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# The Gender Wage Gap and Unpaid Care Work in Utah

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The Utah Women & Leadership Project has a series of Utah Women Stats research snapshots with the goal of providing specific, timely data on a series of issues relevant to Utah women. In 2017, we released the following two: “The Gender Wage Gap in Utah” and “Unpaid Care Work Among Utah Women.” The following article has been adapted from these reports and we, as authors, hope it is useful for those interested in learning more about the status of women in Utah—both LDS and non-LDS. While Mormon women in Utah are not singled out specifically in these reports, we believe that the data here are valuable to the SquareTwo audience as they give a sense of what Utah women (many of whom are LDS) are facing in terms of these serious issues.

The original snapshots, along with other briefs and snapshots, can be found on the project’s website: <http://www.uvu.edu/uwlp/>. We begin by sharing data on the gender wage gap in Utah and then will share data on unpaid care work among Utah women. We will then share a few thoughts in conclusion.

## The Gender Wage Gap in Utah

In 2016, American women earned approximately 20% less than men.<sup>[1]</sup> This gap has narrowed substantially since 1963, when the Equal Pay Act was passed and women earned 41% less than men:<sup>[2]</sup> yet a gap persists.

show a gap between 70–71 cents), and according to the American Association for University Women, we have the nation's fourth-largest gender wage gap for year-round full-time workers.[4] With 43.9% of Utah's workforce comprised of women[5] and 72.1% of adult women participating in the paid workforce in the past 12 months (slightly higher than the national average of 71.5%),[6] this topic is highly relevant to the well-being of Utah women. Closing the gender wage gap will strengthen women's economic impact in their families, communities, and state.

This research snapshot focuses on three main areas:

1. An overview of the gender wage gap and its definition, components, and significance;
2. An analysis of some of the unique factors leading to a large gender wage gap in Utah; and
3. A discussion of possible ways to close the gender wage gap in the state.

## Wage Gap Overview

Simply stated, the gender wage gap is the difference between what women and men earn for paid work. The gap can be measured in many ways, and as metrics become more specific and comprehensive, the gap generally narrows, but remains significant.[7] The gap is a complicated and disputed topic,[8] and some argue it is a myth or simply the result of women's choices. It is impossible to identify a single explanation for the gender wage gap due to the interconnected web of related factors,[9] including educational attainment, recruitment practices, negotiation skills and expectations, job assignment and type of work, hours worked, occupational segregation, occupational tenure, lower earnings in traditionally female occupations, time spent on family care, and discrimination based on gender, compounded by race/ethnicity and age.

The gender wage gap is a crucial component of gender equality in the overall economy,[10] and though the gap narrowed considerably from 1970–1990, largely because of increased educational attainment and workforce participation among women, the rate of progress has slowed since the 1990s.[11] Additionally, though researchers can identify many factors leading to a wage gap, some elements remain unexplained and unquantifiable. Recent studies have shown an 8% wage gap in the U.S. workforce when men and women have comparable factors.[12] Researchers at Cornell University suggest the underlying reason for the gap is that “Work done by women simply isn't valued as highly.”[13] Their research shows that when women enter a male-dominated field, the pay drops, and conversely, when men enter fields where women have held the majority of jobs, wages increase. These scholars assert that a substantial portion of the gap can be attributed to “pure discrimination.” Proponents of gender pay equity assert that whether or not factors are easy to quantify, we must address all facets of the wage gap in order to reduce it.[14]

The generally accepted U.S. wage gap of 80 cents on the dollar is based on all workers performing full-time, year-round paid work. When the gap is measured by weekly or hourly work, it is smaller, but it excludes such items as annual bonuses, which can be a substantial part of overall pay.[15] There are many identifiable factors that may play into the disparity. For example, the gender wage gap is narrower for younger workers but increases as they age. A recent study showed a 7% pay gap between men and women one year out of college, even when controlling for college major, industry and job choice, and other factors.[16] Over time, the gap grows for various reasons, including breaks in labor force participation, which would decrease relative experience and possibly relevant skills. Time spent out of the workforce can have a major effect on earnings, and the wage gap is, in fact, smaller for older women who have worked continuously through their careers.[17] A wage gap factor often related to time spent out of the workforce is motherhood, and research has repeatedly shown a professional “motherhood penalty,” specifically in pay but also in other areas of career success, such as the failure to be promoted as rapidly as men. Working fathers do not experience such setbacks.[18]

While the pay gap is substantial among all American women, it is even higher among women from specific

compound to increase the pay gap. Additionally, all women nationally earn less than men in their same racial or ethnic groups.<sup>[20]</sup> The combination of gender and race widens the pay gap even more in Utah, where black women earn only 56%, Native American women earn 51%, and Hispanic/Latina women make 47% of what white men make.<sup>[21]</sup>

Occupational segregation (the tendency for some jobs and industries to be heavily occupied by one gender) has always been a major factor in the wage gap, as male-dominated fields generally pay more than those that are dominated by women.<sup>[22]</sup> Yet scholars also recognize there are major discrepancies between men's and women's pay even within the same occupations and that increasing the parity within such occupations is necessary.<sup>[23]</sup> Certain occupations have a greater disparity in wages than others, especially those that reward traditional practices such as long, inflexible work days. For example, a recent national study showed occupations categorized as "business" had the largest difference, whereas those labeled "technology" had the smallest. In fact, women younger than 45 in some technology and science occupations actually earned more than men.<sup>[24]</sup> Researchers hypothesized that the parity in wages in the technology sector could exist in part because "tech appears to enable women to work part-time or to work more flexibly."<sup>[25]</sup>

Several other factors are commonly recognized as playing a role in the gender wage gap, including women being less likely to negotiate aggressively for a salary, or being penalized or unsuccessful when trying to do so.<sup>[26]</sup> This is largely because of socialization (women are not taught to ask for what they need),<sup>[27]</sup> but also from the unconscious bias that arises when women break social norms and negotiate for themselves and employers respond negatively. In addition, women nationwide do more unpaid care work than men, which often means women are more likely to work part-time or give up promotions. In Utah, the gap between men's and women's share of unpaid work is higher than the national average.<sup>[28]</sup> These factors can contribute to a lifetime of lower earnings.

## The Wage Gap in Utah

Despite Utah having some of the fastest-growing incomes in the United States,<sup>[29]</sup> Utah's prosperity does not necessarily extend to all segments of the population, specifically working women. Utah has unique cultural and demographic factors that may contribute to the high gender wage gap. For example, about 60% of Utahans identify as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon).<sup>[30]</sup> Mormon culture emphasizes marriage and motherhood as a high priority for women, which is demonstrated by the fact that Utah has the nation's highest marriage rate, the earliest age for marriage,<sup>[31]</sup> the second-highest fertility rate,<sup>[32]</sup> and the largest average household size.<sup>[33]</sup> These factors contribute to the high gender wage gap, since many women in the state prioritize family during their key earning years, which can leave them at a disadvantage in wage potential and actual pay.

Some may believe the large gap is not a concern for many Utah women who choose to prioritize family over career, yet despite common perceptions that Utah women are primarily homemakers, they are actually found in the labor force in similar percentages as the rest of the nation. This includes both married women and the many thousands of Utah women who are single and are both breadwinner and homemaker. However, despite the high rate of women in the workforce, many are very likely to have lower-paying jobs with little career advancement. Occupational segregation is prevalent, with many women clustered in job sectors that pay well below the state average. Please see our previous research snapshot, *Labor Force Participation Among Utah Women*, for more information.

Experts have noted that some women in Utah fail to plan adequately for a workforce career, since they assume motherhood will be their "prime career."<sup>[34]</sup> With that assumption, it is reasonable to think that women, who may already see themselves in a weaker position to negotiate than men, may not assert themselves in recruiting and salary conversations if they do not consider their careers to be long term. This cultural assumption may also

working for many years.[35] Also, the expectation by some women that they won't work outside the home leads to less educational preparation. Utah women are less likely than men to earn graduate or professional degrees, [36] which would lead to higher-paying jobs. Utah women have moved more slowly than women nationally into careers that have traditionally been male dominated and higher paying.[37] Another possible factor in the wage gap is that some Utah men may be able to take on more rigorous and time-intensive careers, thereby boosting their earnings, since many have the support of a stay-at-home spouse. Utah has the largest gap in the nation between fathers' and mothers' participation in the labor force.[38]

Recent events have shown a divide in public attitudes regarding the gender wage gap in Utah. In 2017 State Senator Jake Anderegg, R-Lehi, sponsored Senate Bill 210, which proposed a study to investigate the gender pay gap. Due to lack of support, it failed in the legislative session.[39] In response to this proposed legislation, a local political leader wrote a letter to the editor claiming that equal pay for women would hurt men. He wrote, "If businesses are forced to pay women the same as male earnings, that means they will have to reduce the pay for the men they employ, simple economics." [40] This letter received widespread (even national) attention and backlash. Critics argued that such attitudes about "breadwinning" vs. "staying in the home" were antiquated and harmful and would make it harder for "Utah families to flourish and for our businesses to compete and rise on a national stage." [41]

## Closing the Gender Wage Gap in Utah

The gender wage gap is a complex, multi-faceted issue that affects everyone, especially the 42% of American women who are the primary or sole breadwinner in their homes. This number is much lower in Utah, 26.3%, the lowest rate in the nation. Still, 46.4% of Utah women contribute at least 25% of their family's total income, which means that women's relatively low wages do affect Utah households and families.[42] Furthermore, there are 88,000 families in Utah that have a female head of household, and more than 25% of these households live below the poverty line.[43] The poverty level is even higher (37.5%) for female headed households with children under 18, and when children under age five are present, the poverty rate is 46.9%.[44] Because of the very low household income, most of these families rely on public assistance in one form or another. Reducing the wage gap is a critical goal, yet it will take concerted efforts by many stakeholders, including educators, corporations, and legislators.

From an educational standpoint, girls in Utah need encouragement to attend and graduate from college, particularly at the bachelor's degree level and higher. Young people also need a clear understanding of the realities of the Utah labor force, including the fact that most women will likely be employed for much of their lives, so they can plan accordingly.[45] Women of all ages would benefit from a greater awareness of the career opportunities available to them, including those in occupations and industries currently dominated by men, many of which are much higher paying. Additionally, there are numerous organizations within the state that instruct and support women who are wishing to re-launch into careers after time spent away from the workforce. It is imperative to deliver these services to the women who need them most, including low-income women who may work for many years in low-wage jobs and are unlikely to advance without training and support.

Forward-thinking companies who wish to thrive in a time of low unemployment and a tight labor market[46] would do well to explore flexible work arrangements and alternative career pathways for women who are highly capable and skilled but may not fit into the standard eight-to-five mold. This flexibility would allow some women to pursue better-paying jobs and fill much-needed positions in the workplace while still maintaining favorable work-life integration. This would also require all family members to renegotiate some of the unpaid care responsibilities within households to allow employed men and women the opportunity to thrive both personally and professionally.

Finally, policy makers could create and strengthen laws that would support pay equity. Utah has some existing

regulations, efforts to require transparency surrounding wages, increase access to affordable childcare, and encourage greater access to family leave (for both men and women) would also help to narrow the wage gap. Rather than arguing “if” there is a gender wage gap in Utah, efforts could be better spent on “why” there is a wage gap and addressing specific factors contributing to it. Actions by individuals, companies, universities, government, and other community organizations to remove the barriers to equal pay will improve the lives of Utah’s women and their families and boost the economic well-being of all.

## Unpaid Care Work Among Utah Women

Unpaid work, including childcare, eldercare, housework, and other tasks, is vitally important to the creation of strong families, communities, and nations; in fact, such domestic work has been called “the work that makes all other work possible.”<sup>[48]</sup> According to the McKinsey Global Institute, the monetary value of women’s unpaid work is estimated to be \$10 trillion each year,<sup>[49]</sup> and women worldwide spend a significantly larger portion of their time than men performing this critical work. This happens for many reasons, including personal values and choices, cultural and social norms, unconscious biases, and specific economic and employment considerations. The global average for a women’s daily unpaid work is 4 hours and 47 minutes vs. 1 hour and 30 minutes for men.<sup>[50]</sup> The gap between men’s and women’s unpaid work is largest in many developing nations, yet it remains significant in the United States, and the gap in Utah is higher than the national average.<sup>[51]</sup> Researchers and thought leaders worldwide are urging individuals and societies to recognize that unpaid work is indeed work and to value it accordingly; additionally, many assert that this important work must be distributed more equally between men and women in order for families and communities to thrive.

This research snapshot focuses on three areas:

1. An overview of unpaid care work and its division between women and men both globally and locally;
2. An analysis of some of the factors leading to high rates of unpaid work among Utah women as well as the resulting implications; and
3. A discussion of possible ways to redistribute some unpaid work and therefore ensure Utah women can also attend to other vital areas of their lives.

## Unpaid Care Work Statistics

On average, women worldwide spend between 3–6 hours per day on unpaid work, whereas men spend between 30 minutes to 2 hours per day. The gap between men’s and women’s hours spent on such work is lowest in North America and Europe and highest in the Middle East/North Africa and South Asia regions. In general, the amount of time women spend on unpaid care work varies from twice as much to ten times more than men, depending on region and other factors.<sup>[52]</sup> According to American Time Use Survey tables, U.S. women who participate in unpaid work average 4.92 hours per day vs. 3.79 hours per day for U.S. men. The gap in Utah is wider: Utah women spend 5.55 hours per day in unpaid work vs. 3.22 hours for Utah men.<sup>[53]</sup> Although this snapshot focuses primarily on unpaid care work (generally performed in the home), Utah women also spend significant time doing church and community volunteer work; see our previous snapshot, “Voting and Civic Engagement Among Utah Women”, for more information.

Unpaid care work comes in many forms, but one of the most common is childcare, which is significant in Utah especially as the state has the highest fertility rate<sup>[54]</sup> and the largest household size in the nation.<sup>[55]</sup> Many distinguish between unpaid work that is meaningful and fulfilling (such as caring for a loved one) versus work that is more menial yet necessary. Childcare certainly falls into the “meaningful” category, and many women choose to prioritize childcare over other pursuits. In the United States, about 25.4% of women care for

36.2% of women care for household children on an average day vs. 23.1% of men. The women who give childcare each day in Utah spend an average of 2.3 hours vs. 1.25 hours spent by men.[\[56\]](#)

Another significant source of unpaid care work involves elderly family members. According to a recent study by the Utah Foundation, 59% of caregivers serving the elderly in the state are women caring for parents. This report states that unpaid caregivers for the elderly provide 90% of such care, and much of this service is long-term: 65% have been giving eldercare for between 3 and 10 years. The AARP describes the average caregiver for the elderly in Utah as a “working married mother with some college in her fifties.”[\[57\]](#) This typical caregiver is often still providing care for her own children; women such as this are called the “sandwich generation,” as they are pulled between two roles, both important and valuable, which require significant time spent performing unpaid care work.

Another common category of necessary unpaid work is household chores. The American Time Use Survey shows that in the United States, nearly half of all women perform housework on an average day vs. just 1 in 5 men. Of those who do participate in housework each day, women also spend more time: 1.78 hours per day vs. 1.34 for men who do housework. U.S. women spend more time on food preparation and clean-up, whereas U.S. men spend more time than women on yard work and house maintenance, decoration, and repair. In Utah, about half of women also do housework every day, but only 15.7% of men do (below national average). The gap in time spent on housework between Utah men and women is also larger than the national gap: Utah women spend 1.88 hours per day on housework (slightly higher than U.S. women), and Utah men spend .94 hours (lower than U.S. men). The only category of household work where Utah men spend more time than women is household maintenance, decoration, and repair.[\[58\]](#)

Over the past few years, increasing media attention has been given to additional types of unpaid work generally performed by women, including the emotional and mental work that comes from being involved in relationships, households, and families. Articles in national publications have lamented the fact that women do the vast majority of emotional labor in intimate relationships, and that this is the default, seemingly “natural” role for them to take, despite recognition from mental health professionals that emotional work is indeed work, and it takes a toll on women.[\[59\]](#) Other experts have recognized that even when men participate in the day-to-day work of running a household, it is often the woman who is making many of the decisions and planning—the mental work of the home. Some assert that women do not have as much time to devote to their own personal and professional development when they are taking most of the responsibility for this mental and emotional work.[\[60\]](#)

It should be noted that men do spend more time than women doing paid work activities each day, both locally and globally. Yet, employment data show that more women everywhere are steadily joining the paid workforce, and in nearly every country in the world the daily combined hours of paid and unpaid work are higher for women than for men.[\[61\]](#) This is also true in Utah, and as their labor force participation is rising, women may increasingly find themselves overburdened with the combined load of paid and unpaid work unless efforts are made to redistribute tasks more equally. Both work for pay and unpaid care work are critically important to the well-being of families and society, but unpaid work, which is sometimes referred to as “invisible,”[\[62\]](#) is often omitted in public economic and policy discussions. Of course, even though this work is unpaid, it still has significant monetary value. For example, salary.com performs an annual survey of the work moms do and calculates a base salary of \$49K and overtime value of \$95K.[\[63\]](#) Although this exercise is largely symbolic, for a family to outsource much of the work performed by women at home would cost tens of thousands per year. Both individuals and society as a whole can do more to recognize and applaud the value of this unpaid work while at the same time ensuring that women are not carrying too much of the responsibility alone.

## Factors Surrounding Gender Gaps in Unpaid Work

have some of the highest differences in the amount of unpaid care work performed by women and men. The gap can begin early: girls spend 30% more time on unpaid work than boys.<sup>[64]</sup> In the United States, girls spend an average of two hours more per week on household duties than boys, and when boys do chores they are more likely than girls to be paid.<sup>[65]</sup> These early gaps can interfere with girls' education and establish long-standing patterns.

In general, the United States and Europe have smaller gaps between men and women when it comes to time spent performing unpaid work, yet these are not homogenous geographical areas. Research has shown that there are significant distinctions between states in the United States; for example, in the amount of time women spend in unpaid work when compared to men. A recent scholarly article examined three factors among all states and how they affected unpaid care work (specifically housework): female labor force empowerment, family traditionalism, and state government liberalism. The authors' general hypotheses in this state-by-state analysis were that states in which women received higher overall benefits from paid work, those that showed lower adherence to traditional family gender roles, and those that were more politically liberal would have lower gaps between women's and men's share of housework. Utah was singled out in this report, as the authors concluded that women in Utah rank last in the nation in labor force empowerment. The findings of this study showed that women in Utah spend more time doing housework than women who live in states in which the rewards of paid work are greater for women, in terms of pay, prestige, and possibility for advancement.<sup>[66]</sup> These findings align with the more traditional family structure and gender roles that many Utah families embody.

Other factors specific to Utah may also influence the gap between women's and men's contributions to unpaid care work. A Canadian study recently demonstrated that the timing of major life transitions, including the age of marriage and childbearing, can influence how unpaid work is divided up in families; women who marry and have children at younger ages bear a larger portion of unpaid work than women who make life transitions when they are older.<sup>[67]</sup> Utah has the youngest median marriage age for both men and women in the nation,<sup>[68]</sup> and although mother's age at first birth has been rising in Utah, we still are below the national average.<sup>[69]</sup>

Utahans have traditionally placed a great emphasis on family, and hence it is unsurprising that women in the state prioritize the work of caring for children and other loved ones. Yet there may be some detrimental effects that come along with the uneven distribution of such work between men and women. When women are disproportionately responsible for unpaid care work, they are less able to complete college and pursue professional interests. This may be relevant in Utah, as the gap between men and women who hold a bachelor's degree is one of the largest in the nation.<sup>[70]</sup> Utah women rank highest in the nation for part-time work,<sup>[71]</sup> which is likely related to unpaid work as women are 9 times more likely to choose part-time work because of childcare issues than men.<sup>[72]</sup> Women can face professional setbacks because of care duties, including taking time off, refusing promotions, and choosing less demanding jobs, all of which could leave women financially vulnerable.<sup>[73]</sup> Such by-products of caregiving are much more common among women; for example, mothers are twice as likely as fathers to report that being a parent has made it harder for them to advance in their careers.<sup>[74]</sup>

In addition to economic risks, women who bear a heavy share of unpaid care work may also struggle with physical, emotional, and mental health issues, especially those who are also working for pay.<sup>[75]</sup> Depression, stress, and feelings of isolation are also extremely common among caregivers for the elderly.<sup>[76]</sup> Even though many Utah women willingly choose to prioritize unpaid care work, they still may suffer ill effects if their burden is unequally shared with other family members.

## **Efforts to Promote Equal Distribution of Care Work**

Numerous individuals, organizations, and advocates have suggested means by which unpaid care work can be more equally distributed between men and women in Utah, particularly when women are working for pay as

many new parents or other caregivers. Increased access to affordable childcare would also create opportunities for women who want or need to pursue their professional lives more fully. To encourage such policy initiatives, forward-thinking companies in the private sector can lead the way in creating innovative and affordable solutions for families trying to navigate the responsibilities of paid and unpaid work. Of course, any of these efforts would help women who are most heavily burdened: female heads of households, nearly half of whom live in poverty and carry the entire load of both paid and unpaid work in a family.[77]

Finally, more open discussion of the benefits of rethinking cultural norms could educate men on the value of willingly taking a larger share of unpaid care work. Research shows that fathers who are more heavily involved in the early days of childcare will be greater participants in family care work for years to come.[78] In discussing her study on household labor, Dr. Renata Forste stated, “Family satisfaction depended on both partners contributing to decision-making and housework. In particular, we found that satisfaction was highest among men that reported greater involvement in childcare and household chores.”[79] One possibility is for men, who spend more time on leisure activities than women do,[80] to use some of that time in sharing the load of unpaid care work and thereby reduce the strain on women who may be overburdened.

Overall, Utah individuals, organizations, and communities place a high value on families and all the work that goes into making households strong. In some cases, however, the important work of building these families is being disproportionately performed by women, which can carry negative consequences, including economic, physical, and emotional challenges. A variety of efforts to encourage a more equal distribution of unpaid care work between men and women—including legislation and corporate initiatives, public discussions about cultural norms, and individual choices by family members themselves—will benefit Utah families in addition to strengthening the positive impact of women in communities and the state as a whole.

## Conclusion

Clearly, many Utah women, as well as men and children, feel the effects of such serious issues as the gender wage gap and unpaid care work. As mentioned previously, while Mormon women in Utah are not singled out specifically in these reports, we do believe that the data here are valuable in providing a sense of what Utah women (many of whom are LDS) are facing in terms of the serious issues that thwart women’s physical, emotional, mental, financial, and spiritual wellbeing. And, of course, all of these are directly or indirectly related to women’s struggle with finding their own confidence and voices, as well as their path toward greater influence and leadership. We believe that finding ways to lessen the wage gap and making positive changes regarding the disproportionate care work performed by women will strengthen the positive impact of women in their homes, churches, communities, and even beyond.

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