**Fiscal Facts: Women’s earnings remain lower than men’s in Milwaukee County and nationally**

In 2018, women continued to earn less than men for full-time work both locally and nationally. According to Census data, the median annual earnings of women in Milwaukee County ($41,206) was about 85% of the median among men ($48,413). By comparison, women’s median annual earnings were just 76% of men’s in neighboring Waukesha County and 79% of men’s nationally.

The comparatively smaller gender pay gap in Milwaukee County appears influenced more by relatively low earnings among men than progress toward equal earnings among women. The median wages of Milwaukee County men were almost 8% lower than the median for men nationally, while the median for Milwaukee County women was just 1% lower than the national median for women.

Although the pay gap has shrunk somewhat in recent years, it persists despite women being slightly more likely than men to hold college degrees. This pay gap varies considerably by occupation, with women underrepresented in many of the highest-wage occupations, and is influenced by gender differences in employment between and within occupational groups. Family obligations, gender discrimination, social forces, and other factors also play important roles.

A large body of national research suggests that among those factors contributing to the gender wage gap is the role of women as the main family caregiver. Women are more likely than men to take time away from the workforce to care for children, parents, or other family members, in part because there is more societal pressure on them to do so. Working women also are more likely than men to work part-time and to choose roles that allow for greater flexibility, which reduces their likelihood of choosing certain higher-paying professions and of ascending to the highest positions within many fields.

While the magnitude of economic upheaval stemming from the COVID-19 crisis suggests the gender pay gap could be affected, it is too early to say how. Initial reports suggest women workers have been hit harder by job losses than men, which could exacerbate the pay gap. However, continuing more flexible work-from-home arrangements beyond the pandemic could lead to a decrease over time by opening the door for more women to enter into higher-wage occupations.

*This information is provided to Wisconsin Newspaper Association members as a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at wispolicyforum.org.*