



National Snapshot: Poverty among Women & Families, 2020

AMANDA FINS

Women were already struggling to make ends meet before the pandemic. In 2019, nearly one in nine women – or 13.9 million – and more than one in seven children – nearly 10.5 million – lived in poverty.¹ Among adult women, elderly women, women of color, women with disabilities, and families headed by unmarried mothers all face even higher rates of poverty. About three in five (60 percent) of all poor children lived in families headed by unmarried mothers. Now, in the midst of an economic recession and pandemic, women are bearing [the heavy burden of the current economic and health crisis](#). Job losses in every sector impacting women, and especially women of color, have pushed even more women closer than ever to experiencing poverty.

Women were 35 percent more likely to live in poverty than men in 2019

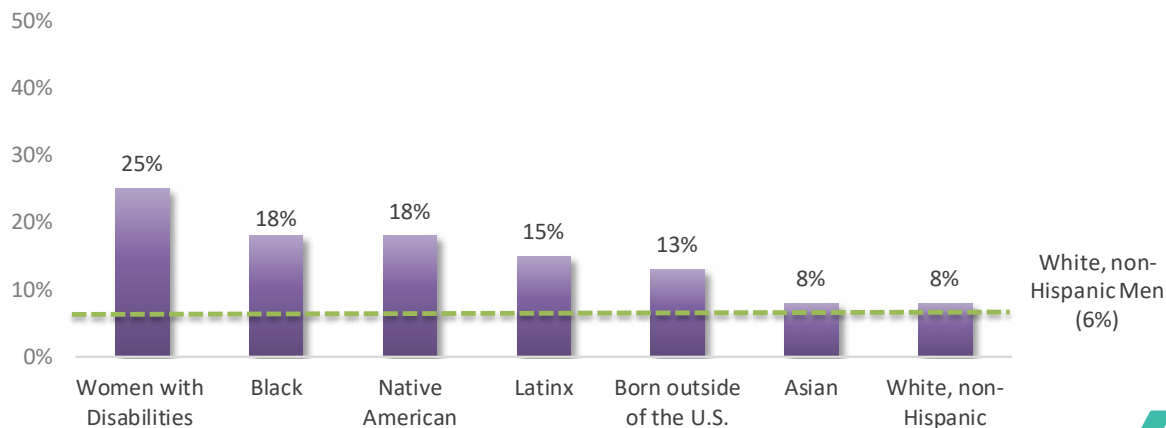
- Nearly one in nine women, nearly 13.9 million, lived in poverty in 2019.
- More than two in five (46 percent) of these women lived in extreme poverty, defined as income at or below 50 percent of the federal poverty level. This means 1 in 20 women lived in extreme poverty last year.
- Women (11 percent) were more likely than men (8 percent) to live in poverty in 2019. Women were also more likely than men to be in extreme poverty: five percent of women versus four percent of men lived in extreme poverty in 2019.

Poverty remains even higher for certain groups of women

- Women in all racial and ethnic groups were more likely than white, non-Hispanic men to be in poverty. About one in twelve (eight percent) white, non-Hispanic women lived in poverty in 2019, compared to six percent of white, non-Hispanic men. However, poverty rates were particularly high for many groups of women:²
 - **Black women:** 18 percent of Black women lived in poverty.
 - **Native American women:** 18 percent of Native American women lived in poverty.
 - **Latinx women:** 15 percent of Latinx women lived in poverty.
 - **Asian women:** 8 percent of Asian women lived in poverty.

- More than one in eight (13 percent) women born outside of the U.S. lived in poverty in 2019.
- The poverty rate for women age 18 to 64 with disabilities was higher than it was for women without disabilities, 25 percent and 10 percent, respectively. The poverty rate among their male counterparts was lower: 20 percent of men with disabilities lived in poverty and 8 percent of men without disabilities lived in poverty in 2019.

POVERTY RATES FOR ADULT WOMEN, 2019



Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey. Figures for women with disabilities are for women 18-64.

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WHAT DOES THE FEDERAL POVERTY RATE MEASURE?

The official poverty rate reported by the Census Bureau measures the percentage of the U.S. population with total income below the federal poverty threshold for their family size (e.g., \$25,926 in 2019 for a family of four with two children). "Income" is calculated before taxes and includes only cash income, such as:

- Earnings
- Pension and retirement income
- Investment income (i.e. interest, dividends, royalties, estates, and trusts)
- Social Security
- Public Assistance (non-cash benefits are not included in the measure – see below)
- Unemployment benefits, workers' compensation, veterans' payments
- Alimony and child support payments

A number of other federal and state benefits that help support low-income families are not counted as income under the official poverty measure. These include:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (formerly known as Food Stamps)
- Tax benefits (e.g., Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit)
- Housing subsidies

More than one in seven children lived in poverty in 2019

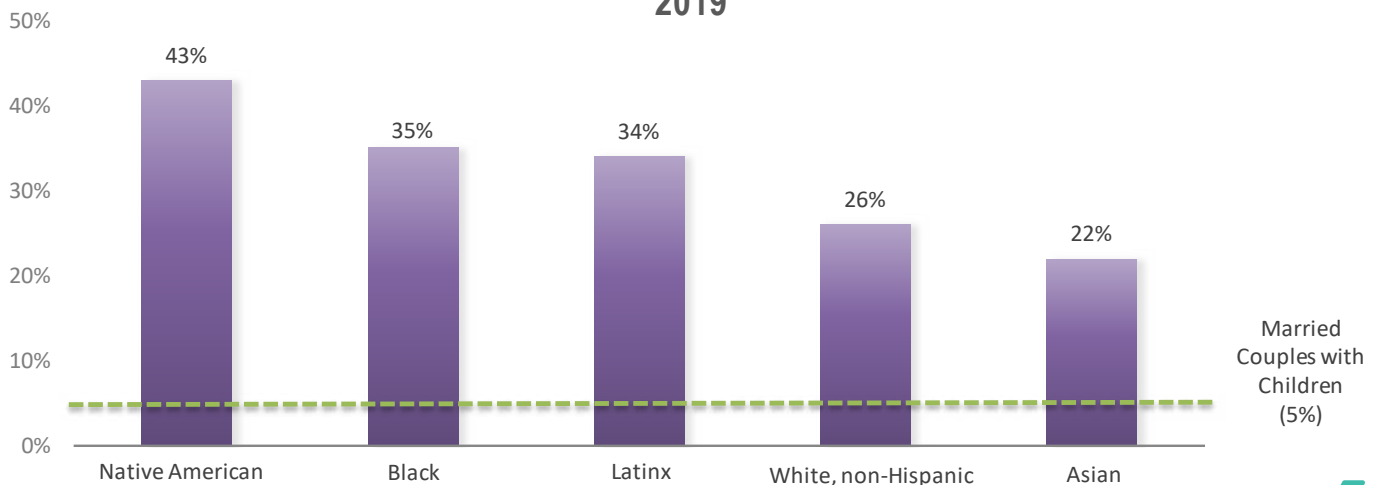
- Nearly 10.5 million children lived in poverty in 2019, more than two out of five of whom (43 percent) lived in extreme poverty. This means that more than one in seven (14 percent) children were poor last year.
- Poverty rates were even higher for certain groups of children:
 - **Black children:** Over one in four (26 percent) Black children lived in poverty.

- **Latinx children:** More than one in five (21 percent) Latinx children lived in poverty.
- **Native American children:** More than one in five (21 percent) Native American children lived in poverty.
- **Asian children:** One in fourteen (7 percent) Asian children lived in poverty.
- **White, non-Hispanic children:** One in twelve (8 percent) white, non-Hispanic children lived in poverty.
- **Children born outside of the U.S.:** More than one in five (21 percent) children born outside of the U.S. lived in poverty.

More than one in three families headed by unmarried mothers lived in poverty in 2019

- About three in five poor children (60 percent) lived in families headed by unmarried mothers.³
- Among those with a householder who worked full-time throughout the year, 440,000 families headed by unmarried mothers (10 percent) were poor in 2019.
- Families with children headed by unmarried mothers were much more likely to be in poverty than families headed by unmarried fathers or married couple families. The poverty rate for families with children headed by unmarried mothers was 31 percent, compared to 15 percent for families with children headed by unmarried fathers and 5 percent of families with children in married couple families.
- Families with children headed by women of color fared even worse:
 - **Black families headed by unmarried mothers:** More than one in three (35 percent) Black families headed by unmarried mothers lived in poverty.
 - **Latinx families headed by unmarried mothers:** More than one in three (34 percent) Latinx families headed by unmarried mothers lived in poverty.
 - **Native American families headed by unmarried mothers:** More than two in five (43 percent) Native American families headed by unmarried mothers lived in poverty.⁴
 - **Asian families headed by unmarried mothers:** More than one in five (22 percent) Asian families headed by unmarried mothers lived in poverty.
 - **White, non-Hispanic families headed by unmarried mothers:** More than one in four (26 percent) white, non-Hispanic families headed by unmarried mothers lived in poverty.

POVERTY RATES FOR FAMILIES HEADED BY UNMARRIED MOTHERS, 2019



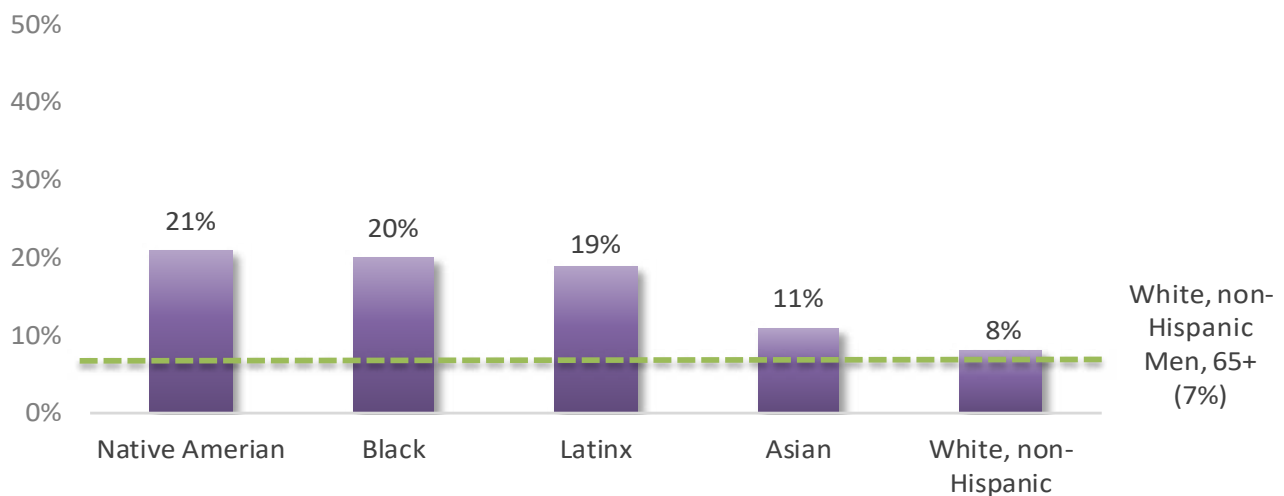
Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey

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Older women were more likely to be poor than older men

- Women made up more than six in ten (63 percent) poor people 65 and older in 2019.
- The poverty rate for women 65 and older was 10 percent, three percentage points higher than the poverty rate for older men (7 percent).
- Poverty rates were particularly high for certain groups of older women in 2019:
 - **Black women:** One in five (20 percent) Black women 65+ lived in poverty.
 - **Latinx women:** Nearly one in five (19 percent) Latinx women 65+ lived in poverty.
 - **Native American women:** More than in five (21 percent) Native American women 65+ lived in poverty.
 - **Asian women:** Nearly one in nine (11 percent) Asian women 65+ lived in poverty.
 - **White, non-Hispanic women:** Approximately one in twelve (8 percent) white, non-Hispanic women 65+ lived in poverty.
 - **Women born outside of the U.S.:** More than one in six (18 percent) foreign-born women 65+ lived in poverty.

POVERTY RATES FOR WOMEN 65 AND OLDER, 2019



Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey

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The U.S. Census Bureau data released in September 2020 shows that poverty did not see notable improvements for families experiencing in the U.S since the year before. And women's economic precarity has only been made worse by the pandemic and the ensuing economic recession. With recovery looking to be a long road forward, especially for women and people of color, there is cause for concern that poverty will increase in 2020 and 2021.

1 Unless otherwise noted, all data in this analysis are NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps.html> and in some cases using Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles and J. Robert Warren. IPUMS, Current Population Survey: Version 8.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020. www.ipums.org.

2 Men and women self-identify their sex in U.S. Census Bureau surveys. They also self-identify their race and ethnicity. Asian women are those who self-identified as Asian. Black women are those who self-identified themselves as Black or African American. Native American women are those who identified themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native. White, non-Hispanic women and men are those who identified themselves as white, but who are not of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin. Latinx women are of any race who identified themselves to be of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin. Foreign-born women are those who have identified themselves as born outside of U.S. territories and possessions. Persons with disabilities are those who have identified themselves as having any physical or cognitive difficulty, as measured by affirmative responses to any of the Current Population Survey's six cognitive difficulties.

3 Almost 10.5 million children lived in poverty in 2019, which includes 281,000 not living in families.

4 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, table C17010C, available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>.