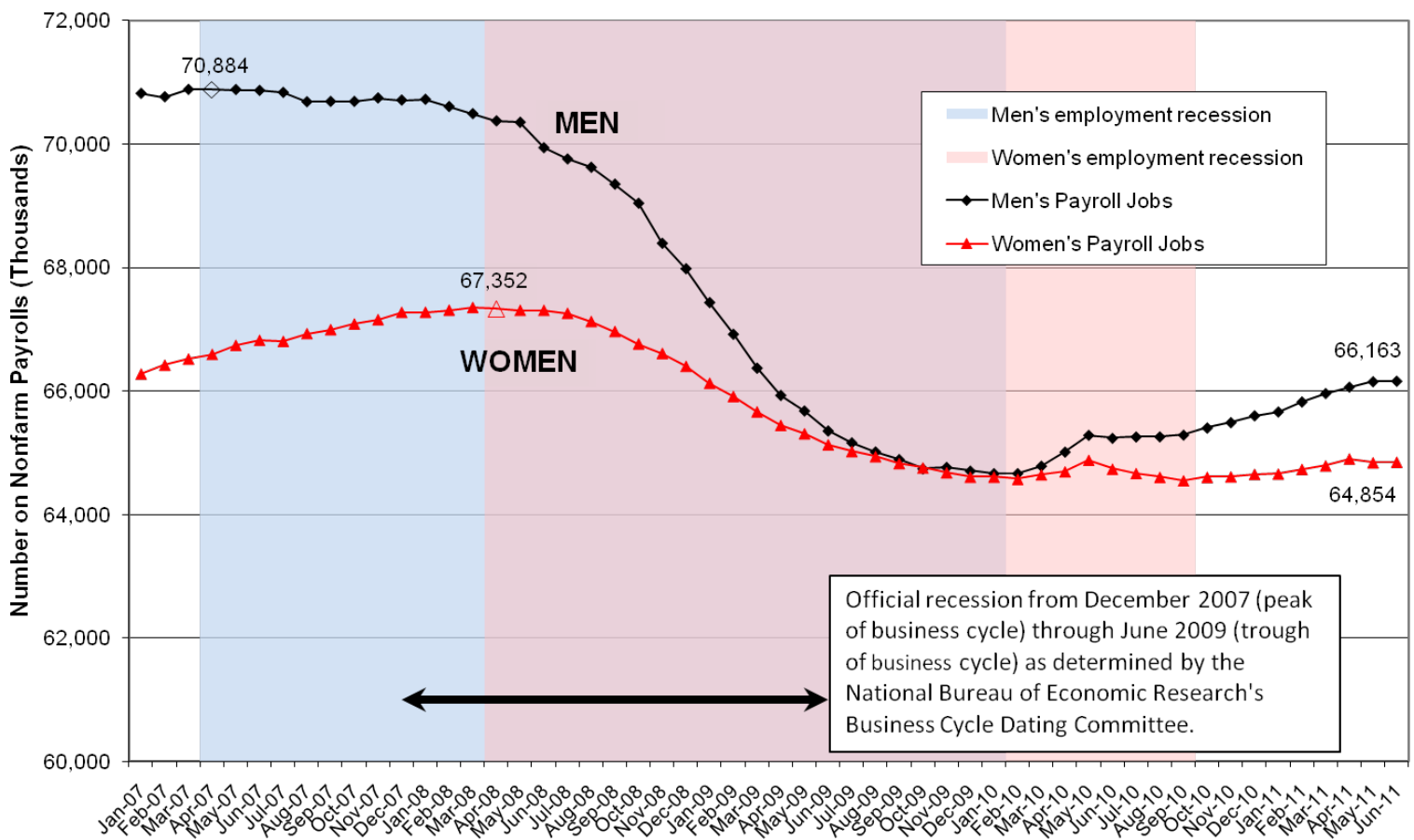


The Job Loss Tsunami of the Great Recession: Wave Recedes for Men, Not for Women

Monthly Number of Women and Men on Payrolls (Seasonally Adjusted), January 2007 – June 2011



Source: IWPR analysis of U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics (July 8, 2011)

The Great Recession has been characterized by massive job loss for both women and men. It is as if a giant tsunami wave washed across the American economy and wiped millions of jobs away. As the wave recedes, people are attempting to rebuild their lives. The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) new graphic shows that the tsunami has been both larger and longer lasting for men than for women, but that the recovery for men has at least begun, while women's job growth has so far failed to take hold.

Men had 33 months of nearly consecutive job loss and women 'only' 23 months. The number of months of nearly consecutive job loss and the size of the job loss is, however, unprecedented for both men and women (with the exception of the Great Depression of the 1930s). As can be seen in the graphic, women's recession, as measured by their job loss, started later than men's and their recovery has also begun later and has been more anemic than men's recovery.

Men's job loss began seven months before the recession began, women's job loss began five months after it began (women's jobs recession began a year after men's). Men's and women's job recovery initially started at about the same point, in the month of March of 2010. Then job growth hesitated for men in June of 2010 and dropped slightly before moving upward again, but women's employment actually fell for several months and reached a new bottom in September of 2010. For men the jobs recession lasted seven months after the economic bottom was reached (as identified by the National Bureau of Economic Research). For women, it lasted 15 months after the bottom.

For men, the tsunami wave seems to be receding as they slowly regain some of the jobs they lost. For women however, the recovery has not yet begun in earnest; women have regained only 11 percent (301,000) of the total jobs they lost in the recession (2.7 million). The picture looks somewhat better for men, especially if we count only from the beginning of the recession: men have gained 25 percent (1.5 million) of the jobs they lost since December 2007 (6 million). If we count all the job losses from the prior seven months, dating back to May of 2007, when men's job losses actually began, then men have regained 24 percent of the total 6.2 million jobs they lost.

Why are men doing somewhat better than women at this point in the recession? Further research will be needed to know all the reasons for this uneven growth. Since men and women tend to work in different sectors of the economy, it may be that men's areas are recovering faster than women's. For example, in business services more men than women have gotten jobs as employment has grown. Perhaps men are being hired as engineers or computer scientists by high tech firms, which are growing, while women are not being hired as secretaries and receptionists across the economy, as new technologies (voicemail) and work processes (consumer data entry) have led to less demand for those occupations. In manufacturing, durables employment (male dominated) has grown in recent months, while nondurable manufacturing (female dominated) is still losing jobs. In retail sales, men's jobs may be growing as automobile and home appliance sales have been picking up; whereas, women's jobs as cashiers may not be growing as more stores selling consumer goods (groceries and pharmacies) turn to self-checkout. Women are a disproportionate share of state and local government; those levels of government are shedding jobs now, and women are losing a disproportionate share of those jobs. Within the same fields, men may have more seniority than women, so may be laid off less or retired sooner.

Another factor could be men getting retrained and entering fields that are growing, such as health care. It has been 3.5 years since the beginning of the recession and the health services industry is the only industry where employment grew steadily every month. Very likely both women and men are shifting to health care. Occupational data, available through 2010 from the Current Population Survey, show no evidence that men are moving in large numbers into health occupations. Yet men are gaining jobs in the health industry. One explanation could be that male accountants and janitors who were laid off from jobs in auto manufacturing, for example, have found jobs in the same occupations in health care.

Another possible factor could be increased discrimination against women or increased bias in favor of men. It is possible that, since this recession was widely trumpeted by the media as a mancession, employers are now favoring men in hiring. An analysis by the Economic Policy Institute of job loss during the recession showed that in nearly every industry, higher shares of women than of men lost jobs. The main reason the recession affected more men than women was that men were located in industries that were harder hit by the economic downturn and women were located in less affected industries, like health care. But the higher female rates of job loss in many industries certainly suggest discrimination. The biases that may have affected job loss may now be affecting hiring.