

WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE

In 2010, 58.6 percent of women aged 16 and older were in the labor force (either employed or not employed and actively seeking employment) compared to 72.3 percent of men.¹⁵ Between 1970 and 2000, women's participation in the labor force increased from 43.3 to approximately 60 percent, and has remained relatively stable over the last decade. Among mothers with children under 18 years of age, 71.3 percent were in the labor force in 2010, up from 47.4 percent in 1975 (data not shown). Labor force participation is higher among mothers with older children and those who are unmarried or separated.¹⁵

Following the recession of 2007–2009, the average annual rate of unemployment (not em-

ployed and actively seeking employment) for persons aged 16 and older in 2010 was 9.6 percent, reaching the highest level since 1983. The unemployment rate was lower among women than men in 2010 (8.6 versus 10.5 percent, respectively) and during the previous three recessions. Women's employment has been less sensitive to recent recessions because of their greater representation in growing occupations, such as health care.¹³

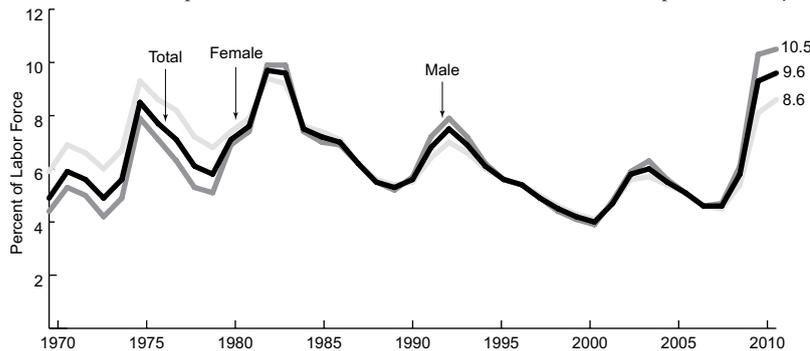
Although women had lower levels of unemployment in 2010, the median weekly earnings of full-time workers aged 25 and older was \$170 more for men than women (\$874 versus \$704). Earnings rise dramatically with increasing education but the gender gap in earnings persists with female full-

time workers earning about 75 cents for every dollar earned by male full-time workers at every level of education. For example, while women with a high school diploma or equivalent earned a weekly average of \$543 in 2010, their male counterparts earned an average of \$710. Only about half of the gender pay gap can be explained by differences in industry and occupation.¹⁶

Despite the gender gap in earnings, families are increasingly dependent on the employment and income of women. From 1967 to 2008, the number of families with mothers serving as breadwinners increased from 11.7 to 39.3 percent.¹⁷ Breadwinner mothers include single mothers who work and married mothers who earn as much as, or more than, their husbands.

Annual Average Unemployment* Rate Among Workers Aged 16 and Older, by Sex, 1970–2010

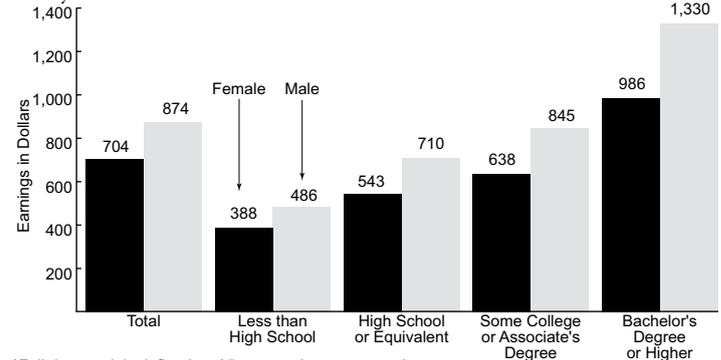
Source I.11: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey



*Not employed and actively seeking employment.

Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Workers* Aged 25 and Older, by Education and Sex, 2010

Source I.11: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey



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