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Defining Comparable Worth/Pay Equity

Comparable Worth (also called pay equity) - A reform effort to pay different job titles based on their value to their employer regardless of the gender/race predominance of those working in such titles.

At the heart of comparable worth or pay equity reform is the fact that jobs traditionally done by women and people of color have been systematically undervalued in the marketplace. The net result is that these jobs are paid less than comparable jobs with the same levels of skills and responsibilities but commonly held by white males. This bias can be demonstrated and subsequently eliminated by assessing the economic value of different jobs through the use of a gender-neutral job evaluation system. For example, food service, nurse, maintenance, dispatcher, supply clerk and drafting jobs can be compared on dimensions such as the education/training necessary, the working conditions and the responsibility levels required.

Pay equity job evaluation studies seek to differentiate legitimate wage differences from those that are solely a function of the gender/race of the typical job incumbent. Sometimes salary inequities are so blatant that advocates can simply offer them as evidence without providing job evaluation measures. For instance, most of the school districts in New York State pay secretaries and teaching assistants less than the cleaners. In Denver, nurses were found to make less than gardeners. In New York State, school nurses in the West Islip school district started at \$27,000, groundskeepers at \$29,000. But, in order to adjust salaries to eliminate inequities such as these, the comparable value of dissimilar job titles should be established using a point factor job evaluation system.



“Does that explain the differences in our salaries?”