



Gender Wage Parity During COVID

An Analysis of New Jersey

This research examines the changing dynamics of gender wage parity in New Jersey during the COVID-19 pandemic. It investigates how factors, such as shifts in employment composition and industry, relate to changes in gender wage gaps across race/ethnicity.

>>> Highlights

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, although women left the labor force at a slightly higher rate than men, among those who remained, women entered full-time employment at a higher rate than their male counterparts. Conversely, men entered part-time employment at a higher rate than women. This suggests that while women were more likely to either remain outside of the labor force or secure full-time positions, men were more inclined to adapt by transitioning into part-time roles to stay employed amid changing economic conditions.
- Fueled by the movement of workers between sectors during the pandemic, in full-time employment, women's earnings were 85.33% of men's during COVID, up from 79.93% in the pre-COVID period. This represents a 6.76% decrease in the gender pay gap. In part-time employment, where women historically earned more than men, the female earnings premium decreased from 115.72% pre-COVID to 104.17% during COVID.
- Black women bore the brunt of the disruptions caused by the movement of workers between sectors during the pandemic, experiencing a setback in achieving gender wage parity: for Black women, the gender wage gap widened by 6.95% among full-time workers and by 16.50% among part-time workers. Meanwhile, White and Hispanic women saw progress towards closing the gender wage gap, although there was a slight increase in the part-time wage gap. Asian and

Pacific Islander women made significant strides, with a 9.59% improvement towards wage parity among full-time workers and a modest 4.05% improvement among part-time workers.

- In high-demand occupations such as construction, health care, health care support, and farming, there was a notable reduction in the gender wage gap, moving closer to wage parity. Conversely, traditionally male-dominated occupations such as tech & IT and science & research experienced setbacks, with widening disparities, highlighting ongoing challenges in achieving gender wage parity in these fields.

>>> Introduction

The gender wage gap, defined as the difference in mean or median earnings between women and men, expressed as a percentage of men's earnings, has long been a barometer of economic and social equality.¹ As highlighted by the United Nations, achieving gender wage parity, defined as equal wage remuneration for men and women, not only promotes fairness and justice but also enhances economic efficiency and growth.² The COVID-19 pandemic shed even more light on these disparities as researchers and policymakers attempted to understand how the crisis would affect employment patterns and wage structures. Interestingly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the wage gap for full-time wage and salary workers was the smallest it had been, narrowing to 83.1% by 2021, a two-percentage point improvement from 81.1% in 2018.³ In other words, for every dollar earned by men, women earned approximately 83 cents. Thus, at first glance, it might seem that women's economic status was improving.

As the pandemic impacted the economy, leading to thousands of job losses and pushing unemployment to a peak of 14.8% in April 2020, it was primarily the part-time and low-wage sectors that experienced the majority of these losses.⁴ The leisure and hospitality industry, along with retail trade, were hit the hardest. Workers in the hospitality sector, who earned an average of \$16.90 per hour, accounted for 39% of the national decline in private employment from February to April. Similarly, those in retail trade, earning an average of \$20.18 per hour, contributed an additional 11% to the job losses.⁵ Within these sectors, women constituted a significant portion of the workforce, making up 51.2% in leisure and hospitality and 47.6% in retail trade.⁶ This significant presence not only highlighted their vulnerability to economic instability but also increased their likelihood of facing unemployment during the downturn. The impact was even more pronounced for women of color, with Black and Hispanic women experiencing unemployment rates that exceeded the national

1 Blau, F. D., & Kahn, L. M. (2017). The gender wage gap: Extent, trends, and explanations. *Journal of economic literature*, 55(3), 789–865.

2 United Nations. (n.d.). *Why gender parity?* <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/How%20We%20Work/Gender-parity/UN-Women-Why-gender-parity-one-pager-en.pdf>

3 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023, March 1). *Earnings of full-time workers*. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-earnings/2021/>

4 Falk, G., Carter, J., Nicchitta, I., Nyhof, E., & Romero, P. (2021, March 12). *Unemployment Rates During the COVID-19 Pandemic: In Brief*. Congressional Research Service. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46554/9>

5 Ansell, R., & Mullins, J. (2021, June). *Covid-19 ends longest employment recovery and expansion in CES history, causing unprecedented job losses in 2020*. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2021/article/covid-19-ends-longest-employment-expansion-in-ces-history.htm#:~:text=for%20that%20recession.,%E2%80%8B%20Source%3A%20U.S.%20Bureau%20of,Statistics%2C%20Current%20Employment%20Statistics%20survey.&text=It%20is%20unsurprising%20that%20leisure,and%20sports%20and%20entertainment%20venues>.

6 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021, April 1). *Women in the labor force: A databook*. [https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2020/#:~:text=By%20industry%2C%20women%20accounted%20of, and%20hospitality%20\(51.2%20percent\)](https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2020/#:~:text=By%20industry%2C%20women%20accounted%20of, and%20hospitality%20(51.2%20percent)).

average, further highlighting the pandemic's uneven effects.⁷ For instance, although Black and Hispanic women make up only 8.36% and 9.82% of the employed population, they constitute 9.5% and 14.4% in the leisure and hospitality industry and 10.8% and 13.0% in the wholesale and retail trade industry, respectively.

Despite these stark disparities, the experience was not universal across all sectors. In more stable industries, particularly those requiring higher educational qualifications, the employment landscape during the pandemic presented different trends. For instance, whereas the labor force declined for all groups with lower educational attainment, the labor force for women with bachelor's degrees increased from 29.6 million to 30.8 million, a 4.05% increase, while for men it only increased by 2.76% from 29.0 to 29.8 million.⁸ In addition, the healthcare, social assistance, and technology sectors saw an influx of workers, benefiting from the essential nature of these jobs during the pandemic.⁹

Given the complexities of these dynamics and the lack of statewide analysis for these nuances, this brief examines the progress toward gender wage parity in New Jersey from 2017 to 2021. It is based on the analyses of weighted American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year microdata (2018–2022), which reflects data from 2017 to 2021, taking into account the broader changes in employment. The analysis is organized into three sections. The first section, *Changes in Employment Across All Workers in New Jersey*, provides context for understanding wage disparities by highlighting overall employment changes in the state. The second section, *Changes in Gender Wage Parity Across All Occupations in New Jersey*, analyzes wage changes among full-time year-round workers and part-time workers, disaggregated by gender and race. The third section, *Changes in the Gender Wage Parity Across Occupations and Industries in New Jersey*, examines changes in the weighted median wage and salary earnings of full-time workers across major occupation and industry groups.

For this brief, full-time year-round workers are defined as individuals aged 18 to 67 who usually work 35 or more hours per week and have worked 50 to 52 weeks in the past year. Part-time workers are defined as individuals aged 18 to 67 who usually work fewer than 35 hours per week, regardless of the number of weeks worked in the past year. Wages refer to total pre-tax wage and salary earnings—specifically, money received as an employee. Please note that year descriptions in the analysis correspond to the reference years for wages, not the years when the surveys were conducted. To observe changes in wage disparities during the COVID era, this analysis divides the period from 2017 to 2021 into two timeframes: the pre-COVID period (2017, 2018, and 2019) and the COVID period (2020 and 2021).

7 Chakrabarti, S., Hamlet, L. C., Kaminsky, J., & Subramanian, S. V. (2021). Association of human mobility restrictions and race/ethnicity-based, sex-based, and income-based factors with inequities in well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. *JAMA network open*, 4(4), e217373-e217373.

8 Fry, R. (2022, January 14). *Some gender disparities widened in the U.S. workforce during the pandemic*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/14/some-gender-disparities-widened-in-the-u-s-workforce-during-the-pandemic/>

9 Hossain, A. T., Masum, A. A., & Xu, J. (2023). COVID-19, a blessing in disguise for the Tech sector: Evidence from stock price crash risk. *Research in international business and finance*, 65, 101938. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ribaf.2023.101938>

>>> Changes in Employment Across All Workers in New Jersey

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were significant gender disparities in employment patterns in New Jersey. Men were much more likely to be employed full-time, with 68.74% of male workers holding full-time positions compared to 51.70% of female workers. Conversely, a higher percentage of women worked part-time, with 17.13% of female employees in part-time roles compared to only 8.72% of male employees (The percentages do not add up to 100% because the remainder of the population was either unemployed or not in the labor force).

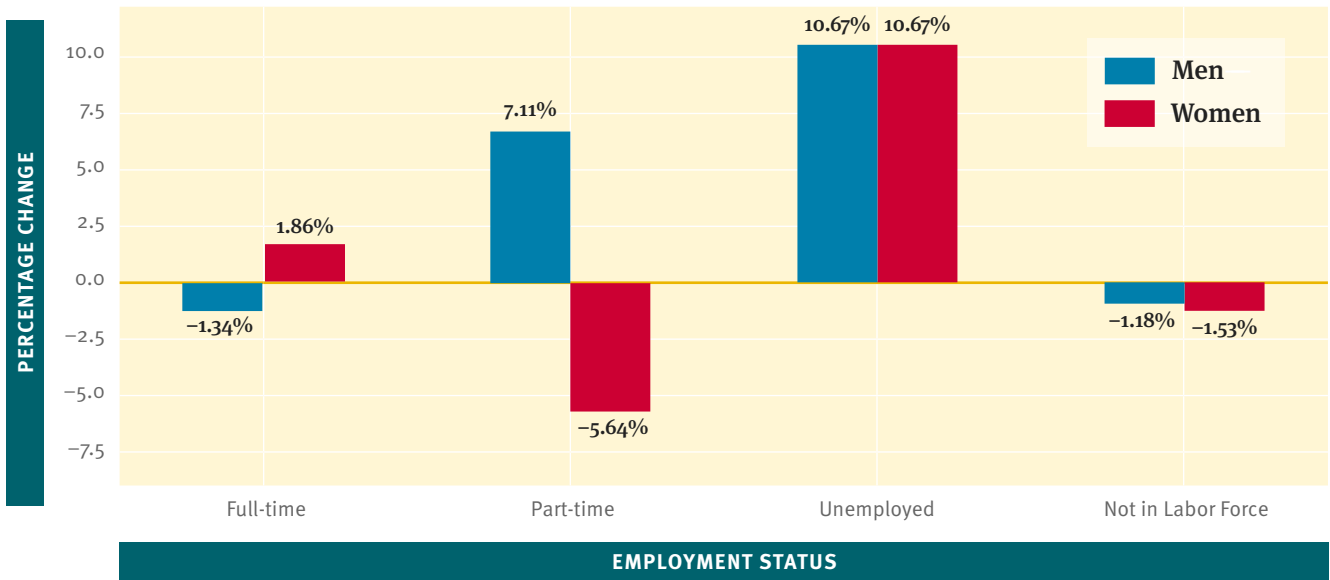
During the pandemic, as widespread economic disruptions persisted—leading to job losses, reductions in work hours, and shifts in industry employment patterns—the employment composition changed dramatically (Figure 1). While unemployment rates rose equally for both men and women (10.67%), the number of individuals not in the labor market decreased, suggesting that as resources tightened, both men and women were compelled to remain or re-enter the workforce despite the challenging conditions (For a more disaggregated view of these shifts, refer to Table 1 in the Appendix).^{10, 11} For those who were employed during the period, there was a noticeable shift in employment patterns: full-time employment slightly increased for women while decreasing for men, whereas part-time employment saw an increase among men and a decrease among women.

In particular, during COVID-19, full-time employment among male workers declined by 1.34%, while female full-time employment increased by 1.86%, a change likely linked to the increased demand in essential industries such as health care and education. Conversely, part-time employment patterns shifted significantly, with a 7.11% increase among male workers and a 5.84% decrease among female workers. This shift is also likely tied to changes in job availability across sectors, especially with the closure of sectors like personal services, hospitality, and retail, which traditionally employ more part-time and female workers.

¹⁰ Martin-Caughey, A. (2023b, March 14). Men continued to outnumber and Outearn women among full-time, year-round workers in 2021. Census.gov. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/03/women-and-men-occupation-changes-during-covid-19.html#:~:text=Although%20women%20lost%20more%20jobs,that%20grew%20during%20the%20pandemic>.

¹¹ Sean M. Smith, Roxanna Edwards, and Hao C. Duong, “Unemployment rises in 2020, as the country battles the COVID-19 pandemic,” Monthly Labor Review, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 2021, <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2021.12>

FIGURE 1: Percentage Change in Employment Status by Gender in New Jersey (Pre-COVID to During COVID)



Note: The sample includes individuals aged 18 to 67 in New Jersey who were employed full-time, part-time, unemployed, or not in the labor force during the pre-COVID (2017–2019) and COVID (2020–2021) periods. Full-time employment is defined as working 35 or more hours per week, while part-time employment includes those working fewer than 35 hours per week. Unemployed individuals are those who reported not currently working but actively seeking employment. Population estimates are weighted using survey weights.

Source: Rutgers University’s Center for Women and Work analysis of the 2018–2022 American Community Survey Microdata.

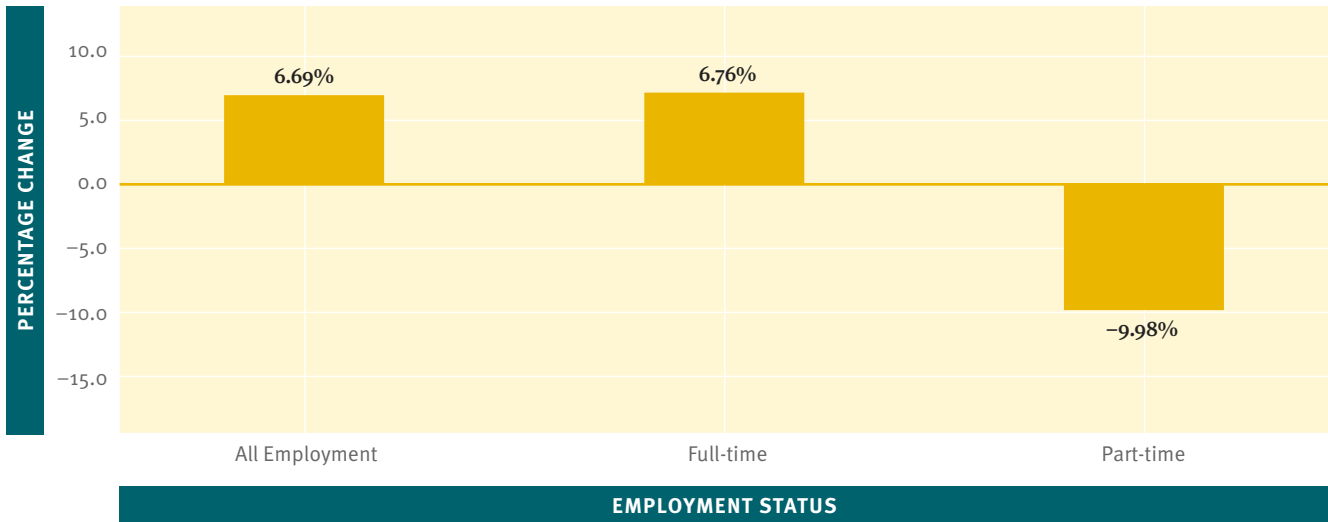
>>> Changes in the Gender Wage Gap Across All Occupations in New Jersey

With a clear understanding of the shifts that occurred in the composition of employment by gender, we now turn our analysis to the movement towards gender wage parity during the pre-COVID and COVID periods. As illustrated in Figure 2, progress towards wage parity for full-time employment improved by 6.76% during the COVID-19 period, moving from 79.93% in the pre-COVID period to 85.33% during COVID (For a more disaggregated view of these changes, refer to Table 2 in the Appendix). This improvement may be attributed to a slight increase in full-time workforce participation by women, contrasted with a slight decrease among men during the same timeframe. In contrast, the scenario for part-time employment presents a different narrative. Historically, part-time employment exhibited a female wage premium (where women earned more than men); however, the pandemic brought a change. The female wage premium decreased by 9.98%, from 115.72% pre-COVID to 104.17% during COVID. In other words, while women still earned more than men in part-time roles, the gap significantly narrowed, indicating that part-time working men experienced smaller wage losses—or even wage gains—compared to their female counterparts. A potential driver of this shift is the transition of men from full-time to part-time work, possibly in higher-paying part-time roles or in sectors less impacted by wage declines during the pandemic.

Overall, the movement towards gender wage parity in full-time roles was likely driven by a stagnation or decline in men’s wages rather than significant gains for women. Conversely, the part-time

sector witnessed a reversal of the usual wage advantage for women, suggesting shifts in workforce composition and job availability rather than a real reduction in gender disparity.

FIGURE 2: Percentage Change in Weighted Median Wage and Salary Earnings of Full Time, Part-Time, and All Workers in New Jersey (Pre-COVID to During COVID)



Note: The sample includes individuals aged 18 to 67 in New Jersey who were employed full-time or part-time, during the pre-COVID (2017–2019) and COVID (2020–2021) periods. Full-time employment is defined as working 35 or more hours per week, while part-time employment includes those working fewer than 35 hours per week. Population estimates are weighted using survey weights.

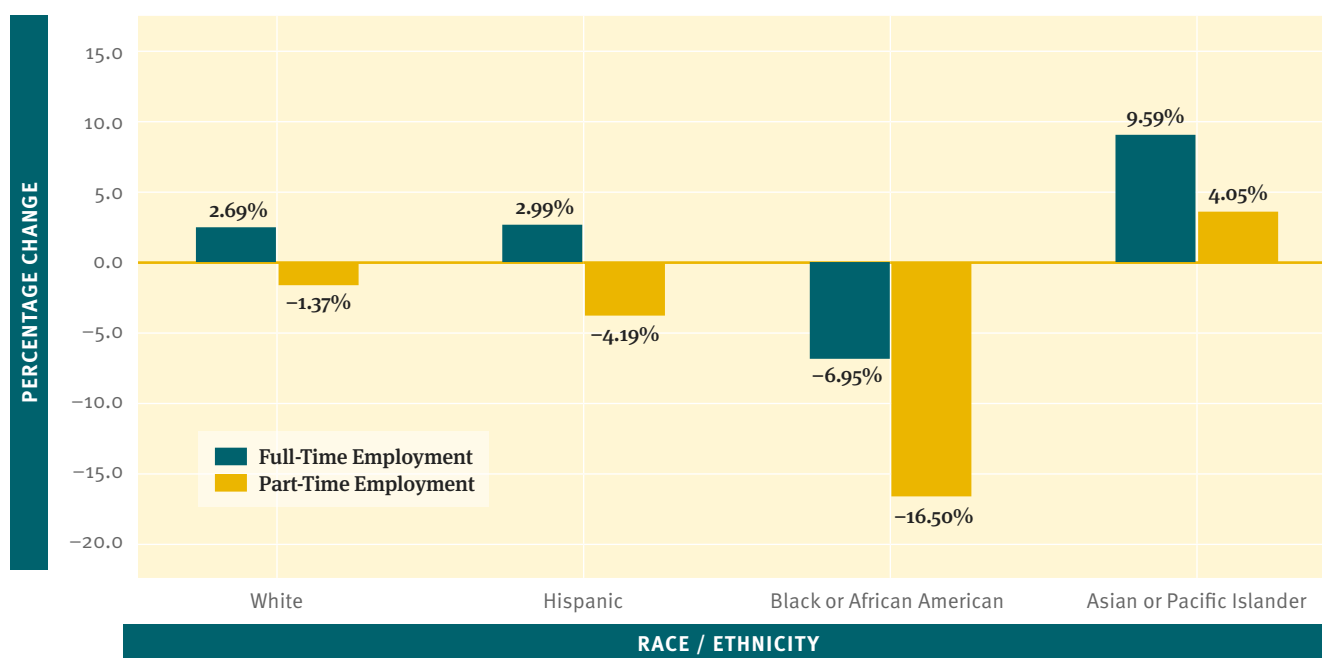
Source: Rutgers University’s Center for Women and Work analysis of the 2018-2022 American Community Survey Microdata.

Upon disaggregating by race and ethnicity, we observe that women working full-time generally made strides towards achieving gender wage parity, experiencing greater percentage increases in wages compared to men across all racial and ethnic groups, except for Black/African American workers (Figure 3). In particular, Asian or Pacific Islander women saw a 9.59% movement towards parity, followed by Hispanic women at 2.99% and White women at 2.69%. These changes suggest that, in most cases, the movement towards wage parity in full-time employment was generally driven by either modest gains for women or stagnation/declines in men’s wages. However, the Black/African American group was the only one where the movement towards wage parity reversed, widening by as much as 6.95%, indicating that Black women may have encountered more significant labor market disruptions, wage stagnation, or losses relative to Black men during the pandemic—a concern that warrants further investigation.

Conversely, for part-time employment, the changes varied significantly across racial and ethnic groups. While Asian or Pacific Islander women saw a slight improvement towards wage parity (by 4.05%), every other group saw setbacks in achieving wage parity, with men’s wages increasing relative to women’s. Black women saw a 16.50% increase in the gender wage gap. Hispanic women experienced a 4.19% increase in the gap, while White women saw a 1.37% increase in the gap (For

a more disaggregated view of these changes, refer to Tables 3 and 4 in the Appendix). One possible explanation for these shifts is that more men transitioned into part-time work during the pandemic, but in higher-paying roles or industries compared to women. Meanwhile, Asian or Pacific Islander women were more likely to find opportunities in sectors that offered stable or increased wage, such as technology or health care, where demand for labor continued or grew during the pandemic, aiding their progress toward wage parity.¹²

FIGURE 3: Percentage Change in Weighted Median Wage and Salary Earnings of Full-Time Workers in New Jersey, by Race and Employment Status (Pre-COVID to During COVID)



Note: The sample includes individuals aged 18 to 67 in New Jersey who were employed full-time or part-time, during the pre-COVID (2017–2019) and COVID (2020–2021) periods. Full-time employment is defined as working 35 or more hours per week, while part-time employment includes those working fewer than 35 hours per week. Population estimates are weighted using survey weights.

Source: Rutgers University’s Center for Women and Work analysis of the 2018–2022 American Community Survey Microdata.

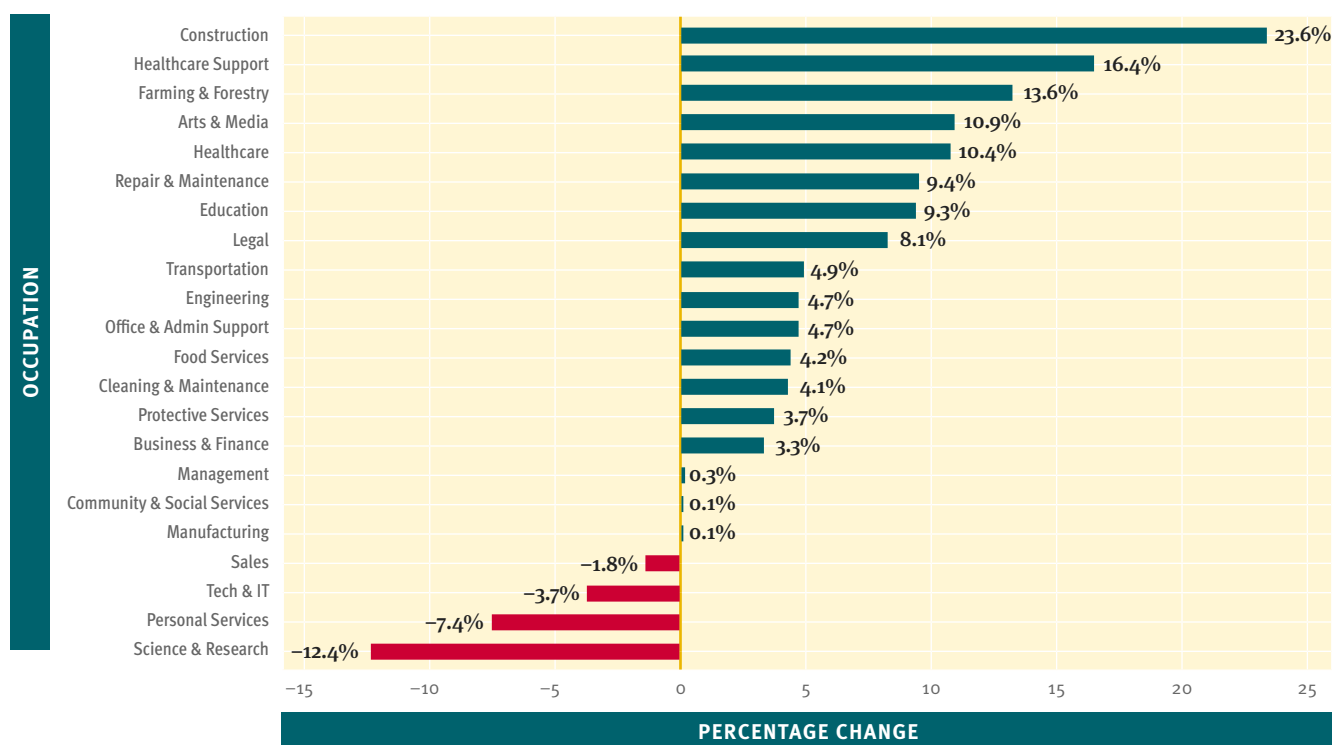
>>> Changes in the Gender Wage Gap Across Occupations and Industries in New Jersey

Upon disaggregating by occupation for full-time workers only, two main patterns emerge. On one hand, low-paying occupations, regardless of their gender distribution, tended to experience reductions in the gender wage gap (Figure 4). In low-paying occupations, which often employ a mix of both men and women, there was a notable movement towards parity. Occupations such as construction, health care support, and farming and forestry saw significant improvements in parity, with reductions in the wage disparity of 23.6%, 16.4%, and 13.6%, respectively (Figure 4). These changes suggest that the economic impacts in these fields disproportionately affected lower-paid men, leading to a

12 Wang, Y. (2024). Understanding Asians’ Success in Pursuing and Completing STEM Degrees. *Research in Higher Education*, 65(7), 1561–1586.

narrowing of the wage gap that favored gender wage parity, rather than an actual rise in women’s wages. Conversely, in male-dominated, higher-paying occupations, there was a regression from parity as the wage gap widened, indicating that men were either retaining higher-paying roles at a greater rate or experiencing less economic disruption than women. For example, in technology and information technology (IT) and science & research, the gap increased by 3.7% and 12.4%, respectively, suggesting that women in these fields were more likely to experience wage stagnation, job losses, or reduced working hours compared to their male counterparts.

FIGURE 4: Percentage Change in Weighted Median Wage and Salary Earnings of Full-Time Workers in New Jersey, by Occupation (Pre-COVID to During COVID)



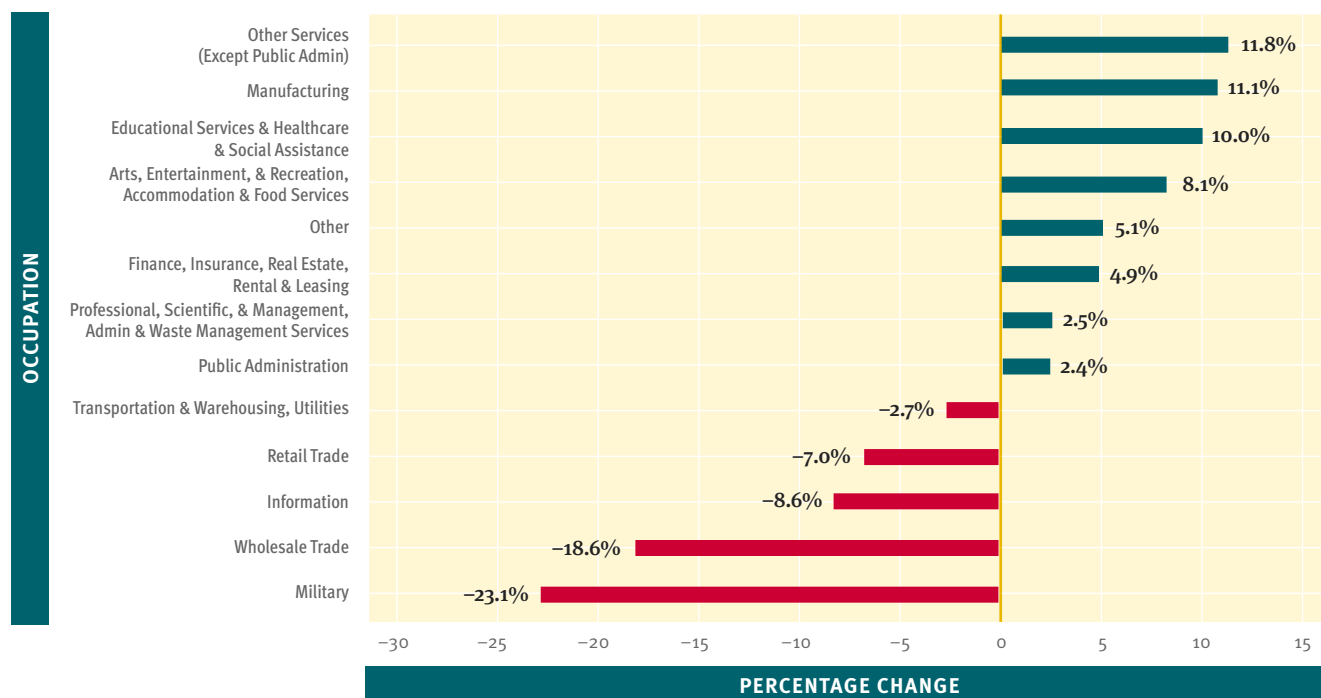
Note: The sample is limited to individuals in New Jersey with non-zero wage and salary earnings who are working full-time and year-round. This includes individuals aged 18 to 67 who usually worked 35 hours or more per week and more than 50 weeks in the previous year.

Source: Rutgers University’s Center for Women and Work analysis of survey-weighted ACS 5-year microdata.

Although the change in the gender wage gap becomes slightly less clear upon disaggregating by industry, the general pattern remains: industries typically paying lower wages saw a narrowing of the wage gap, reflecting advances towards gender wage parity, while male-dominated, higher-paying industries experienced a widening of the gap (Figure 5). Industries such as manufacturing, and educational services, health care, and social assistance saw reductions in the gender wage gap, again suggesting that economic impacts were harsher on men’s wages within these sectors, aiding a relative improvement in parity.

Conversely, more traditionally male-dominated and higher-paying industries like the military, wholesale trade, information, and retail trade witnessed a significant widening of the wage gap, indicating that men in these industries were able to maintain or even increase their earnings advantage over women, exacerbating pre-existing disparities.

FIGURE 5: Percentage Change in Weighted Median Wage and Salary Earnings of Full-Time Workers in New Jersey, by Industry (Pre-COVID to During COVID)



Note: The sample is limited to individuals in New Jersey with non-zero wage and salary earnings who are working full-time and year-round. This includes individuals aged 18 to 67 who usually worked 35 hours or more per week and more than 50 weeks in the previous year.

Source: Rutgers University’s Center for Women and Work analysis of survey-weighted ACS 5-year microdata.

>>> Conclusion

Our analysis of the gender wage gap during the pre-pandemic and pandemic periods highlights the significant impact that COVID-19 had on the labor force in New Jersey. Wage parity improved more noticeably within full-time employment, where women generally saw better wage outcomes relative to men, with highly educated women entering the workforce at a higher pace compared to men. However, part-time employment saw a reversal of the usual wage advantage for women, with a narrowing of the wage gap as men moved into higher-paying part-time roles or less pandemic-impacted sectors. Across racial groups, Asian and Pacific Islander women made the most significant strides in achieving wage parity, while Black and Hispanic women encountered setbacks that stalled their progress. In specific occupations and industries, the movement towards gender wage parity was mixed. Low-paying occupations, including health care support and retail, saw a narrowing of

the wage gap, hinting at a leveling effect possibly driven by economic pressures on men's wages rather than increases in women's earnings. Conversely, higher-paying, male-dominated fields such as technology and science saw a widening wage gap. Thus, while at first glance the progress toward gender wage parity made during the pandemic may seem promising, the actual outcomes were unevenly distributed, demonstrating the need for continued and focused efforts to truly achieve gender wage equality.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Appendix

TABLE 1
Percentage Distribution of Employment Status by Gender in New Jersey (Pre-COVID vs. During COVID), weighted

	Male Employees			Female Employees		
	Pre-COVID	During-COVID	Percent Change	Pre-COVID	During-COVID	Percent Change
Full-time employment	68.74	67.82	-1.34	51.70	52.66	1.86
Part-time employment	8.72	9.34	7.11	17.13	16.13	-5.84
Unemployed	4.78	5.29	10.67	4.31	4.77	10.67
Not in the labor force	17.76	17.55	-1.18	26.85	26.44	-1.53
Unweighted Total	78,283	58,367	19,916	80,854	60,434	20,420
Weighted Total	1,801,049	1,199,131	601,918	1,811,193	1,196,784	614,409

Note: The sample includes individuals aged 18 to 67 in New Jersey who were employed full-time, part-time, unemployed, or not in the labor force during the pre-COVID (2017–2019) and COVID (2020–2021) periods. Full-time employment is defined as working 35 or more hours per week, while part-time employment includes those working fewer than 35 hours per week. Unemployed individuals are those who reported not currently working but actively seeking employment. Population estimates are weighted using survey weights.

Source: Rutgers University’s Center for Women and Work analysis of the 2018-2022 American Community Survey Microdata.

TABLE 2
Gender Wage Gap in New Jersey, by Employment Status (Pre-COVID vs. During COVID)

	Gender Wage Gap: Women’s Earnings as a Percent of Men’s		
	Pre-COVID	During-COVID	Percent Change
Full-time employment	79.93	85.33	6.76
Part-time employment	115.72	104.17	-9.98
All employment	68.92	73.53	6.69

Note: The sample includes individuals aged 18 to 67 in New Jersey who were employed full-time or part-time, during the pre-COVID (2017–2019) and COVID (2020–2021) periods. Full-time employment is defined as working 35 or more hours per week, while part-time employment includes those working fewer than 35 hours per week. Population estimates are weighted using survey weights.

Source: Rutgers University’s Center for Women and Work analysis of the 2018-2022 American Community Survey Microdata.

TABLE 3**Percentage Distribution of Employment Status by Race and Ethnicity in New Jersey (Pre-COVID vs. During COVID), weighted**

	White			Hispanic			Black or African American			Asian or Pacific Islander		
	Pre-COVID	During-COVID	Percent Change	Pre-COVID	During-COVID	Percent Change	Pre-COVID	During-COVID	Percent Change	Pre-COVID	During-COVID	Percent Change
Full-time employment	60.92	61.18	0.43	59.47	59.98	0.86	56.59	54.22	-4.19	63.62	64.04	0.66
Part-time employment	13.36	13.08	-2.10	13.54	12.54	-7.39	11.94	12.98	8.71	10.31	10.61	2.91
Unemployed	3.99	4.17	4.51	5.08	6.10	20.08	6.39	7.20	12.68	3.45	3.45	0
Not in the labor force	21.72	21.57	-0.69	21.91	21.38	-2.42	21.38	25.60	19.74	22.62	21.58	-4.60
Unweighted Total	96,003	67,931	-28,072	25,584	20,508	-5,076	16,284	11,522	4,762	17,736	14,354	3,382
Weighted Total	1,930,367	1,215,406	-714,961	746,516	530,649	-215,867	476,145	301,974	174,171	370,303	255,929	114,374

Note: The sample includes individuals aged 18 to 67 in New Jersey who were employed full-time, part-time, unemployed, or not in the labor force during the pre-COVID (2017–2019) and COVID (2020–2021) periods. Full-time employment is defined as working 35 or more hours per week, while part-time employment includes those working fewer than 35 hours per week. Unemployed individuals are those who reported not currently working but actively seeking employment. Population estimates are weighted using survey weights.

Source: Rutgers University’s Center for Women and Work analysis of the 2018-2022 American Community Survey Microdata.

TABLE 4**Gender Wage Gap in New Jersey, by Employment Status and Race and Ethnicity (Pre-COVID vs. During COVID)**

	Gender Wage Gap: Women’s Earnings as a Percent of Men’s					
	Full-Time Employment			Part-Time Employment		
	Pre-COVID	During-COVID	Percent Change	Pre-COVID	During-COVID	Percent Change
White	76.59	78.65	2.69	120.33	118.68	-1.37
Hispanic	86.31	88.89	2.99	96.92	92.86	-4.19
Black or African American	95.74	89.09	-6.95	118.18	98.68	-16.50
Asian or Pacific Islander	73.00	80.00	9.59	93.73	97.53	4.05

Note: The sample includes individuals aged 18 to 67 in New Jersey who were employed full-time or part-time, during the pre-COVID (2017–2019) and COVID (2020–2021) periods. Full-time employment is defined as working 35 or more hours per week, while part-time employment includes those working fewer than 35 hours per week. Population estimates are weighted using survey weights.

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