Asian American and Pacific Islander Women and the Wage Gap

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A persistent gender-based wage gap continues to harm women, their families and the economy – and it is particularly damaging for many Asian American and Pacific Islander women. Asian American women in the United States who work full time, year-round are typically paid just 85 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, and the wage gaps among Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) subgroups show that AAPI women of many ethnic and national backgrounds continue to suffer from even larger gaps in wages. These wage gaps are driven by factors including gender and racial discrimination, workplace harassment, job segregation and a lack of workplace policies that support family caregiving, which is still most often performed by women.

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

- Among 20 select subgroups of AAPI women working full time, year-round, pay ranges from 50 cents to 121 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.

- Burmese, Hmong and Laotian women experience the largest wage gaps. Burmese women are paid 50 cents, Hmong women 57 cents and Laotian women 58 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.

- Among the subgroups in which women are typically paid more than or the same as white, non-Hispanic men, women are still paid less than men within the same subgroup. For example, of full-time, year-round workers, Indian women are paid 77 cents, Taiwanese women 74 cents, Sri Lankan women 83 cents and Chinese women 86 cents for every dollar paid to men within their subgroups.

- The largest groups of Asian Americans in the United States, based on self-reported ancestry or ethnicity, are Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese and Korean. Chinese and Indian women are typically paid more than white, non-Hispanic men, but Filipina, Vietnamese and Korean women are paid less. Filipina women are paid 83 cents, Vietnamese women 64 cents and Korean women 86 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.
How Does the Wage Gap Harm Asian American Women?

Median wages for Asian American women in the United States are $51,378 per year, compared to median wages of $60,388 annually for white, non-Hispanic men. This amounts to a difference of $9,010 each year. These lost wages mean Asian American 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 Asian American woman working full time, year-round would have enough money for approximately:

- More than 12 additional months of child care;¹⁰
- One additional 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;¹¹
- More than six months of premiums for employer-provided health insurance;¹²
- Nearly six months of mortgage and utilities payments;¹³
- Nearly nine additional months of rent;¹⁴
- More than seven additional years of birth control;¹⁵ or
- Enough money to pay off student loan debt in just over three years.¹⁶

**Asian American Women at the Margins Are Hurt the Most**

Eliminating the wage gap would provide much-needed income to Asian American women whose wages sustain their households.

- Nearly 45 percent of Asian American 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.¹⁷
- The poverty rate for Asian Americans is 12 percent overall and many subgroups experience much higher rates. For example, 35 percent of Burmese people and nearly 30 percent of Hmong people live in poverty.¹⁸ Women in these families are already struggling and can't afford unfair pay.
- More than one in four Asian Americans (26 percent) live in multigenerational households, compared to just 19 percent of U.S. households overall. Bhutanese people (53 percent), Cambodians (41 percent) and Laotians (38 percent) are particularly likely to live in multigenerational families, which means family incomes, including women's wages, support more people.¹⁹

**Asian American and Pacific Islander Women Are Demanding Change**

- Asian American and Pacific Islander women experience workplace harassment and discrimination at high rates. In a recent survey conducted by the YWCA, more than half of AAPI women (56 percent) reported experiencing racial discrimination at work, and three in ten (30 percent) reported being “very worried” about sexual harassment.²⁰
- Asian American and Pacific Islander women want Congress to act. Nearly nine in ten AAPI women (88 percent) strongly agree that Congress should take action to strengthen equal pay laws, and more than two-thirds (68 percent) strongly agree that Congress should pass paid family and medical leave legislation.²¹
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 And Medical Insurance Leave (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.

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1 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.


5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.


8 See note 4.

9 See note 2.

10 Child Care Aware of America. (2018). *The U.S. and the High Cost of Child Care: A Review of Prices and Proposed Solutions for a Broken System*. Retrieved 1 March 2019, from https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubsfs/3957809/COCreport2018_1.pdf; Estimate of $8,893 based on the average cost of center-based child care for a four-year-old. This average is not representative of the mean and is an approximation calculated by weighting state child care cost averages by the number of programs by type reported by each state. It is not to be considered a "national average."

11 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2018, November). *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 2017-18)*. Retrieved 1 March 2019, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_330.10.asp (The average total annual cost of undergraduate tuition and required fees is $9,037 for a four-year public college or university or $3,243 for a two-year college.)

12 Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.) *Average Annual Single Premium per Enrolled Employee For Employer-Based Health Insurance, 2017*. Retrieved 1 March 2019, from https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/single-coverage/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D


15 Center for American Progress. (2012, February 15). The High Costs of Birth Control: It’s Not As Affordable As You Think. Retrieved 19 February 2019, 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.)


19 Ibid.

20 YWCA USA (2018, September). What Women Want 2018. Retrieved 19 February 2019, from https://www.ywca.org/wp-content/uploads/WhatWomenWant2018_final.pdf (Lake Research Partners and American Viewpoint conducted a national survey, commissioned by the YWCA USA, among 1,038 adult women with oversamples of 100 Black women, 100 Latinas, 100 Asian/Pacific Islander women, and 100 Native American women. The survey was conducted from Aug. 27 – Sept. 6, 2018. The margin of error for the sample as a whole is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points but was higher for subgroups.)

21 Ibid.

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.

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