INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH

QUICK FIGURE

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Black Women Need Better Access to Leadership Positions—and Equal Pay When They Get There

Attaining postsecondary education offers economic mobility for Black women; however, it is not enough to eliminate the disparities they experience in advancing to leadership roles. Black women in the United States continue to experience a steady increase in successfully earning college degrees[1] but are significantly less likely to achieve management and professional positions than their White male counterparts.

In 2024, only 7.7 percent of all workers in professional and related occupations—such as legal occupations, engineers, and health care practitioners—were Black women, while 28.7 percent were White men (Table 1). The percentages were slightly lower for management, business, and financial operations occupations, with Black women making up only 6.1 percent, while 36.2 percent were White men (Table 1).

Table 1. Black Women and White Men, Full-Time Year-Round Workers by Occupation Level

Occupations	Number of workers by occupation	Number of Black women workers by occupation	Number of White men by occupation	Black women in occupations as % of all workers	White men in occupations as % of all workers
All occupations (100%)	120,053,000	8,444,000	38,591,000	7.0%	32.1%
Management, business, and financial operations occupations	24,084,000	1,479,000	8,725,000	6.1%	36.2%
Professional and related occupations	31,967,000	2,473,000	9,167,000	7.7%	28.7%

Source: IWPR analysis of data from the US Department of Labor, "Table A-2. Usual Weekly Earnings of Employed Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Intermediate Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity and Non-Hispanic Ethnicity, Annual Average 2024" (Washington, DC: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished).
Notes: Workers ages 16 or older. Full-time is defined as 35 or more hours per week. Data for White workers is for White alone, non-Hispanic; data for Black workers may include Hispanics. Hispanics may be of any race. Annual averages of median weekly earnings.

Black women are not only less likely to occupy leadership roles than their White male counterparts, but once they rise to these positions, they receive less pay. In 2024, across all occupations, Black women received median weekly earnings of $922 compared to $1,423 for White men, representing a $501 earnings gap per week (Table 2). For management, business, and financial occupations, the earnings gap increased to $615 per week, with Black women in these positions earning $1,345—significantly less than the $1,960 White men earned. The earnings gap per week widened to $658 for professional and related occupations, with Black women earning $1,187 compared to $1,845 for White men.

These weekly earnings cumulate to a significant difference over the course of a year, with Black women in management, business, and financial occupations earning a median annual income of $69,940, compared to $101,920 paid to their White male counterparts—an annual earnings gap of

$31,980.[2] Black women in professional and related occupations earned a median annual income of $61,724, compared to $95,940 earned by their White male counterparts—an annual earnings gap of $34,216. **These gaps add up to thousands of dollars less for Black women to pay for housing, groceries, child care, and investing in education or retirement.**

It is also important to note that the occupational pay disparities are not related to education differences: The pay disparity between Black women and White men persists at every degree level, widens at higher levels of education, and is the greatest for those with professional degrees.[3]

Table 2. Median Weekly Earnings for Black Women and White Men, Full-Time Year-Round Workers by Occupation Level

Occupations	Black women	White men	Earnings gap each week	Median weekly earnings ratio
All occupations (100%)	$922	$1,423	$501	64.8%
Management, business, and financial operations occupations	$1,345	$1,960	$615	68.6%
Professional and related occupations	$1,187	$1,845	$658	64.3%

Source: IWPR analysis of data from the US Department of Labor, "Table A-2. Usual Weekly Earnings of Employed Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Intermediate Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity and Non-Hispanic Ethnicity, Annual Average 2024" (Washington, DC: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished).
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Unfortunately for Black women in the United States, the intersection of structural racism and sexism has a negative impact on their career advancement and pay outcomes. Addressing these disparities requires our legislators to advocate and support policies that strengthen workplace equity, supplier diversity, economic inclusion, pay equity, and pay transparency.

For more information on the pay disparities Black women face, read our latest fact sheet.

This Quick Figure was prepared by Dr. Robyn Watson Ellerbe, with data analysis conducted by Cristy Mendoza and Dr. Melissa Holly Mahoney. Thank you to our key funders for their generous support of IWPR's core research and flagship products.

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[1] Kiely Hurst, "U.S. women are outpacing men in college completion, including in every major racial and ethnic group" (Washington DC, Pew Research Center, 2024), https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/11/18/us-women-are-outpacing-men-in-college-completion-including-in-every-major-racial-and-ethnic-group/.

[2] Calculations based on weekly salaries for each occupation group are annualized by multiplying them by 52 weeks.

[3] Melissa Mahoney, Robyn Watson Ellerbe, Cristy Mendoza, and Miranda Peterson, "Across Degrees, Titles, and States, Black Women Earn Just 64 Cents on the Dollar" (Washington DC, Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2025), https://iwpr.org/black-womens-equal-pay-day-2025/. Table 4: Median Annual Earnings for Black Women and White Men: Full-Time Year-Round Workers, by Education Level and Table 5: Median Annual Earnings for Black Women and White Men: All Workers, by Education Level.