

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

APRIL 2024

Conversations around the wage gap and women of color often stall when talking about Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) women because of the perceived lack of a wage gap for these women. AANHPI women are often held up by those entrenched in white supremacy and patriarchy as “model minorities” who overcome racism and sexism through education and hard work. But individual accomplishments cannot overcome systemic discrimination, and 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 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 2022, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) women were paid just 80 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.¹ But that topline number masks the diversity of experiences among AANHPI women.² Some AANHPI women are paid as little as 49 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, as Bangladeshi women are, or 51 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 These structural factors can manifest for AANHPI women in the workplace as racist expectations of meekness, sexual

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 2022, more than 27 million women workers would not have been counted in the full-time wage gap.

objectification and perpetual otherness that can result in denied promotions, harassment and violence, like for the women targeted in the 2021 Atlanta spa shootings.

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

- Among 25 select subgroups of AANHPI women, pay gaps range from 49 cents to 118 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.⁵
- The largest wage gaps among these groups are for Bangladeshi women (49 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men), Nepali women (51 cents) and Burmese women (52 cents).⁶
- The largest groups of AANHPI women in the United States, based on self-reported ancestry or ethnicity, are Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese and Korean.⁷ While the wage gap between Indian women and white, non-Hispanic men is nonexistent, Chinese, Filipina, Vietnamese and Korean women are 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.⁸
- 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 service occupations, 67 cents, an annual pay gap of \$15,594 compared to white, non-Hispanic men in the same occupations.⁹

Women’s Median Earnings and Wage Gap by Self-Reported Ancestry or Ethnicity				
Self-Reported Ancestry or Ethnicity	Total Population in the United States	Median Earnings	Wage Gap	Cents on the Dollar
Bangladeshi	41,287	\$27,023	\$28,091	\$0.49
Nepali	46,944	\$28,104	\$27,010	\$0.51
Burmese	37,654	\$28,705	\$26,409	\$0.52
Pakistani	102,148	\$30,396	\$24,718	\$0.55
Bhutanese	5,032	\$30,595	\$24,519	\$0.56
Vietnamese	535,191	\$32,408	\$22,706	\$0.59
Mongolian	6,741	\$32,427	\$22,687	\$0.59
Tongan	10,310	\$32,427	\$22,687	\$0.59

Hawaiian	45,618	\$33,994	\$21,120	\$0.62
Thai	71,611	\$34,447	\$20,667	\$0.63
Samoan	26,729	\$34,447	\$20,667	\$0.63
Indonesian	28,312	\$35,000	\$20,114	\$0.64
Cambodian	76,852	\$35,072	\$20,042	\$0.64
Hmong	77,091	\$35,072	\$20,042	\$0.64
Laotian	51,999	\$35,306	\$19,808	\$0.64
Guamanian/ Chamorro	20,299	\$36,475	\$18,639	\$0.66
Fijian	11,435	\$40,000	\$15,114	\$0.73
Sri Lankan	16,198	\$40,188	\$14,926	\$0.73
Filipino	988,993	\$44,317	\$10,797	\$0.80
Korean	423,080	\$45,000	\$10,114	\$0.82
Malaysian	7,713	\$45,398	\$9,716	\$0.82
Chinese	1,194,464	\$47,560	\$7,554	\$0.86
Japanese	204,017	\$47,592	\$7,522	\$0.86
Indian	1,009,367	\$60,856	-\$5,742	\$1.10
Taiwanese	64,283	\$64,855	-\$9,741	\$1.18

Sources: Author's calculations using 2018-2022 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 \$55,114 in this time period. Indian women represent those who self-selected "Asian Indian" as their race.

How Does the Wage Gap Harm AANHPI Women?

In 2022, median wages for AANHPI women in the United States were an estimated \$44,819 per year, compared to \$56,285 annually for white, non-Hispanic men. This amounts to a difference of about \$11,466 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:

- nearly 15 months of food;¹¹
- almost 13 additional months of child care;¹²
- 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;¹³
- seven months of premiums for employer-provided health insurance;¹⁴
- nearly seven months of mortgage and utilities payments;¹⁵
- more than eight months of rent;¹⁶ or
- their entire student loan debt in 39 months.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 7.3 percent, and for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander households it is 13.6 percent; for female-headed households, these rates jump to 14.6 percent and 23.8 percent respectively. Many subgroups experience much higher rates of poverty.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 to continue to be paid unfairly.
- 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.²¹

AANHPI Women Are Demanding Change

- AANHPI women experience workplace harassment and discrimination at high rates. In a recent 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.²²

- 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.²³
- 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 of paid family and medical leave
 - 80 percent for workforce training for nontraditional jobs
 - 79 percent for prohibiting the use of salary history²⁴
- 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 **Ending the Monopoly of Power Over Workplace Harassment through Education and Reporting (EMPOWER) Act** would address certain issues related to workplace harassment, such as prohibiting nondisclosure and non-disparagement clauses in certain circumstances and requiring companies to disclose how many harassment claims they settle each year and the amount paid out to them.
 - 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.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). American Community Survey 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). Retrieved 10 January 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 2022 from the American Community Survey PUMS. The median annual earnings of white, non-Hispanic men in 2022 in this source was \$56,285.

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, 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.

³ Author's calculations using 2018-2022 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 \$55,114 in this time period. Indian women represent those who self-selected "Asian Indian" as their race.

⁴ 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>

⁵ See note 3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

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 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 and 2022 have not been disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

¹⁰ See note 1.

¹¹ 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.)

¹² Child Care Aware of America. (2022). *Demanding Change: Repairing Our Child Care System*. Retrieved 1 September 2023, from <https://www.childcareaware.org/demanding-change-repairing-our-child-care-system>. 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, \$9,715 with a 10.84% inflation adjustment to account for the rise in child care costs since 2020 (Inflation adjustment uses the Consumer Price Index data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for Day care and preschool) for a total annual cost of \$10,768.

¹³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2023, July). *Digest of Education Statistics: 2022* (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 2021-22), Chapter 3. Retrieved 6 September 2023, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_330.10.asp (The average total annual cost of undergraduate tuition and required fees is \$9,596 for a four-year public college or university or \$3,564 for a two-year college)

¹⁴ Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.) *Average Annual Single Premium per Enrolled Employee For Employer-Based Health Insurance, 2022*. Retrieved 5 September 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>

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2022, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics*. Retrieved 14 September 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/> (Calculation uses median monthly owner costs, housing units with a mortgage.)

¹⁶ Ibid. (Calculation uses median gross rent for occupied units paying rent.)

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 1 September 2023, from <https://studentaid.gov/data-center/student/portfolio>. (Average dollars outstanding for recipients of direct loans as of Q2 2022, \$37,673.)

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 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>

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2022 Table S1702: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months of Families*. Retrieved 26 March 2024, from <https://data.census.gov/>

²⁰ 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/>

²¹ Ibid.

²² 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>

²³ 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/>

²⁴ YWCA. (2022, August). *YWomensVote 2022 – Midterm Elections: Spotlight on Asian American and Pacific Islander Women*. Retrieved 26 March 2024, from <https://ywomensvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/20220825-YWomensVote2022-SpotlightAAPIWomen-FINAL.pdf>

Anwasha Majumder was the primary author on the April 2024 edition of this factsheet. Please contact her with any questions at amajumder@nationalpartnership.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.

© 2024 National Partnership for Women & Families. All rights reserved.