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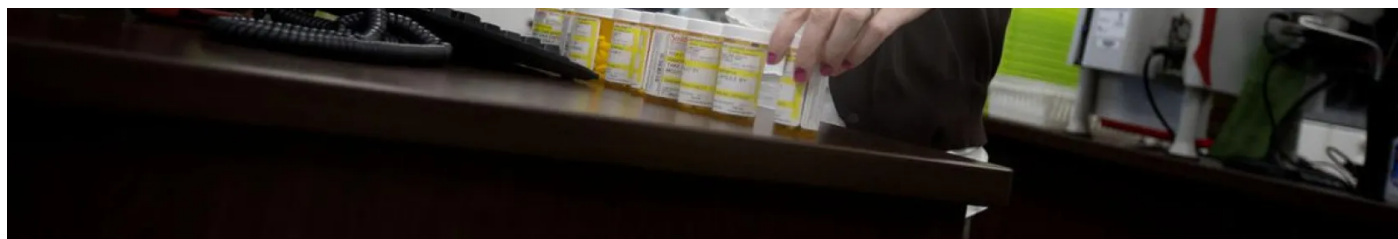
The truth about Utah's and the nation's gender pay gap

Is the wage gap real? Yes. But it might not be what you think it is.

By Sara Israelsen-Hartley | Aug 27, 2017, 2:05am EDT

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Nikki Hendriksen works in the pharmacy at Smith's Marketplace in West Jordan on Thursday, Aug. 10, 2017.

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SALT LAKE CITY — In nearly every report and ranking metric evaluating the gender-based wage gap, Utah is at the bottom, saddled with one of the nation's largest gaps between male and female salaries.

Currently the state ranks 50th out of 50 states and the District of Columbia with women being paid roughly 68 cents for every dollar paid to a man, according to a 2016 Congressional report. Other lists put the wage gap in Utah at 29 cents — 71 cents to every dollar. Nationally, the gap is around 20 cents.

"There's too much evidence that there is a problem," says Susan Madsen, a professor of organizational leadership at Utah Valley University and founder and director of two state-wide initiatives, the Utah Women & Education Initiative and the Utah Women & Leadership Project.

Not only does this gap mean lower wages and less financial security for many women and their families, but experts say it reveals a deeper problem in Utah and across the country: a cultural devaluation of caregiving work, including jobs often held by women. It also shows that flexibility at work has a value and women who want to prioritize family have to pay a steep price.

"People will write to me and (say that) 'women are choosing lower paying jobs,' — that's such a fascinating idea," says Elise Gould, a senior economist with Economic Policy Institute, a non-profit Washington, D.C.-based, think tank that focuses on the economic condition of low- and middle-income Americans.

"(Women) may be choosing different occupations, but they're not really choosing lower paying jobs," Gould continues. "Why are female dominated occupations — why do we pay them less?"

Data show that when profession and a host of other factors are taken into account, it explains much of the wage gap — but the gap doesn't disappear entirely.

A Glassdoor review of more than 505,000 salaries from full-time U.S. employees found that women earned about 76 cents on the dollar compared to men. Yet when Glassdoor compared workers of similar age, education and years of experience, the gap shrank to 19.2 percent, or 80.8 cents on the dollar. A further comparison of workers with the same job title, employer and location dropped the gender gap to 5.4 percent or 94.6 cents per dollar.

What remains is the "residual" or "unexplained" portion — the part that researchers cannot find any logical explanation for after considering everything else. Yet because that figure, around 5 to 8 cents, is so much smaller than the oft-quoted 20-cents, some critics say the wage gap is not really a gap at all, but simply the result of flawed comparisons.

"This narrative, telling women that when they graduate from college they are going to pay a 21-, 20-, 19-cent tax, just because they are women, I don't think is helpful," says Karin Agness Lips, founder of NeW, Network of enlightened Women, a conservative university women's organization. "Where there is discrimination, I, of course, believe it should be rooted out, but it's harmful to not get at the root of the issue and the 20-cent number and narrative doesn't get at the root of the issue."

Sarah Fleisch Fink, director of workplace policy and senior counsel at the National Partnership for Women & Families, would love to get to the heart of the issue, but too often, the conversation gets stuck in 'is it really a 20-cent gap, or is it a 10-cent gap?' or 'If I account for all these things'..." she sighs. "Let's move to 'OK, there is a gap and what are we going to do about it?' "

In Utah, experts say closing that gap is possible, but it will require a significant investment on multiple fronts — beginning with broadening the conversation about the responsibilities, roles and opportunities for women and mothers, particularly within the LDS community.

and even legislative efforts that promote policies supporting Utah workers and their children — all issues the Deseret News is exploring in this ongoing, in-depth series on Utah's wage gap.

“We talk about choice a lot,” says Anna Bergevin, a former research associate at the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah, who studied working mothers and women in Utah, “but people aren’t making choices in a vacuum. In our state, (sometimes we’re) dismissive of the wage gap by saying, ‘women wanted to stay home with their children, they chose to make less money,’ but when we sit down and talk to women, all these decisions are much more complicated than that.”

Wage gap a myth?

The most commonly cited national wage gap number is roughly 20 cents, meaning that for every dollar paid to a man, women are only paid 80 cents.

But women of color fare even worse. In Utah, Latino women are paid around 47 cents for each dollar paid to a white non-Hispanic male, Asian women 69 cents and African American women 52 cents, according to the National Women's Law Center and the National Partnership for Women & Families.

Wage gap figures are calculated by taking the annual median earnings of full-time working women and dividing them by the median earnings of full-time working men — the way the Census Bureau reports its data.

Using these annual data, 24/7 Wall Street found that Provo/Orem had the country's largest wage gap, with women getting paid 64 cents for every dollar paid to a man — or \$33,500 a year for women compared to \$52,068 for men.

Rather than annual data, the Bureau of Labor Statistics calculates its gap by comparing weekly wages of men and women, while other experts prefer hourly wage comparisons.

Elise Madsen, Deseret News

But this is where many critics argue that the gap is inflated and misleading.

Pulling data from all full-time workers across all professions will, of course, create a wage gap, because it's pitting sales clerks against rocket scientists — not a fair comparison.

"(Those) who promote the (78-cent pay gap) myth are manipulating statistics in a way to convince women that they are the victims of systematic societal discrimination, and, therefore, stand to benefit from further government action," wrote Lips.

Lips argues that continuing to cite a 20-cent gap without considering the host of life-shaping choices made by women prevents a "fruitful discussion" about a gender wage gap.

"It turns out that both sides have a point," writes Steven Horwitz, a professor of economics at Ball State University in Indiana. "Whether the gender pay gap is a myth depends upon exactly what claim either side is making."

If the claim is that women with the same skill set, educational background and experience as their male colleagues are getting paid 80 percent of male salaries for doing the exact same work, then yes, the glaring 20-cent wage gap is a myth, says Horwitz, who is echoed by Lips and Hanna Rosin, who wrote an article for Slate entitled, "The Gender Gap Wage Lie."

But Horwitz and Rosin caution against ending the conversation there, because even when the wage gap can be made smaller by comparing apples to apples, there are always a few pennies

"The point here is not that there is no wage inequality," Rosin writes. "But by focusing our outrage into a tidy, misleading statistic we've missed the actual challenges."

While some would prefer to discard the 20-cent figure, Fink believes both ways of looking at the wage gap can be instructive. The 20-cent gap shows that most females work in fields that are lower paying, and are thus at an economic disadvantage, which means more families and children in poverty. And the remaining pennies of difference point to cultural bias and discrimination that women continue to face.

Even when females are in the same high-paying jobs as men, they're still not paid as much as their male colleagues. According to calculations by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, relying on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, the field with the greatest financial disparity between male and female salaries is that of financial management.

Female financial managers earn, on average, \$953 a week, compared to men who make \$1,714 a week — creating a 44.4 percent pay gap. Not too surprisingly, financial management is a field that's heavily male dominated.

So why are male-dominated fields the higher paying ones? Why are there so many women in low-paying jobs? And why, when a field becomes more female-oriented, does the pay go down?

Occupational segregation

These important questions reflect occupational segregation, which Julie Anderson, a senior research associate at the Institute for Women's Policy Research, believes is a key factor in the wage gap.

Data from the National Women's Law Center show that women "make up two-thirds of the over 23 million workers in low-wage jobs," making \$10.50 an hour or less. On the other end of the spectrum, women make up less than 13 percent of employees in each of the 10 highest paying jobs, with only five percent of women ending up as chief technology officer or vice president of engineering, where salaries are \$190,000 or above.

Even where the skill level is similar between occupations, women tend to be concentrated in jobs

she could make \$20,000 more a year.

Elise Madsen, Deseret News

Or if she became a nurse anesthetist, instead of a registered nurse, her salary could jump from \$68,000 to more than \$100,000. That's the approach more men take, evidenced by the fact that 40 percent of nurse anesthetists are men, despite men only comprising 10 percent of the entire nursing profession.

Yet, even in nursing, there's still a gap, as female RNs make \$1,076 a week, on average, compared to \$1,190 for male RNs. It's one of the professions with the smallest gaps though, according to a 2015 report by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, with only cashiers, office clerks, maids, personal care aides and social workers coming in with smaller gender wage gaps.

Experts point out that there's nothing inherently wrong with men and women choosing different fields because everyone has different interests. However, many women may be choosing certain jobs more because of the schedule, and opting for that job flexibility often comes at a steep

Harvard economist Claudia Goldin has researched extensively about the "high cost of temporal flexibility," or the price women pay for seeking out a more family friendly work arrangement.

"Disproportionately, women, particularly those who are mothers or who are taking care of others, would like greater predictability in their hours," Goldin said in an NPR interview. "They would like less on-call hours. They would like fewer periods of long hours. Well, those jobs are often the jobs — the ones that have the longer hours, the less predictability — those are the ones that are often the higher income occupations."

UVU's Madsen said she hears about the desire for flexibility "over and over again."

"Women want to work, want to make money, they want to make a difference ... yet (they) still want to have the flexibility to be the 'good mom,' whatever that looks like," Madsen said.

So, to be that "good mom", many women in Utah gravitate toward careers that offer shift work, summers off, fewer days of work each week or less demanding schedules so they still have time to raise their family.

Utah women dominate careers as occupational therapists, preschool and kindergarten teachers, medical transcriptionists, dental hygienists and assistants, secretaries and child care workers — some of the lowest paying professions in the country.

The largest female-dominated field in Utah is healthcare support, where women make up 82 percent of the workforce and earn around \$24,326 a year. Male healthcare support workers earn \$28,891 a year.

In talking with women across the state, many Utah women told Bergevin they had "avoided a certain field because they didn't think it was flexible."

"Women are kind of forced sometimes into a choice of taking big breaks from work, taking more flexible work and not being as aggressive about their career because work-life policies don't accommodate the flexibility they need when they have children," Bergevin said. "I talked to a lot of women who said, 'I would take a job that pays less and isn't in my field if it means I can pick up my kids from school and have that flexibility' "

And that's what a lot of Utah moms do. In fact, 40 percent of Utah women work part-time — the highest percentage of any state in the nation, says Anderson.

Working part time, while it may offer the desired flexibility, often comes with negative stigmas and assumptions, as well as a lack of opportunities for career growth and even lower pay.

"There's something communicated about part time ... the impression that it equals less commitment or different priorities," says Anderson.

For most working women, having children changes career plans. And when women take time off to care for those children, it can mean losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in wages and benefits over the course of a career, the future challenge of on-ramping back to a career, as well as combatting negative assumptions about career dedication.

It's those assumptions, says Anne-Marie Slaughter, that lay bare a deep bias in the American culture and an undercurrent of the entire wage gap — the devaluation of caregiving, which not only spawns gender biases and stereotypes against working parents, but punishes professional caregivers, who happen to be mostly female and poorly paid to begin with.

Slaughter experienced these biases first hand when she left her job as the director of policy planning for the United States Department of State (the first woman to hold that position) to be home with her family, particularly one of her sons who was struggling with juvenile delinquency.

Even though she was incredibly devoted to her career, and is currently the president and CEO of the think tank New America, she said after she left Washington she felt judged, even looked down on, as if she had somehow given up or taken the easy way out. She said the experience changed how she viewed her work in the home and the work of caregiving in general.

“When people say, ‘I’m home with my kids,’ I say, ‘You’re doing really important work,’ and I mean it,” Slaughter told the Washington Post. “Whereas before, I was the classic woman that said, ‘Oh, what a pity.’ Like, ‘You’re not doing the real thing.’”

In her new book Slaughter writes of other powerful high-achieving women who chose to stay

and experienced negative backlash — a major part of the "motherhood penalty," — which played out through lower wages, perceived incompetence or a loss of career opportunities.

But it's not just women who are penalized.

In a report, "The State of the World's Fathers: Time for Action" by Promundo — an organization dedicated to promoting gender equality, they found that when Australian employees requested more flexible work hours following the birth of a child or to care for an aging parent, 49 percent of mothers as well as 27 percent of fathers experienced discrimination and negative comments and attitudes from colleagues.

The pharmacy solution

Such a stigma doesn't seem to exist in the field of pharmacy, which has gone from 8 percent female in 1960 to nearly 55 percent today, says Goldin, who has written extensively about the pharmacy industry.

Nikki Hendriksen works in the pharmacy at Smith's Marketplace in West Jordan on Thursday, Aug. 10, 2017. | Laura Seitz, Deseret News

Thanks to technology, standardization of drugs and the rise of large firm pharmacies rather than individually owned shops, pharmacy has become a high-paying, female-dominated profession and one of the only fields to buck the wage-gap trend.

The job is now so standardized that pharmacist A can come in and work 20 hours then seamlessly pass off the work to pharmacist B. There's no company benefit to having one employee work 60 hours, when they could have two employees work 30 hours each.

The pay is "almost perfectly linear in hours," Goldin writes, meaning that "those who work fewer hours — say, because of family responsibilities — are paid proportionately less (overall, but not less per hour). Part-time work is common, especially for women. But there is almost no part-time wage penalty."

That was one of the reasons Nikki Hendriksen, 35, chose the pharmacy field. That, and it offered her, as a chemistry major, a more service-oriented profession than lab work.

After she had her first child, she went from working 40 hours to two 10-hour shifts a week at a pharmacy near her home in Daybreak, but said she hasn't felt stigmatized or penalized for her part-time status.

"For me, it works out well," said Hendriksen, a mom of three kids, 6, 4, and 17 months. "It's a perfect balance for me to be able to have most of my time with my children but then some time still out away. I went to school for so long, and worked hard to gain some skills, it's nice to sometimes leave the house and use those. It brings me a lot of joy."

The part-time penalty, Goldin argues, is one of the biggest causes of the wage gap. Why? Because across a range of fields, the employees who most often pull long days, nights and weekends are men.

"The gender gap in hourly compensation would vanish if firms did not have a financial incentive to pay employees working 80 hours a week more than twice what they would receive for 40-

Nikki Hendriksen, left, helps Kalli Hansen at the pharmacy in Smith's Marketplace in West Jordan on Thursday, Aug. 10, 2017. | Laura Seitz, Deseret News

Beyond finances, the pharmacy model also represents a change in thinking, a shift from the idea of face time in the office toward the idea of productivity and a job well done.

This focus on "tasks," rather than an "ongoing set of clumsily worded objectives," allows companies to break down work into specific assignments with specific rates and deadlines — and then be able to quickly evaluate effectiveness, says Tammy Erickson, a professor of organizational behavior at London Business School.

Under that system, it doesn't matter if someone is in the office eight hours a day or three, as long as their work is done on time and done well.

in America: Work and Life Well-Lived."

Meaning, if companies and organizations can break out of the rigid 40-hours-in-the-office thinking, not only could it empower and enable more women and men to find flexible, family friendly schedules, but it could also prevent companies "from leaving talent on the table by leaving women out," says Anderson.

Nikki Hendriksen works in the pharmacy at Smith's Marketplace in West Jordan on Thursday, Aug. 10, 2017.. | Laura Seitz, Deseret News

The unexplained portion

While occupational segregation, devaluation of care, part-time penalties and correct numerical comparisons can help explain most of the 20-cent wage gap, it's still difficult to classify the remaining pennies.

The five- or six-cent difference in the aggregated salaries of equally qualified men and women boils down to discrimination and sexism, experts say.

And in some cases, it can be worse than just a few cents.

Like when Dani Meyer, the only female intern at her local software design firm in Appleton, Wisconsin, discovered months later that she had been paid \$18 an hour while all the men were paid \$20 an hour for the exact same work.

Or when Chelsea Davis became a manager over 20 people in a Salt Lake pipeline inspection company and could immediately see that the salaries of the male employees under her were larger than hers, yet she had more seniority and greater responsibilities.

Or when researchers at Yale found that male and female professors in STEM fields "rated male applicants as more competent and hireable than the identical female applicant," and "selected a higher starting salary and offered more career mentoring to the male applicant."

Findings like these are why Horwitz warns against dismissing the entire wage gap as a myth.

Yes, men and women pick different fields and may work different hours, but what economic studies can't tease out is whether those differences are caused by "sexism before (women) come to the labor market," Horwitz writes. "Nor do such studies ask whether differences in preferences or job experience by gender are also due to sexism or other aspects of socialization."

"Other aspects of socialization" is another way to talk about bias and stereotypes, which according to a growing number of women, are still alive and well in workplaces across the country.

"Women are perhaps avoiding situations where they'll face harassment, discrimination," says Anderson. "A choice to avoid discrimination doesn't really feel like a pro-active choice. I don't think women are choosing to earn less."

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