

# Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Women and the Wage Gap

APRIL 2025

Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) women are often held up as “model minorities” who overcome racism and sexism through education and hard work – an inaccurate stereotype rooted in white supremacy and patriarchy, especially as the gender wage gap still exists for these women. In 2023, AANHPI women were paid just 83 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>1</sup> But that topline number masks the diversity of experiences among the community.<sup>2</sup> Some AANHPI women are paid as little as 50 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>3</sup>

Individual accomplishments cannot overcome systemic discrimination. Disparities in pay and exploitation of workers based on race, class, gender and immigration status can be traced all the way back to this country’s horrific past of enslaving Africans and their descendants; and colonial attempts to destroy Native communities. This foundation of systemic oppression laid the groundwork for a long history of discriminatory immigration policies—from the Page Act of 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 to the Immigration Act of 1924 and, more recently, the Trump administration’s Muslim bans.

The wages of AANHPI women are driven down by a number of current factors including gender and racial discrimination, workplace harassment, job segregation and the devaluing of jobs dominated by women and the lack of support for family caregiving, which is still most often performed by women.<sup>4</sup> These structural factors can manifest for AANHPI women in the workplace as racist expectations of meekness, sexual

## AANHPI Women Are Not a Monolith

AANHPI women represent more than 50 ethnic subgroups speaking more than 100 languages. A lack of disaggregated economic data obscures the disparities between AANHPI subgroups and the unique challenges our communities face. This lack of information makes it difficult to design culturally-responsive policy solutions and to know where resources are needed. Better data can help paint a clearer picture of what the obstacles to economic justice are for AANHPI women and gender expansive people and inform the design of policy that better serves our communities.

objectification and the “perpetual foreigner” stereotype can result in denied promotions, harassment and violence, like for the women targeted in the 2021 Atlanta spa shootings.<sup>5</sup>

### **Disaggregated data for Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women show gender and racial wage gaps persist.**

- Among 27 select subgroups of AANHPI women, pay gaps range from 50 cents to 116 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men for all women workers including part-time and seasonal workers.<sup>6</sup> When comparing men and women within the same ethnic subgroup, there is a gender wage gap within almost every group.
- The largest wage gaps among these groups are for Bangladeshi women (50 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men), Burmese women (53 cents) and Nepali women (54 cents).<sup>7</sup>
- The largest groups of AANHPI women in the United States, based on self-reported ancestry or ethnicity, are Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese and Korean.<sup>8</sup> While the data don’t show a wage gap between Indian women and white, non-Hispanic men, Chinese, Filipina, Vietnamese and Korean women are still paid less. Chinese women are paid 86 cents, Filipina women 80 cents, Vietnamese women 59 cents and Korean women 82 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>9</sup>
- In fields where Asian American women are well represented, there are still wage gaps. Within management and financial occupations, Asian American women are paid 83 cents, an annual pay gap of \$15,694; as scientists, 89 cents, an annual gap of \$9,518; in sales, 87 cents, an annual pay gap of \$9,532; and in all service occupations, 67 cents, an annual pay gap of \$15,594 compared to white, non-Hispanic men in the same occupations.<sup>10</sup>

#### **AANHPI Women’s Median Earnings and Wage Gap by Self-Reported Ancestry or Ethnicity**

<b>Self-Reported Ancestry or Ethnicity</b>	<b>Total Population in the United States</b>	<b>Median Earnings</b>	<b>Wage Gap</b>	<b>Cents on the Dollar</b>
Bangladeshi	46,699	\$28,138	\$27,862	\$0.50
Burmese	40,971	\$29,780	\$26,220	\$0.53
Nepalese	49,770	\$30,000	\$26,000	\$0.54
Bhutanese	4,337	\$30,677	\$25,323	\$0.55
Pakistani	108,545	\$31,238	\$24,762	\$0.56
Tongan	11,870	\$33,000	\$23,000	\$0.59

Vietnamese	545,900	\$33,320	\$22,680	\$0.60
Samoa	29,023	\$33,765	\$22,235	\$0.60
Hawaiian	44,972	\$34,000	\$22,000	\$0.61
Mongolian	7,297	\$34,000	\$22,000	\$0.61
Indonesian	28,515	\$35,000	\$21,000	\$0.63
Thai	73,442	\$35,116	\$20,884	\$0.63
Kazakh	1,367	\$36,000	\$20,000	\$0.64
Laotian	53,075	\$36,000	\$20,000	\$0.64
Hmong	79,094	\$36,400	\$19,600	\$0.65
Guamanian/ Chamorro	20,013	\$36,400	\$19,600	\$0.65
Cambodian	77,822	\$37,000	\$19,000	\$0.66
Fijian	11,288	\$40,000	\$16,000	\$0.71
Malaysian	7,620	\$42,769	\$13,231	\$0.76
Mien	1,167	\$43,000	\$13,000	\$0.77
Sri Lankan	17,590	\$45,000	\$11,000	\$0.80
Filipino	1,004,242	\$45,020	\$10,980	\$0.80
Korean	425,774	\$46,000	\$10,000	\$0.82
Japanese	201,905	\$49,980	\$6,020	\$0.89
Chinese	1,211,299	\$50,000	\$6,000	\$0.89
Indian	1,048,120	\$62,475	-\$6,475	\$1.12
Taiwanese	68,929	\$65,000	-\$9,000	\$1.16

Sources: Author's calculations using 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates via IPUMS. Figures are for non-Hispanic AANHPI women aged 16 and older with earnings in the prior year, including AANHPI women who reported more than one race. The wage gap is calculated based on national median earnings for white, non-Hispanic men, about \$56,000 in this time period. Indian women represent those who self-selected "Asian Indian" as their race.

## AANHPI Women at the Margins Are Hurt the Most

Eliminating the wage gap would provide much-needed income to AANHPI women whose wages sustain their households, many of whom have been hit hard by the pandemic.

- Forty-three percent of Asian American and Pacific Islander mothers bring in 40 percent or more of their families' income, which means their households rely heavily on their wages to make ends meet and get ahead.<sup>11</sup>
- The poverty rate for Asian American households is 7.2 percent, and for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander households it is 13.0 percent; for female-headed households, these rates jump to 14.6 percent and 23.3 percent respectively. Many subgroups experience much higher rates of poverty.<sup>12</sup> For example, 25 percent of Burmese people and 25 percent of Mongolians live in poverty.<sup>13</sup> Women in these families are already struggling to pay for essentials and can't afford to continue to be paid unfairly because of their gender and race.
- More than 1 in 4 Asian Americans (27 percent) live in multigenerational households, compared to just 19 percent of U.S. households overall. Bhutanese people (56 percent), Laotians (40 percent), Cambodians (42 percent) and Hmong (36 percent) are particularly likely to live in multigenerational families, which means family incomes, including women's wages, support more people.<sup>14</sup>

## **How Does the Wage Gap Harm AANHPI Women?**

In 2023, median wages for AANHPI women in the United States were an estimated \$48,937 per year, compared to \$59,132 annually for white, non-Hispanic men. This amounts to a difference of about \$10,195 each year.<sup>15</sup> These lost wages mean AANHPI women and their families have less money to support themselves and their families, save and invest for the future, and spend on goods and services. Families, businesses and the economy suffer as a result.

For example, if the wage gap were eliminated, on average, an AANHPI woman would have enough money for:

- more than 12 months of food;<sup>16</sup>
- almost 11 additional months of child care;<sup>17</sup>
- one year of tuition and fees for a four-year public university, or the full cost of tuition and fees for a two-year community college;<sup>18</sup>
- six months of premiums for employer-provided health insurance;<sup>19</sup>
- more than five months of mortgage and utilities payments;<sup>20</sup>
- seven months of rent;<sup>21</sup> or
- their entire student loan debt in 44 months.<sup>22</sup>

## **AANHPI Women Are Demanding Change**

- AANHPI women experience workplace harassment and discrimination at high rates. In a survey conducted by NAPAWF, 74 percent of AANHPI women report that they have experienced racism or discrimination in the last year, with 17 percent reporting

that discrimination came at work. Almost three-quarters of AANHPI women, or 71 percent, reported feeling stressed and/or anxious due to fear of gender and/or race-based discrimination, harassment, or violence, with more than 1 in 20 (6 percent) feeling scared to return to work.<sup>23</sup>

- AANHPI women face exceptionally high rates of long-term unemployment, with almost half of Asian American women who experienced a job loss in 2020 being out of work for longer than six months.<sup>24</sup>
- Asian American and Pacific Islander women want Congress to act. Ahead of the 2024 Presidential elections, large shares of AAPI women rated the following policy solutions as either very important, or among the most important issues Congress can act on:
  - 75 percent support addressing the gender wage gap with equal pay
  - 85 percent support ensuring everyone has access to affordable health care
  - 85 percent support paid family and medical leave
  - 80 percent support making child care affordable<sup>25</sup>

## Congress Must Act

It is past time for Congress to enact policies that promote fair pay, address workplace discrimination and harassment, and ensure economic security for AANHPI women and their families.

- The **Paycheck Fairness Act** would strengthen the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and help eliminate the discriminatory pay practices that plague employed women. Wage transparency in lieu of salary history will help reduce compensation disparities amongst employees in the same, or similar jobs.
- The **FAMILY Act** would create a national paid leave insurance program to provide up to 12 weeks of paid leave when a new child arrives or a serious personal or family medical need arises, regardless of job type and title.
- The **Healthy Families Act** would allow workers to earn seven paid sick days to use to recover from illness, access preventive care or care for a sick family member.
- The **Be Heard Act** would expand protections against harassment and discrimination in the workplace to workers who have historically been excluded and also gradually raise the tipped minimum wage to choose between fair pay and their right to a safe, respectful workplace.
- The **Connecting Caregivers to Medicare Act** can help family caregivers better coordinate the care for their loved ones enrolled in Medicare, which is especially important for AANHPI women who live in multigenerational homes and provide care for parents.

- The **Health Equity and Access Under the Law (HEAL) for Immigrant Families Act** would allow immigrants to participate in health insurance programs for which they would be eligible but for their immigration status or length of stay. Many immigrants are barred from accessing publicly sponsored health insurance programs and must navigate a complex patchwork of care and pay out-of-pocket, making it more difficult to obtain vital health care.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). American Community Survey 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). Retrieved 11 December 2024,

from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/microdata/access.html>. Note: The Current Population Survey and American Community Survey do not provide data for Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women's earnings. This calculation is based on a comparison of white, non-Hispanic men and AANHPI women with earnings in 2023 from the American Community Survey PUMS. The median annual earnings of white, non-Hispanic men in 2023 in this source was \$59,132.

<sup>2</sup> Due to varying categories used in underlying data sources, this fact sheet uses various terminology to describe "racial" and "ethnic" categories throughout. This fact sheet draws on data from the U.S. Census, Current Population Survey and American Community Survey and, through secondary sources, data from the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, and from a national public opinion survey. All of these are based on respondents' self-reported identity and ancestry, but each source records, categorizes and reports those responses differently. In this fact sheet, we use the terminology from the underlying source. Where possible, we include disaggregated data for specific sub-categories based on self-reported national or ethnic ancestry.

<sup>3</sup> Author's calculations using 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates via IPUMS. Figures are for non-Hispanic AANHPI women aged 16 and older with earnings in the prior year, including AANHPI women who reported more than one race. The wage gap is calculated based on national median earnings for white, non-Hispanic men, about \$56,000 in this time period. Indian women represent those who self-selected "Asian Indian" as their race.

<sup>4</sup> Glynn, S. J. (2018, April 9). *Gender wage inequality: What we know and how we can fix it*. Retrieved 26 March 2024 from Washington Center for Equitable Growth website: <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/gender-wage-inequality/?longform=true>

<sup>5</sup> National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF) (2022, March). The state of safety for Asian American and Pacific Islander women in the US. Retrieved 26 March 2024, from <https://www.napawf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/napawf-state-of-safety-report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> See note 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2020). *Current Population Survey Occupation of Longest Job-People 15 Years Old and Over, by Total Money Earnings, Work Experience, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex PINC-06*. Retrieved 26 March 2024, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-06.html> Note: More recent data from 2021, 2022, and 2023 have not been disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

<sup>11</sup> Shaw, E., Mason, C., Lacarte, V., & Jauregui, E. (2020, May). *Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, & Breadwinners During COVID-19*. Retrieved 26 March 2024 from the Institute for Women's Policy Research <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Holding-Up-Half-the-Sky-Mothers-as-Breadwinners.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2023 Table S1702: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months of Families*. Retrieved 31 March 2025, from <https://data.census.gov/>

<sup>13</sup> Budiman, A. . (2021, April 29). *Asians in the United States*. Retrieved 26 March 2024, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/collection/asians-in-the-united-states/>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See note 1.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023, September). Consumer Expenditures - 2022. Retrieved 5 September 2023, from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cesan.pdf> (Calculation uses overall average "food" cost.)

<sup>17</sup> Child Care Aware of America. (2024). *Child Care at a Standstill: Price and Landscape Analysis*. Retrieved 11 September 2024, from <https://www.childcareaware.org/thechildcarestandstill/#PriceofCare>. The authors note that the landscape of child care varies significantly from state to state and computing a single national average is complex. This analysis uses the average of program-weighted averages for center-based care for a four-year-old, \$11,582.

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2024, July). Digest of Education Statistics: 2023 (Table 330.10, Average undergraduate tuition and fees and room and board rates charged for full-time students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution: 1963-64 through 2022-23), Chapter 3. Retrieved 9 September 2024, from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23\\_330.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_330.10.asp) (The average total annual cost of undergraduate tuition and required fees is \$9,750 for a four-year public college or university or \$3,598 for a two-year college).

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. (n.d.) Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) Insurance Component (IC): Table Series X. Private-Sector Data of Percentile Distributions of Premiums, Employee Contributions, and Employer Costs and State, 2023. Retrieved 9 September 2024, from <https://datatools.ahrq.gov/meps-ic/>

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2023, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics. Retrieved 12 September 2024, from <https://data.census.gov/> (Calculation uses median monthly owner costs, housing units with a mortgage.)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. (Calculation uses median gross rent for occupied units paying rent.)

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal Student Aid. (n.d.) Federal Student Loan Portfolio: Federal Student Aid Portfolio Summary. National Student Loan Data System Publication. Retrieved 9 September 2024, from <https://studentaid.gov/data-center/student/portfolio>. (Average dollars outstanding for recipients of direct loans as of Q3 2023, \$37,673.)

<sup>23</sup> National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF) (2022, March). *The state of safety for Asian American and Pacific Islander women in the US*. Retrieved 26 March 2024, from <https://www.napawf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/napawf-state-of-safety-report.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum. (2021, June 3). *Long-Term Unemployment Among Asian American and Pacific Islander Women*. Retrieved 26 March 2024, from <https://napawf.org/resources/long-term-unemployment-aapi-women/>

<sup>25</sup> Intersections of Our Lives. (2024, May). Ensuring the Voices of Women of Color are Heard. Retrieved 1 April 2025, from <https://intersectionsofourlives.org/polling/>

Anwesha Majumder and Sydelle Barreto were the primary authors on the April 2025 edition of this factsheet. Please contact them with any questions at [amajumder@nationalpartnership.org](mailto:amajumder@nationalpartnership.org) and [sbarreto@napawf.org](mailto:sbarreto@napawf.org).

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality, affordable health care and policies that help all people meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [NationalPartnership.org](https://NationalPartnership.org).

National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum is the only organization dedicated to uplifting and building power with AANHPI women and girls in the US. Employing a reproductive justice framework to guide their work, they use organizing, advocacy, and communications strategies to assert full agency over our lives, our families, and our communities.

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