

Why GAO Did This Study

Women represent an increasingly larger share of the total workforce in the United States—constituting nearly half of the total workforce. In addition, an increasing proportion of women in the workforce are more educated. However, research by GAO and others has shown that women’s average pay has been and remains lower than that of men. Questions have been raised about the extent to which less-advantaged women—that is, those who are low wage or less educated—experience lower wages than less-advantaged men.

GAO was asked to examine the differences in representation, key characteristics, and pay among women and men (1) with less education and (2) with low wages. GAO defined less-educated workers as those having a high school degree or less and low-wage workers as those earning an hourly wage rate in the bottom quintile—or 20 percent—of wages across the workforce. GAO analyzed data from the Department of Labor’s Current Population Survey (CPS); reviewed other work on similar topics; and interviewed agency officials, representatives of women’s groups, and other researchers.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making recommendations in this report. The Department of Labor provided technical comments, which were incorporated where appropriate. The Department of Commerce had no comments on this report.

View [GAO-12-10](#) or key components. For more information, contact Andrew Sherrill at (202) 512-7215 or sherrilla@gao.gov.

GENDER PAY DIFFERENCES

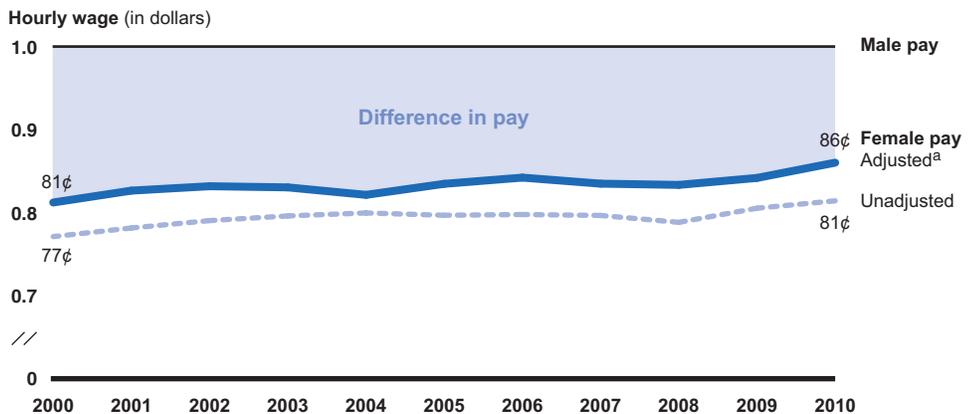
Progress Made, but Women Remain Overrepresented among Low-Wage Workers

What GAO Found

Women in general have surpassed men in obtaining education over the last three decades, but on average, women with a high school degree or less earned lower hourly wages than men with the same level of education. Among these less-educated workers, women tended to work in industries and occupations, such as health care and social assistance, that had lower wages than those in which men worked. Even when less-educated women and men were in the same broad industry or occupation category, these women’s average hourly wage was lower than men’s. GAO estimated that in 2010, less-educated women earned 86 cents—compared with 81 cents in 2000—for every dollar men earned, after adjusting for available factors that may affect pay. The annual household income of less-educated workers varied based on marital status and the presence of children, but in all cases, women, on average, had lower personal earnings than men. Less-educated single women households with children had among the lowest total annual income of all households, averaging about \$37,000.

Women have made progress in earning higher wages over the last three decades, but they remain overrepresented among workers who earn low wages. Women made up an estimated 49 percent of the overall workforce in 2010, but constituted 59 percent of the low-wage workforce. Low-wage women and men earned a similar hourly wage, but women as a group earned less in a typical week—in part, because they were more likely to work part-time. While hourly wages for low-wage men and women did not vary much, annual household income did vary, largely based on marital status and the presence of children in the household. Single women with children in the household had the lowest annual household income, averaging about \$27,000.

Estimated Pay Differences between Less-Educated Women and Men, 2000-2010



Source: GAO analysis of CPS data.

^aThe adjusted pay difference controls for the following factors—age, race/ethnicity, education, marital status, children in the household, full-time/ part-time job status, union membership, citizenship status, veteran status, state of residence, industry, and occupation (see app. III for more details).