



Labor Force Participation Among Utah Women

Setting the Stage

Over the past half-century or so, Utah women's participation in the labor force has steadily increased at a rate of about 8% per decade.¹ According to the most recent (2015) U.S. Census Bureau estimates, women in Utah make up 43.9% of the state workforce, which is slightly lower than the U.S. women's share of the national workforce, 47.4%.² In general, Utah women are about as likely to be employed as U.S. women, but Utah women are less likely to work full-time year round.³ Numerous factors influence Utah women's experiences in the labor force, including such barriers to successful employment as trouble accessing affordable childcare and occupational segregation in lower-paying industries.

This research snapshot focuses on three key areas:

- 1) An overview of Utah women's labor force participation, broken down by demographics,
- 2) An exploration of the industries and occupations where Utah women are most likely to work, and
- 3) A discussion of ways to increase Utah women's success in the labor force.

Demographics

According to recent American Community Survey estimates for adults ages 16–65, 72.1% of Utah women worked over the previous 12 months, a slightly higher rate as compared to U.S. women (71.5%).⁴ Estimates for the same time period give different numbers for the specific category of Utah women “in the labor force,” which includes those who are unemployed but looking for work, though with those data as well Utah women's rates are higher than the national average (59.2% vs. 58.1%).⁵ However, Utah women were less likely than U.S. women to work full-time, year-round: 35.7% vs. 41.8%. Utah women are also considerably less likely to work than Utah men: 87.2% of Utah men had worked in the previous 12 months, and 60.3% of them had worked full-time, year-round.⁶ A recent report ranked Utah first in the nation for the percentage of employed women who worked part-time (40.2% vs. the national average of 29.4%).⁷

Various factors play a role in determining Utah women's likelihood to participate in the labor force. For example, age significantly impacts women's employment rates. In

both the U.S. and Utah, younger women are very likely to be in the labor force. According to 2015 U.S. Census Bureau estimates, Utah women participate in the labor force at a higher rate than the national average in their late teens and early 20s. Beginning at age 25, however, the national average for women's labor force participation becomes higher than Utah women's participation rate and remains higher though age 69. Utah women's labor force participation drops considerably below the national average from ages 25–45, the years when many women are having children. After age 45 the labor force participation rate for Utah women jumps up to levels near the national average. See Table 1 for more detail.⁸

Table 1: Percentage of Women in the Labor Force by Age

Age	U.S. Women	Utah Women
16–19	39.2%	54.0%
20–21	67.8%	74.0%
22–24	76.9%	81.2%
25–29	78.2%	72.9%
30–34	75.9%	66.3%
35–44	76.0%	68.4%
45–54	74.9%	71.9%
55–59	66.9%	64.6%
60–61	57.8%	56.6%
62–64	45.6%	43.4%
65–69	27.1%	25.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015, American Community Survey.

Marital status is another telling factor when it comes to Utah women's employment. Married women in the state are less likely to be in the labor force than the national average, but Utah women who are not currently married are more likely to be in the labor force than the average U.S. woman. Specific labor force participation rates are as follows: 56.4% of Utah married women (vs. 58.9% U.S.), 70.6% of Utah women who have never been married (vs. 66.4% U.S.), 70.7% of Utah women who are separated (vs. 65.7% U.S.), 70.0% of Utah women who are divorced (vs. 62.9% U.S.), and 18.4% of Utah women who are widowed (vs. 18.1% U.S.).⁹

Utah women's labor force participation also varies by ethnicity: a recent report showed that 64.8% of Hispanic

women, 61.9% of women who identified as “other” or two or more races, 60.4% of Asian/Pacific Islander women, 59.3% of White women, and 55.9% of Native American women are in the labor force (data for Black women in Utah were not available).¹⁰

Although a majority of Utah mothers do participate in the labor force, Utah mothers of young children are less likely to be employed than U.S. mothers. 2012 U.S. Census Bureau estimates show that 61% of Utah mothers with children under age 6 work (vs. 70% U.S.), 51% of Utah mothers with children under age 6 and children ages 6–17 work (vs. 64% U.S.), 73% of Utah mothers whose children are all between the ages of 6–17 work (vs. 77% U.S.), and 76% percent of Utah mothers with no children under age 18 work (this is higher than the national average of 73%).¹¹ Although the majority of Utah mothers do work, Utah ranks last in the nation for children with both parents in the labor force with 52%, well below the national average of 65%.¹² Utah also has the largest gap in the nation between fathers’ and mothers’ participation in the labor force, at 42.7%.¹³ Also, 77% of Utah women with no children work.¹⁴

Women’s labor force participation rates also vary somewhat according to where they live in Utah. A recent report stated that the counties with the highest female labor force participation are Summit (65.3%), Salt Lake (64.8%), Grand (64.7%), and Beaver (62.9%); the counties with the lowest rates are Washington (49.8%), Duchesne (49.3%), Piute (49.0%), and Daggett (45.0%).¹⁵

Occupational Segregation

One key aspect of understanding the female labor force in Utah is occupational segregation—the phenomenon of women holding a high percentage of jobs in certain industries as well as specific positions within those industries. In some ways, occupational segregation has been decreasing over time; for example, in 1980, around one quarter of Utah women worked in jobs in which approximately 90% of the workers in that field were women. By 2000, only 10% of Utah women worked in such occupations. Conversely, some positions, such as elementary school teachers and cosmetologists, became even more female dominated during those same years.¹⁶

Today, Utah women still make up a high percentage of all workers in certain occupations, many of which require relatively lower skills and receive lower pay. According to 2015 U.S. Census Bureau estimates, the three areas where Utah women are mostly highly segregated are healthcare support occupations (83.4% of workers are women), personal care and service occupations (79.2%), and health technologists and technicians (73.7%).¹⁷ The median incomes for all workers in these three occupational areas

are, respectively, as follows: \$19,286, \$13,001, and \$26,890. The median income for each of these three female-dominated professions is below average for all professions in the state (\$31,446).¹⁸ In contrast, the occupations where the lowest percentage of jobs are held by women are construction and extraction occupations (2.1%); installation, maintenance, and repair occupations (3.2%); and architecture and engineering occupations (10.4%).¹⁹ The median earnings for all workers in these three male-dominated occupational areas are, respectively, as follows: \$35,582, \$41,391, and \$70,885, all above the median income for all professions in the state.²⁰

Not only do Utah women make up high percentages of workers in certain occupations, but a large number of all Utah working women are segregated in a few specific (and lower-paying) jobs. According to a recent report, more than 40% of Utah women work in just two occupational groups: office and administrative support, where 24.0% percent of employed Utah women work and service occupations, where 18.8% of them work.²¹ Both of these groups of jobs have median wages below the state average.²² Utah men, on the other hand, are more likely than Utah women to be concentrated in higher-paying industries and job types.²³

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Increasing Utah Women’s Employment Success

Public entities, corporations, and individual women can make efforts to increase women’s success in the Utah labor force. Working women in the state face various challenges; for example, parents may have difficulty finding quality childcare, which is cost-prohibitive for many families in Utah (as it is in the rest of the nation).²⁴ This dilemma is amplified in Utah as we tend to have more children than the national average.²⁵ Interestingly, a recent study ranked Utah 48th in the country in its “Childcare Index,” which ordered states by the relative costs of infant care, the proportion of four-year olds in publicly funded Pre-K programs, and policies in place to promote quality Pre-K care.²⁶ Another barrier specific to low-income women’s employment success is the “cliff effect,” wherein women who have been receiving public benefits risk losing this support as they become eligible for promotions or raises at work, and the loss of public benefits occurs faster than rising incomes replace their value.²⁷ Various groups and policy makers are working to address these types of issues legislatively.²⁸

Utahans could also benefit from increased support for women entrepreneurs. Women in Utah are slightly more likely than Utah men to be self-employed (7% vs. 5%).²⁹

Additionally, 2012 Census estimates show 30.3% of firms in Utah are owned by women³⁰ (compared to 35.8% nationally),³¹ and sales by women-owned businesses in Utah make up only a very small share of total sales by all firms.³² Please refer to a previous *Utah Women & Leadership Project* research and policy brief, [The Status of Women and Entrepreneurship in Utah](#), for an in-depth look at women-owned businesses in the state.

Corporations in the state can also do much to improve employment success for women who choose to work. For example, the [Women's Leadership Institute](#) has invited companies statewide (both public and private) to participate in the ElevateHER Challenge, which has among its stated goals to increase the percentage of women in senior leadership positions and on boards, to retain women at all organizational levels, and to close gender pay gaps.³³ In addition, all organizations in the state would do well to reevaluate their systems and processes regarding employee recruitment, hiring, development, and promotion to ensure they have diverse and inclusive work environments that offer flexibility and maximum potential for employee success.

Finally, individual Utah women, schools, universities, and other stakeholders can work to close the education gap between genders in the state. Utah women are less likely than U.S. women to work in jobs that require higher education. As more women in Utah earn at least bachelor's degrees, specifically in high paying, growth industries, they will have more choices and opportunities for successful employment.³⁴ Additionally, some women may benefit from exploring training and certification in fields that are traditionally male dominated yet lead to careers that are relatively high paying and flexible.

Conclusion

Women in Utah make up a significant proportion of the overall labor force in the state, but many are employed in low-paying jobs with limited room for advancement. Finding ways to improve various factors for Utah women in the labor force will not only better their lives, but also strengthen the positive impact of women in communities and the state as a whole.

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² United States Census Bureau. (2015a). Occupation by sex for the civilian employed population 16 years and over. S2401. U.S. and Utah.

³ United States Census Bureau. (2015b). Sex by full-time work status in the past 12 months for the population 16 to 64 years. K202302. U.S. and Utah.

⁴ United States Census Bureau. (2015b).

⁵ United States Census Bureau. (2015c). Selected population profile in the United States. S0201. U.S. and Utah.

⁶ United States Census Bureau. (2015b).

⁷ Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR). (2013 data). Status of women in the states: Employment and earnings. Table B2.6. Retrieved from <http://statusofwomendata.org/explore-the-data/employment-and-earnings/employment-and-earnings/#PartTimeWork%20>

⁸ United States Census Bureau. (2015d). Sex by age by employment status for the population 16 years and over. B23001. U.S. and Utah.

⁹ United States Census Bureau. (2015e). Marital status by sex by labor force participation. B12006. U.S. and Utah.

¹⁰ IWPR. (2015a). The Status of women in Utah, 2015: Highlights. IWPR #R455. Retrieved from [Utah State Fact Sheet](#)

¹¹ Langston, L. P. (2014). Hard @ work: Women in the Utah labor force. Utah Department of Workforce Services. Retrieved from [Hard @ Work: Women in the Utah Labor Force](#)

¹² Langston, L. P. (2010, February). Hard at work: Women in the Utah labor force. Department of Workforce Services. Retrieved from [Hard at Work: Women in the Utah Labor Force](#)

¹³ IWPR. (2015b). Status of women in the states: Work and family. Retrieved from <http://statusofwomendata.org/explore-the-data/work-family/>

¹⁴ Langston, L. P. (2010, July/August). What's the truth about Utah women in the labor force? *Trendlines*. Department of Workforce Services. Retrieved from <http://jobs.utah.gov/wi/pubs/trendlines/julaug10/whats happening.pdf>

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¹⁶ Langston, L. P. (2010).

¹⁷ United States Census Bureau. (2015a).

¹⁸ United States Census Bureau. (2015f). Occupation by sex and median earnings in the past 12 months (in 2015 inflation-adjusted dollars) for the civilian employed population 16 years and over. S2411. Utah.

¹⁹ United States Census Bureau. (2015a).

²⁰ United States Census Bureau. (2015f).

²¹ Hess, C., & Williams, C. (2014, May). The well-being of women in Utah: An overview. Institute for Women's Policy Research. #R379. Retrieved from [Well-being of Women in Utah](#)

²² United States Census Bureau. (2015f).

²³ Hess, C., & Williams, C. (2014, May).

²⁴ Economic Policy Institute. (2016). The cost of childcare in Utah. Retrieved from <http://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/UT>

²⁵ Langston, L. P. (2014).

²⁶ IWPR. (2015b).

²⁷ The Women's Foundation of Colorado. (n.d.) What is the "cliff effect?" Retrieved from <http://www.wfco.org/document.doc?id=520>

²⁸ See, for example, the 2016 Legislative Ticker from the Utah Women's Coalition. <http://www.utahwomenscoalition.org/resources/>

²⁹ Department of Workforce Services. (2014, February). Hard at work—Women in the Utah labor force.

<http://jobs.utah.gov/wi/pubs/womencareers/factsheet.html>

³⁰ United States Census Bureau. (n.d.). QuickFacts. Utah.

³¹ United States Census Bureau. (n.d.). QuickFacts. United States.

³² Langston, L. P. (2014).

³³ Women's Leadership Institute. (n.d.). The ElevateHER Challenge. Retrieved from <http://wliut.com/elevateher-challenge/>

³⁴ Department of Workforce Services. (2014, February).

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