The Biblical “Pay Gap”

The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate a person to the LORD by giving the equivalent value, set the value of a male between the ages of twenty and sixty at fifty shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel; for a female, set her value at thirty shekels; for a person between the ages of five and twenty, set the value of a male at twenty shekels and of a female at ten shekels; for a person between one month and five years, set the value of a male at five shekels of silver and that of a female at three shekels of silver; for a person sixty years old or more, set the value of a male at fifteen shekels and of a female at ten shekels. If anyone making the vow is too poor to pay the specified amount, the person being dedicated is to be presented to the priest, who will set the value according to what the one making the vow can afford.’” (Lev. 27:1-8, TNIV)

Possible explanation: People who dedicated themselves or their families to the LORD could get out of the vow by paying money to the priests. The values approximate the costs of buying male or female slaves of different ages.

The high prices may have discouraged rash vows. One shekel represented an average worker’s wage for a month.