

Pay Transparency Laws and the Gender Pay Gap:  
Evidence from a National Survey of US Adults

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### Introduction

For nearly sixty years, women in the United States have looked to the Equal Pay Act to guarantee “equal pay for equal work.”<sup>1</sup> But despite these protections, U.S. men have consistently received higher salaries compared to women. A Pew survey in 2020 found that women currently earn 84% of what men earn, based on median hourly earnings of full- and part-time workers.<sup>2</sup> This gap was smaller for some subgroups, such as women aged 25-34 (93%), but it was present in the same direction in every group.<sup>3</sup> Across industries, the Department of Labor has documented that men outearn women in early every occupation.<sup>4</sup> The pay gap expands as wages increase: women earn 92% compared to men at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of the wage distribution, but only 74% compared to men at the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile.<sup>5</sup> Over a lifetime, the average woman in the workplace foregoes more than \$530,000 due to the gender pay gap, escalating towards \$800,000 for women with college degrees.<sup>6</sup> The gender disparity in wages remains even when analyses control for education, workforce experience, occupation, industry, and part-versus full-time employment. Women also report reduced access to non-wage benefits compared to men, including access to employer-sponsored health insurance.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices/civil-rights-center/internal/policies/equal-pay-for-equal-work>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/25/gender-pay-gap-facts/>

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> <https://blog.dol.gov/2021/03/19/5-facts-about-the-state-of-the-gender-pay-gap>; Foster et al., US Census Bureau 2020

<sup>5</sup> Economic Policy Institute, <https://www.epi.org/publication/what-is-the-gender-pay-gap-and-is-it-real/>

<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Id.

<sup>8</sup> DOL, *supra* note 3.