



CHILD CARE & EARLY LEARNING

NEARLY ONE IN FIVE WORKING MOTHERS OF VERY YOUNG CHILDREN WORK IN LOW-WAGE JOBS

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Despite an improving economy, millions of women—disproportionately women of color—struggle to make ends meet. Women continue to be vastly overrepresented in low-wage jobs¹—and for women with children, especially very young children, low-wage work can severely undermine their efforts to support and care for their families.

The nearly 1.3 million mothers of very young children (ages 3 and under) who work as cashiers, personal care aides, maids, restaurant servers, and in other demanding low-wage jobs face particular challenges as breadwinners and caregivers. For the children who depend on their income, the first three years of life are especially critical due to the rapid brain development and skill formation that occur during this time.² But low-wage work often makes it exceptionally difficult for parents to meet their children's basic needs. In addition to inadequate pay, low-wage jobs often entail unstable, unpredictable schedules over which workers have little control, along with little (if any) paid sick or family leave. With limited incomes and volatile schedules, parents in low-wage jobs also have tremendous difficulty finding and affording high-quality early care and education—and child care assistance and other federally and state-funded early childhood programs are often unavailable for these parents or not designed to meet their needs. The conditions of low-wage work thus can keep parents from being consistently

available when their children need them, and can make it hard to access the high-quality child care that children need to be successful in school and beyond.³

Working mothers with very young children are more likely than workers overall to be in low-wage jobs. More than half of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage jobs are raising children on their own; four in ten are working full time; and nearly one-third are poor. They are disproportionately Black, Latina, and immigrant women.⁴ They are also less likely to have a college education than workers overall.

KEY FACTS

- Close to 1.3 million mothers with very young children—nearly one in five—work in low-wage jobs.
- Women of color make up more than half of mothers with very young children in low-wage jobs.
- Almost one-third of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage jobs are poor.
- About four in ten mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage jobs are employed full time.

Finally, these mothers—and their children—are particularly vulnerable due to current threats to funding for programs that provide child care assistance, health care, housing, education, and other essential supports for women and their families; actions that harm immigrant women and their families; and steps to undo important workforce protections, placing women at greater risk of unsafe working conditions, unfair pay practices, and discrimination in the workplace.

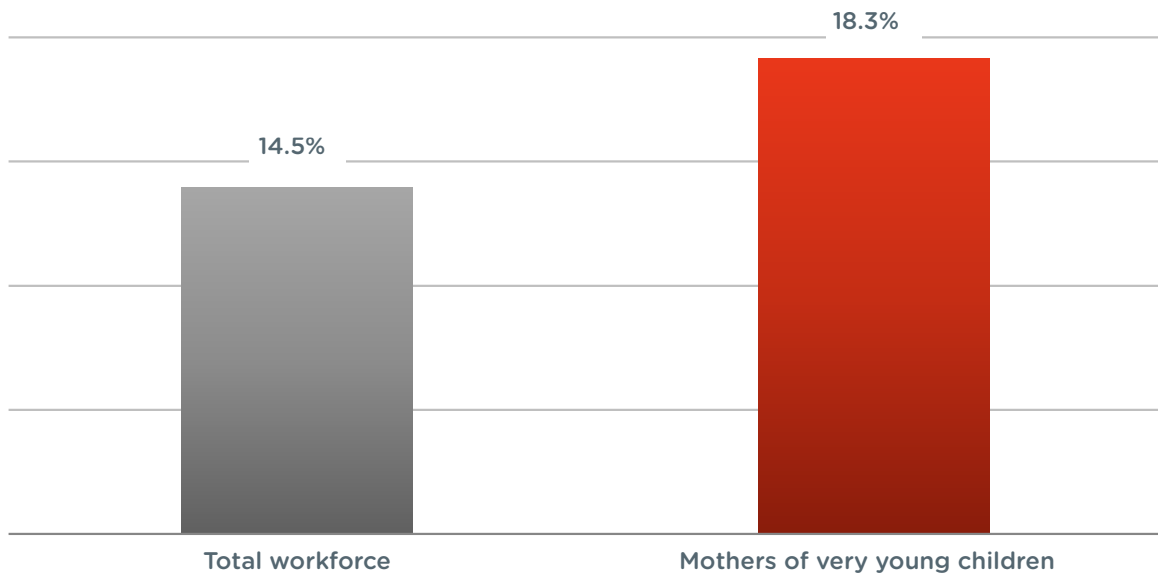
A new National Women’s Law Center analysis of Census data shows that:⁵

- Close to 1.3 million mothers with very young children (children ages 3 and under) work in low-wage occupations (those that typically pay \$10.50 or less per hour).
- Nearly one in five (18.3 percent) working mothers of very young children are employed in low-wage occupations; in comparison, about one in seven (14.5 percent) of all workers are employed in low-wage occupations. These

shares are largely unchanged from NWLC’s 2014 analysis of these trends.⁶

- In nearly every state, working mothers of very young children are disproportionately represented in low-wage occupations.⁷
- Nearly one-third (32.6 percent) of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage occupations are poor, compared to just 5.8 percent of all workers and 13.0 percent of all working mothers with very young children.
- Over half (56.5 percent) of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage occupations are supporting their families without a spouse; among all working mothers with very young children, about one-third (33.1 percent) are unmarried.

Share of workers in low-wage occupations



Source: NWLC calculations based on Current Population Survey 2016 using Sarah Flood et. al., IPUMS-CPS. Mothers of very young children are those who have at least one child age 3 or younger at home. Figures are for all employed workers.

- 20.8 percent of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage occupations are Black and 30.4 percent are Latina; in comparison, 11.6 percent of all workers are Black and 16.5 percent are Latinx.
- More than one-quarter (26.5 percent) percent of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage occupations are immigrant women, while immigrants represent less than one-fifth (18.3 percent) of all workers.
- Only 9.7 percent of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage occupations have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 36.4 percent of all workers and 42.8 percent of all working mothers with very young children.
- About four in ten (43.0 percent) of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage occupations are employed full time, compared to 73.9 percent of all workers and 62.5 percent of all working mothers with very young children.
- Providing paid family leave and paid sick days.
- Enforcing and strengthening laws prohibiting pregnancy and caregiver discrimination.
- Strengthening and expanding supports such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) that help parents working in low-wage jobs care for their families and pull them out of poverty.

These measures would greatly bolster the ability of hard-working parents with low-wage jobs to ensure the well-being of their young children—and this investment in children's successful growth and development will ultimately help strengthen our nation's economy.¹¹

* * *

The following tables show national and state data on mothers who have very young children and who are employed in low-wage occupations. This analysis focuses on children ages 3 and younger because high-quality child care is particularly important during the early ages of children's growth and development, yet often unaffordable—care for infants and toddlers costs more than care for older children—and very difficult to find in many communities.¹²

Supporting Parents in Low-Wage Jobs and Their Children: An Agenda for Action

Parents in low-wage jobs work hard, making sacrifices because they want better lives for their children. Yet the very nature of those jobs and the financial insecurity that goes with them can create tremendous stress for parents, which can affect their relationship with their children and the home environment and put their children at risk of falling behind even before they enter school.⁸

With low-wage jobs projected to account for much of the job growth in our economy over the next ten years,⁹ it is crucial that lawmakers adopt policies that can help parents in low-wage jobs gain more financial security, reduce their stress, and support their children's successful development.¹⁰ These policies include:

- Raising the minimum wage, including the wage for tipped workers.
- Establishing fair scheduling practices that allow employees to meet their caregiving responsibilities and other obligations outside of work.
- Increasing investments to make child care assistance available to more low-income families and their children, raise provider payment rates and compensation, and strengthen the quality and supply of care.
- Designing child care and early education policies to meet the needs of families with parents working in low-wage jobs.

TABLE 1. Working mothers of very young children (0-3)

	All workers		Working mothers of very young children			
	Number	Percent	All occupations		Low-wage occupations	
Number			Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Total	150,761,703	100.0%	6,986,181	100.0%	1,276,412	100.0%
Race/Ethnicity						
White, non-Hispanic	97,284,020	64.5%	4,107,860	58.8%	547,172	42.9%
Black	17,498,807	11.6%	1,038,884	14.9%	265,081	20.8%
Latinx	24,864,021	16.5%	1,271,399	18.2%	388,254	30.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	9,666,179	6.4%	498,999	7.1%	72,539	5.7%
Immigrant Status						
U.S. Born	122,981,379	81.6%	5,773,019	82.6%	938,596.10	73.5%
Foreign Born	27,575,500	18.3%	1,206,731	17.3%	337,816.30	26.5%
Full-/Part-Time Status						
Full time	111,441,382	73.9%	4,367,381	62.5%	549,436	43.0%
Part time for any reason	34,921,449	23.2%	2,219,420	31.8%	659,151	51.6%
PT for economic reasons	6,122,000	4.1%	335,527	4.8%	170,107	13.3%
PT for non-economic reasons	28,799,449	19.1%	1,883,893	27.0%	489,043	38.3%
Marital Status						
Married	79,757,017	52.9%	4,674,850	66.9%	555,760	43.5%
Single*	71,004,686	47.1%	2,311,330	33.1%	720,652	56.5%
Poverty Status						
Below poverty	8,806,063	5.8%	906,627	13.0%	416,606	32.6%
Above poverty	141,955,640	94.2%	6,079,554	87.0%	859,807	67.4%
Educational Attainment						
Less than high school	13,335,458	8.8%	474,961	6.8%	246,800	19.3%
High school diploma or equivalent	38,981,870	25.9%	1,403,738	20.1%	488,733	38.3%
Some college/associate's degree	43,557,470	28.9%	2,120,657	30.4%	416,614	32.6%
Bachelor's degree or higher	54,886,906	36.4%	2,986,825	42.8%	124,265	9.7%

*Includes those who are married but their spouse is absent.

Notes: Mothers of very young children are those who have at least one child age 3 or younger at home. Figures are for all employed workers. "Low-wage" occupations are those with median hourly wages of \$10.50 or less per hour.

Source: NWLC calculations based on the Current Population Survey (CPS) 2015 using Stephen Ruggles et al. IPUMS-CPS: Version 6.0. [Machine-readable database] Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015. Median hourly wages of occupations: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), May 2015 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm.

TABLE 2. Mothers of very young children (0-3) in low-wage occupations, state by state

State	Share of workforce that is comprised of mothers of very young children		Share of workers who are in low-wage occupations	
	Overall	Low-wage	Total workforce	Mothers of very young children
<i>United States</i>	4.6%	5.9%	14.5%	18.3%
Alabama	4.5%	6.5%	13.8%	19.7%
Alaska	4.5%	5.4%	13.4%	15.9%
Arizona	4.2%	5.2%	15.7%	19.5%
Arkansas	4.4%	5.9%	14.6%	19.4%
California	4.0%	4.6%	17.1%	19.6%
Colorado	4.3%	4.7%	14.0%	15.5%
Connecticut	3.9%	4.3%	13.3%	14.7%
Delaware	4.1%	4.0%	14.5%	14.1%
District of Columbia	3.6%	4.0%	10.6%	11.9%
Florida	3.8%	4.6%	16.6%	20.1%
Georgia	4.6%	6.2%	13.9%	19.0%
Hawaii	4.1%	5.4%	17.6%	22.9%
Idaho	4.7%	5.5%	16.3%	19.1%
Illinois	4.3%	4.8%	14.2%	15.8%
Indiana	4.5%	6.2%	13.9%	19.0%
Iowa	5.0%	5.5%	14.3%	15.8%
Kansas	4.9%	5.8%	13.5%	15.9%
Kentucky	4.6%	5.6%	14.3%	17.3%
Louisiana	4.7%	6.9%	15.5%	22.6%
Maine	3.7%	4.4%	14.8%	17.5%
Maryland	4.3%	4.7%	12.6%	13.6%
Massachusetts	4.1%	4.2%	13.3%	13.8%
Michigan	4.4%	5.5%	14.9%	18.5%
Minnesota	5.1%	5.7%	14.0%	15.8%
Mississippi	4.9%	7.1%	15.1%	21.9%
Missouri	4.7%	5.4%	14.5%	16.4%
Montana	4.1%	5.9%	16.0%	23.4%
Nebraska	5.2%	6.3%	14.2%	17.2%
Nevada	4.2%	4.6%	23.5%	26.3%
New Hampshire	3.4%	4.2%	13.0%	16.0%
New Jersey	4.1%	4.1%	13.2%	13.4%
New Mexico	4.3%	6.2%	17.2%	25.1%
New York	4.0%	4.3%	14.7%	15.6%
North Carolina	4.3%	5.9%	14.1%	19.0%
North Dakota	5.4%	6.1%	14.9%	16.9%
Ohio	4.5%	5.6%	13.9%	17.3%
Oklahoma	4.6%	6.9%	14.0%	20.7%
Oregon	4.2%	5.9%	17.0%	23.6%
Pennsylvania	4.1%	4.4%	14.1%	15.4%
Rhode Island	4.2%	4.2%	14.3%	14.3%
South Carolina	4.3%	5.8%	15.1%	20.2%
South Dakota	5.6%	5.4%	15.8%	15.3%
Tennessee	4.4%	6.0%	14.6%	19.9%
Texas	4.6%	6.3%	14.7%	20.0%
Utah	5.3%	6.2%	12.9%	15.0%
Vermont	3.7%	4.4%	13.8%	16.2%
Virginia	4.3%	5.0%	13.3%	15.6%
Washington	4.1%	5.6%	15.2%	20.5%
West Virginia	4.0%	5.1%	14.9%	19.0%
Wisconsin	4.6%	5.1%	14.2%	15.7%
Wyoming	4.2%	7.0%	14.0%	23.7%

Notes: Mothers of very young children are those who have at least one child age 3 or younger at home. Figures are for all employed workers. “Low-wage” occupations are those with median hourly wages of \$10.50 or less per hour.

Source: *National data* are NWLC calculations based on the Current Population Survey (CPS) 2015 using Stephen Ruggles et al. IPUMS-CPS: Version 6.0. [Machine-readable database] Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015. *State data* are NWLC calculations based on American Community Survey 2011-15 five-year averages using Steven Ruggles et al., IPUMS: Version 6.0 [Machine-readable database] Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015. *Median hourly wages of occupations*: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), May 2015 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm.

Endnotes

- 1 NWLC calculations based on the Current Population Survey (CPS) 2016 using Sarah Flood et al., IPUMS-CPS: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015); Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), May 2015 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm (last visited Jan. 28, 2017). Women represent nearly two-thirds of workers in low-wage occupations, which are defined in this analysis as those with median hourly wages of \$10.50 or less per hour.
- 2 See generally, e.g., NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL & INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE, FROM NEURONS TO NEIGHBORHOODS: THE SCIENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (Jack P. Shonkoff & Deborah A. Phillips eds., 2000); NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD, CENTER ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD, HARVARD UNIVERSITY, WORKING PAPER No. 5: THE TIMING AND QUALITY OF EARLY EXPERIENCES COMBINE TO SHAPE BRAIN ARCHITECTURE (2007), available at http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Timing_Quality_Early_Experiences-1.pdf.
- 3 See generally Julie Vogtman & Karen Schulman, Nat'l Women's Law Ctr. (NWLC), Set Up to Fail: When Low-Wage Work Jeopardizes Parents' and Children's Success (Jan. 2016), available at <http://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/FINAL-Set-Up-To-Fail-When-Low-Wage-Work-Jeopardizes-Parents%E2%80%99-and-Children%E2%80%99s-Success.pdf>.
- 4 “Black women” refers to those who identified themselves in a U.S. Census Bureau survey as Black or African American. “Latinas” refers to women of any race who identified themselves to be of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.
- 5 NWLC calculations based on 2016 CPS, *supra* note 1, and American Community Survey 2011-15 five-year averages using Steven Ruggles et al., IPUMS: Version 6.0 [Machine-readable database] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015).
- 6 See Helen Blank, Karen Schulman & Lauren Frolich, NWLC, Nearly One in Five Working Mothers of Very Young Children Work in Low-Wage Jobs (Apr. 2014), available at http://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/mothers_of_young_children_in_low_wage_jobs.pdf. In 2013, 13.9 percent of the total workforce and 19.2 percent of working mothers with very young children worked in jobs with median hourly wages of \$10.10 or less. *Id.*
- 7 The exceptions are Delaware (14.5 percent of all workers and 14.1 percent of working mothers with children ages 0-3 hold low-wage jobs), Rhode Island (14.3 percent of the total workforce as well as working mothers of children ages 0-3 hold low-wage jobs), and South Dakota (15.8 percent of all workers and 15.3 percent of working mothers with children ages 0-3 hold low-wage jobs). In Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York, the difference between the share of all workers and the share of mothers with very young children in low-wage jobs is less than one percentage point. See Table 2.
- 8 See generally Vogtman & Schulman, *supra* note 3.
- 9 See, e.g., Katherine Gallagher Robbins & Julie Vogtman, NWLC, Low-Wage Jobs Held Primarily by Women Will Grow the Most over the Next Decade (Apr. 2016), available at <http://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Low-Wage-Jobs-Held-Primarily-by-Women-Will-Grow-the-Most-Over-the-Next-Decade.pdf>.
- 10 See generally Emily Martin et al., NWLC, Set Up for Success: Supporting Parents in Low-Wage Jobs and Their Children – An Agenda for Action (June 2016), available at <http://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Set-Up-for-Success.pdf>.
- 11 James J. Heckman & Dimitriy V. Masterov, Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Research, *The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children* (Working Paper 13016) (2007), available at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w13016>; Lawrence J. Schweinhart et al., High/Scope Educ. Research Found., *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions, and Frequently Asked Questions* (2005), available at http://www.highscope.org/file/Research/PerryProject/specialsummary_rev2011_02_2.pdf; Frances A. Campbell et al., *Adult outcomes as a function of an early childhood educational program: An Abecedarian Project follow-up*, 48 *Developmental Psychology* (4), 1033-1043 (July 2012); Arthur J. Reynolds, et al., *Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Center Program: Executive Summary* (2001), available at <http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/cbaexecsum4.html>.
- 12 See, e.g., NWLC, Expand Access to High-Quality Early Care and Education for Infants and Toddlers (Mar. 2013), available at <http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/infanttoddlerfactsheet.pdf>; Child Care Aware of Am., Parents and the High Cost of Child Care, at 18, 32 (Dec. 2016), available at http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CCA_High_Cost_Report_01-17-17_final.pdf.