WASHINGTON, D.C. (Achieve3000, October 1, 2014). Are U.S. women and men treated equally at work? According to a 2013 study by the Pew Research Center, the answer is no. Women do have more opportunities than in the past. However, there's still a long way to go to achieve gender equality.

The study found that women, who make up half of the U.S. workforce, are increasingly moving into higher career positions. This is true in both government and business. This may be due to women's educational gains. Thirty-eight percent of American women ages 25 to 32 hold bachelor's degrees (four-year college degrees). That's compared with 31 percent of men in that age group. As a result, 49 percent of employed workers with at least a bachelor's degree in 2013 were women. That's up from 36 percent in 1980. This means there are more women in skilled positions. U.S. women are increasingly entering fields traditionally dominated by men. Those fields include law, medicine, management, and science. These higher-level positions also come with higher paychecks.

According to the Pew study, however, the median hourly wage in 2012 for young millennial women was 93 percent of that for their male peers. True equality would put that statistic at 100 percent.

Why aren't American women earning as much as American men? What accounts for this "pay gap"?

More women are entering high-level jobs. But low-wage jobs are still occupied mostly by women. U.S. women are much more likely than men, the study shows, to take home the nation's minimum wage. In addition, U.S. women are twice as likely as U.S. men to work part time in order to care for children and other families. They are also more likely to take time off from work for the same purpose. Among the women ages 25 to 32 in the survey, 59 percent said that being a working parent makes it harder to advance in a career. Just 19 percent of men in that age group said the same thing. Across all age groups, 22 percent of women and 9 percent of men report having quit jobs for family reasons at some point during their working lives.

Women's time away from work may cost them opportunities for promotions and pay raises. While women ages 25 to 32 earn nearly as much as their male peers, women in their mid-30s and older earn only 84 percent of men at that age.
The study identified other factors that may contribute to the pay gap. Gender discrimination may cause U.S. women to be passed over for promotions and pay raises. In addition, women are less likely to ask for promotions and pay raises. Fewer young women say they aim to become a boss or top manager. Some 34 percent say they're not interested. That's compared with 24 percent of young men.

Andrew Cherlin is a sociology professor at Johns Hopkins University. "The [study] shows that [U.S. women] have made [a lot of] progress on gender equality in the workplace," Cherlin said. "But [this] progress has shown us more clearly what still needs to be accomplished. More doors are now open to women, but they can now see how far they are from equality in high-level jobs."

*The Associated Press contributed to this story.*

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**Dig Deeper**

In "Still a Tough Road," you read about a study on gender equality in the United States. Gender equality has been the goal of women's rights advocates for generations. Some of those advocates believe that bringing about equality requires an amendment to the U.S. Constitution. That amendment would read, in part:

Equality of rights under the law shall not be [limited] by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

This proposed amendment would be called the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Its goal would be to help end discrimination on the basis of gender in the U.S.

Why would people feel that the Constitution needs to be amended to protect women's rights?

In 1868, the states ratified the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which contained the "equal protection clause." This clause says that no state can deny any person "the equal protection of the laws." This means that states are required to treat all citizens equally. But some people argue that the equal protection clause does not do enough to protect women's rights. They argue that the ERA is necessary because it puts clearer limits on gender discrimination than anything currently in the Constitution.

The ERA was first proposed in 1923. Three years earlier, women in the U.S. had been granted the right to vote. However, their rights and opportunities were limited due to deep-rooted discrimination. Many jobs, particularly in management and other positions of power, were open only to men. The belief that women were not suited to these careers often prevented them from attending universities. Generally speaking, women were expected to do the housework. Men were expected to earn a paycheck and make the household decisions. Determined to expand opportunities, women's rights activists went to Washington, D.C. Lawmakers who supported their cause introduced the ERA in Congress. The ERA would be debated in Congress for decades.
Those who opposed the amendment offered a variety of arguments. Some opponents claimed that the ERA would threaten a way of life that had been in place for generations. Others said that certain laws were in place to protect women, particularly poor and working-class women. For example, some laws limited the amount of time that women could work on factory floors. Others prohibited women from fighting on the front lines in combat. Should the ERA be ratified, the opponents argued, these protections could be taken away. ERA supporters argued that the amendment would help all women by expanding opportunities.

Beginning in the 1950s, a new generation of women's rights activists began working in support of the ERA. By the late 1960s and 1970s, inspired in part by the civil rights movement, they became increasingly vocal and visible. Activists such as journalist Gloria Steinem wrote articles about the discrimination that American women faced every day. Women, they wrote, were often treated with a lack of respect, and their abilities were underestimated. With limited rights, they had limited opportunity to prove themselves.

The ERA had been introduced in nearly every Congressional session since 1923. Each time, it failed to pass. At times, there seemed to be little hope for the amendment. Then, in 1970, Steinem and other activists spoke before Congress in support of the ERA. The House of Representatives approved the measure. Two years later, the Senate did the same. But the amendment could not be added to the Constitution until it was ratified by three-fourths of the states (38 states). In the early 1970s, public opinion began to shift. More and more Americans supported the amendment. By 1973, 30 states had ratified the ERA.

ERA opponents responded by organizing a campaign against the amendment. Their arguments shifted public opinion once again. By 1977, 35 states had ratified the ERA, but movement toward full ratification slowed. There were no more ratifications between 1977 and 1982, the deadline for passage of the ERA.

Since 1982, attempts to revive the ERA by reintroducing it in Congress have been unsuccessful. As of 2014, women's rights—and the government’s power to make laws concerning them—continue to be debated in the United States. Many lawmakers continue to campaign in favor of the ERA.

**Dictionary**

*advocate (noun)*  somebody who supports or speaks in favor of something

*discrimination (noun)*  unfair acts against one group of people

*dominate (verb)*  to be most prominent in something

*factor (noun)*  something that causes a result

*minimum wage (noun)*  the least a worker can be paid each hour by law

*ratify (verb)*  to give formal approval to something

*sociology (noun)*  the study of society and how it changes over time