girls and women in Utah need encouragement to complete post-secondary certificates and degrees. Young women in particular need resources and support to help them navigate family and work options and plan education and career goals accordingly.

“Forward-thinking companies that wish to thrive in a time of heightened economic and social awareness would do well to find ways to support female talent and develop female leadership in their organizations,” Madsen said. “Requiring wage transparency, increasing access to affordable childcare and implementing better family leave would address and narrow the gap. This in turn would help strengthen economic stability and prosperity for families, communities and the state.”

To read the full report, including links to resources and references, visit usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/31.pdf.

Further information about the UWLP can be found at utwomen.org.

Writer: Julene Reese, Julene.Reese@usu.edu

Contact: Susan Madsen, Susan.Madsen@usu.edu