



### If the Job Fits: Rethinking American Occupations to Put Women on the Path to Prosperity

What do an IT support specialist and a library assistant have in common? A new report by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) examined 473 occupations to look for opportunities for women in higher paying, middle-skill jobs. Library assistants—8 in 10 of whom are women—get paid almost \$24,000 less per year than IT support specialists, nearly 3 in 4 of whom are men. Based on the analysis, these two occupations share many similar characteristics, and with some additional training and education, library assistants could become IT support specialists, improving their own earnings and filling growing demand for IT workers.

This is a critical study because the majority of workers whose full-time weekly earnings trap them in near-poverty are women.

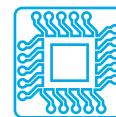
Many middle-skill jobs — those occupations that require more than a high school education, but not a college degree — pay a living wage and can serve as a stepping stone to a higher-paying career. These well-paying middle-skill jobs include occupations such as truck drivers, welders, and quality control inspectors, among many others.

In many of the sectors in which employers have the most trouble filling jobs, women make up a small percentage of the workforce. **Could women be the answer to the rising need for middle-skill workers?**

*American companies are having trouble filling these middle-skill jobs — especially in the growing industries driving our national economy.*



MANUFACTURING



IT



TRANSPORTATION

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities, and societies. The Institute's research strives to give voice to the needs of women from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds across the income spectrum and to ensure that their perspectives enter the public debate on ending discrimination and inequality, improving opportunity, and increasing economic security for women and families. The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research and to build a diverse network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women's studies and public policy and public administration programs at The George Washington University.

IWPR examined middle-skill occupations in the United States to understand growing job sectors, women's roles in the middle-skill economy, and how to connect women workers to the jobs that can lift them out of poverty.

IWPR undertook an innovative analysis of data from the Department of Labor, looking at 473 occupations and 252 different job attributes that describe the nature and duties of each occupation. The research sought to understand:

- which good jobs are growing the fastest;
- how many women these jobs currently employ;
- what skills and experience these occupations require;
- and how prepared women are to fill these jobs.

The report finds that women are the majority of workers in middle-skill jobs, but the middle-skill jobs that women have pay much less than those held primarily by men. That is true despite the fact that the middle-skill jobs that are mainly done by women can require more education.

Women are the backbone of the 21st century economy, but they're not getting their fair share. To put themselves on a pathway to decent earnings and a lifelong career, women need those jobs that will give them the highest return on their investments in education and training. At the same time, employers need women to make up the skilled workforce they need to grow.

## ARE WOMEN GETTING LEFT OUT OF THE GROWING ECONOMY?



**Women hold 83% of the jobs in middle-skill occupations** that pay less than \$30,000 per year.



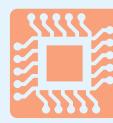
**Women are 55% of workers** in all middle-skill occupations.



But among good, growing middle-skill occupations that pay at least \$35,000 per year, **women make up just 36% of job-holders**.



In manufacturing, there will be 533,000 good middle-skill jobs available over the next decade. Currently, **only 7 percent of workers in these jobs are women**.



In information technology, there will be 240,000 good middle-skill jobs available over the next decade. Currently **only 29 percent of workers in these jobs are women**.



In transportation, distribution, and logistics, there will be 1.3 million middle-skill jobs available over the next decade. Currently, **only 9 percent of workers in these jobs are women**.



If just **10%** of women workers moved into similar but higher paying jobs, their **median earnings would increase by more than 50%**.



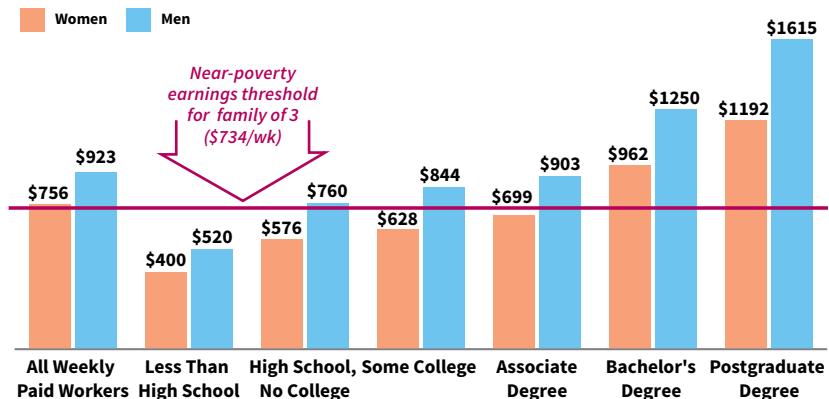
## A Problem of Perception

The divide between men and women in middle-skill jobs is due, in part, to conventional wisdom about occupations and gender roles. Predominantly male-dominated occupations, like IT support specialists, may seem dramatically different from those occupations typically filled by women, like librarian assistants.

A library assistant can build on her skills and experience by choosing a traditional pathway, studying six years to obtain the bachelor and master's degrees typically required for librarians. Instead, she can opt to build on her experience by pursuing an associate's degree to become an IT support specialist, which requires about half of the years in college and promises annual earnings that are as high if not higher than librarians.

But what IWPR found is that differences between these jobs are often superficial — when it comes to the nature of the work and the qualities

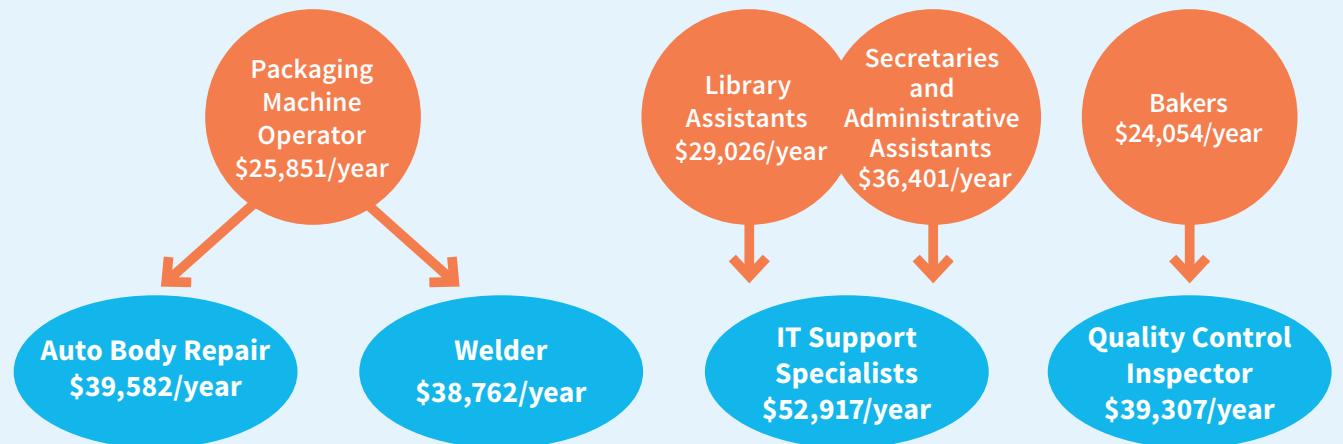
### WOMEN EARN LESS THAN MEN AT EVERY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL



required to succeed, these jobs are closely related. The fastest-growing, highest-paid jobs are skilled occupations: any worker requires training to do them. But the analysis shows that women are just as likely as men to have the prerequisites for doing these jobs — they simply aren't given the opportunities to prove it.

## THE ON-RAMP

The report found that many of the jobs currently held by American women can serve as on-ramps to higher paying jobs that will anchor the 21st century economy. In three growing sectors — manufacturing, IT and transportation — the report identified jobs dominated by women with many similar traits and duties as higher-paying jobs dominated by men.



IWPR estimates that if **10 percent** of working women moved into the closest jobs that required similar skills but provided higher wages, **the median income of these women would increase by over 50 percent**.



# WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

This research shines a light on a clear solution to two separate problems. Our country can address both industry shortages of skilled labor and the disproportionate number of women who are living in or near poverty if employers, workforce developers and policymakers come together to take action.

For **employers**, it means implementing new ways to attract and retain female talent. This should include providing training and mentoring programs for employees at all levels; offering flexible workplace policies; and establishing a culture that provides a safe and welcoming work environment. It also means ensuring that hiring and recruiting processes encourage and do not discriminate against women.

For **workforce developers**, it means making information about these middle-skill jobs available to women and encouraging them to get the training they need for better, higher-paying jobs. Developers should also ensure that they're delivering career and technical education in a way that appeals to both women and men regardless of the occupation.

For **lawmakers**, it means enabling institutions like the Department of Labor to fund technical support to both employers and job-seekers and to hold employers, workforce developers, and educators accountable for integrating women into these occupations. Pre-apprenticeship programs can help women step up to new opportunities.

To help find solutions, IWPR also launched an accompanying interactive website, [womenandgoodjobs.org](http://womenandgoodjobs.org), which includes a searchable database of well-paying middle-skill jobs, providing more examples of on-ramps for women into better jobs.

Today, women are missing out on opportunities to build careers that can support their families, while American companies are losing out on a skilled, educated workforce that can drive their success.

**In the 21st century, the U.S. can no longer afford for occupations to be segregated by sex.** To power the industries that drive America, it's important to match women workers with the skills for the jobs employers need to fill. Not only will it strengthen the economy, it will allow women and their families to exit the poverty that often comes with low-wage jobs.

This executive summary was prepared by the Institute for Women's Policy Research. It is part of a larger research project generously funded by the JPMorgan Chase Foundation as part of its *New Skills at Work* initiative. To see the full report, *Pathways to Equity: Narrowing the Wage Gap by Improving Women's Access to Good Middle-Skill Jobs*, visit [www.womenandgoodjobs.org](http://www.womenandgoodjobs.org).