



INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH
1707 L Street NW, Suite 750 ♦ Washington, DC 20036

Statement by IWPR on the BLS Decision to Discontinue Data Collection on Women's Employment
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On November 5th, 2004, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) announced plans to discontinue data collection from the Current Employment Statistics (CES) survey on the number of women workers in the United States (<http://www.bls.gov/ces/cesww.htm>). The CES survey is a monthly nationwide survey of payroll records for nonsupervisory workers that covers more than 300,000 businesses and provides important industry-level data on women's employment. Analysis of the CES shows where women are gaining or losing jobs, in response to economic restructuring, changes in the business cycle, variation in labor supply, or other factors. The CES survey data are released monthly by BLS along with the unemployment rate to track job gains and losses for men and women workers.

The BLS stated its intention to begin collecting other payroll data, including total monthly earnings and the wages and hours of supervisors, while dropping the collection of information about the number of women and men employed. (Data on gender are often not maintained by employers on payroll records.)

While we certainly are sympathetic with the desire of the BLS to reduce respondent burden, it is important to realize that these data on women workers are unique and extremely useful for research on women's employment. Since the proposed revisions to the survey include expanding reporting in other areas, it seems especially unreasonable to discontinue reporting on these important data on women workers.

As we all know, women and men generally work in very different places in the labor market; occupational segregation by sex is a persistent feature of U.S. employment. Job losses and job gains over the course of a recession and recovery vary tremendously by industry, leading to unpredictable differences between women's and men's experiences over the business cycle and in response to structural economic change. Without accurate, timely data, we may develop misleading pictures of employment changes for both men and women and institute ineffective policy solutions.

Contrary to the BLS's statement, Current Population Survey (CPS) data do not provide a substitute for these CES data. While CPS data, which are collected from households, are useful for other purposes, the CES data, collected from establishments, are regarded as the most reliable when measuring month-to-month changes in employment. Without information on gender for these data, important questions regarding women's employment and job loss across the business cycle will be impossible to answer.

Currently, the Institute for Women's Policy Research uses the establishment data on women workers in a number of our research areas. In our latest Briefing Paper on women's economic status (available online at <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B245.pdf>), the establishment data proved invaluable for analyzing women's job losses and gains by industry before and since the 2001 recession.

Once the proposed change to the CES is publicized in the *Federal Register* (planned for later this month), there will be a 60-day public comment period.

The Current Employment Statistics data on women's employment are a critical source of information about women's employment and job loss. In our view, it is essential that collection of data on women and men separately be continued.