

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

MARCH 2023

Conversations around the wage gap tend to over-focus on the numbers while ignoring the causes. But these numbers are more than facts and figures, they represent the tangible consequences of sexism and white supremacy in the United States and how our country systematically devalues women of color and their labor. While racism and sexism are often thought of as individual bias, history shows us that systemic discrimination 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 immigration policies, from the Page Act of 1875, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Immigration Act of 1924, to the Trump administration's Muslim bans. Many of these policies stemmed from our horrific past of enslaving Africans and their descendants; and colonial attempts to destroy Native communities.

In 2021, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) women were paid just 80 cents for every dollar paid to a white, non-Hispanic man.¹ But that topline number masks the diversity of experiences among AANHPI women.² Looking just at AANHPI women who work full time, year-round, some are paid as little as 52 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, as Burmese women are, or 54 cents, as Nepali women are.³

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.⁴

Counting All Women Workers in the Wage Gap

In previous years, conversations about the wage gap focused only on women working full time, year-round. That meant leaving out part-time and seasonal workers – disproportionately women of color – who not only tend to be paid less but also often have less-flexible jobs and fewer benefits. In 2021, more than 28 million women workers would not have been counted in the full-time wage gap.

Data for Asian American and Pacific Islander women show gender and racial wage gaps persist.

- Among 23 select subgroups of AAPI women working full time, year-round, pay ranges from 52 cents to 121 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.⁵
- The largest wage gaps among these groups are for Burmese women (52 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men), Nepali women (54 cents) and Tongan, Cambodian, Hmong and Samoan women (60 cents).⁶
- The largest groups of Asian Americans in the United States, based on self-reported ancestry or ethnicity, are Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese and Korean.⁷ While the wage gap between Chinese and Indian women and white, non-Hispanic men is small or nonexistent, Filipina, Vietnamese and Korean women are paid less. Filipina women are paid 83 cents, Vietnamese women 63 cents and Korean women 86 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.⁸
- Asian American women within management and financial occupations 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 service occupations, 67 cents, an annual pay gap of \$15,594 compared to white, non-Hispanic men in the same occupations.⁹

Wage Gaps for Asian American and Pacific Islander Women by Subgroup, Compared to White, Non-Hispanic and AAPI men

Self-Reported Ancestry or Ethnicity	Total Number in the United States	Median Wages for Women	Annual Wage Gap Compared to White, Non-Hispanic Men
Burmese	233,347	\$30,000	\$28,000
Nepali	217,150	\$31,200	\$26,800
Cambodian	272,408	\$35,000	\$23,000
Hmong	345,338	\$35,000	\$23,000
Samoan	121,585	\$35,000	\$23,000
Tongan	44,193	\$35,000	\$23,000
Laotian	181,458	\$35,300	\$22,700
Hawaiian	185,391	\$36,000	\$22,000
Vietnamese	1,896,690	\$36,500	\$21,500
Thai	180,364	\$37,000	\$21,000
Guamanian/ Chamorro	68,757	\$37,000	\$21,000
Fijian	35,480	\$38,000	\$20,000
Bangladeshi	245,131	\$40,000	\$18,000
Indonesian	85,957	\$45,000	\$13,000
Filipino	2,960,811	\$48,000	\$10,000

Pakistani	555,917	\$48,500	\$9,500
Korean	1,445,315	\$50,000	\$7,000
Sri Lankan	72,271	\$50,000	\$7,000
Japanese	742,549	\$55,000	\$3,000
Chinese	4,103,036	\$60,000	\$2,000
Indian	4,402,223	\$70,000	-\$12,000
Taiwanese	257,430	\$70,000	-\$12,000
Malaysian	23,238	\$70,000	-\$12,000

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Geographies: All States within United States, Table B02015 and Table B02016*; Center for American Progress analysis of median earnings for full-time, year-round workers by AAPI subpopulation based on Steven Ruggles and others, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, U.S. Census Data for Social, Economic, and Health Research, 2015-2019 American Community Survey: 5-year estimates: Version 10.0" (Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center, 2021), available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. White, non-Hispanic men made \$58,000 annually, on average, between 2015 and 2019. Indian women represent those who self-selected "Asian Indian" as their race.

How Does the Wage Gap Harm AANHPI Women?

In 2021, median wages for AANHPI women in the United States were an estimated \$40,000 per year, compared to \$50,000 annually for white, non-Hispanic men. This amounts to a difference of about \$10,000 each year.¹⁰ 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 approximately:

- Twelve additional months of child care;¹¹
- 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;¹²
- More than six months of premiums for employer-provided health insurance;¹³
- Six months of mortgage and utilities payments;¹⁴
- More than nine months of rent;¹⁵
- More than eight additional years of birth control;¹⁶ or
- Enough money to pay off student loan debt in just under four years.¹⁷

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.¹⁸
- The poverty rate for Asian American households is 7.5 percent, and for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander households is 13.5 percent, and many subgroups experience much higher rates.¹⁹ For example, 25 percent of Burmese and 25 percent of Mongolians live in poverty.²⁰ Women in these families are already struggling and can't afford unfair pay.
- More than one in four 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.²¹

AANHPI Women Are Demanding Change

- AAPI women experience workplace harassment and discrimination at high rates. In a recent survey conducted by TIME'S UP, 58 percent of AAPI women report that they have experienced gender or racial discrimination or obstacles within the workplace. Moreover, 51 percent of AAPI women report that they feel men had more opportunities in the workplace and only 27 percent are very sure their employer pays men and women equally.²²
- In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, 52 percent of AAPI women report that they have faced some economic set back such as being laid off, furloughed, or faced a pay cut.²³ And AAPI women faced exceptionally high rates of long-term unemployment, with almost half who experienced a job loss in 2020 being out of work for longer than six months.²⁴
- Asian American and Pacific Islander women want Congress to act. Ahead of the 2022 midterm elections, large shares of AAPI women rated the following policy solutions as either very important, or among the most important Congress can act on:
 - 83 percent for strengthening equal pay laws;
 - 82 percent for ending workplace harassment and discrimination;
 - 81 percent for paid family and medical leave;
 - 80 percent for workforce training for nontraditional jobs; and
 - 79 percent for prohibiting the use of salary history.²⁵

- It is past time for Congress to enact policies that promote fair pay, address workplace discrimination and harassment, and ensure the economic security of working families.
 - The **Paycheck Fairness Act** would strengthen the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and help eliminate the discriminatory pay practices that plague employed women.
 - 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.
 - 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 **Ending the Monopoly of Power Over Workplace Harassment through Education and Reporting (EMPOWER) Act** would address certain issues related to workplace harassment.

¹ National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF) analysis of median earnings for full and part-time workers by Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander subpopulation based on 2021 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, accessed via Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Megan Schouweiler and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 12.0. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V12.0>. White, non-Hispanic men made \$50,000 annually in 2021. Indian women represent those who self-selected “Asian Indian” as their race. For more information on including part-time and seasonal workers in the wage gap, see *Closing the Wage Gap for All Women Workers*, <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/fair-pay/closing-the-wage-gap-for-all.pdf>

² 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, where an underlying source refers to women with self-reported Asian ancestry alone, we use “Asian American women.” Where a source refers to Asian and Pacific Islander women, we use “Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women.” Where possible, we include disaggregated data for specific sub-categories based on self-reported national or ethnic ancestry.

³ Center for American Progress analysis of median earnings for full-time, year-round workers by AAPI subpopulation based on Steven Ruggles and others, “Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, U.S. Census Data for Social, Economic, and Health Research, 2015-2019 American Community Survey: 5-year estimates: Version 10.0” (Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center, 2021), available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. See Bleiweis, R. (2021, March 4). *The Economic Status of Asian American and Pacific Islander Women (Figure 3)*. Retrieved 16 February 2023, from Center for American Progress website: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/economic-status-asian-american-pacific-islander-women/>

⁴ Glynn, S. J. (2018, April 9). *Gender wage inequality: What we know and how we can fix it*. Retrieved 16 February 2023 from Washington Center for Equitable Growth website: <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/gender-wage-inequality/?longform=true>

⁵ See note 3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2021, Geographies: All States within United States, Tables B02015 and B02016*. Retrieved 16 February 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/>

⁸ See note 3.

⁹ 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 21 February 2023, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-06.html>

¹⁰ See note 1.

¹¹ Child Care Aware of America. (2022, March). Demanding Change: Repairing our Child Care System. Retrieved 16 February 2023, from <https://www.childcareaware.org/demanding-change-repairing-our-child-care-system/>. The price of child care is shaped by numerous local and state factors, making it complex to estimate a single national average; this calculation is based on the average of program-weighted averages for center-based child care for a four-year-old, \$9,715.

¹² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *Digest of Education Statistics (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: Selected years, 1963-64 through 2020-21)*. Retrieved 16 February 2023, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_330.10.asp?current=yes (The average total annual cost of undergraduate tuition and required fees is \$9,375 for a four-year public college or university or \$3,501 for a two-year college.)

¹³ Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.) *Average Annual Single Premium per Enrolled Employee For Employer-Based Health Insurance, 2021*. Retrieved 16 February 2023, from <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/single-coverage/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Employee%20Contribution%22,%22sort%22:%22desc%22%7D>

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2021, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics*. Retrieved 16 February 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/> (Calculation uses median monthly owner costs for housing units with a mortgage.)

¹⁵ Ibid. (Calculation uses median gross rent for occupied units paying rent.)

¹⁶ Center for American Progress. (2012, February 15). *The High Costs of Birth Control: It's Not As Affordable As You Think*. Retrieved 16 February 2023, from https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/02/pdf/BC_costs.pdf (Calculated from a survey of retail costs of oral contraceptives for the uninsured and average copays, combined with the average cost of doctor visits to obtain the prescription. While the Affordable Care Act greatly advanced access to birth control by requiring coverage of contraceptives without cost sharing, many women still must pay out of pocket because they lack insurance, because their plan is grandfathered and does not cover contraceptives without a copay, or because their plan only covers generics.)

¹⁷ 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 15 September 2022. (Average dollars outstanding for recipients of direct loans as of Q2 2022, \$37,633.)

¹⁸ 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 16 February 2023 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>

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2021 Table S1702: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months of Families*. Retrieved 14 February 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/>

²⁰ Budiman, A. . (2021, April 29). *Asians in the United States*. Retrieved 16 February 2023, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/collection/asians-in-the-united-states/>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Time's Up Foundation (2020, July 30). *Gender and racial inequity during crisis: The pay gap*. Retrieved 16 February 2023, from <https://timesupfoundation.org/work/times-up-pay-up/gender-and-racial-inequity-during-crisis-the-pay-gap/>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum. (2021, June 3). *Long-Term Unemployment Among Asian American and Pacific Islander Women*. Retrieved 16 February 2023, from <https://www.napawf.org/our-work/content/2021/6/3/long-term-unemployment-among-aapi-women-afzf4>

²⁵ YWCA. (2022, August). *YWWomenVote 2022 – Midterm Elections: Spotlight on Asian American and Pacific Islander Women*. Retrieved 16 February 2023, from <https://ywomenvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/20220825-YWomenVote2022-SpotlightAAPIWomen-FINAL.pdf>