

HR Compliance Library, ¶33,950, Gender diversity: Issues of women at work

There are distinct differences between diversity issues and discrimination issues when discussing gender. Discrimination issues include:

- Equal pay,
- Sexual harassment, and
- Discrimination in the terms and conditions of employment such as promotions.

Gender wage gap. The issue of pay includes both gender diversity and discrimination issues. The wage gap between men and women has narrowed since enactment of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, but women still earn substantially less than men. Even after controlling for differences in skills and job characteristics, women still earn less than men.

A fact sheet released in 2012 by the Institute for Women's Policy Research shows that the gender wage gap has not narrowed during the last decade (^{.05}). This is in stark contrast to previous decades. During the 1990s the wage gap narrowed by four percentage points and during the 1980s by over 10 percentage points.

Gender diversity issues are similar to those of discrimination but differ in that the issues arise out of the presence of and value of women in the workforce, including an environment that supports a balance of work and family for women and men. Major gender diversity issues include:

- **Positive role of women in the workplace.** Many proponents of gender diversity suggest that women contribute something different and important to the workplace and that the presence of representative numbers of women in the workplace demonstrates a commitment by the employer to the value of women in the workforce.
- **Glass ceiling.** "Glass ceiling" is a term that has come to mean the presence of discrimination at the higher management and professional levels within corporations and associations such as professional firms. This concept implicitly recognizes that women have been employed in great numbers; however, senior level jobs are still filled by males. In addition to the relatively few (compared to lower ranks) women in executive roles, there have also been several high-profile female executives that have either left their positions in order to devote more time to personal issues including family, or who have publicly stated that the price of success at a senior level is one that (at least for them) included not having children and marrying later than the norm. These women argue that the rules are the same for men and women—the opportunity to achieve executive status in a highly competitive environment requires total dedication and an almost total time commitment. They stress that no one can "have it all."
- **Family-friendly programs.** Traditionally, women were viewed as caretakers. Some companies have tried to encourage and enable women (and increasingly men as well) to remain in the workforce by recognizing their family obligations and taking steps to assist them in the form of on-site child care and flexible working hours.

Footnotes

- .05 Fact sheet released September 14, 2012, by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (www.iwpr.org), 1200 18th Street NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20036; telephone: 202-785-5100.