

WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE

In 2009, 59.2 percent of women aged 16 and older were in the labor force (either employed or not employed and actively seeking employment), compared to 72.0 percent of men.¹⁵ Between 1970 and 1999, women's participation in the labor force increased from 43.3 to 60.0 percent and has remained relatively stable over the last decade (data not shown).

Amidst a recession, the average annual rate of unemployment (not employed and actively seeking employment) for persons aged 16 and older in 2009 was 8.1 percent among women compared to 10.3 percent among men.¹⁵ Women's employment has been less sensitive to recent recessions because of their greater representation in growing occupations, such as health care.¹⁶

Overall, 71.6 percent of mothers with children under 18 years of age were in the labor force in 2009 (data not shown). However, labor force participation varies by the age of the child and marital status. Labor force participation among women is lower when children are younger and when the mother is married. In 2009, labor force participation ranged from 59.8 percent among married mothers with children under 3 years of age to 81.6 percent among unmarried or separated mothers with children aged 6–17 years.

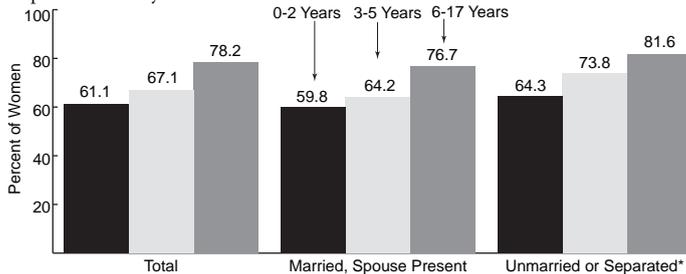
From 1979 to 2009, median earnings for full-time workers aged 25 and older increased 27.8 percent among women compared to 1.0 percent among men, adjusting for inflation (data not shown). The growth in earnings for women has helped to reduce a longstanding gender gap in earnings, but striking differences remain. In 2009,

the median weekly earnings of full-time workers aged 25 and older was \$186 less for women than men (\$687 versus \$873). Although earnings rise dramatically with increasing education, the gender gap in earnings persists. Female full-time workers earn about 75 cents for every dollar earned by male full-time workers at every level of education. Only about half of the gender pay gap can be explained by differences in industry and occupation.¹⁷

Despite the gender gap in earnings, families are increasingly dependent on the employment and income of women. Between 1967 and 2008, the number of families with mothers serving as breadwinners increased from 11.7 to 39.3 percent.¹⁸ Breadwinner mothers include single mothers who work and married mothers who earn as much as, or more than, their husbands.

Labor Force Participation Among Mothers, by Marital Status and Age of Youngest Child, 2009

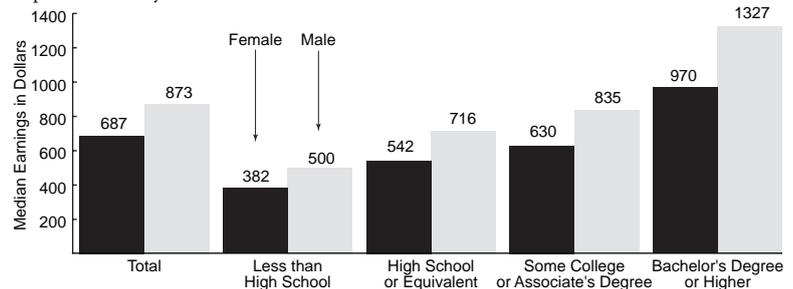
Source I.14: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey



*Includes never-married, divorced, separated, and widowed persons.

Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Workers* Aged 25 and Older, by Educational Attainment and Sex, 2009

Source I.14: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey



*Full-time work is defined as 35 or more hours per week.