

Comparable worth essay



Matthew Hutson 09-13-2008 Professor Miclot Phase 3 Individual Project The principle of comparable worth also known as sex equality and pay equality, is easily defined as “ the principle that men and women should be compensated equally for work requiring comparable skills, responsibilities, and effort. ” (britannica. com).

Comparable worth has been an issue of debate since it was introduced in the 1970s by people looking to counter act the inequities of pay for occupations typically held by men and women. After congress passed the equal pay act in 1963 employers were required to provide “ equal pay for equal work” regardless of gender, still compensation for occupations dominated by women continued to be far less than that of male dominated occupations. Some say that the principle of comparable worth clashes with the operation of the free market and that the worth of an occupation is undefinable and cannot be compared. There have been many lawsuits brought on the issue of comparable worth which has pushed it to political prominence. In 1981 “ the state of Washington was ordered to provide raises and compensatory back pay to female state employees, who were found to be earning 20 percent less than their male coworkers. ” (britannica.

com). Although the case of American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees V. State of Washington was over turned in a court of appeals, the state conceded to make women’s pay equal to that of there male counterparts. Laws pertaining to pay equity have been enacted in Europe, Canada, Australia, and in a number of state and municipalities in the United States. A major catalyst of the comparable worth revolution was the simple fact that women were only making approximately 60 cents for every

dollar that the men were making, which was a gap that had not changed much in decades.

pay equity advocacy groups and individuals presumed that the earnings difference to the sexual segregation of the workforce. Because of this practice women were contained to such low paying jobs as nursing, retail sales, and clerical services. Sexual discrimination discouraged or restricted women from attaining higher pay jobs that were assumably male only professions. Employers were still able to circumvent the 1963 Equal Pay Act, because prevailing interpretations of the law through the 1960s and '70s stated that women must receive equal pay when they perform the same job. The federal courts of the 1980s found little or no merit for suits that would broaden the reach of the Equal Pay Act, which would force employers to apply comparable worth principles to compensation.

The courts decided that the pay disparities between men and women were a product of supply and demand rather than intentional employer discrimination. Advocacy groups for comparable worth have had more luck in legislation than in the court room. In 1973 " the state of Washington became the first state to conduct a study of its own workforce to test for unequal compensation rates between sex-segregated jobs. " (answers. com). 10 years later in 1983 Minnesota became the first state to pass legislation to change the pay of all its employees, providing equal pay for comparable work.

By the late 1980s only four states had undertaken no comparable worth action at all, including data collection, task forces, job evaluation studies, or

salary adjustments, while twenty states were in the process of implementing pay equity plans based on comparable worth principles. References:

Comparable worth. (2008). In Encyclopedia Britannica.

Retrieved September 13, 2008, from Encyclopedia Britannica Online: www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/129611/comparable-worth Comparable worth. (2008). In US History Encyclopedia.

Retrieved September 14, 2008, from answers.com: <http://www.answers.com/topic/comparable-worth>