

LETTERS

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Pay Gap Between Male And Female Physicians

Using New York State survey data for 1999–2017, Anthony Lo Sasso and co-authors (Feb 2020) found sex-based disparities in physicians' starting pay, even after they adjusted for important variables. We have two comments on the research. First, when there are substantial differences in the sample's high-paying specialty distribution between the sexes, cross-specialty comparisons may conflate specialty choice with sex-based disparities within a specialty.

Second, like every study of sex-based income differences, the authors found that male physicians work substantially more hours than female physicians do. We have proposed that overtime pay premiums might explain sex-based income differences.¹ Overtime pay reimburses the sacrifice of nonfungible leisure time, and overtime pay is law: US federal law requires that wage earners who work more than forty hours per week be paid an overtime premium of at least 50 percent.²

In a sample of about 8,500 primary care general internists, family practitioners, and pediatricians, our specialty-specific analysis found that when hypo-

thetical overtime premiums of 0–61 percent (depending on the specialty) were applied to more than two thousand annual hours of work, significant sex-based income disparities were eliminated.¹

If such reasonable levels of overtime pay premiums can explain sex-based income disparities within physician specialties, then future sex-based income disparity research might pursue a family—as opposed to a labor—economics approach to understand and address the barriers that women face in pursuing careers in highly paid specialties or having the opportunity to work more hours within their chosen specialty, if they wish to do so.

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NOTES

1 Weeks WB, Ventelou B. Exploration of leisure time valuation to explain sex-based wage gaps among salaried primary care physicians in the US. *J Rev Global Econ.* 2017;6:395–403.

2 Department of Labor. Overtime pay [Internet]. Washington (DC): DOL; [cited 2020 Jan 27]. Available from: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/overtime>