

The Workforce Investment Act Adult Program: How Women Fare

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) created programs designed to help participants obtain and maintain jobs, increase their earnings, and develop better occupational skills. Although WIA does not designate special assistance for women, they might benefit from targeted employment and training services because they are underrepresented in high-paying jobs. Women could benefit particularly from the Adult program, which gives high priority to serving low-income individuals and helping workers achieve self-sufficiency.

Published statistics on the WIA program indicate that women in the Adult program are substantially more likely than men to receive job training, but they earn considerably less after leaving the program. Mathematica's new study provides insight into how these patterns might be associated with differences between women and men in their attributes before enrolling in WIA programs, such as the employment barriers they faced.

The study found that women facing barriers before entering the Adult program were more likely to receive services than men, but their training tended to focus on different types of jobs. Less than half of the earnings gap between women and men could be explained by the differences between them before they joined the program and the services they received while participating in it. More research is needed to understand the gender differences in the focus of job training and how they might be related to the earnings gap between women and men after they leave the Adult program.

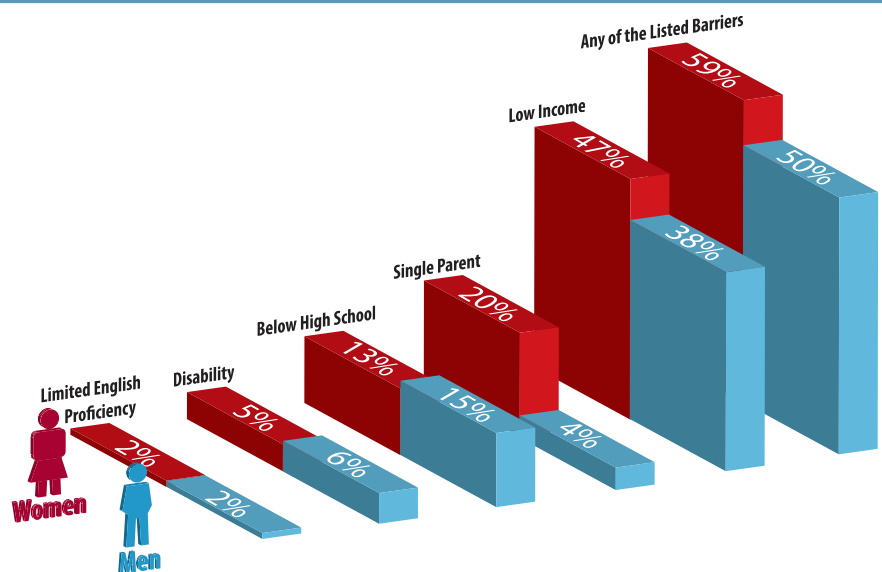
Common Employment Barriers Facing Women

About 60 percent of women in the Adult program faced at least one of five employment barriers examined in the study. Almost half had a low income, 20 percent were single mothers, and about 13 percent had not finished high school. About 25 percent faced two or more barriers. Younger women and minority women were most likely to start the Adult program facing one or more employment barriers. Substantially more women than men had a low income or were single parents when they joined the Adult program. Differences between women and men in other characteristics were less pronounced.

WIA Services and Employment Barriers

The study found that women facing greater employment barriers were more likely than other women to receive job training and specialized assistance through the Adult program. Training rates were higher among single parents and low-income women. Women faced with barriers were also more likely to receive supportive services, such as child care and transportation, as well as needs-related financial assistance. Most of the differences in WIA services received by women and men could be explained by employment barriers, other pre-enrollment attributes (such as demographics, education, and earnings), and the characteristics of their service areas (such as poverty and unemployment rates).

Prevalence of Employment Barriers



Women were more likely than men to face a barrier to gainful employment, specifically with regard to low income and single parenthood.

Gender Differences in Job Training Focus

Women and men tended to receive very different types of job training through the Adult program. For example, 52 percent of men, but only 7 percent of women, were trained for mechanical and transportation-related jobs. Women's training concentrated disproportionately on office and service jobs. These gender differences were so large

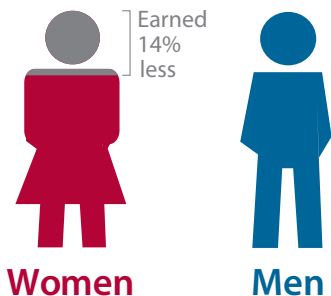
Training focus for women and men would be congruent only if at least half of the Adult program participants trained for a different type of job.

that the focus of training for women and men would be congruent only if at least half of the Adult program participants trained for a different type of job. Employment barriers, other pre-enrollment attributes, and service-area characteristics explained no more than 17 percent of the differences in the focus of job training.

Gender Gap in Earnings After Leaving the Program

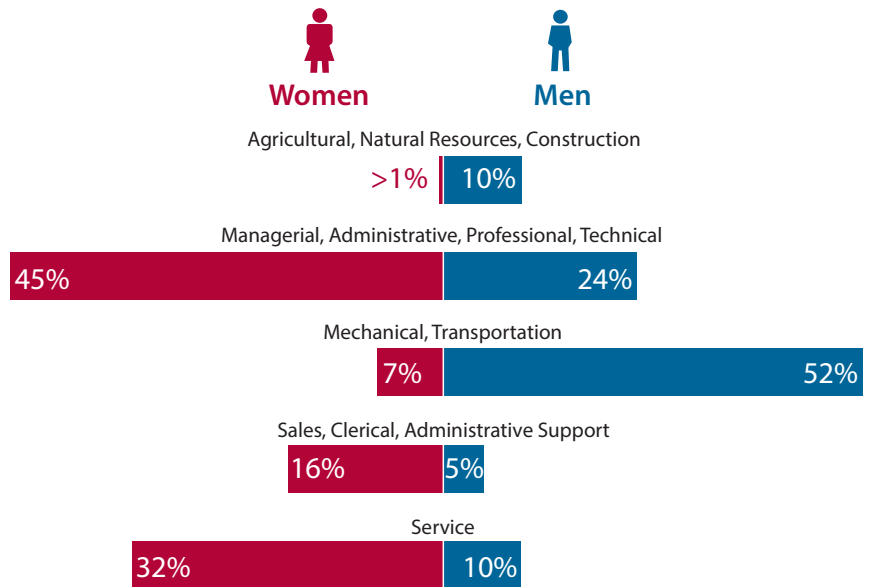
Gender gaps in earnings, but not in employment, were substantial in the first year after participants left the Adult program. About 74 percent of

Earnings Outcomes



Women earned 14 percent less than men during the first year after they left the WIA Adult program.

Focus of Job Training Received



Among those who received training, substantial differences between women and men were found in their occupational focus.

women and 73 percent of men became employed within one year after participating in the program. The study also examined a measure of average earnings that included all former participants—both workers and individuals who left the program but did not have jobs. Based on this measure, women earned on average about 14 percent less than men (\$13,421 versus \$15,539) in the year after they left the Adult program.

WIA Programs: Further Exploration

This study found that women and men in the WIA Adult program differed substantially in three respects: the barriers they faced before entering the program, the training they received while participating in the program, and their earnings after leaving the program. Most of the apparent female advantage in services received could be explained by the participants' pre-enrollment attributes and service-area characteristics. But there were large unexplained differences in the focus of their job training while in the Adult program and in their post-program earnings. New research on WIA program operations

and more measures of participants' attributes could enrich our understanding of the factors that contribute to the differences between women and men. Better quality data would also facilitate improved monitoring of how women fare in the Adult program.

This research was conducted by Mathematica Policy Research for the Women's Bureau at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and was sponsored by DOL's Chief Evaluation Office. The full report also includes a discussion of participants in the WIA Dislocated Worker program. The report is available on the U.S. Department of Labor website at www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/.