

Study finds male partners make an average of 53% more than female partners at top law firms

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Careers

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Posted December 6, 2018, 3:40 pm CST

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The difference in average compensation for male and female partners at top U.S. law firms amounts to a 53 percent pay gap, according to a survey released on Thursday.

Average compensation for male partners responding to the survey was \$959,000, which is 53 percent more money than the average of \$627,000 paid to female partners, according to [the partner compensation survey](#) from Major, Lindsey & Africa. Average compensation for all partners was \$885,000. The [National Law Journal](#) and [Bloomberg Law](#) have coverage.

Only one female partner was among the group of highest-paid partners with compensation above \$4.1 million.

Nearly 1,400 partners responded to the survey, which was emailed to more than 63,000 partners in large and mid-size law firms on lists published by the National Law Journal and American Lawyer. Some of the partners also responded as a result of a LinkedIn campaign.

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Major, Lindsey & Africa sponsored and developed the survey in association with legal market intelligence specialist Acritas.

In a 2016 survey, the pay gap was only 44 percent. A [press release](#) cautions against concluding that the pay gap is widening, however, because partners responding to the survey likely vary each year.

Most male partners don't perceive a problem with pay differences, according to the new survey. Eleven percent of the males said they believe a pay gap exists, compared to 67 percent of the women. Only 23 percent of all the partners say law firm management has addressed the possibility of a pay gap.

A majority of the partners indicated they were satisfied with compensation: 21.8 percent were very satisfied, 34.8 percent were moderately satisfied, and 9.5 percent were slightly satisfied. Nineteen percent of female partners were very satisfied with compensation, compared to 23 percent of male partners.

Lucy Leach, technical research director of Acritas, said in a press release that differences in originations and billing rates were responsible for nearly 75 percent of the overall variation in compensation. "While the data doesn't suggest a conscious bias against women," Leach said, "it does suggest that the predominant compensation model in BigLaw today, which heavily rewards partners for their originations and hourly rates, may fail to recognize other contributions to firms and may be putting women at a disadvantage."

Average originations for male partners was \$2,788,000, compared to \$1,589,000 for female partners. Average hourly billing rates for male partners was \$736, compared to \$650 for the women.

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