



THE UNION DIFFERENCE FOR WORKING FAMILIES

Union members are more likely to have higher wages, paid sick days, affordable health insurance, and retirement benefits. For most union members, their union job means they can pay their mortgage and provide for their kids. A union job also means that there is extra money for parents to send their kids to summer camp, enroll them in pre-kindergarten, and save for college. Paid sick days and affordable health insurance means a parent can care for a sick child and take her child to the emergency room without fear of cost. Union membership also makes it possible for women to raise a family on their own, if necessary. For women, a union job also means a voice in the workplace to address issues like the gender wage gap.

Wages and Benefits

Women and men represented by unions bring home bigger paychecks than nonunion workers do. Union members earned 27 percent more than nonunion members did in 2014, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.¹ This “union advantage” — more money in union members’ paychecks — exists in almost every occupation, from service and factory workers to clerical and professional employees. Today’s unions mean even more for minorities. In 2014, Black and African American union members earned 33 percent more, Asian union members earned three percent more, and the union advantage was a staggering 42 percent for Hispanic and Latino workers.²

Union members have greater access to medical and retirement benefits as well as paid sick leave and life insurance.³

- In 2014, 94 percent of union members working full-time had access to employer-provided medical benefits. Only 65 percent of nonunion members working full-time had access to employer-provided medical benefits. Medical benefits for families were also more affordable for union members. Union employees paid 16 percent of the premium for family coverage. Nonunion member medical plans required employees to pay 35 percent of the premiums for family coverage in 2015.⁴
- In retirement, union members are much more likely to enjoy secure retirement benefits. In 2015, 94 percent of union members had access to a retirement plan, while only 65 percent of nonunion workers had access. Among union members who had access to a retirement plan, 85 percent participated, compared to 48 percent of nonunion workers. The majority of union members participate in defined-benefit plans. Because union members are better paid during their working years, they earn larger pensions — and have a better chance to save for retirement.⁵
- Union members are far less likely to have to choose between caring for their health and losing their jobs. In 2015, 85 percent of union members had paid sick leave, compared to only 62 percent of nonunion workers. Most union members, 86 percent, had access to life insurance benefits through their job, compared to just 56 percent of nonunion workers. The vast majority of workers who had access to life insurance participated in the plan, signaling the value of the benefit.⁶

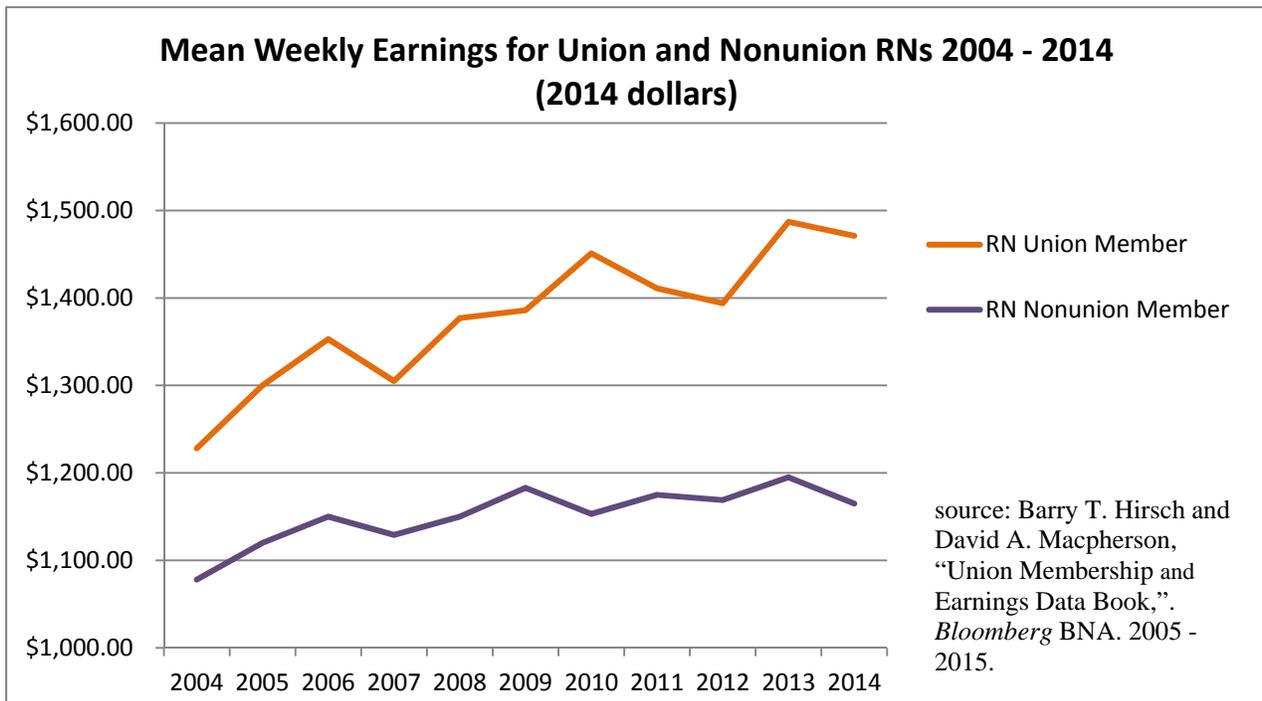
Union Difference for Women

Women are making up a larger portion of union members in the U.S. In 1989, women made up 36 percent of all union members; by 2013, that increased to 46 percent.⁷ Women made up 57 percent of all union members in professional and related occupations in 2014. Many of those women worked in community and social service (64 percent of the workforce), education, training, and libraries (74 percent), and healthcare practitioner and technical occupations (74 percent). These three occupation groups also had above average union density in 2013.⁸ Increased union density has meant higher pay and benefits for work that was historically lower paying because it was considered “women’s work.”

Union members in these three occupation groups earned median weekly wages that were between 11 and 28 percent more than their nonunion counterparts in 2014.⁹ This wage differential makes it possible for professional union women to adequately support themselves and their families and attain all the benefits and stability of a middle-class lifestyle.

In 2014, union women earned 33 percent more than nonunion women did. The union difference is apparent in the median hourly wages of predominantly female occupations. In 2014, union preschool and kindergarten teachers earned 112 percent more than their nonunion counterparts. In 2013, union librarians earned 77 percent more than their nonunion counterparts, while union social workers and counselors earned 30 percent and 60 percent more, respectively.¹⁰

There has been a consistent union difference for RNs who have chosen collective bargaining to fight for better pay and working conditions. After adjusting for inflation, the mean weekly earnings for RNs who were union members increased 19 percent from 2004 to 2014 (more than double the increase for nonunion RNs). Between 2004 and 2014, mean wage of RNs who were union members increased from \$1228 to \$1471.¹¹ Union RNs earned \$306 more per week than nonunion RNs did in 2014.¹²



The union difference for RNs has enabled them to earn fair pay for a tough job, but collective bargaining also makes it possible for RNs to fight for improved patient safety. The United Federation of Teachers (UFT), an American Federation of Teachers chapter, represents 700 RNs at Brooklyn’s Lutheran Medical Center. In February 2013, UFT ratified a three-year contract that required the hospital to hire 25 additional nurses to achieve a lower nurse-to-patient ratio.¹³

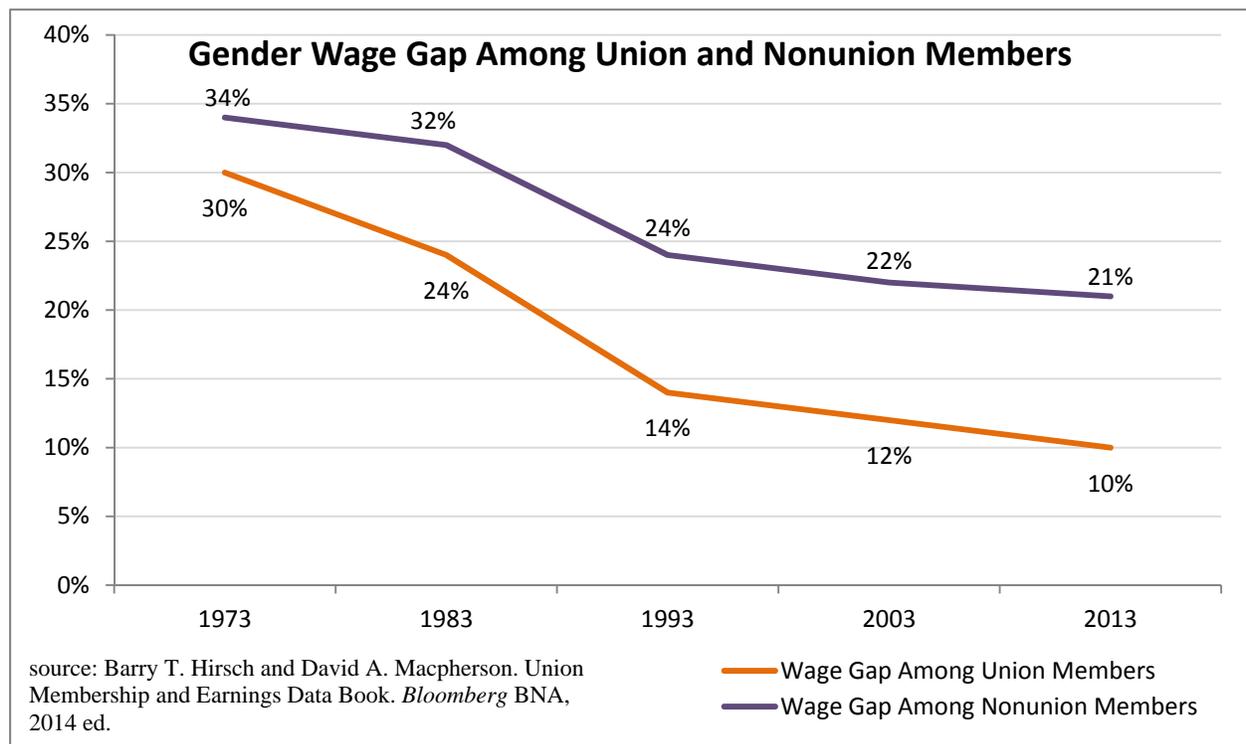
RNs represented by United Steelworkers Local 4-200 at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJ) in New Brunswick, NJ were awarded the American Nurses Association’s 2012 Outstanding Nursing Quality Award for the second consecutive year. RNs at RWJ reduced patient falls by 50 percent through “safety huddles” at the beginning of shifts. Their exceptional teamwork worked to “identify at-risk patients and to implement prevention strategies, such as bed alarms and risk mitigation during hourly nursing rounds.”¹⁴

Black and African American, Asian, and Hispanic and Latina women also benefit significantly from union membership:

- Median weekly earnings of Black and African American union women were 34 percent more than their nonunion counterparts.¹⁵
- Median weekly earnings for Asian women who were union members in 2013 were 14 percent more than their nonunion counterparts.¹⁶
- Hispanic and Latina women who were union members had median weekly earnings that were 46 percent higher than their nonunion counterparts.¹⁷

Union Membership Narrows the Wage Gap

The difference between men and women’s earnings has a significant impact on the lifetime earnings potential and retirement benefits of women. Unions have been successful in



helping to close the wage gap over the last 40 years. In 2013, the wage gap in mean hourly earnings among all workers 16 and over was 21 percent among nonunion workers and 10 percent among union members.¹⁸ The wage gap between nonunion White male workers and nonunion Black and African American male workers was 28 percent in 2014. Union membership narrowed this wage gap to 11 percent among White and Black male workers in 2014.

Conclusion

Labor unions are crucial to millions of working families. With unions, working people are more likely to balance both their budgets and their schedules. Balancing the demands of work and family is a challenge for most working Americans, and unions today help working people achieve that balance. Union members earn higher wages, have greater access to paid sick leave, pay less for family health insurance coverage, and have access to a comfortable retirement. For union women, union membership means they are significantly closer to closing the gender wage gap.

The Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE) comprises 22 AFL-CIO unions representing over four million people working in professional and technical occupations. DPE-affiliated unions represent: teachers, college professors, and school administrators; library workers; nurses, doctors, and other health care professionals; engineers, scientists, and IT workers; journalists and writers, broadcast technicians and communications specialists; performing and visual artists; professional athletes; professional firefighters; psychologists, social workers, and many others. DPE was chartered by the AFL-CIO in 1977 in recognition of the rapidly growing professional and technical occupations.

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¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Household Data Annual Averages “Table 41. Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by union affiliation and selected characteristics,” 2014.

² U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Household Data Annual Averages, Table 43. Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by union affiliation, occupation, and industry, 2014.

³ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employee Benefits in the United States—March 2015.” News Release.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson. “Union Membership and Earnings Data Book.” *Bloomberg BNA*, 2015 ed.; Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson. “Union Membership and Earnings Data Book: Compilations from the Current Population Survey,” The Bureau of National Affairs, 2000 ed.



⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Household Data Annual Averages, Table 11. Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2014.

⁹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Household Data Annual Averages, Table 43. Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by union affiliation, occupation, and industry, 2014.

¹⁰ Barry T. Hirsch, and David A. Macpherson. "Union Membership and Earnings Data Book," *Bloomberg BNA*, 2015 ed.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Michael Hirsch, "Lutheran Nurses OK 3-Year Contract," United Federation of Teachers, February 28, 2013.

¹⁴ United Steelworkers HealthCare Workers Council, "RWJUH Earns 2nd Consecutive Outstanding Nursing Quality Award from American Nurses Association." September 8, 2013. Available at: <http://www.usw4-200.org/2013/09/09/rwjuh-earns-2nd-consecutive-outstanding-nursing-quality-award-from-american-nurses-association/>

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Household Data Annual Averages "Table 41. Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by union affiliation and selected characteristics," 2014.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Household Data Annual Averages, Table 41. Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by union affiliation and selected characteristics, 2013.