

## **Low Pay and Pay Equity—the United States Picture**

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### **Abstract**

Women remain a disproportionate share of low-wage workers in the U.S. A new study published by the Institute for Women's Policy Research that looks at women and men's work careers over 15 years finds that women are 90 percent of the persistent prime age adult workers (aged 26-59 and in the labor market every year) who average \$15,000 or less per year. Women are also 60 percent of those workers earning the federal minimum wage (\$5.15 per hour). Both pay equity remedies and minimum wage increases would help women at the bottom of the labor market. An analysis by Deborah Figart and June Lapidus of the US situation in the early 1990s showed that both policies would raise women's wages and reduce the proportion of women earning poverty-level wages (about \$15,000 for a family of three). Many argue that neither a minimum wage increase nor a comparable worth policy is targeted at low-income workers, but in fact both reforms would reduce poverty substantially, especially among single mothers who are moving from welfare to work.