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Let's Talk Human Rights! May 11, 2017

1 message

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Thu, May 11, 2017 at 9:03 AM

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Let's Talk Human Rights!



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 - Office on the Status of Women
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Support for “pink collar” work is support for all of us

In honor of Mother's Day on Sunday, May 14th, I would like to dedicate this blog to my two favorite mothers – my own and my mother-in-law – two of the strongest and

smartest “pink collar” women I know.

My mother, a daughter of five kids who was married at the age of eighteen, graduated from high school and went on to spend her nearly 40 years in the workforce working as a receptionist for a variety of different doctor’s offices. She, like many other women in Iowa, has spent her life working in what is known as a “pink collar” job – or one that is in the service sector, in a field traditionally dominated by women.

My mother-in-law, a child of the 50s and 60s, spent the majority of her life working in a different pink collar job – nursing. During one conversation with my mother-in-law about work and why she chose to become a nurse, her response to me was: “Well, I didn’t want to become a teacher or a secretary so the only thing left for me was nursing.”

I’ve spent my life watching my mother work long hours, smiling while supporting everyone around her, trying to keep clients happy when they are screaming in her face for something beyond her control. I’ve watched her come into the office on her day off to fix the office computers, train other staff, and do other duties that likely fall into the “other duties as assigned” category.

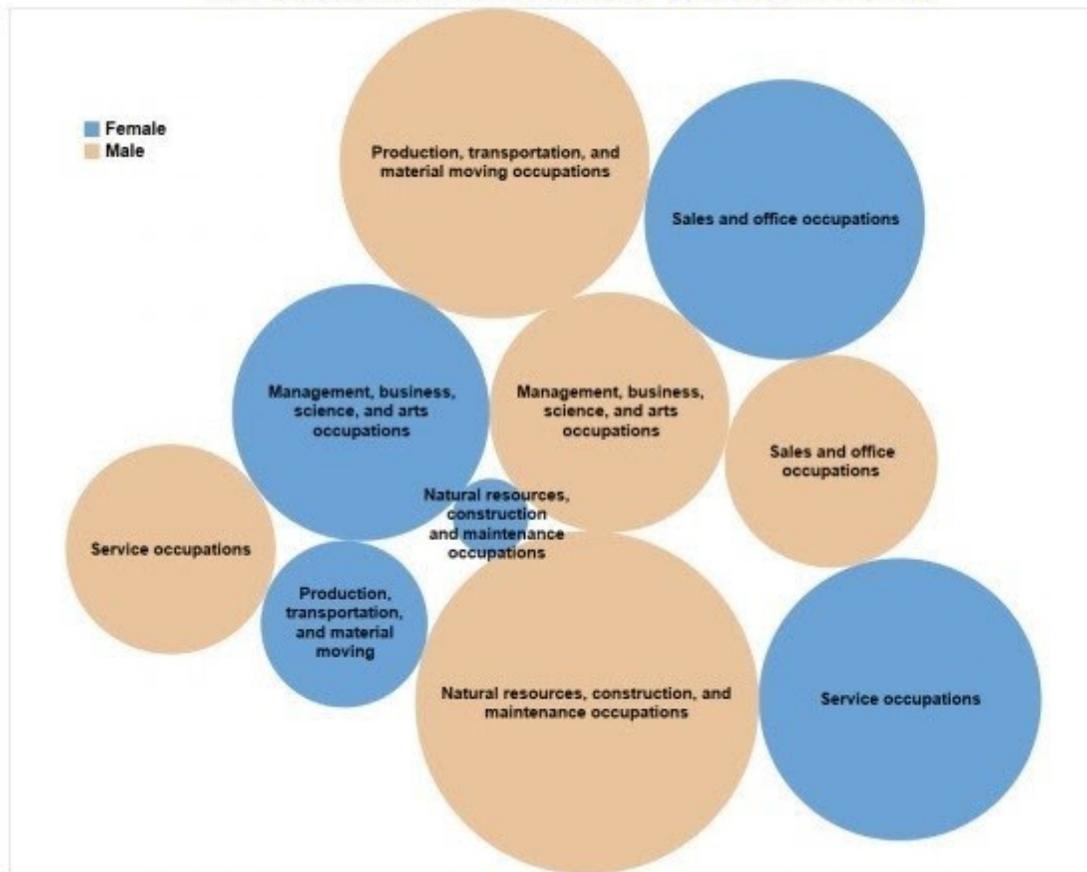
I’ve listened to stories of my mother-in-law working long hours as a nurse to come home to raise three children, while taking care of her dying mother.

These are two of the strongest role models I know. They are fierce. They are caring. They are also incredibly underpaid and undervalued.

So why am I writing about this in our blog this week?

Because these two women, like many women in Iowa, work in what are known as “pink collar” jobs. In fact, jobs in administrative support, other office occupations, and general service occupations make up the majority of the female workforce in this state (see figure below). They also make up some of the most notoriously low-paying and undervalued work.

Occupation in Iowa by gender: 2015



Source: [Women in Iowa: 2017](#)

While jobs that are blue-collar, such as unskilled and skilled work in manufacturing, maintenance or the construction industry, are often seen as good-paying jobs that are needed to boost our economy (and also dominated by men), pink collar jobs are often left by the wayside. These jobs are often not mentioned when it comes to training our future workforce, but support for these jobs is fundamental when it comes to stabilizing and boosting our local economies. It is imperative that we financially value these jobs the same way we value both unskilled and skilled blue-collar work, and the rest of our workforce in Iowa.

Women, children, persons with disabilities and seniors make up some of the most economically disadvantaged populations we serve in the state of Iowa. That could be due to the fact that the median income for women in Iowa in 2015 who worked full-time, year round was \$37,050, while the full-time, year round salary for men in Iowa was a \$49,081 – a \$12,031 gap. When we compare that to the salaries of single parents, the disparity is even worse. The median family income for single parent, female-headed households in 2015 was \$25,206; while the median family income for single parent, male-headed households: \$40,122 – a gap of \$14,916.

Add to that the pay disparity between “pink collar” and “blue collar” work and the picture becomes a little clearer. A typical starting salary for a receptionist or administrative support position in Iowa is between \$20,356 and \$21,962 per year. A typical starting salary for a pre-school teacher: \$19,418. For a nursing assistant: \$21,441. A home health aide: \$20,356. A childcare worker: \$17,040. A sewing machine operator: \$19,730. Community health worker: \$23,464. Community and social service specialist: \$21,441. Healthcare support occupations: \$21,274. These are all jobs primarily held by women.

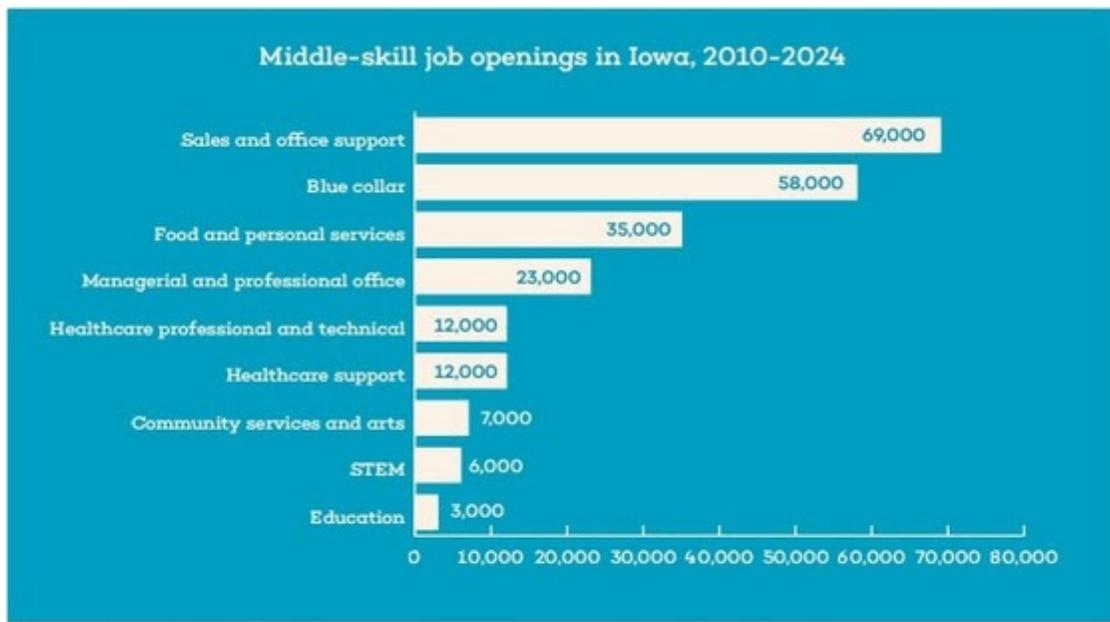
On the other hand, for blue collar jobs typically held by men the salaries are higher. The starting salary for a general construction laborer in Iowa is \$24,528. Carpet installer: \$27,030. Floor sander/finisher: \$25,696. Painter: \$25,258. Installation, maintenance and repair occupation: \$27,990. General production occupation: \$23,443. Locksmith and safe repairer: \$23,506. A general woodworker: \$22,963. Material moving worker: \$24,256.



(Data sources: [Iowa Workforce Development](#); [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#))

According to a recent report released by Georgetown University in support of the Future Ready Iowa initiative, [Iowa: Education and Workforce Trends through 2025](#), “between 2010 and 2025, 225,000 job openings will be in middle-skill jobs. But the share of middle-skill job openings will be much higher in certain occupations – especially healthcare support occupations, where 67 percent of job openings will require some

postsecondary education or training.” The report also shows the following graph which shows that sales and office support jobs will lead the way in job growth:



Source: Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl, *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020*, 2013.

Although these “pink collar” job areas are high growth, they are also very low-paying jobs, which often require a fine-tuned set of skills. It is unsettling to see that some of the highest growth industries are also those that pay some of the lowest wages, but are also jobs that are clearly needed.

How about this Mother’s Day, let’s value the majority of the female workforce in this state by stating what they are – vital, and by giving them the pay raise they deserve.

Sources:

Future Ready Iowa. “Future Ready Iowa Fact Sheet.” <https://governor.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/documents/FutureReadyIowa-FactSheet.pdf>

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Iowa Workforce Development. “Iowa Wage Report 2016.” <https://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/iowa-wage-report>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. “Poverty Guidelines.” <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>

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