

Lessons from Implementing Pay Equity in the United States

Dr Heidi Hartmann
Institute for Women's Policy Research
Washington, DC

Abstract

Pay equity adjustments to predominantly female occupations have been implemented in the United States only in limited circumstances. Most of the cases we know about have occurred in the state civil services, where wage scales are public information and political pressure can be organized to pass specialized legislation requiring job evaluation studies and appropriating funds for pay adjustments. It is also likely that some private sector employers have implemented comparable-worth type pay adjustments. The U.S. courts, however, have generally not held that the employment title (Title VII) of the 1964 Civil Rights Act requires equal pay for jobs of equal value. A new bill, the Fair Pay Act, requiring employers to implement equal pay for jobs of comparable worth, has been introduced in the Congress for the past several years, so far without result. A study by the Institute for Women's Policy Research and the Urban Institute of the 20 states that had adjusted the pay rates of one or more female dominated jobs by 1990 found that for the 14 states for which information was available, all succeeded in raising the female/male wage ratio in their civil service, from 1 to 8 percentage points, closing the gender wage gap by 4 to 31 percent. The ending gender ratios ranged from 74 to 88 percent, higher than the national ratio of 71 percent in 1992. Recent IWPR research shows that job segregation by gender and unequal pay among jobs requiring comparable amounts of education remain significant in the U.S. labor market.