WOMEN ARE LEADING THE NEXT DECADE OF JOB GROWTH

THE 75 MILLION

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Key Findings

- Women are a solid majority (58 percent) of the ten occupations projected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to generate the most new jobs between 2024 and 2034.
- Significant job growth will come from women working in healthcare. Four of the top ten occupations are in the health care sector and women make up a large majority — at least 70 percent — of all four occupations.
- In the ten occupations expected to create the most new jobs, the gender pay gap still exists. Women in the combined ten occupations expected to contribute the most to job creation are typically paid 90 percent of what men are typically paid in the same occupations. In the rest of the economy, women are paid only 85 percent of men in the same occupation.
- Educational attainment differs widely across the top ten job-creating occupations. Six of the occupations have a higher than average share of college graduates (43 percent), including 99 percent of nurse practitioners. But four of the top ten have much lower than average educational attainment, with college graduates making up only 8 to 13 percent of occupational employment.
- Higher educational attainment does not necessarily protect women from experiencing pay gaps within occupations. In the top ten job-generating occupations, women's higher educational attainment is associated with *lower* earnings relative to men in those same occupations. In five of the six top-growth occupations with above average shares of college graduates, women face higher gender pay gaps than in the other occupations with the lowest levels of educational attainment.

INTRODUCTION

As the second Trump administration rolls back policies and programs that support women's workforce participation, often under the banner of eliminating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), understanding women's role in the occupations that will drive future growth has never been more important. Women are poised to shape the trajectory of the labor market over the coming decade.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the top ten occupations by projected job growth through 2034 include: (1) home health aides, (2) software developers, (3) stockers and order fillers, (4) fast food and counter workers, (5) restaurant cooks, (6) registered nurses, (7) general and operations managers, (8) medical and health services managers, (9) financial managers, and (10) nurse practitioners. While women made up just under half of the workforce at the time that the BLS made their occupational projections, in the most recent data for 2026 women's employment rates have reached parity with men's. And women are in the majority in the occupations expected to drive job growth through 2034. From healthcare to restaurants, women are a majority of the workforce in the occupations that will grow the economy.

This report draws on BLS occupational projections to analyze where job creation will be concentrated, the jobs where women are most represented, and how education and earnings intersect within these high-growth fields. We find women are not only participating in the workforce, but are central to its expansion. At the same time, persistent disparities in pay and uneven returns to education highlight the structural challenges facing working women and their impact on economic outcomes.

THE ECONOMY OF THE FUTURE RELIES ON WOMEN WORKERS

Working women are a driving force of the economy. Women make up just under half of the US workforce (49 percent), but they are well over half (58 percent) of the workers in the ten occupations that the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects will create the most new jobs in the decade between 2024 and 2034.

According to the BLS projections, occupations in healthcare will drive job growth over the next ten years, and due to a number of factors, women are overrepresented in those jobs. "Home health and personal care aides," an occupation that is 82 percent women, is the occupation that will see the largest increase in total employment over the next decade. Three other health care occupations with large shares of women workers are also in the BLS top ten: "Registered nurses" (88 percent women), "Medical and health services managers" (74 percent), and "Nurse practitioners" (89 percent). **(Figure 1)**

Women are also a majority in two other top ten occupations: "Fast food and counter workers" (67 percent women) and "Financial managers" (56 percent).

Women are under-represented in four of the top categories. Less than half of "Cooks" (42 percent), "General and operations managers" (38 percent), and "Stockers and order fillers" (37 percent) are women and only one-in-five "Software developers" is a woman (20 percent).

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT VARIES ACROSS THE WOMEN'S JOBS OF THE FUTURE

Women's educational attainment varies widely across the occupations projected to generate the most new jobs over the next decade **(Figure 2)**. In five of the occupations, a majority of women have a four-year college degree or more: "Nurse practitioners" (99 percent), "Software developers" (89 percent), "Registered nurses" (69 percent), "Medical and health services managers" (61 percent), and "Financial managers" (54 percent). "General and operations managers" are close behind (48.4 percent).

But educational attainment is much lower in four of the ten occupations: "Home health and personal care aides" where only 13 percent of women workers have a four-year college degree or more, "Stockers and order fillers" (12 percent), and "Fast food and counter workers" (11 percent) and "Cooks" (8 percent).

In the women's workforce overall, 43 percent have a college degree, close to the average for the top ten occupations combined (44 percent).

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

In 2024, the baseline year used for the BLS projections, Black, Latina, Asian, and women of other races or more than one race or ethnicity taken together made up 43 percent of combined employment in the ten occupations projected to grow most by 2034, about three percentage points more than their share in the rest of the economy. **(See Table 2.)**

Relative to their share in the economy as a whole (13 percent), Black women were over-represented in "Home health and personal care aides" (26 percent), "Stockers and order fillers" (16 percent), "Restaurant cooks" (15 percent), and "Medical and health services managers" (15 percent); under-represented among "Software developers" (6 percent), "Financial managers" (9 percent), "Nurse practitioners" (10 percent), and "General and operations managers" (11 percent); with representation in the remaining occupations at about equal to their representation in the overall workforce: "Registered nurses" (12 percent), "Fast food and counter workers" (12 percent).

Latina women were equally represented, at 14 percent, in both the overall workforce and in the ten occupations projected to grow the most through 2034. Latina workers were over-represented in "Restaurant cooks" (30 percent), "Home health care and personal care aides" (21 percent), "Stockers and fillers (21 percent), and "Fast food and counter workers" (17 percent); under-represented in "Software developers" (5 percent), "Registered nurses" (7 percent); "General and operations managers" (11 percent), "Medical and health service managers" (11 percent); "Financial managers" (11 percent), and "Nurse practitioners" (5 percent).

Asian women were over-represented in the ten biggest growing occupations (9 percent) relative to their representation in the rest of the economy (7 percent). Asian women make up almost half of the women who work as "Software developers (47 percent); they are also over-represented as "Home health care and personal care aides" (9 percent) and "Registered nurses" (9 percent). Asian women are under-represented as "Stockers and order fillers" (5 percent) and "Restaurant cooks" (5 percent); and have about equal representation as "Nurse practitioners" (7 percent), "Financial managers" (8 percent); "General and operations managers" (6 percent); "Medical and health service managers" (6 percent) and "Fast food and counter workers" (6 percent).

White women were slightly under-represented in the top-ten growing occupations. They made up 60 percent of the women's workforce overall, but only 57 percent of employment in the top ten. White women were strongly over-represented in "Nurse practitioners" (74 percent), "Financial managers" (67 percent), "General and operations managers" (67 percent), "Medical and health services managers" (64 percent) and "Registered nurses" (66 percent), but somewhat or substantially under-represented among "Stockers and order fillers (53 percent), "Fast food and counter workers" (58 percent), "Home health and personal care aides" (39 percent), "Software developers" (37 percent), "Restaurant cooks" (45 percent).

The final group of women in Table 2 covers women who identify as not being of any of the the other four racial or ethnic groups, or as having multiple racial backgrounds, or as being in an ethnic group not covered in the ACS survey questionnaire.This category includes Native Americans, who can be identified separately, but the underlying sample available after applying filters for gender, age, employment status, and occupation are too small to yield reliable statistics. In general, the underlying sample in this category is small and highly heterogeneous. The table reports results for this group for completeness, but we are hesitant to draw strong conclusions based on the data constraints.

GENDER WAGE GAPS PERSIST

The earnings gap between women and men in the ten occupations projected to grow most through 2034 is smaller than it is in the rest of the economy, but women still earn less than men in all of these occupations. Using the median earnings as a benchmark, and pooling all workers in the top ten occupations, women at the median of the women's wage are paid 92 percent of what men are paid at their median in the same combined group of occupations **(Figure 3)**. In the rest of the economy combined — that is, in all occupations excluding the top ten — a similar calculation shows a substantially wider earnings gap. The median wage for women in all the occupations in the economy excluding the top ten is only 85 percent of the median wage of men in these occupations.[1]

The four occupations with the lowest shares of college graduates — "Home health and personal care aides," "Stockers and order fillers," "Fast food and counter workers," and "Cooks" — all have smaller than average gender pay gaps. These smaller gender pay gaps are unfortunately not a reflection of more equitable pay practices or working conditions; instead, there is a much narrower range of possible earnings in those occupations because low-wage workers are paid so little, regardless of gender.

Meanwhile, the gap between women and men's pay tends to be higher in occupations that have the highest level of formal education. In five of the top-growth occupations with above average shares of college graduates — "Registered nurses," "Software writers," "General and operations managers," "Medical and health service managers," and "Financial managers" — women face higher gender pay gaps than in the other occupations with lower levels of educational attainment.

One exception to this general pattern of larger within occupation pay gaps being larger for more educated women is "Nurse practitioners." Ninety nine percent of all nurse practitioners are women and 99 percent have a four-year college degree. Even then, women are only *close* to pay parity with men in that occupation (98 percent).

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[1] We use the median hourly wage as a benchmark. The median wage is the wage of the worker exactly in the middle of the wage distribution, that is, the worker that makes more than the bottom half of workers and less than the top half of workers. Using the arithmetical mean (average) instead of the mean generally estimates similar or slightly larger women's wage gaps in all categories in Figure 2. The only exception is "Nurse Practitioners," where the average woman makes about 12 percent more than the average man. The gender gaps would be larger if we used annual earnings because on average women work fewer weeks per year and fewer hours per week, which amplifies these differences in hourly pay rates.

To be clear, education overwhelmingly pays off financially: women with higher levels of educational attainment systematically earn more than women with lower levels of formal education. But this effect primarily reflects the role that education plays in providing access to better paying occupations. Additional education, for example, might allow a woman to move from a "home health care aide" position to a much better paying "health services manager" position within the same organization. But, in general, the gap between the newly promoted woman manager and her male counterparts in the new management position — where women typically earn only 72 percent of men — will be higher than when she was a home health care aide, where women earn 90 percent of men in the same occupation.

CHANGES TO THE ECONOMY — INCLUDING HEALTH CARE CUTS AND THE RISE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE — WILL IMPACT WOMEN WORKERS

We are still early in the 2024-2034 projections window, but two new trends that have emerged since the BLS made its projections may have an important impact on future occupational employment.

The first is the rise of artificial intelligence (AI). The BLS projection that "Software developers" would be the occupation generating the second highest number of new jobs over the next decade may turn out to be too optimistic given the likelihood that AI may substantially reduce the need for software coders.[2]

On its own, a slowdown in growth or even a reversal in the total number of software developers would not notably alter the main conclusions in the analysis. Software developers are the occupation in the BLS top ten that has, by far, the lowest share of women (20 percent), so its removal from the top ten would likely only increase women's employment share in the biggest growing occupations.

The main impact of AI on the labor market, however, is likely to be felt much more broadly than software developers and other workers most directly engaged in information technology. Two recent reports have independently highlighted the potential threats that AI poses to women, in particular, in the workforce. A 2026 National Partnership for Women & Families report concludes that "women workers are overrepresented in occupations where they may be particularly affected by AI in the workplace" and AI "risks…exacerbating existing workplace inequities and barriers for women." Another 2026 report by Anthropic also finds that "[w]orkers in the most exposed professions are more likely to be older, female, more educated, and higher-paid."

The second issue that may affect the BLS employment predictions are recent federal government cuts to projected health care spending affecting Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act. No comprehensive analysis of the employment impacts of recent legislative and administrative changes

[2] For a discussion by BLS analysts of how they factor AI into employment projections, see Machovec, Christine, Michael J. Rieley, and Emily Rolen, "Incorporating AI impacts in BLS employment projections: occupational case studies," *Monthly Labor Review*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 2025.

to the health care sector exists, but the estimated declines in revenue could reduce projected spending and, as a result, the pace of employment growth in the sector.[3]

The uncertainties surrounding both AI and the future of US health care are real, and come as America is facing an affordability crisis. Under the best of circumstances, predicting the path of the economy over a ten-year period is difficult, but the BLS conducts regular assessments of its occupational employment projections and past experience offers some confidence in the reliability of BLS projections even in the context of large fluctuations in macroeconomic and sector-specific shocks. The most recent BLS review of its 2014-2024 projections — a period that included both the unusually long economic recovery after the Great Recession as well as the Covid-19 pandemic — found that the BLS "correctly projected whether an occupational group would grow or decline 86 percent of the time."

Conclusion

The next decade of job growth will be built substantially by women's work. Women make up a majority of the workers in the top ten occupations projected to add the most jobs through 2034, including in healthcare, a likely major driver of future employment growth. Yet women's dominance in these growing occupations does not translate into full economic equity. Gender pay gaps remain in these fast growing jobs where women are overrepresented, even for women with the highest educational credentials. Increasing women's participation in high-growth jobs is not enough to close long-standing disparities. These structural challenges facing women in the workforce are due to how certain work and workers are valued and compensated.

As policymakers and employers look ahead, ensuring job growth is matched by equitable outcomes will be essential. The rise of AI and threats to the future of the health care sector add another layer of uncertainty as women workers appear disproportionately exposed to both these sources of potential disruption. Without intentional action, the economy may rely on women for growth but without the outcomes they deserve.

[3] For an analysis of the potential impacts of recent proposed spending Medicaid cuts, see Sanjay Basu, Sadiq Y. Patel, and Seth A. Berkowitz, "Projected Health System and Economic Impacts of 2025 Medicaid Policy Proposals," *JAMA Health Forum*, vol. 25, no. 6, July 16, 2025. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12268486/

Table 1

Women's Employment in Top 10 Projected Growth Occupations

Ranked by total projected job growth, 2024- 2034

OCCUPATION	WOMEN'S SHARE OF TOTAL EMPLOYMENT	EDUCATION		MEDIAN WOMEN'S WAGE RELATIVE TO MEDIAN MEN'S
		NON-COLLEGE	COLLEGE	
Home health and personal care aides	81.7%	86.7%	13.3%	94.9%
Software developers	19.6%	11.2%	88.8%	88.4%
Stockers and order fillers	37.3%	88.3%	11.7%	98.6%
Fast food and counter workers	66.5%	89.4%	10.6%	95.5%
Cooks, restaurant	42.2%	92.5%	7.5%	96.9%
Registered nurses	87.6%	31.0%	69.0%	91.9%
General and operations managers	38.3%	51.6%	48.4%	83.1%
Medical and health services managers	73.8%	39.2%	60.8%	79.6%
Financial managers	55.8%	46.2%	53.8%	68.6%
Nurse practitioners	88.8%	1.4%	98.6%	98.3%
Top 10 Projected Combined	**58.0%**	**55.7%**	**44.3%**	**91.8%**
All Other Occupations	**47.3%**	**57.8%**	**42.2%**	**84.9%**
All Occupations	**48.5%**	**57.5%**	**42.5%**	**86.1%**

Analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Projections, 2024–34 (https://www.bls.gov/emp/) and the IPUMS extract of the American Community Survey 2024 (https://usa.ipums.org/usa/).

Table 2

Demographic Distribution of Women in Growth Occupations

Analysis of projected employment growth, 2024-2034

OCCUPATION	WOMEN'S SHARE OF TOTAL EMPLOYMENT	RACE AND ETHNICITY OF WOMEN WORKERS (%)				
		WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	ASIAN	OTHER
Home health and personal care aides	81.7%	38.8%	26.0%	21.0%	8.6%	5.6%
Software developers	19.6%	37.3%	6.2%	5.0%	47.0%	4.5%
Stockers and order fillers	37.3%	53.0%	16.1%	20.5%	4.6%	5.8%
Fast food and counter workers	66.5%	57.5%	11.5%	16.6%	6.4%	7.9%
Cooks, restaurant	42.2%	44.5%	15.1%	29.5%	5.3%	5.5%
Registered nurses	87.6%	66.1%	12.3%	7.2%	9.4%	4.9%
General and operations managers	38.3%	66.6%	10.6%	11.4%	6.1%	5.3%
Medical and health services managers	73.8%	63.8%	14.8%	10.5%	5.5%	5.3%
Financial managers	55.8%	67.4%	8.9%	10.7%	8.1%	5.0%
Nurse practitioners	88.8%	73.5%	9.8%	5.4%	7.2%	4.0%
Top 10 Projected Combined	**58.0%**	**56.6%**	**14.7%**	**13.9%**	**9.4%**	**5.4%**
All Other Occupations	**47.3%**	**60.2%**	**13.2%**	**14.1%**	**6.8%**	**5.7%**
All Occupations	**48.5%**	**59.7%**	**13.4%**	**14.1%**	**7.2%**	**5.6%**

Analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Projections, 2024–34 and IPUMS extract of the American Community Survey 2024.

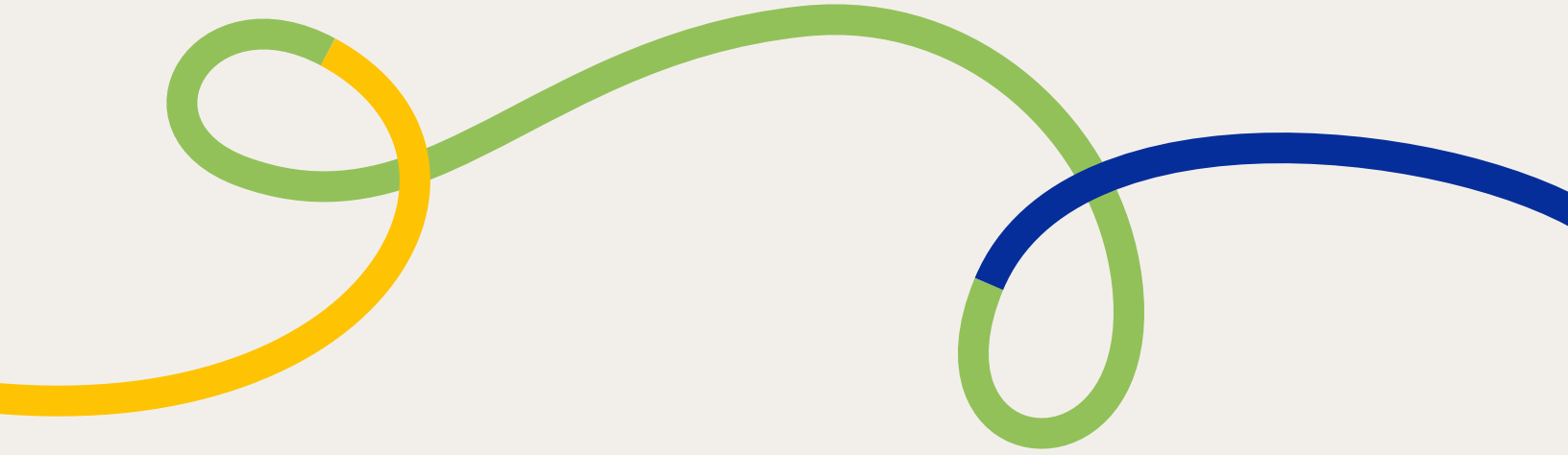
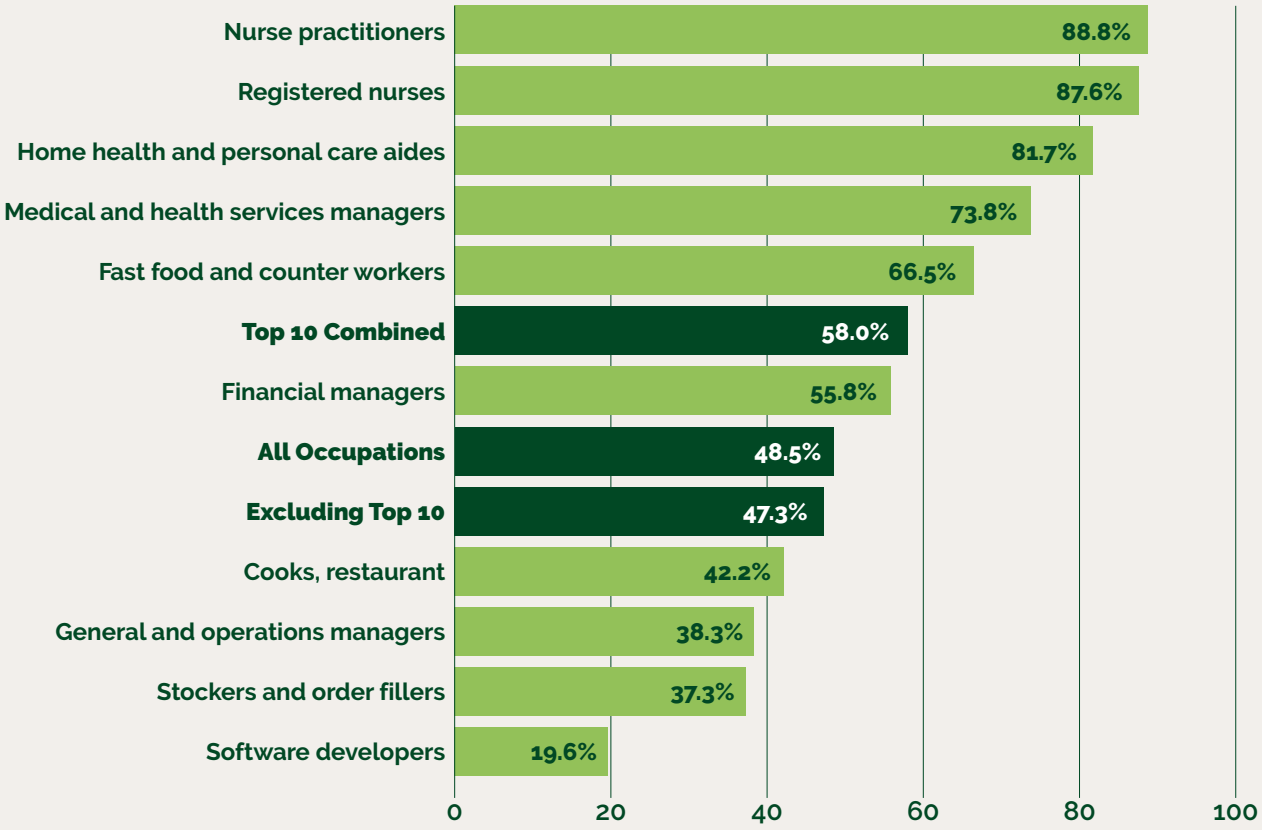


Figure 1

Women's Share of Total Employment in Projected Ten Biggest Growing Occupations, 2024-2034

Ranked from highest to lowest share of women

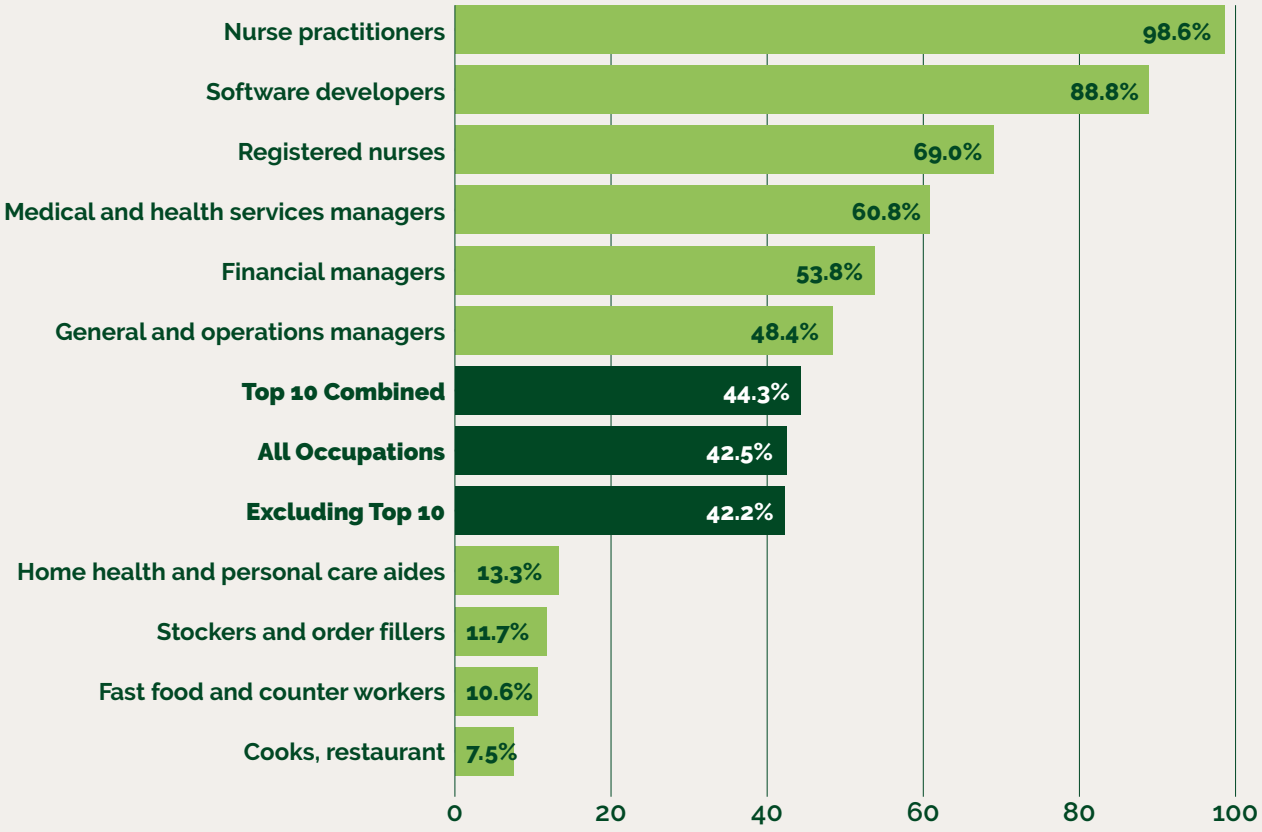


Source: Analysis of BLS, Occupational Employment Projections, 2024–34 and the IPUMS extract of the American Community Survey 2024.

Figure 2

Share of Women with College Degrees in Projected Ten Biggest Growing Occupations, 2024-2034

Occupations ranked from highest to lowest share of women graduates

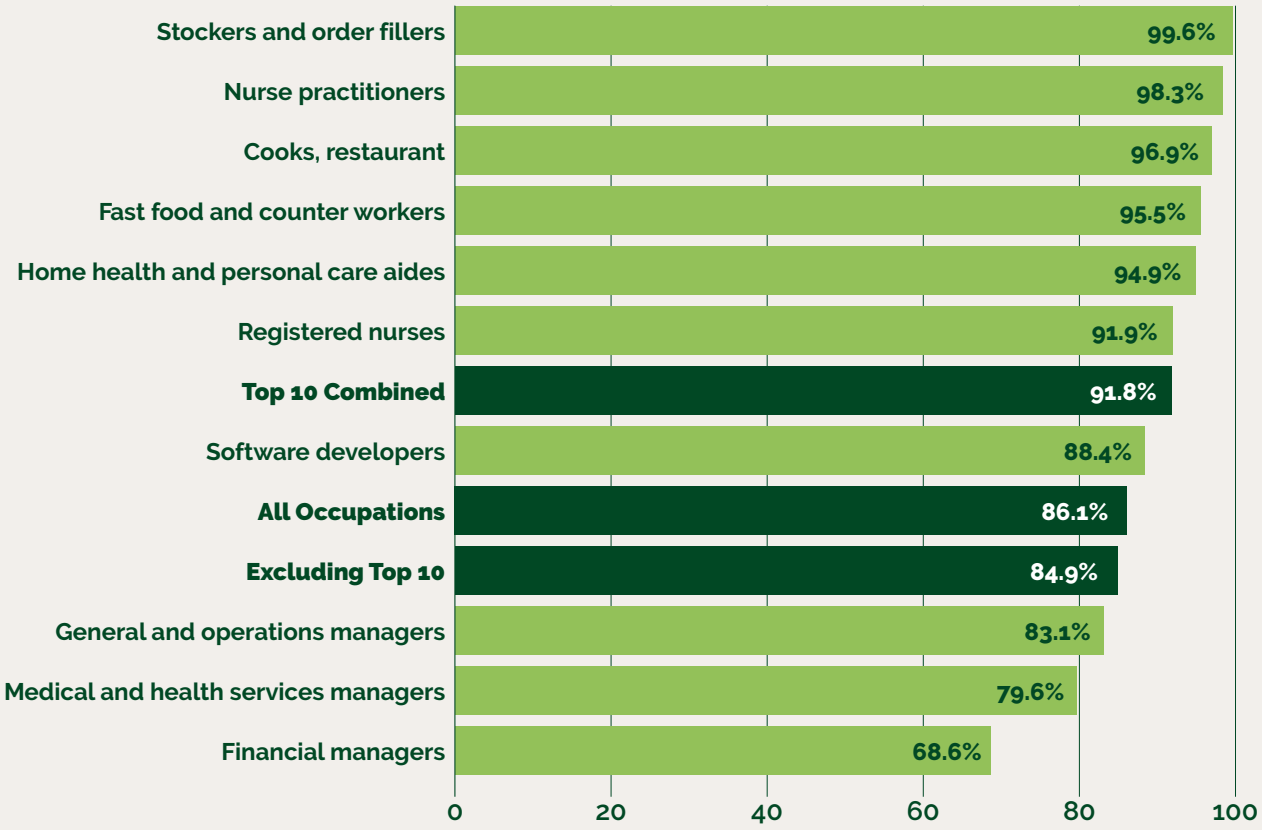


Source: Analysis of BLS, Occupational Employment Projections, 2024–34 and the IPUMS extract of the American Community Survey 2024.

Figure 3

Median Women's Pay Relative to Men's in Projected Ten Biggest Growing Occupations, 2024-2034

Ranked from highest to lowest rate of median hourly pay

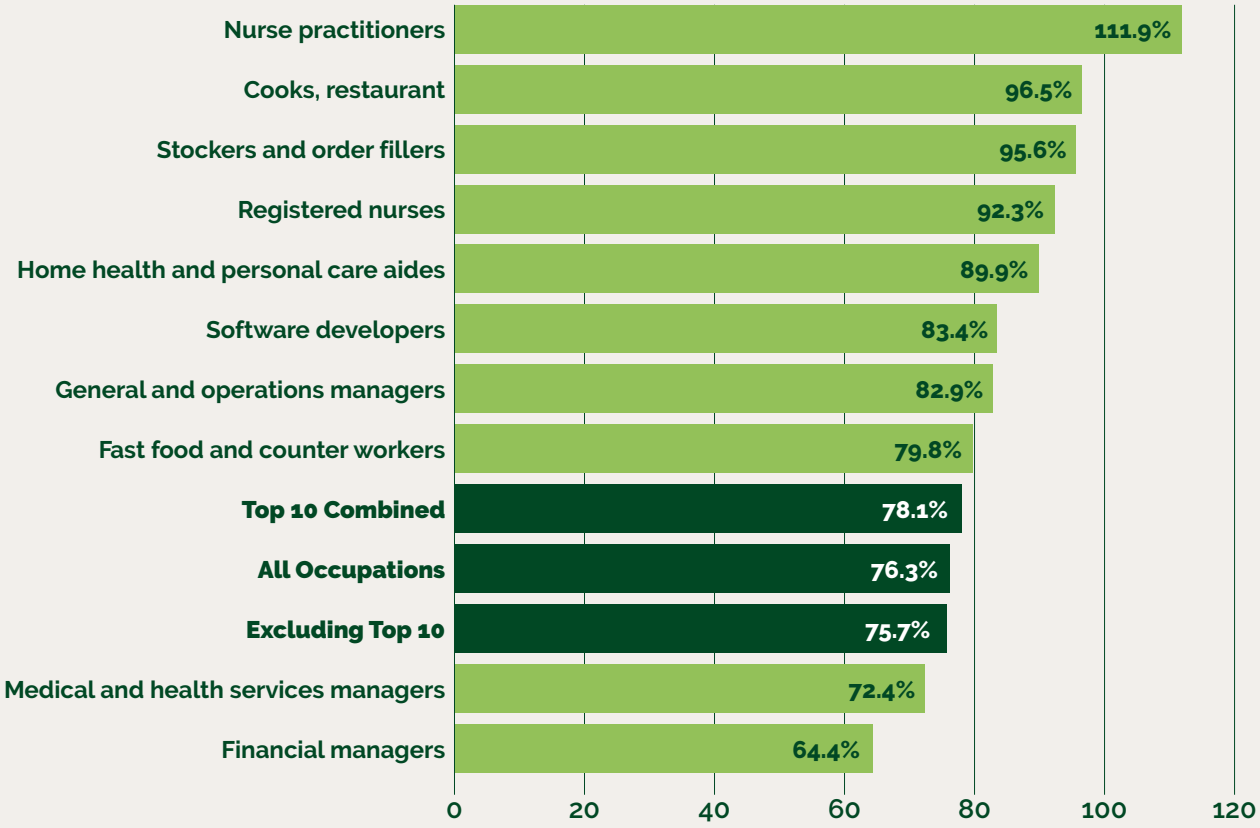


Source: Analysis of BLS, Occupational Employment Projections, 2024–34 and the IPUMS extract of the American Community Survey 2024.

Figure 4

Average Women's Pay Relative to Men's in Projected Ten Biggest Growing Occupations, 2024-2034

Ranked from highest to lowest rate of average hourly pay



Source: Analysis of BLS, Occupational Employment Projections, 2024–34 and the IPUMS extract of the American Community Survey 2024.

METHODOLOGY

We constructed the tables and figures from two data sources. We identified the ten occupations projected to create the most new jobs by ordering the "Line item" occupations from largest to smallest job growth using "Employment change, numeric, 2024-2034" in Table 1.2 of the BLS occupational projections for 2024-2034, available in spreadsheet form here: https://www.bls.gov/emp/ind-occ-matrix/occupation.xlsx. Separately, we obtained demographic characteristics for each BLS occupation using the 2024 IPUMS USA ACS extract, available here: https://usa.ipums.org/usa/about.shtml. We then matched occupational categories across the two data sources, using the crosswalk available on the US Census website here: https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/guidance/industry-occupation/

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