

## Gender, Employment Sector, and Displacement: An Examination of Mecklenburg County during the Jobless Recovery Period

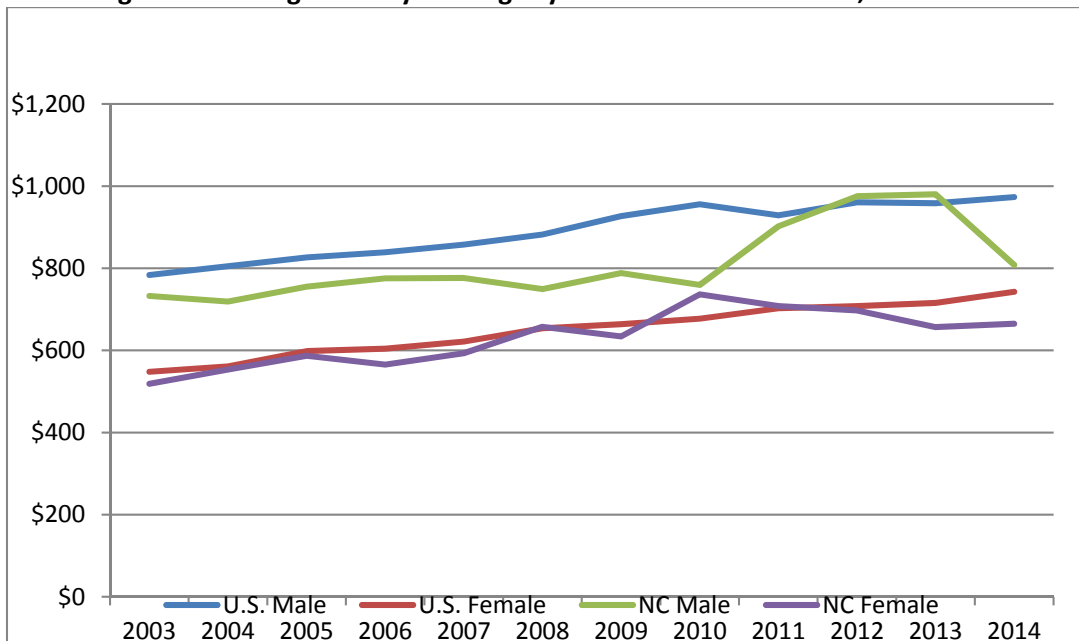
Jaclyn Piatak, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

This brief explores gender differences in employment outcomes for the United States as a whole, and North Carolina and Mecklenburg County in particular—with a focus on the jobless recovery period following the 2008 Recession. Using the Current Population Survey, the study examines unemployment rates, full-time labor force participation, and average weekly earnings. Armed with these statistics, the study considers potential reasons for the persistent wage gap between men and women, noting that women account for a greater percentage of the part-time or chronically underemployed labor market. Recognizing that unemployment and under-employment have significant social spillovers, Charlotte Works, the local workforce development board, attempts to address persistent labor market challenges in the area and effectively match qualified workers with available jobs. Although client satisfaction surveys indicate that Charlotte Works is generally doing an outstanding job addressing workers' needs in the job search process, recent surveys and focus groups indicate areas for potential improvement as well as significant differences in how both men and women perceive the services received.

### Gender Differences in Employment Outcomes

Despite strides in recent decades to address the pervasive gap in labor force outcomes for men and women, significant differences persist. The statistics reported below are compiled from the Current Population Survey - the years 2003 to 2014. The Current Population Survey, the primary source of labor force statistics in the United States, is a monthly household survey administered by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The following data relates to adults of prime working age, those between 16 and 64 years old.

**Figure 1: Average Weekly Earnings by Gender in the U.S. & NC, 2003-2014**



Source: Current Population Survey, Pooled Cross-Sections of the January Basic File, 2003-2014, Weighted

On a national level, women outperform men based on different unemployment indicators (women have a reported 3.4% unemployment rate compared with 4.6% for their male counterparts), yet the data for full-time labor force participation and average weekly earnings tell a more complicated story. Nationally, 88% of men are employed on a full-time basis versus only 74% of women. Men significantly out-earn women based upon average weekly earnings figures—both nationally and within the state of North Carolina as Figure 1 illustrates. The average weekly earnings for a male employee is \$891.81, whereas women earn only \$650.58. This variance results in an earnings gap of \$241.23 per week. Often, as the sole household wage earner, frequently caring for children, or perhaps acting as a care-giver for an older adult relative, the approximately 25% gender-based earnings discrepancy has detrimental socio-economic implications for women and their immediate and extended families (Mathiowetz & Oliker, 2005; Metlife, 2001).

**Table 1: Gender Differences in Employment & Earnings by Geographic Area**

		Unemployed	Full-Time Employees	Average Weekly Earnings	Wage Gap
<b>United States</b>	Men	4.6%	88%	\$ 891.81	\$ 241.23
	Women	3.4%	74%	\$ 650.58	
<b>North Carolina</b>	Men	5.0%	89%	\$ 809.41	\$ 177.56
	Women	3.8%	77%	\$ 631.85	
<b>Charlotte Metro</b>	Men	6.3%	88%	\$ 797.14	\$ 171.85
	Women	5.1%	76%	\$ 625.29	

*Source: Current Population Survey, Pooled Cross-Sections of the January Basic File, 2003-2014, Weighted*

The national trend of reduced earnings is replicated to a slightly lesser degree in the state of North Carolina and the Charlotte metropolitan area. For both men and women, North Carolina unemployment rates are above the national average, as illustrated in Table 1 above. The level of unemployment for men is 0.4 percentage points above the national average, standing at 5.0%, and this difference is the same for women, also at a 0.4 percentage point lead above the national average of 3.8%. Unemployment rates are significantly higher in the Charlotte metro area. The Charlotte Metro rates stand at 6.3% and 5.1% for men and women, respectively. Numerous potential reasons exist for the fact that men’s unemployment rates are persistently higher than those of women. One potential reason gaining traction is that, particularly during the Great Recession, men traditionally tended to be employed in industries with higher unemployment rates than women, or in industries that are hit particularly hard during economic downturns (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2010).

For men, the percentage of those categorized as full-time employees in North Carolina, and the Charlotte Metro area, closely mirror employment figures nationwide. These rates are 89% and 88%, respectively, with a national figure of 88%. Although a significant gap exists between the reported male numbers and the statistics for females in these locations, full-time labor force participation rates for women in the Charlotte Metro area exceed the national average. In North Carolina, the full-time employment rate for women stands at 77%. In the Charlotte Metro area, the indicator is 76% — while the national average full-time labor force participation rate is a mere 74%.

In the state of North Carolina, average weekly earnings figures also mirror the Charlotte Metro area, and figures for the United States as a whole. However, it is important to note that the wage gap between men and women in the two smaller regions is significantly lower than of the country as a whole. Compared with a nationwide pay gap of \$241.23 per week, the pay gap is \$177.56 in North Carolina and \$171.85 in the Charlotte metro area. The wage gap, however, tells a small — and incomplete — portion of the story. In both North Carolina and the Charlotte Metro area, men's earnings significantly lag the national average of \$891.81 per week. The figures stand at \$809.41 and \$797.14 for North Carolina and the Charlotte Metro area, respectively. There are myriad reasons to explain these earnings differences, including economics, local labor market idiosyncrasies, geographic and socio-demographic differences (such as age and race), as well as the varying patterns of growth in differing sectors and industries (The Job Gap Economic Prosperity Series, 2015).

A closer analysis of year-on-year statistics for the 2003-2014 period illustrates that average weekly earnings for men in North Carolina lagged the national average for each year in the period (with the exception of the years 2012 to 2013, when earnings were approximately equal to the national average). The difference between these two figures (national and statewide) is the greatest in 2009, during the depths of the Great Recession, as well as in the most recent year of the survey, 2014. Additional research is warranted to determine the reasons behind the dramatic fall in weekly earnings for 2014. Unlike male figures, which show dramatic differences across the analyzed time horizon, earnings profiles for women nationally and in North Carolina closely mirrored one another. In 2010, average weekly earnings for women in North Carolina surged above the national average. However, this trend quickly reversed itself, and by 2012, the average weekly earnings for American women surpassed those of their North Carolina counterparts. In fact, this earnings gap has widened in recent years, which begs the question of why and for how long will this gap persist?

As noted, the unemployment rate provides only a portion of the labor market picture — albeit a very informative part. The unemployment rate does not capture chronically underemployed individuals, such as those working at a job that does not utilize their full skill set or does not offer them their ideal number of working hours. In addition, the unemployment rate does not take into account frustrated workers who have chosen to drop out of the labor force. Statistics indicate that between 2003 to 2014, 33,126,000 workers reported only part-time work. Perhaps most importantly, out of this pool of part-time (and potentially underemployed) individuals, women accounted for 58% of the group. Given the fact that part-time earners often receive significantly lower wages and frequently do not qualify for benefits, like paid leave and health insurance, this figure has spillover effects upon living standards and relates strongly to social and policy issues (Owen, 1978).

Table 2 table below provides more detailed information on why different workers are working only part-time—broken down across genders. For both men and women alike, a slack labor market, meaning insufficient demand for workers, is the primary reason reported for part-time work. More than half of men (51.5%) and more than 40 percent of women (40.9%) attribute their part-time work to a slack labor market. The second most commonly cited reason across genders was the ability to only find part-time (P/T) work. A relatively large percentage of women (7.4%) also noted family and personal commitments played a role in limiting their ability to work full-time.

**Table 2: Reasons for Working Part-time by Gender (in thousands)**

	Men	M%	Women	W%	Total	T%
<b>Slack work</b>	7,177	<b>51.5</b>	7,850	<b>40.9</b>	15,027	<b>45.4</b>
<b>Only found P/T work</b>	3,782	<b>27.2</b>	6,124	<b>31.9</b>	9,906	<b>29.9</b>
<b>In school/ training</b>	813	<b>5.8</b>	1,079	<b>5.6</b>	1,892	<b>5.7</b>
<b>Seasonal work</b>	398	<b>2.9</b>	198	<b>1.0</b>	596	<b>1.8</b>
<b>Other family/personal</b>	313	<b>2.3</b>	1,429	<b>7.4</b>	1,742	<b>5.3</b>
<b>FT workweek difficult</b>	285	<b>2.0</b>	522	<b>2.7</b>	807	<b>2.4</b>
<b>Child care problems</b>	58	<b>0.4</b>	544	<b>2.8</b>	602	<b>1.8</b>
<b>Health limitations</b>	283	<b>2.0</b>	364	<b>1.9</b>	64	<b>1.9</b>
<b>Retired/social security</b>	83	<b>0.6</b>	60	<b>0.3</b>	143	<b>0.4</b>
<b>Other</b>	734	<b>5.3</b>	1,030	<b>5.4</b>	1,764	<b>5.3</b>

Source: Current Population Survey, Pooled Cross-Sections of the January Basic File, 2003-2014, Weighted

The reasons provided by males and females for leaving their jobs, shown below in table 3, closely align with the reasons for working part-time. Across both genders, 37.6% of people state that they left their previous job to return to school or to enhance their training. These figures are significantly higher for men than they are for women — 31.6% for females, compared with their male counterparts at 45.6%. On the flip side, far more women report leaving their previous job for broadly defined personal reasons; encompassing issues related to health, pregnancy, and family. For women, personal reasons such as these account for 21.5% of job leavings, whereas men point to these reasons at a rate of only 3.4%.

**Table 3: Reason for Leaving Prior Job by Gender (in thousands)**

	Men	M%	Women	W%	Total	T%
<b>Return to school</b>	1,366	<b>45.6</b>	1,243	<b>31.6</b>	2,609	<b>37.6</b>
<b>Temporary or seasonal</b>	402	<b>13.4</b>	458	<b>11.6</b>	860	<b>12.4</b>
<b>Slack work</b>	364	<b>12.2</b>	330	<b>8.4</b>	694	<b>10.0</b>
<b>Health</b>	141	<b>4.7</b>	213	<b>5.4</b>	354	<b>5.1</b>
<b>Personal/family (includes pregnancy)</b>	102	<b>3.4</b>	847	<b>21.5</b>	949	<b>13.7</b>
<b>Unsatisfactory work arrangement</b>	98	<b>3.3</b>	156	<b>4.0</b>	254	<b>3.7</b>
<b>Retirement or old age</b>	46	<b>1.5</b>	41	<b>10.0</b>	87	<b>1.3</b>
<b>Other</b>	478	<b>16.0</b>	647	<b>16.4</b>	1,125	<b>16.2</b>

Source: Current Population Survey, Pooled Cross-Sections of the January Basic File, 2003-2014, Weighted

Although telling, the reported unemployment rates and the other highlighted figures do not capture discouraged workers who have permanently dropped out of the labor force and are no longer actively seeking employment; statistics related to the reasons behind their choice provide a more detailed picture. As shown in Table 4 below, the most commonly reported reason for leaving the workforce is the pursuit of education or occupational training. For men, 24.8% state this as the reason they are not actively seeking employment.

On the other hand, fewer women (19.4%) indicate that school or training is the reason that they are not seeking employment. Other explanations listed for dropping out of the labor force are the inability to find work, the belief that no work exists, and ill health or physical disability. Other social and cultural motives that explain withdrawing from the labor market are childcare challenges and other family-

related challenges. Of the women polled, 22.4% note family responsibilities as a reason for leaving the workforce, the highest reason reported for women. This compares with only 6.2% of men who note this concern. These figures underscore the fact that decades after the Women's Liberation Movement, significant gender divisions still exist in American households and these household differences have an undisputed impact on the labor market.

**Table 4: Reasons Not Looking for Work (Discouraged) by Gender (in thousands)**

	Men	M%	Women	W%	Total	T%
<b>In school/training</b>	3,117	<b>24.8</b>	2,777	<b>19.4</b>	5,894	<b>22.0</b>
<b>Could not find work</b>	1,745	<b>13.9</b>	1,319	<b>9.2</b>	3,064	<b>11.4</b>
<b>Believes no work is available</b>	1,391	<b>11.1</b>	929	<b>6.5</b>	2,320	<b>8.6</b>
<b>Ill-health/physical disability</b>	1,244	<b>9.9</b>	1,481	<b>10.4</b>	2,725	<b>10.2</b>
<b>Family responsibility</b>	779	<b>6.2</b>	3,197	<b>22.4</b>	3,976	<b>14.8</b>
<b>Can't arrange child care</b>	57	<b>0.5</b>	21	<b>3.7</b>	578	<b>2.2</b>
<b>Transportation problems</b>	358	<b>2.9</b>	417	<b>2.9</b>	775	<b>2.9</b>
<b>Employer bias – age</b>	287	<b>2.3</b>	262	<b>1.8</b>	549	<b>2.0</b>
<b>Lacks required education/training</b>	252	<b>2.0</b>	233	<b>1.6</b>	485	<b>1.8</b>
<b>Other types of discrimination</b>	54	<b>0.4</b>	26	<b>0.2</b>	80	<b>0.3</b>
<b>Other</b>	3,278	<b>26.1</b>	3,126	<b>21.9</b>	6,404	<b>23.9</b>

Source: Current Population Survey, Pooled Cross-Sections of the January Basic File, 2003-2014, Weighted

### Charlotte Works

Charlotte Works, the local workforce development board, builds bridges between employers within the community (across sectors) and talented workers in search of new jobs. Charlotte Works professionally serves more than 800 firms and hosts more than 90,000 employee visits per annum. The organization's leadership believes that its best practice programs, and improved matching designs between qualified employees and employers, will spur vital economic development in the region.

Charlotte Works serves a large number of registered users (job seekers) each year. For the 15-month period under investigation (August 5, 2013-November 1, 2014), 11,417 job seekers registered with the organization. Women made up 57% of newly registered users. African Americans also made up the majority of Charlotte Works' registered users — approximately 52% of the pool. Although the vast majority of individuals utilizing Charlotte Works' services are currently unemployed, approximately 11% (across gender) are employed full-time, and roughly, 8% work part-time. The educational attainment of registered users spans the full spectrum — from school dropouts to those who hold doctoral degrees. The two most common cohorts, however, are those with high school diplomas and those who have earned a bachelor's degree.

A client satisfaction survey distributed in 2014 indicates that the vast majority of respondents were satisfied with the services provided by Charlotte Works. Roughly 97% of men and women alike noted that they were satisfied with the services rendered, and a similar, slightly higher figure, would recommend Charlotte Works to a friend. The most significant gender difference is seen in the preparedness question. Almost 98% of men felt better prepared for their job search after working with Charlotte Works as compared with only 94% of women. This gender difference will be explored in

greater detail when analyzing the results of the in-depth focus group study, as well as when policy prescriptions are provided to upgrade proffered services.

The majority of clients participating in the client satisfaction survey had only attended one to two organizational workshops. This held true across both genders. Only a small handful —significantly more women than men — reported participating in seven or more workshops.

### **Focus Groups: Insights into Jobseeker Experiences by Gender**

As the client satisfaction survey highlights, during the period analyzed, the vast majority of individuals who have utilized Charlotte Works' services have been extremely satisfied with the amenities they received. Although the client satisfaction survey indicates similarities across cohorts, the examination underscores a significant difference between men and women regarding individual perception of how beneficial Charlotte Works' services have been as an effective means for preparing them to begin their job search. This difference — and coherently explaining it — is identified as a significant topic within the focus group research.

More generally, the findings from the Charlotte Works' participant focus groups explore comprehensive and systemic gender differences in the job market. These variances range from unemployed status, to active job search, to job acquisition. To ensure transparency, single gender focus groups were established. Two focus groups were set up consisting of only females and two groups consisted of only men. The focus groups included 6-8 participants each. To guarantee wide participation from Charlotte Works' broad participant pool, focus groups were scheduled at different times of day. Although the focus groups were designed to stimulate free-flowing information exchange, certain questions were used as prompts in all the focus groups — eliciting necessary information related to the core research question. These prompt questions ranged from the solicitation of background information (Why was the individual utilizing Charlotte Works' services? Within what sector of the economy they would ultimately like to find work?) to specific experiences with Charlotte Works and follow-up advice learned from the jobseeker's experience.

#### ***Male Jobseekers***

Answers and feedback obtained from participants in the male focus groups closely align with statistics generated by the satisfaction survey. The participants noted that the quality of the provided services were excellent. Rather than recommending any paradigm shifts, male participants suggested minor tweaks to upgrade the provided services. One important recommendation was to differentiate workshops offered and the skills-focus based upon different industries — recognizing the fact that the requisite job skills for a manufacturing job could be dramatically dissimilar to the skills for an IT sector placement. Further, participants noted that rather than merely focusing on search skills, Charlotte Works should consider a transition to greater emphasis on teaching the requisite skills for successful job placement. As one individual stated, "Getting a job is different from having a job. You must be prepared and obtain different skills to find a job."

## **Female Jobseekers**

Whereas men focused on the technical aspects of the job search process — including increasingly utilizing social media tools, such as Twitter and LinkedIn — female Charlotte Works’ participants largely highlighted the emotional and psychological costs of unemployment. These concerns were particularly marked for older unemployed women. To address this, a participant recommended “counseling services for laid-off or fired older employees.” Also recognizing the fact that women may have extensive commitments outside of the workforce, female participants highlighted the need for Charlotte Works to have non-traditional office hours made available.

Although male participants hinted at the need to differentiate the skills taught to individuals based on their preferred job, female focus group participants went a step further by suggesting that women should be placed in jobs within their targeted industries to learn these skills first-hand. This suggestion considers a shift in focus from simply job search, but instead toward workplace success and, ultimately, long-term job retention. A participant noted, “If Charlotte Works could offer on-the-job training that made us more marketable for the type of jobs we are seeking that could close the gap between us and the existing jobs that would be very helpful.” Mentorship programs would play a similar role — strengthening women’s often susceptible position within the labor market.

The information generated by the focus groups provides a foundation for policy recommendations.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Despite the fact that most Charlotte Works’ clients expressed satisfaction with the provided services, this does not mean that the focus groups did not generate significant feedback and proffered recommendations. Some of these suggestions were universal across gender, whereas other recommendations were more specific to one gender or another.

- **Provide more specific and targeted workshops.** Universally, both men and women urged Charlotte Works to launch training sessions that would take into account that different industries require a wide variety of skill sets. The specific list of Charlotte Works’ seminars should take into account the following three factors: (a) the demographic characteristics and current skills of people utilizing Charlotte Works; (b) the industries in Charlotte that are booming and looking to hire; and (c) the skill sets and expertise of Charlotte Works’ employees and trainers. The goal should not simply be to introduce skills, but rather should be to offer best practice training.
- **Support older workers who may experience additional challenges in the job market.** The job search process takes significantly longer for older workers (Chan & Stevens, 2001). Some female focus group participants expressed that the length of the search process for older workers — compounded by other factors — causes significant emotional and psychological costs. Therefore, they recommended that Charlotte Works start offering psychological support services. As the focus group coherently and poignantly explained, “there is a lot of anger and sorrow in being unemployed.” In the short-term, this support may not be feasible — given budget constraints. However, it may be possible to establish a peer mentoring network that can provide support and guidance in an informal manner.

- **Training on and the use of technology.** Although the focus groups and satisfaction survey showed significant similarities along gender lines, certain differences were brought to the forefront. One of the starkest differences was in terms of technology. Female participants generally reflected on the fact that Charlotte Works' programs were difficult to navigate online — and that this aspect of its services should be dramatically upgraded. This upgrade would have to be evaluated from a comprehensive cost-benefit perspective. Whereas female participants concentrated on aspects of Charlotte Works' technology driven programs, some male participants in the focus group highlighted the importance of launching training that would allow job seekers to utilize social media tools effectively, such as LinkedIn and Twitter, in the job search process. In recent years, research has just begun to emerge regarding the benefits of social media in effectively seeking employment (Garb & Telang, 2011), as well as potential differentiated effects depending on gender and the types of jobs that the seeker desires. Even though only males highlighted the need for increased social media training, all Charlotte Works' participants would benefit from similar programs.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Despite strides in recent decades, gender differences in labor market outcomes persist on all levels—national, state, and local. Women still earn significantly less than men, and, at the same time, women are more likely to be under-employed or employed part-time. Various reasons contribute to these differences, including gendered expectations in the home and with childcare that may lead to certain behaviors in the labor market (up to and including, voluntarily dropping out). Recognizing that Charlotte has a large pool of untapped or under-utilized workers, Charlotte Works attempts to bridge the gap between potential employees and employers in the job search process.

Through satisfaction surveys and intensive focus groups, this study evaluated the quality of the programming provided by Charlotte Works. Although the quality was generally perceived to be high, concrete recommendations were offered including providing more targeted workshops that incorporate modern tools needed in labor search, such as social media acumen. Just as labor market results are gendered, the recommendations for Charlotte Works also demonstrated significant gender differences with female job seekers highlighting the need for the organization to focus more attention on the psychological costs of the job search process, whereas men focused more on industry-specific questions. The information contained in this study obtained from pooled data in the Current Population Survey to more micro-level data in the satisfaction surveys and focus groups should help Charlotte Works become more effective at targeting ongoing and structural challenges in the labor market.



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