

# Asian American and Pacific Islander Women and the Wage Gap

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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.

Today this means that Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)<sup>1</sup> women who work full time, year-round are paid as little as 52 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, as Burmese women are.<sup>2</sup> AAPI women overall are paid just 85 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>3</sup>

The wages of AAPI 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>

## 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.<sup>5</sup>
- 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).<sup>6</sup>
- The largest groups of Asian Americans in the United States, based on self-reported ancestry or ethnicity, are Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese and Korean.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

- Asian American women within management and financial occupations are paid 88 cents, an annual pay gap of \$10,654; as doctors, 75 cents, an annual gap of \$50,009; and in sales, 62 cents, an annual pay gap of \$25,015, compared to white, non-Hispanic men in the same occupations.<sup>9</sup>

<b>Wage Gaps for Asian American and Pacific Islander Women by Subgroup</b>			
Wage gaps among subgroups of AAPI women compared to white, non-Hispanic and AAPI men			
<b>Self-Reported Ancestry or Ethnicity</b>	<b>Total Number in the United States</b>	<b>Median Wages for Women</b>	<b>Annual Wage Gap Compared to White, Non-Hispanic Men</b>
Burmese	173,586	\$30,000	\$28,000
Nepali	189,399	\$31,200	\$26,800
Cambodian	258,052	\$35,000	\$23,000
Hmong	308,803	\$35,000	\$23,000
Samoaan	112,845	\$35,000	\$23,000
Tongan	43,090	\$35,000	\$23,000
Laotian	192,689	\$35,300	\$22,700
Hawaiian	198,734	\$36,000	\$22,000
Vietnamese	1,873,707	\$36,500	\$21,500
Thai	224,463	\$37,000	\$21,000
Guamanian/ Chamorro	78,323	\$37,000	\$21,000
Fijian	37,712	\$38,000	\$20,000
Bangladeshi	198,628	\$40,000	\$18,000
Indonesian	81,269	\$45,000	\$13,000
Filipino	2,983,596	\$48,000	\$10,000
Pakistani	506,193	\$48,500	\$9,500
Korean	1,461,843	\$50,000	\$7,000
Sri Lankan	47,936	\$50,000	\$7,000
Japanese	755,762	\$55,000	\$3,000
Chinese	4,216,922	\$60,000	\$2,000
Indian	4,240,466	\$70,000	-\$12,000
Taiwanese	187,756	\$70,000	-\$12,000
Malaysian	21,499	\$70,000	-\$12,000

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Geographies: All States within United States, Table B02015 Asian Alone by Selected Groups Universe: Total Asian alone population; Table B02016 Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone by Selected Groups Universe: Total Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone population*; 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 Asian American Women?

Median wages for Asian American women in the United States are \$56,807 per year, compared to median wages of \$65,208 annually for white, non-Hispanic men. This amounts to a difference of \$8,401 each year.<sup>10</sup> 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:

- Nearly eleven additional months of child care;<sup>11</sup>
- Nearly a full 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>12</sup>
- More than five months of premiums for employer-provided health insurance;<sup>13</sup>
- More than five months of mortgage and utilities payments;<sup>14</sup>
- Nearly eight additional months of rent;<sup>15</sup>
- Nearly seven additional years of birth control;<sup>16</sup> or
- Enough money to pay off student loan debt in just under four years.<sup>17</sup>

## 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, 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>18</sup>
- The poverty rate for Asian American households is 6.5 percent, and for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander households is 12 percent, and many subgroups experience much higher rates.<sup>19</sup> For example, 35 percent of Burmese people and

nearly 30 percent of Hmong people live in poverty.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

### **Asian American and Pacific Islander 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.<sup>22</sup>
- During 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.<sup>23</sup>
- Asian American and Pacific Islander women want Congress to act. Nearly nine in 10 AAPI women (89 percent) say equal pay for women is just as or even more important during the current economic situation,<sup>24</sup> and about three-quarters want Congress to enact permanent paid sick leave (76 percent) and paid family leave (74 percent) legislation.<sup>25</sup>
- 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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<sup>1</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, 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.

<sup>2</sup> Bleiweis, R. (2021, March). *The Economic Status of Asian American and Pacific Islander Women*. Center for American Progress Publication. Retrieved 16 March 2021, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2021/03/04/496703/economic-status-asian-american-pacific-islander-women/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Glynn, S. J. (2018, April 9). *Gender wage inequality: What we know and how we can fix it*. Retrieved 2 March 2021 from Washington Center for Equitable Growth website: <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/gender-wage-inequality/?longform=true>

<sup>5</sup> See note 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Geographies: All States within United States, Tables B02015 and B02016*. Retrieved 2 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=b02015&g=&lastDisplayedRow=24&table=B02015&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B02015> and <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=b02016&g=&lastDisplayedRow=14&table=B02016&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B02016>

<sup>8</sup> See note 2.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2019). *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 2 March 2021, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-06.html>

<sup>10</sup> See note 3.

<sup>11</sup> Child Care Aware of America. (2019). *The U.S. and the High Price of Child Care: An Examination of a Broken System*. Retrieved 2 March 2021, from <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/3957809/2019%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Final-TheUSandtheHighPriceofChildCare-AnExaminationofaBrokenSystem.pdf>; Estimate of \$9,254 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.”

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *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 2018-19)*. Retrieved 2 March 2021, from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19\\_330.10.asp?current.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_330.10.asp?current.asp) (The average total annual cost of undergraduate tuition and required fees is \$9,212 for a four-year public college or university or \$3,313 for a two-year college.)

<sup>13</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.) *Average Annual Single Premium per Enrolled Employee For Employer-Based Health Insurance, 2019*. Retrieved 2 March 2021, from <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/single-coverage/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics*.

Retrieved 2 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=dp04&d=ACS%2019>

*Year%20Estimates%20Data%20Profiles&tid=ACSDP1Y2019.DP04&hidePreview=true* (Calculation uses median monthly owner costs for housing units with a mortgage.)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. (Calculation uses median gross rent for occupied units paying rent.)

<sup>16</sup> Center for American Progress. (2012, February 15). *The High Costs of Birth Control: It's Not As Affordable As You Think*. Retrieved 2 March 2021, from [https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/02/pdf/BC\\_costs.pdf](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.)

<sup>17</sup> Siegel Bernard, T., & Russell, K. (2018, July 11). *The New Toll of American Student Debt in 3 Charts*. *The New York Times*. Retrieved 2 March 2021, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/your-money/student-loan-debt-parents.html> (The average debt load at graduation for a student receiving a bachelor’s degree was \$30,301 in 2015-2016.)

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<sup>18</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 2 March 2021 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>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Table S1702: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months of Families*. Retrieved 2 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S1702&tid=ACSST1Y2019.S1702&hidePreview=false>

<sup>20</sup> López, G., Ruiz, N. G., & Patten, E. (2017, September 8). *Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population*. Retrieved 2 March 2021 from Pew Research Center website: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Time's Up Foundation (2020, July 30). *Gender and racial inequity during crisis: The pay gap*. Retrieved 2 March 2021, from <https://timesupfoundation.org/work/times-up-pay-up/gender-and-racial-inequity-during-crisis-the-pay-gap/>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Time's Up Foundation (2020, November 19). *New Election Exit Poll Shows Bipartisan Support for Policies to Address Caregiving Crisis*. Retrieved 2 March 2021, from <https://timesupnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Election-Eve-Omnibus-Caregiving-Poll-Memo.pdf>

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