CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

PATHWAYS >> TO PROGRESS

Accelerating the Possibilities

Occupational Segregation

WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

Contents

WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

Introduction

For twenty-five years, the WNY Women's Foundation (WNYWF) has been transforming systems, culture and policy to create opportunities that allow each woman to thrive. To commemorate this silver milestone, the WNYWF is releasing the third installment of our *Pathways to Progress: Accelerating the Possibilities* series. This data-driven analysis focuses on: **child care, poverty, leadership, education, occupational segregation, and pay equity**. Our latest edition builds on the WNYWF's 2010 and 2017 *Pathways to Progress: The Status of Women in WNY* reports, comparing the state of affairs for women 25 years ago to the current climate, while providing a forecasted trajectory over the next 20-25 years.

Occupational segregation continues to be a significant barrier for women in the workforce, confining many to lower-paying, women-dominated industries such as education, healthcare, and retail. Meanwhile, women remain underrepresented in high-paying fields like technology, engineering, and finance. This division not only curtails women's economic advancement, but also exacerbates gender pay gaps, limiting opportunities for financial independence. Despite some progress, deep-rooted systemic barriers still hinder women's access to leadership roles and equitable compensation. Tackling occupational segregation requires comprehensive policy reforms, expanded access to education and training, and a concerted effort to challenge and break down entrenched gender norms in career choices.

Overview

Occupational segregation refers to the uneven distribution of demographic groups across various jobs and industries, where certain groups, such as women, are either overrepresented or underrepresented. This segregation is one of the largest identifiable causes of the gender pay gap, as women are disproportionately concentrated in lower-paying occupations and industries while being underrepresented in higher-paying ones. Even as women make gains in higher-paying fields, they continue to face wage disparities, earning less than their male counterparts in equivalent roles.

Perspective

When **78% of elementary and middle school teachers are women** and 80% of software developers are men, young people's perceptions of their future opportunities are impacted (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).

Management

While women are 46.9% of the total labor force, they hold only **41.9% of management positions and 30.6% of chief executive positions** (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).

Pay Gap

Being segregated into lower-paying jobs resulted in **lost potential earnings of approximately $42.7 billion for Black women and $53.3 billion for Hispanic women in 2023** (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2024).

Lack of Representation

Among all workers in 2023 (including part-time and full-time), women represent just **3.1% of Carpenters** (a decline from 3.5% in 2022) and just **2.9% of Electricians** (an increase from 2.1% in 2022) (Hegewisch & Gartner, 2024).
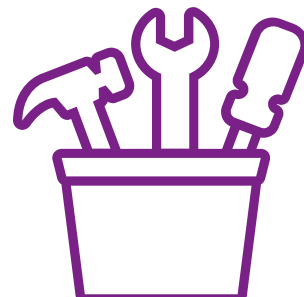
Causes

Occupational segregation is driven by a variety of interrelated factors. From an early age, gender biases, societal stereotypes, and behavioral expectations shape children's interests, often channeling them into career paths that align with traditional gender roles. Education and training opportunities also reinforce these patterns, as girls and boys are steered toward certain fields. Role models play a significant role in shaping aspirations, yet the lack of diverse examples in many sectors limits the career exploration of young people. These stereotypes not only restrict all children from pursuing broader career interests, but also contribute to the undervaluing of women-dominated professions, which are often essential but underpaid.

Men are approximately **35 times more likely** to be carpenters, while women are **17 times more likely** to be child care workers (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2024).
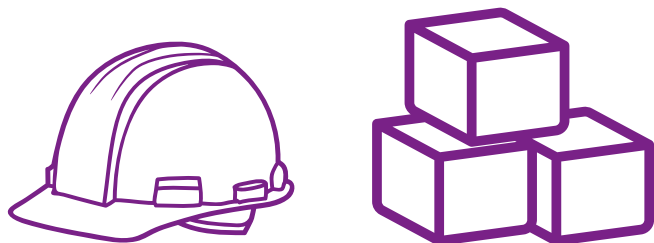
White women are almost twice as likely as Black women to work as elementary or middle school teachers, and **Latina women are over six times more likely than White women** to work as maids and housekeepers (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2024).

Workplace discrimination based on gender, race, and ethnicity impacts all areas of work including recruitment, hiring, evaluations, and promotions. Workplace culture and harassment can create hostile work environments for women, especially in workplaces with few women (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2024). Many workplaces do not have policies that are tolerant or supportive of workers with family caregiving responsibilities. Family caregiving responsibilities disproportionately fall on women, which often limits the time they can spend on paid work or the types of jobs they accept. Additionally, the discriminatory perception that women may want to take on family caregiving responsibilities, or that those responsibilities will interfere with work performance, may impact the work responsibilities, jobs, and promotions they are offered by employers (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2024). Networks and mentors, especially of the same gender or race/ethnicity, can help women get referrals for job openings, hiring, or promotions, but these are limited for women and people of color in fields traditionally dominated by white men.

Occupations

Women make up 45% of full-time workers. While the 20 occupations with the highest median wages overall and the 20 occupations with the lowest median wages overall both employ just over 7 million full-time workers, **women hold 31% of the highest-paid occupations and 67% of the lowest-paid occupations** (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2022). Within the 20 highest-paid occupations, women working full-time, year-round collectively lose $44.4 billion to the wage gaps within those occupations (Mason & Robbins, 2023). Occupations that employ a larger share of women pay lower wages even after accounting for characteristics of the workers and job, such as education, skills and experience (Glynn & Boesch, 2022).

Women-Dominated Occupations

	% Women	Men's Median Earnings	Women's Median Earnings	Annual Difference
Preschool & kindergarten teachers	97%	$38,933	$34,472	-$4,461
Child Care workers	95%	$36,302	$26,820	-$9,482
Speech-language pathologists	94%	$82,439	$72,470	-$9,969
Executive secretaries & executive administrative assistants	94%	$63,168	$66,750	$3,582
Dental assistants	93%	$46,858	$37,080	-$9,778
Secretaries & administrative assistants (except legal, medical & executive)	93%	$50,397	$43,062	-$7,335
Medical assistants	91%	$40,256	$36,930	-$3,326
Medical records specialists	91%	$62,677	$47,679	-$14,998
Veterinary technologists & technicians	90%	$41,083	$36,111	-$4,972

U.S. Dept. of Labor, Women's Bureau, Employment & Earnings by Occupation, 2022

Even within women-dominated jobs, women are paid less on average than men in the same job. **For example, women represent 95% of child care workers nationally, but earn only 74% of what their male counterparts earn** (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2022), which translates to an average annual pay gap of $9,482. In New York State, 94% of child care workers are women and 54% are people of color (Patel et al., 2023). Among occupations where at least 90% of the workers are women, only women executive secretaries and executive administrative assistants have annual median earnings higher than men's.

Occupations, cont.

Jobs in the care economy - child care, home health aides, personal care aides - pay significantly below average wages, despite the importance of these occupations. These and other occupations dominated by women are less likely to offer employer-provided benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, and retirement plans than occupations dominated by men. **Only 64% of workers in Service occupations, where 1 in 5 Black women and 1 in 4 Latina women work, have access to paid sick time**, compared to 96% of workers in Management, Business, and Financial occupations, where more than 1 in 5 White men work (Hegewisch & Gartner, 2024). Underpaying and undervaluing women-dominated occupations is detrimental to the economic security of women and their families, as well as the economy overall.

Devaluation of Women-Dominated Occupations

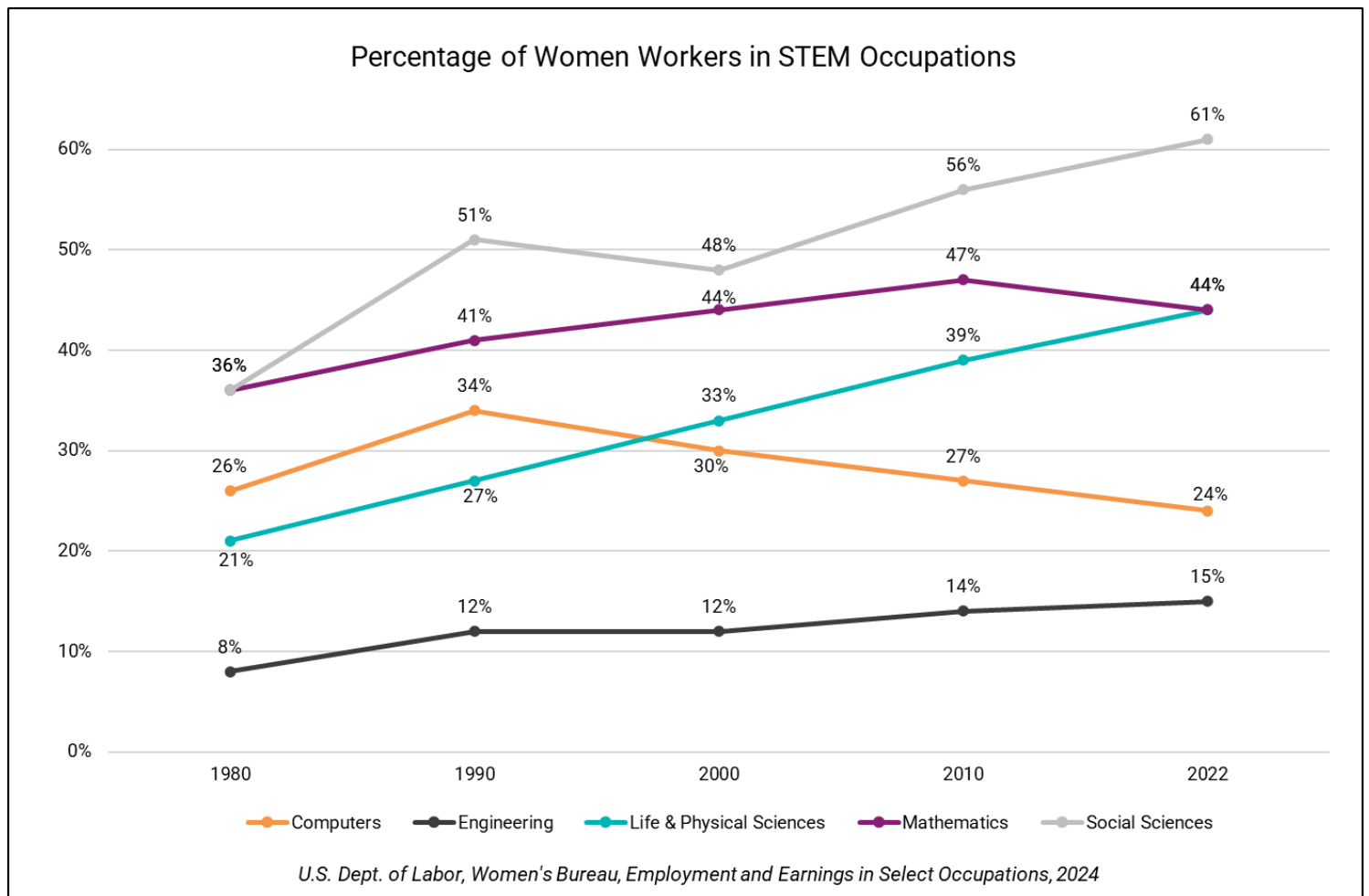|	Women's Median Earnings	Men's Median Earnings	% Women in Occupation
Child Care workers	$26,820	$36,302	95.2%
Landscaping & groundskeeping workers	$29,617	$34,586	5.6%
Personal care aides	$31,605	$34,036	79.4%
Home health aides	$31,744	$34,527	86.5%
Food processing workers	$37,864	$45,556	31.1%
First-Line supervisors of retail sales workers	$43,654	$57,730	43.1%
Postal service mail carriers	$56,680	$64,813	37.5%

U.S. Dept. of Labor, Women's Bureau, Employment & Earnings by Occupation, 2022

To dismantle occupational segregation, a concentrated effort is needed to challenge gender biases and societal norms, encourage diverse interests, and provide equal opportunities across all fields, regardless of gender. This effort must also involve supporting women entering traditionally male-dominated fields and raising wages in undervalued women-dominated jobs. The **historical roots of occupational segregation reflect the systemic sexism and racism embedded in the workforce**, which costs women, particularly women of color, billions in lost wages each year. While women have always been critical contributors to the economy, their work has too often been undervalued and undercompensated. Addressing this imbalance is key to creating a more equitable and innovative society.

STEM

Women have made significant progress in the science, technology, engineering, and math workforces over the past several decades, but still experience occupational segregation in many STEM fields. **Overall, women's representation in STEM fields increased from 14% in 1980 to 26% in 2022** (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2024b), but more progress has been made in some fields than others. Between 1980 and 2022, the share of women in Social Sciences increased significantly from 36% to 61%, even surpassing women's representation in the overall workforce (47%). Meanwhile, during the same time period, the share of women in computer occupations actually decreased slightly from 26% to 24%, despite increasing to 34% in 1990.

Percentage of Women Workers in STEM Occupations

U.S. Dept. of Labor, Women's Bureau, Employment and Earnings in Select Occupations, 2024

STEM occupations are some of the fastest-growing and highest-paid jobs. **The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects STEM jobs to grow by 10.4% in the next 10 years,** compared to 3.6% growth for non-STEM jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). In order for women to reap the benefits of this growth, we must encourage and support them in pursuing STEM careers, remove barriers, and change perceptions of STEM fields. Barriers like discrimination, stereotypes, and biases steer women away from these careers, and need to be dismantled in order to improve representation of women in STEM.

Pay Gap

Nationwide, in occupations that pay less than $30,000 per year, 2 out of every 3 full-time workers are women (Chun-Hoon, 2023). In jobs paying an average of $100,000 or more per year, fewer than 1 in 3 full-time workers are women. **Even when working full-time in the same occupation, women and people of color tend to be paid less than their male counterparts.** Addressing the gender wage gap requires supporting women in entering traditionally male-dominated fields, raising wages in women-dominated sectors, and reducing systemic barriers such as workplace discrimination and caregiving responsibilities that limit women's economic mobility.

Median Weekly Earnings for Full-Time Workers by Occupation, 2023

Legend: White Women, Black Women, Hispanic Women, Asian Women, White Men, Black Men, Hispanic Men, Asian Men

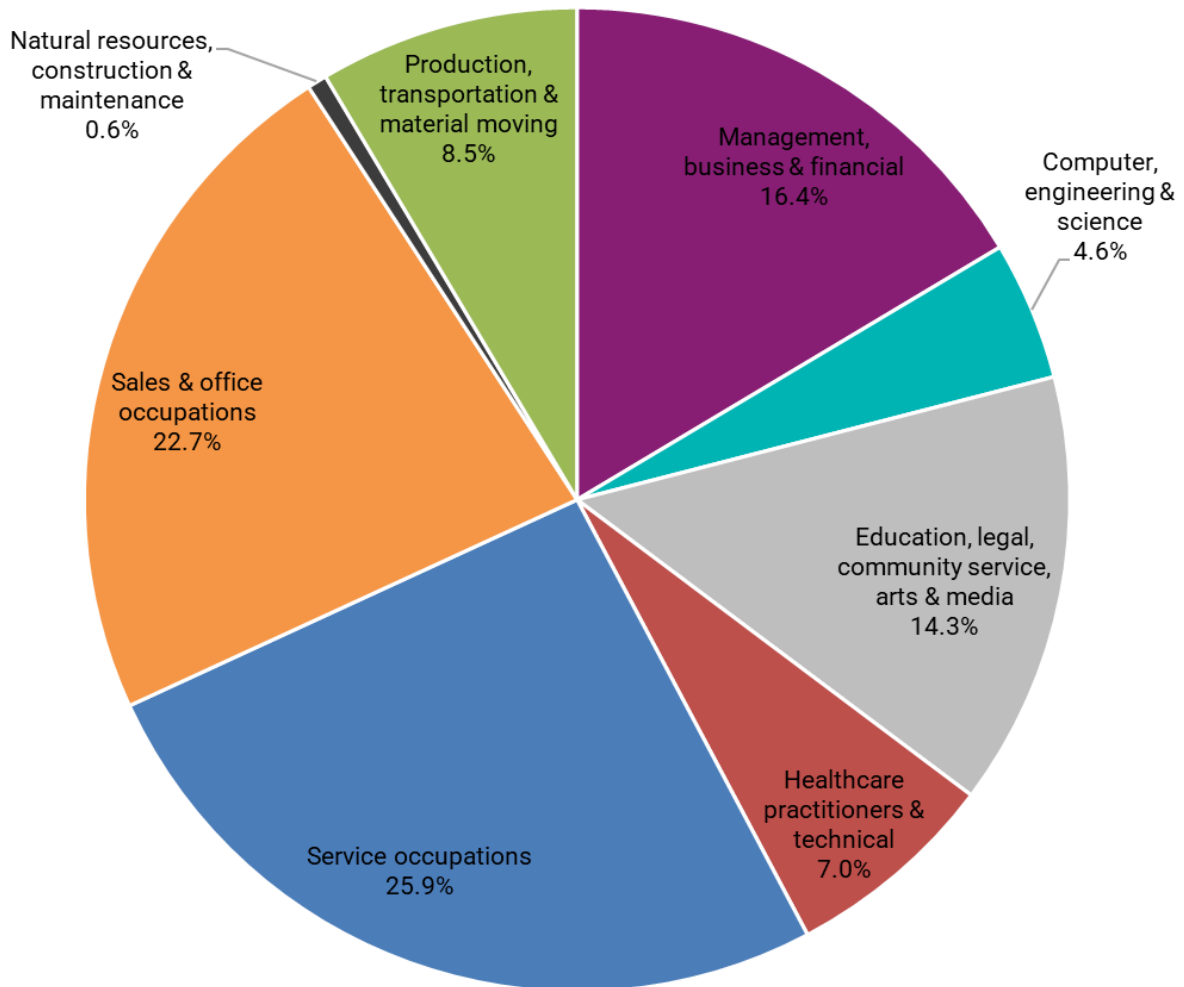*Institute for Women's Policy Research, Fact Sheet C521, March 2024*
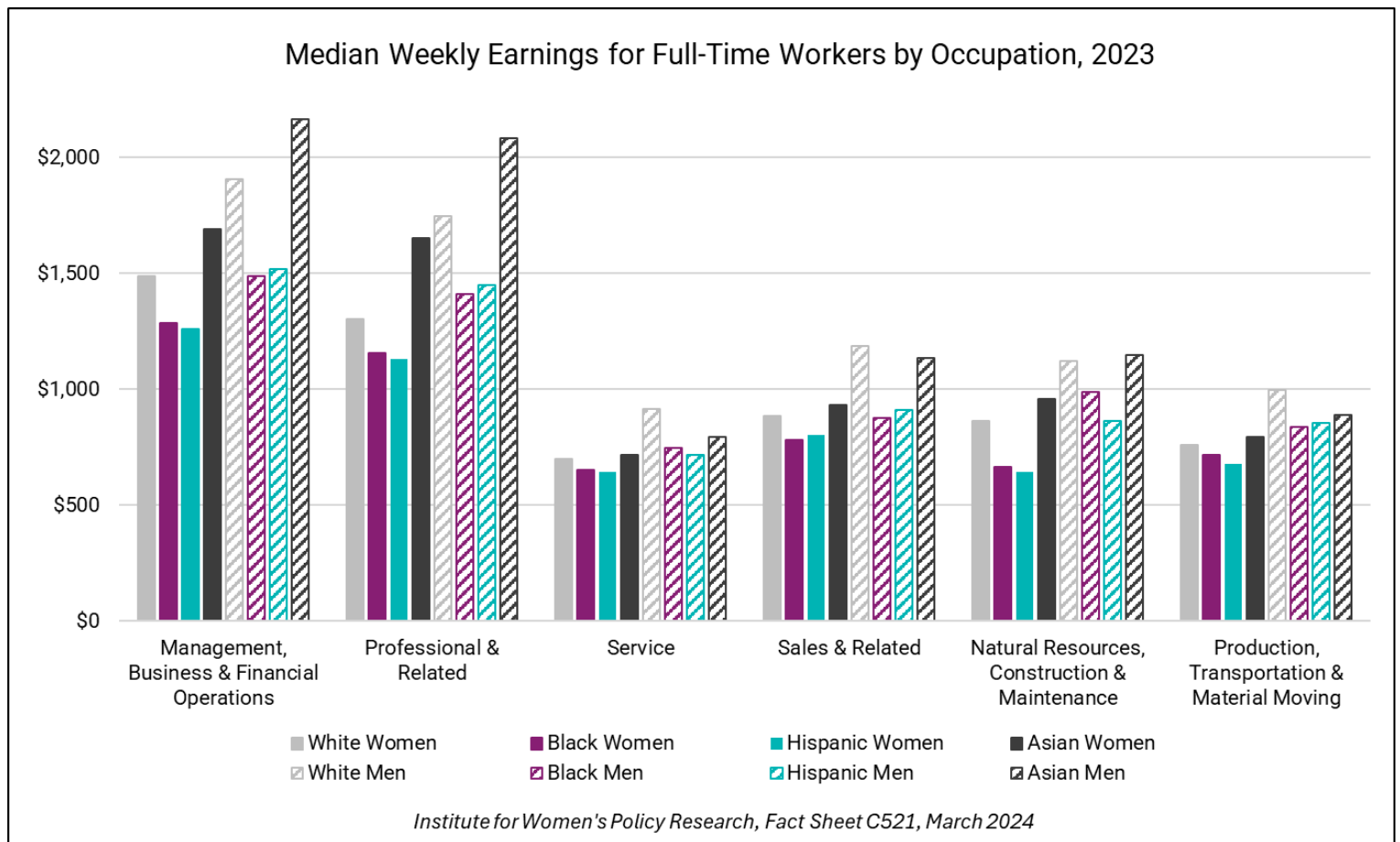
Significant income disparities persist in median weekly earnings for full-time workers in 2023 across various occupations based on race and gender. **White and Asian men consistently have higher earnings**, particularly in high-paying sectors like management and finance, **while women of color, especially Black and Hispanic women, earn the least.** In occupations such as service and sales, the wage gap narrows but remains present. Asian men also earn relatively high wages, especially in professional and construction-related fields, whereas Asian women, though earning more than other racial groups, still trail behind men (Hegewisch & Gartner, 2024). The data highlights persistent wage inequality, emphasizing the need for policy changes to address racial and gender-based income disparities in the U.S. workforce.

Local Statistics

Where Women Work in Buffalo, NY

- Natural resources, construction & maintenance 0.6%
- Production, transportation & material moving 8.5%
- Management, business & financial 16.4%
- Computer, engineering & science 4.6%
- Education, legal, community service, arts & media 14.3%
- Healthcare practitioners & technical 7.0%
- Service occupations 25.9%
- Sales & office occupations 22.7%

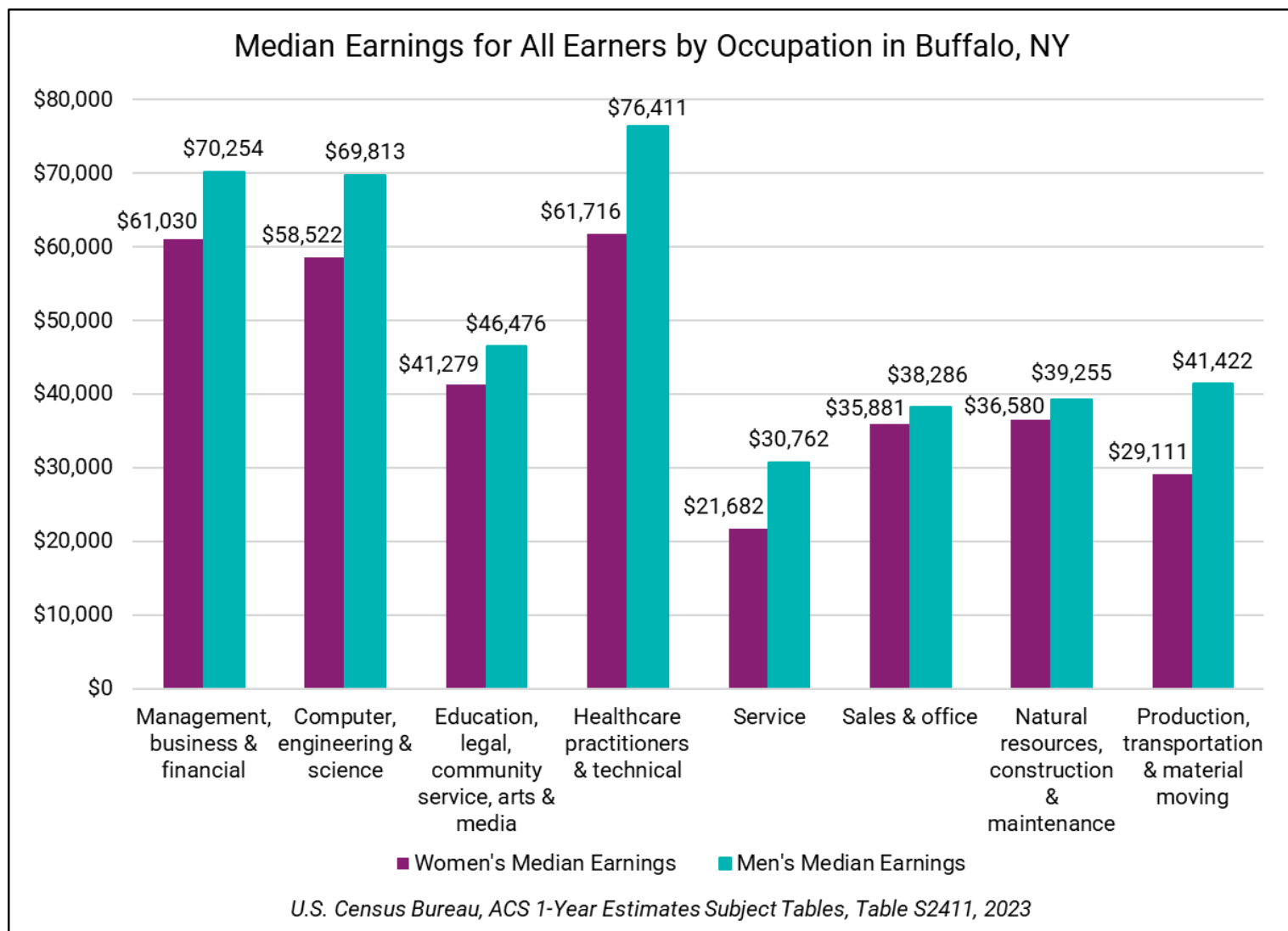*U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2401, 2023*

In Buffalo, the largest portion of women, **25.9%, are employed in service occupations**, followed closely by sales and office occupations, which account for 22.7% of women workers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023b). Management, business, and financial jobs also represent a significant portion, employing 16.4% of women. In contrast, women are underrepresented in fields such as natural resources, construction, and maintenance, where only 0.6% of women work. The chart highlights the occupational segregation of women, with fewer women in higher-paying fields such as computer, engineering, and science (4.6%), and a substantial concentration in lower-paying sectors like service and sales roles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023b). This segregation contributes to the gender pay gap, as fields with a higher representation of women tend to offer lower wages and fewer benefits.

Local Statistics, cont.

Median Earnings for All Earners by Occupation in Buffalo, NY

Occupation	Women's Median Earnings	Men's Median Earnings
Management, business & financial	$61,030	$70,254
Computer, engineering & science	$58,522	$69,813
Education, legal, community service, arts & media	$41,279	$46,476
Healthcare practitioners & technical	$61,716	$76,411
Service	$21,682	$30,762
Sales & office	$35,881	$38,286
Natural resources, construction & maintenance	$36,580	$39,255
Production, transportation & material moving	$29,111	$41,422

U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2411, 2023

The median earnings for men and women across various occupations in Buffalo, NY reveal a persistent gender pay gap. **In every occupational category, men's median earnings surpass those of women**. For example, in health care, a women-dominated field, women earn a median of $61,716, while men in the same field make $76,411 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023a). Similarly, in management, business, and financial sectors, women earn $61,030 compared to men's $70,254. The gap is especially wide in service occupations, where women earn just $21,682, while men make $30,762 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023a). These disparities highlight how occupational segregation and systemic inequalities contribute to the wage gap, underscoring the need for measures that promote pay equity.

Take Action!

1. Join a mentoring program like WNYWF's Ready, Set LEAD!
<ins>Learn more about Ready, Set, LEAD!:</ins>

2. Learn more about occupational segregation. Join us for our Pathways to Progress Speaker Series - Occupational Segregation on October 23 , 2024 from 12pm-1pm. <ins>For more information on the series:</ins>

3. Know the facts and educate your community!

Utilize this white paper as your guide to data and research on poverty to educate your community.

Conclusion

Discrimination and stereotypes have historically funneled women, particularly women of color, into limited career paths, stifling their potential and deepening systemic inequality. Implicit biases—unconscious attitudes and stereotypes—profoundly shape educational and occupational choices. These biases, ingrained from an early age, steer women and marginalized groups toward specific roles, narrowing their opportunities and reinforcing occupational segregation across industries.

To break down occupational segregation, robust policy reforms are essential. Ensuring equal access for women across all sectors requires enacting legislation for equal pay, gender-inclusive hiring practices, and opportunities for leadership advancement. Investments in education and skills development, particularly in programs that encourage girls and women to pursue STEM fields and vocational training in trades, are crucial steps forward. Additionally, creating mentorship opportunities and professional networks can provide vital support for women entering male-dominated industries, helping them navigate challenges and advance their careers.

Fostering a cultural shift to dismantle gender stereotypes, starting in early education and extending into professional environments, is essential. Schools, workplaces, and media must collaborate to promote diverse role models and normalize women in all professions, breaking down outdated gender roles and empowering future women leaders. By enabling women to thrive in any career, we not only build a more dynamic economy but also create a more just and inclusive society where everyone can contribute to shared success. Gender equity in career opportunities benefits individuals, organizations, and communities, paving the way for a more prosperous future.

References

Chun-Hoon, W. (2023, March 14). 5 Fast Facts: The gender wage gap. U.S. Department of Labor Blog. https://blog.dol.gov/2023/03/14/5-fast-facts-the-gender-wage-gap

Glynn, S., & Boesch, D. (2022, March 15). Connecting the dots: "Women's work" and the wage gap. U.S. Department of Labor Blog. https://blog.dol.gov/2022/03/15/connecting-the-dots-womens-work-and-the-wage-gap

Hegewisch, A., & Gartner, H. (2024, March). Women earn less than men whether they work in the same or different occupations. Institute for Women's Policy Research. Fact Sheet #C521. https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Occupational-Wage-Gap-2024-Fact-Sheet-1.pdf

Mason, J., & Robbins, K. (2023). Women's work is undervalued, and it's costing us billions. National Partnership for Women & Families. https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/womens-work-is-undervalued.pdf

Patel, S., Steffey, K., Koczak, S., & Meichtry, K. (2023). 2023 Childcare in New York State. New York State Department of Labor, Division of Research & Statistics. https://dol.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2024/02/2023-child-care-report.pdf

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024, August 29). Employment in STEM occupations, 2023 and projected 2033, Table 1.11. https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/stem-employment.htm

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023a). Occupation by sex & median earnings in past 12 months for the civilian employed population 16 years & over. ASC 1-year estimates subject tables. Table S2411, 2023. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S2411

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023b). Occupation by sex for the civilian employed population 16 years and over. ASC 1-year estimates subject tables. Table S2401, 2023. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2019.S2401

U.S. Department of Labor. (2022). Employment & earnings by occupation. https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/Employmentearningsoccupationdatatable2022.xlsx

U.S. Department of Labor. (2024, March). Still bearing the cost: Black and Hispanic women lose billions due to job segregation. https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/media/BearingTheCostReport2024.pdf

U.S. Department of Labor (2024b, April). Percentage of women workers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/data/occupations-stem

Contact

WNY Women's Foundation
741 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14203
(716) 217- 9056
www.wnywomensfoundation.org
wnyfdn@wnywfdn.org

(f) @WNY Women's Foundation
(ig) @wnywomensfoundation

WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

www.wnywomensfoundation.org

Pathways to Progress: Accelerating the Possibilities **accompanying virtual speaker series is sponsored by Impressia Bank.**