

Women's overrepresentation in low-wage jobs

October 2015 | Anne Morrison & Katherine Gallagher Robbins

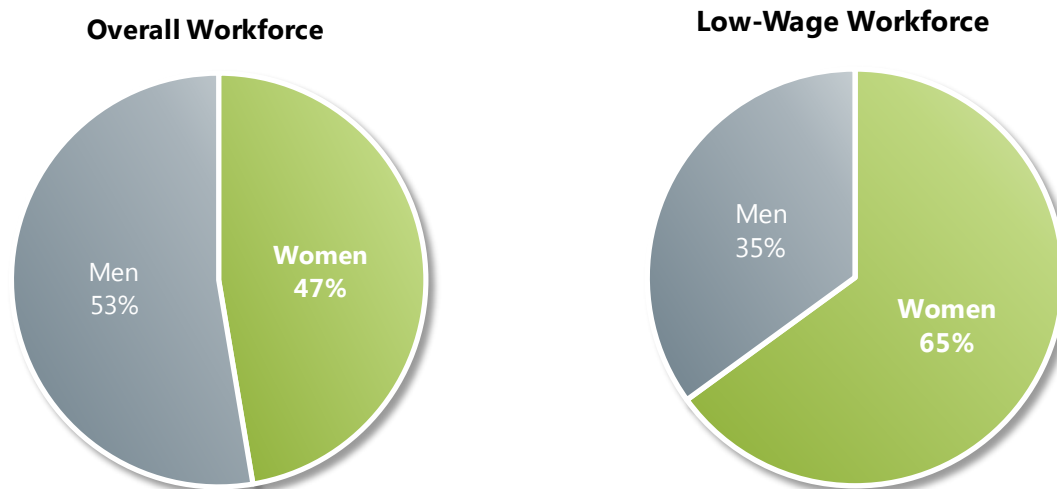
OVER THE PAST FOUR DECADES, women's work experience and educational attainment have increased dramatically. Although women have better credentials than ever before, the job and income prospects for many are bleak. Women make up two-thirds of the over 23 million workers in low-wage jobs—defined as jobs that typically pay \$10.50 per hour or less—although they make up slightly less than half of the workforce as a whole.

This analysis reveals a stark reality: regardless of their education level, age, marital or parental status, race, ethnicity, or national origin, women make up larger shares of the low-wage workforce than do their male counterparts. This pattern holds in each of these groups, even though in virtually all of them women represent a similar or smaller share of the overall workforce than their male counterparts. What's more, of all the groups of women analyzed, only one group of women—those who have a bachelor's degree or more—is underrepresented in low-wage jobs, relative to its share of the overall workforce. Nearly every other group of women, including mothers, women in the prime of their career (ages 25-49), and women with some college or an associate's degree, is overrepresented in the low-wage workforce, relative to its share of the overall workforce. Even within these low-wage jobs, women working full time, year round are typically paid less than their male counterparts, and the wage gaps are even larger for most women of color.

The note on methods at the end defines "low-wage jobs" and other terms used in this chartbook.

WOMEN ARE OVERREPRESENTED IN THE LOW-WAGE WORKFORCE

- Over 15 million of the more than 23 million low-wage workers—2/3—are women, even though women are less than 1/2 of the overall workforce.

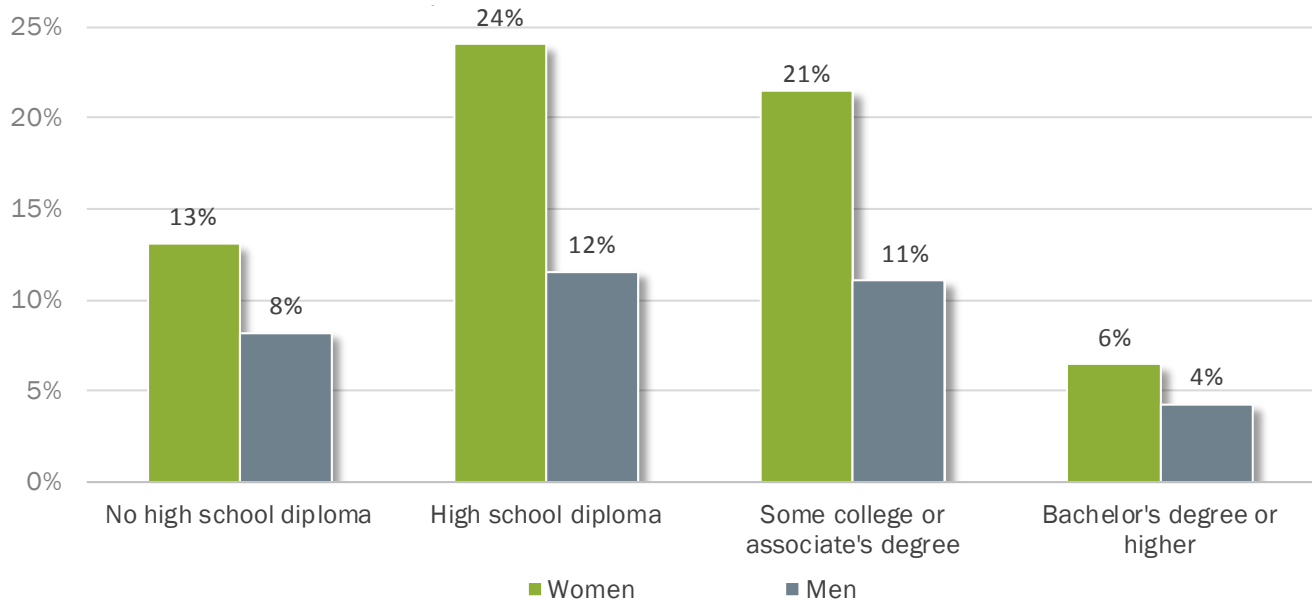


Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers. The low-wage workforce is defined here as occupations with median wages of \$10.50 or less per hour based on BLS, Occupational Employment Statistics.

AT EVERY EDUCATION LEVEL, WOMEN'S SHARE OF THE LOW-WAGE WORKFORCE IS LARGER THAN MEN'S

- At every education level, women make up a larger share of the low-wage workforce than their male counterparts, even though their share of the overall workforce is similar or smaller.
- Women are overrepresented in the low-wage workforce at every education level except bachelor's degree or higher. Only men without a high school degree are overrepresented in the low-wage workforce.

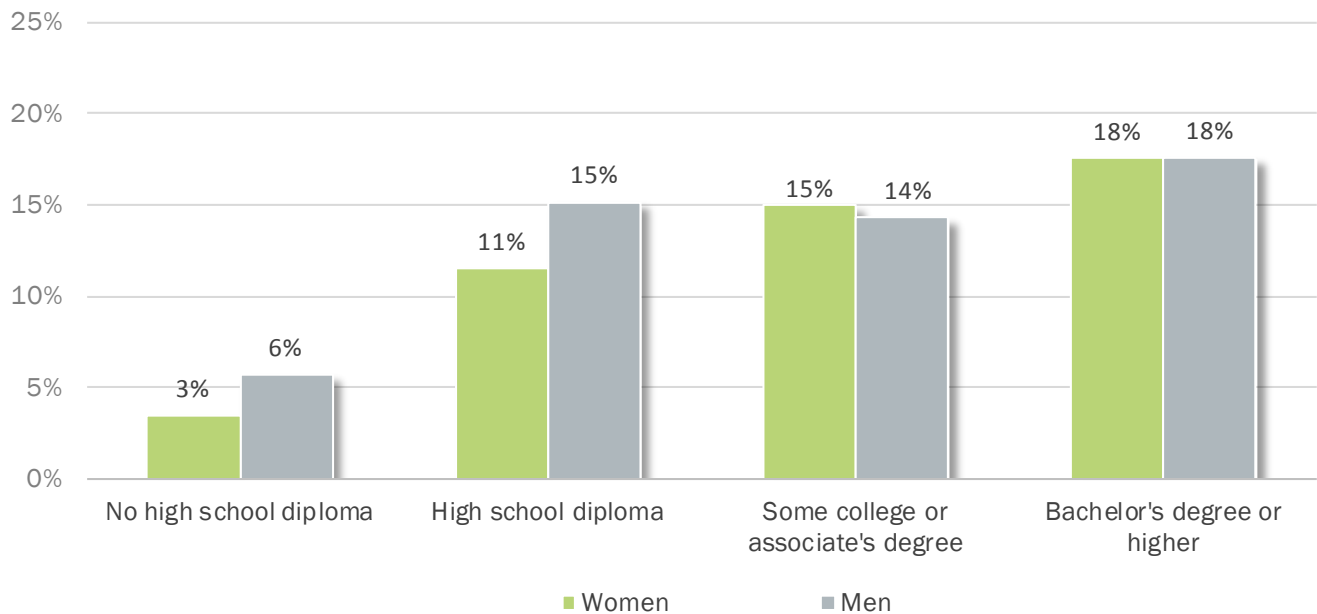
Low-Wage Workforce by Sex and Educational Attainment



Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers. The low-wage workforce is defined here as occupations with median wages of \$10.50 or less per hour based on BLS, Occupational Employment Statistics.



Overall Workforce by Sex and Educational Attainment



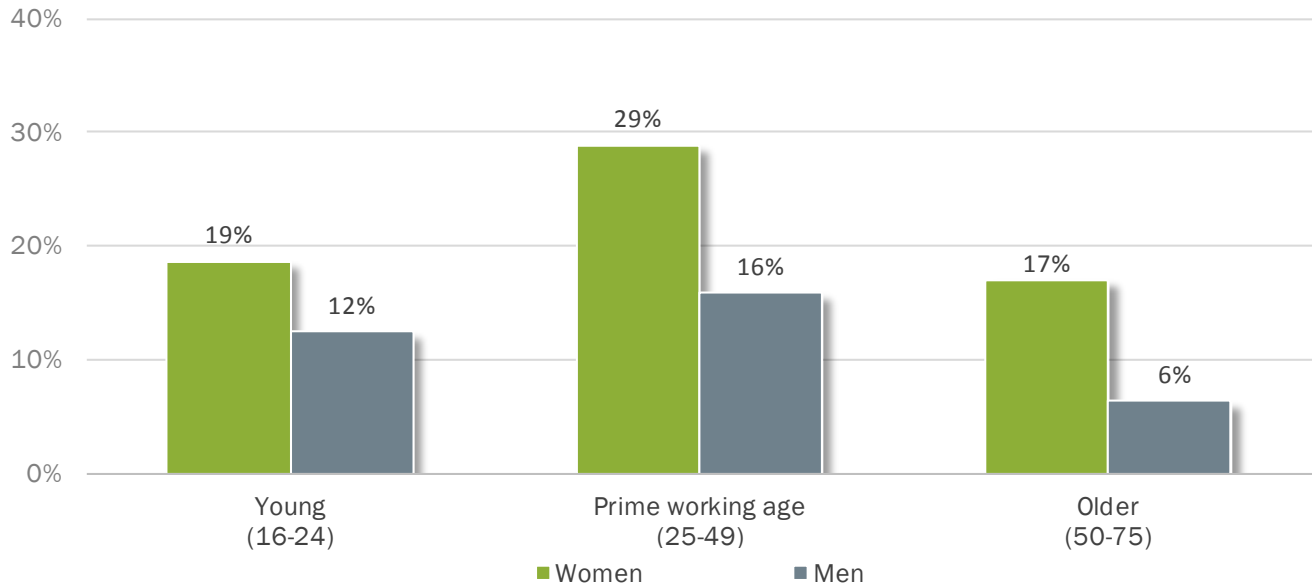
Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers.



WOMEN AT ALL AGES MAKE UP LARGER SHARES OF THE LOW-WAGE WORKFORCE THAN MEN

- Women at all ages make up larger shares of the low-wage workforce than men of the same age, even though they make up similar or smaller shares of the overall workforce.
- Both young women and women in their prime working years are overrepresented in the low-wage workforce. Only young men are overrepresented in the low-wage workforce.

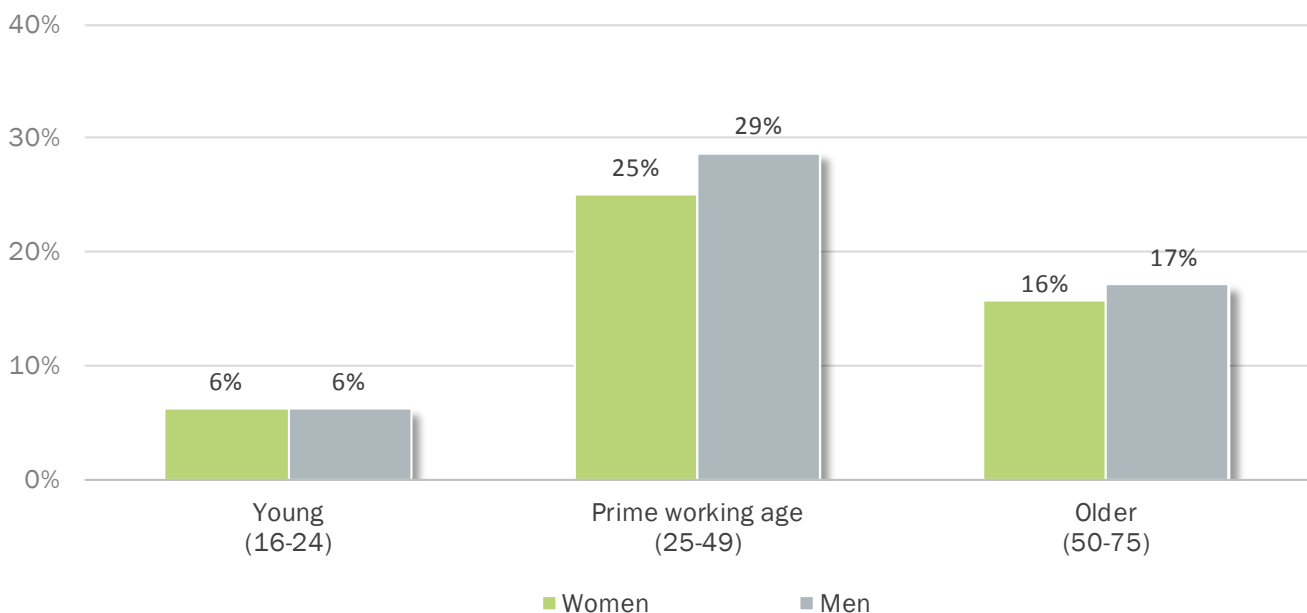
Low-Wage Workforce by Sex and Age



Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers. The low-wage workforce is defined here as occupations with median wages of \$10.50 or less per hour based on BLS, Occupational Employment Statistics.



Overall Workforce by Sex and Age



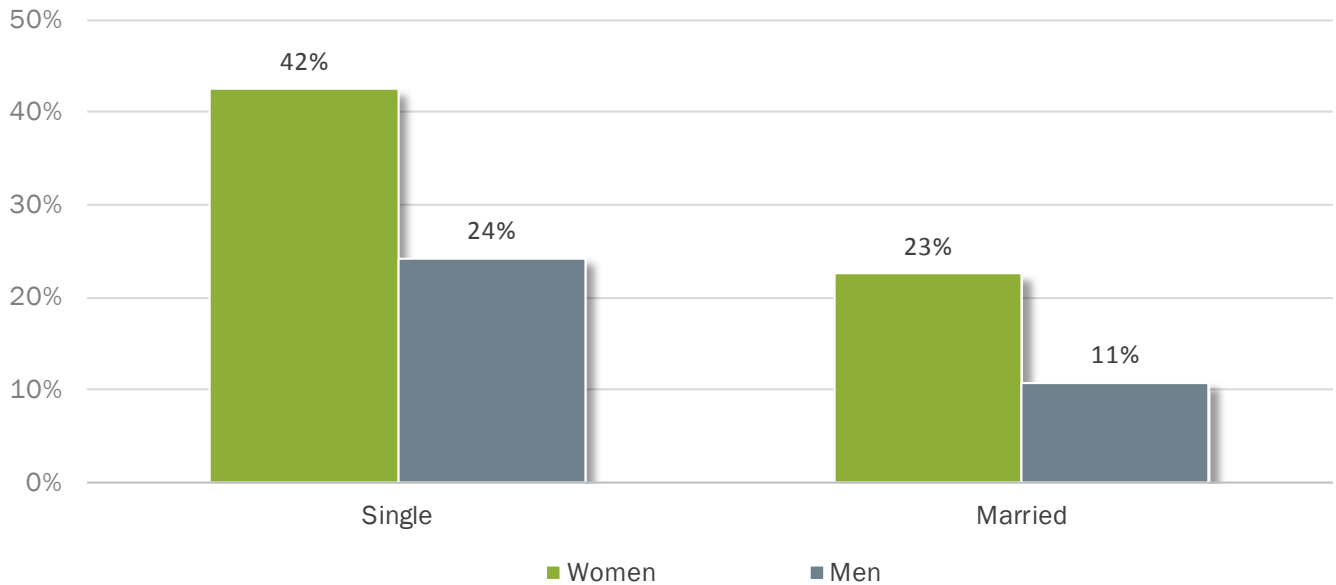
Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers.



BOTH SINGLE AND MARRIED WOMEN ACCOUNT FOR LARGER SHARES OF THE LOW-WAGE WORKFORCE THAN THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS

- Both single and married women make up larger shares of the low-wage workforce than their male counterparts, though their shares of the overall workforce are similar or smaller.
- Single women are overrepresented in the low-wage workforce, while single men make up similar shares of the low-wage and overall workforces. Married women make up similar shares of the low-wage and overall workforces while married men are dramatically underrepresented in the low-wage workforce.

Low-Wage Workforce by Sex and Marital Status

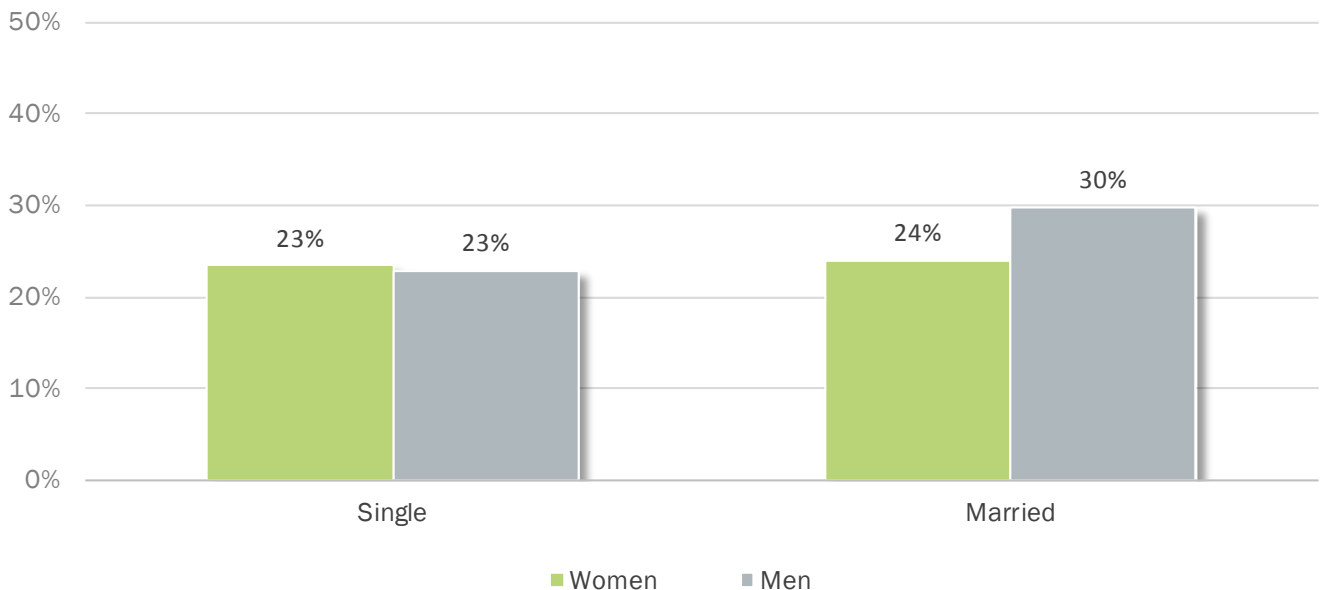


Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers. The low-wage workforce is defined here as occupations with median wages of \$10.50 or less per hour based on BLS, Occupational Employment Statistics.



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Overall Workforce by Sex and Marital Status



Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers.

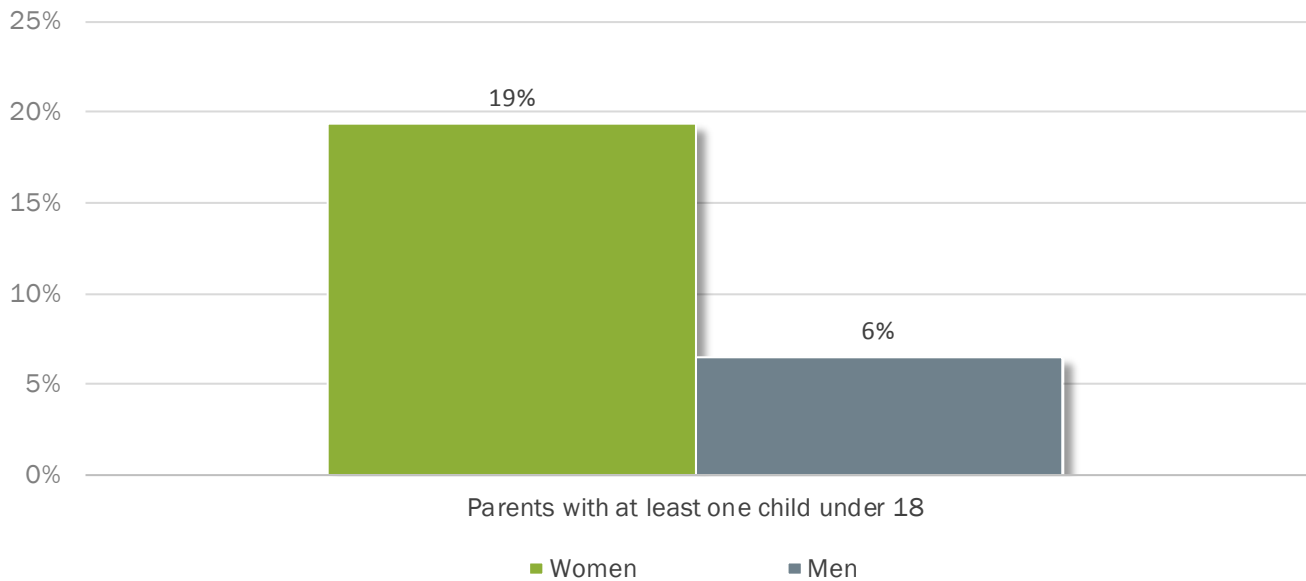


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MOTHERS' SHARE OF THE LOW-WAGE WORKFORCE IS LARGER THAN FATHERS'

- Mothers' share of the low-wage workforce is 3 times larger than fathers', even though their shares of the overall workforce are similar.
- Mothers are overrepresented in the low-wage workforce, while fathers are dramatically underrepresented.

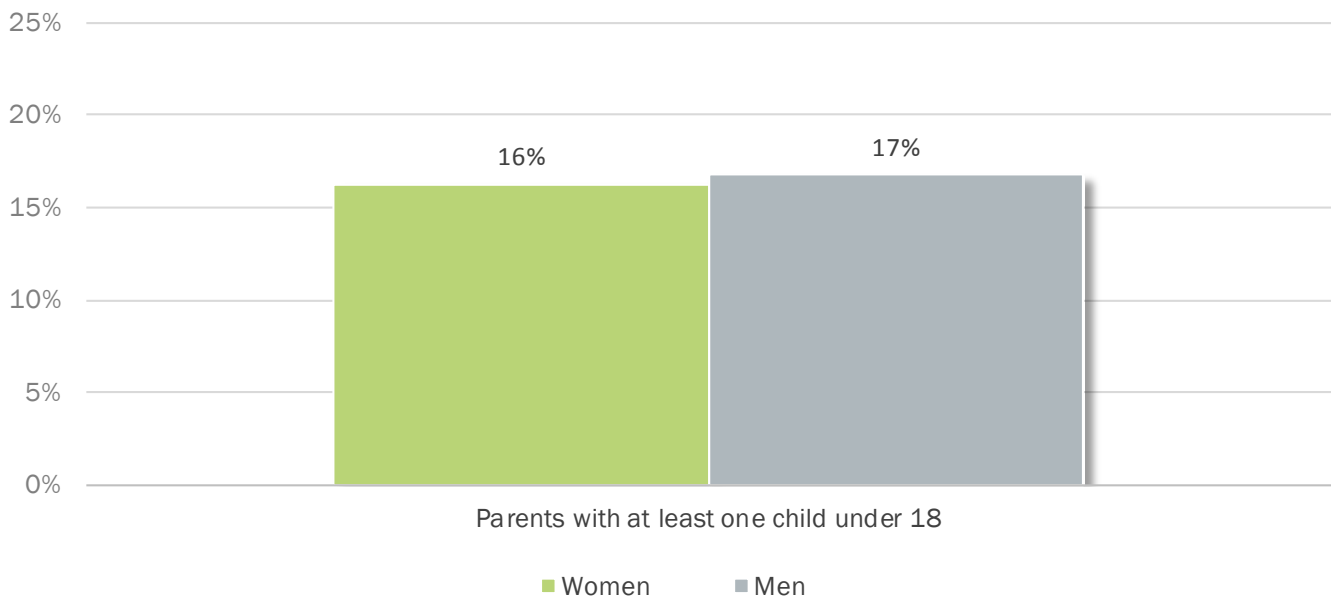
Low-Wage Workforce by Sex and Parental Status



Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers. The low-wage workforce is defined here as occupations with median wages of \$10.50 or less per hour based on BLS, Occupational Employment Statistics. "Parents" have related children living with them.



Overall Workforce by Sex and Parental Status



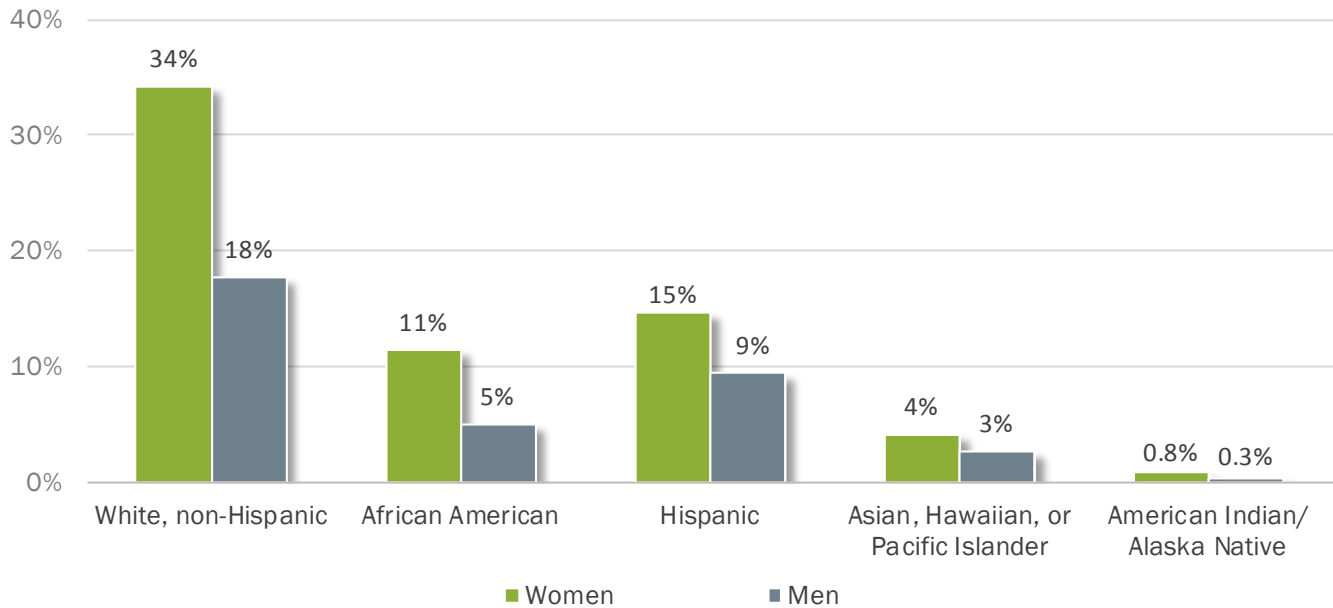
Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers. "Parents" have related children living with them.



ACROSS RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS WOMEN ACCOUNT FOR LARGER SHARES OF THE LOW-WAGE WORKFORCE THAN THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS

- Across racial and ethnic groups women account for larger shares of the low-wage workforce than their male counterparts, even though their shares of the overall workforce are generally similar or smaller.
- All groups of women of color are overrepresented in the low-wage workforce. In comparison, no group of men is overrepresented.

Low-Wage Workforce by Sex and Race/Ethnicity

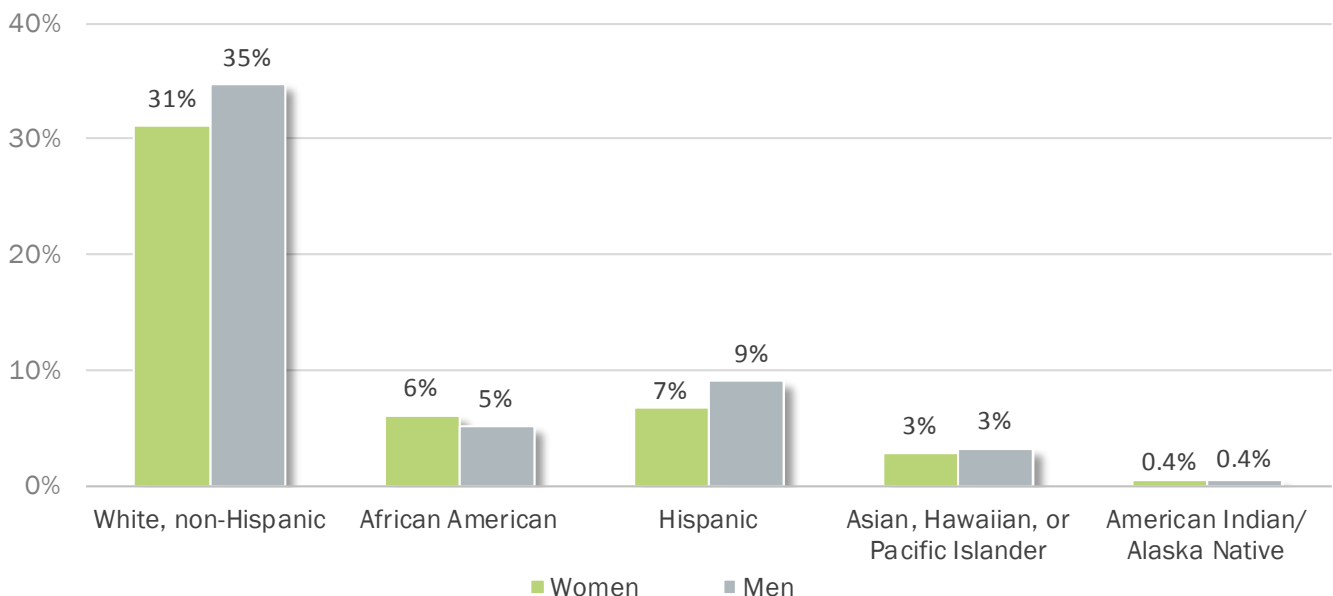


Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers. The low-wage workforce is defined here as occupations with median wages of \$10.50 or less per hour based on BLS, Occupational Employment Statistics.



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Overall Workforce by Sex and Race/Ethnicity



Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers.

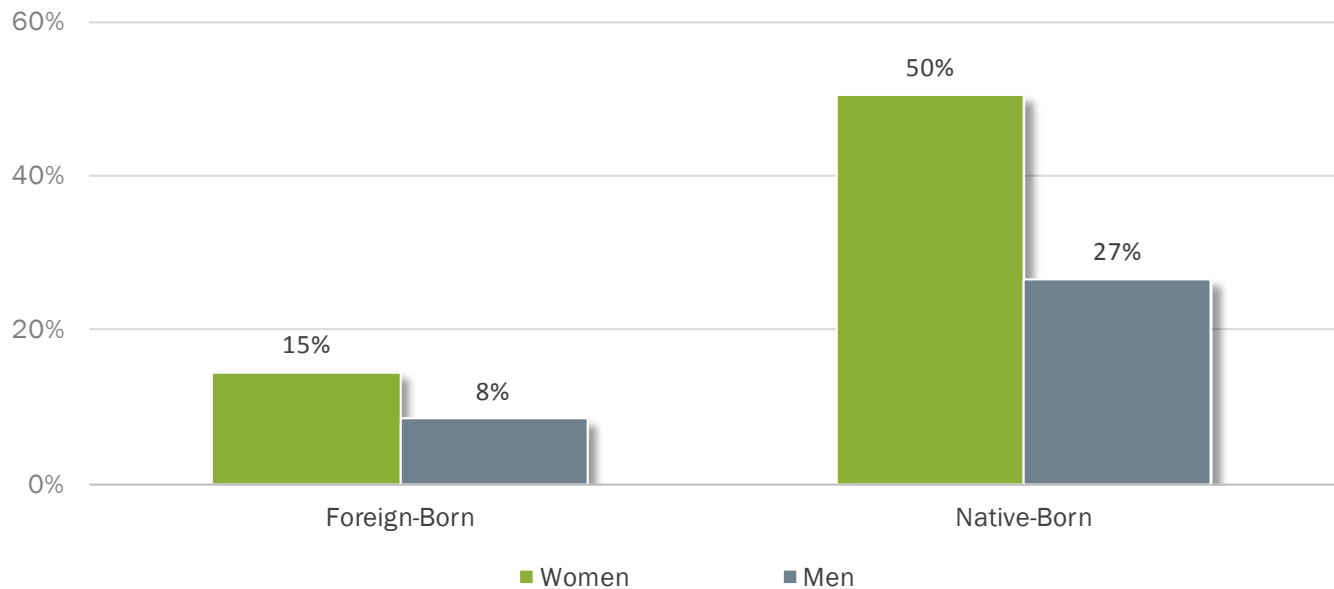


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FOREIGN-BORN AND NATIVE-BORN WOMEN ACCOUNT FOR LARGER SHARES OF THE LOW-WAGE WORKFORCE THAN THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS

- Both foreign-born and native-born women account for larger shares of the low-wage workforce than their male counterparts, even though they make up similar or smaller shares of the overall workforce.
- Foreign- and native-born women are both overrepresented in the low-wage workforce, while both foreign- and native-born men are underrepresented.

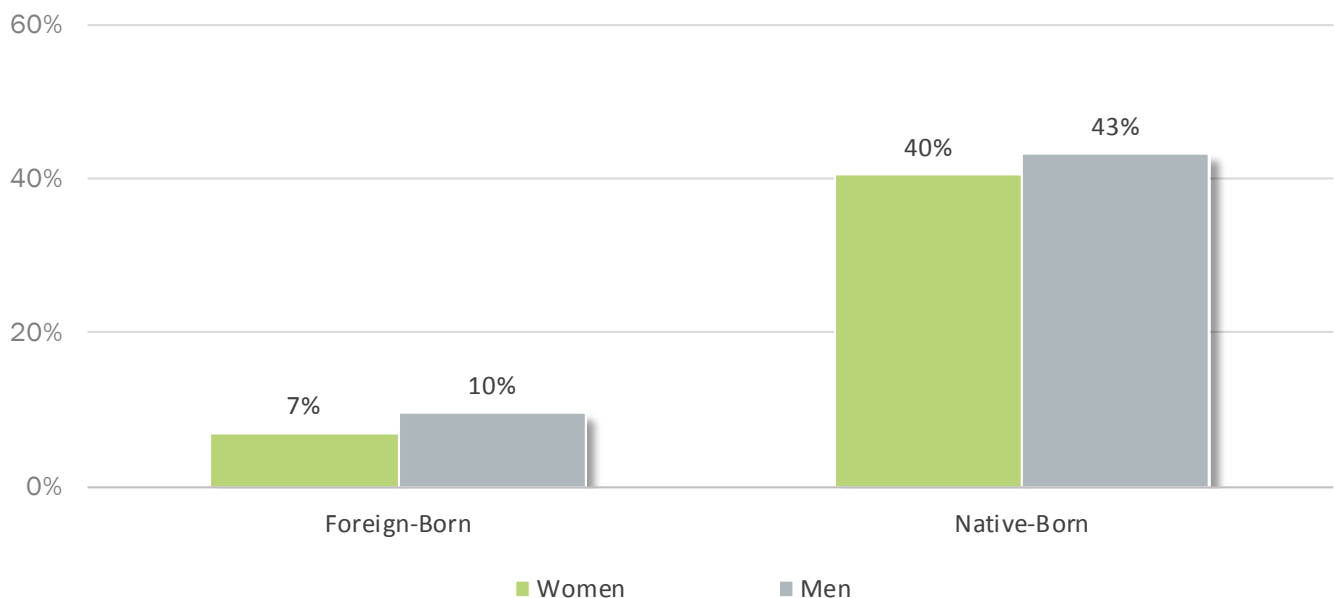
Low-Wage Workforce by Sex and Foreign- or Native-Born



Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers. The low-wage workforce is defined here as occupations with median wages of \$10.50 or less per hour based on BLS, Occupational Employment Statistics.



Overall Workforce by Sex and Foreign- or Native-Born



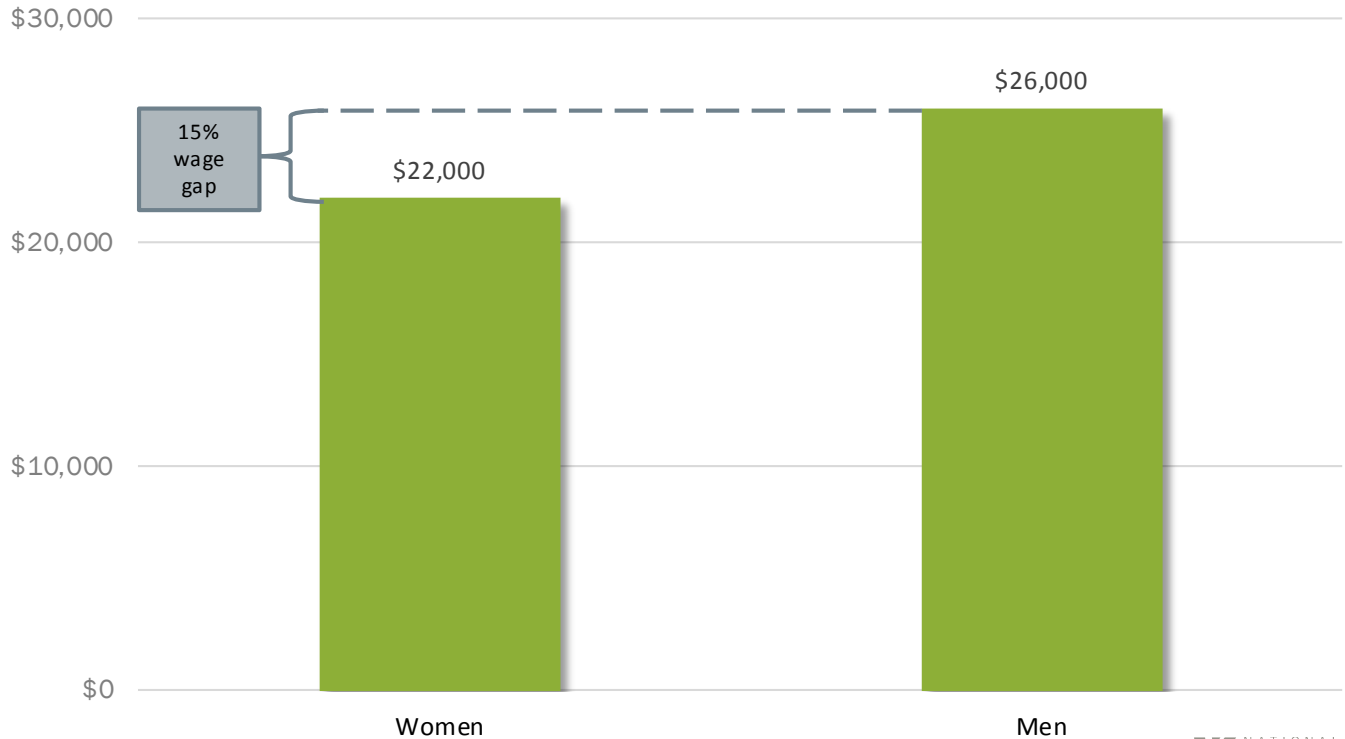
Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for employed workers.



WOMEN WORKING IN LOW-WAGE JOBS ARE PAID LESS THAN THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS, AND THE WAGE GAPS ARE EVEN LARGER FOR MOST WOMEN OF COLOR

- Women working full time, year round in low-wage jobs typically earn just 85 percent of what their male counterparts earn, a 15 percent wage gap.

Median Annual Earnings in the Low-Wage Workforce by Sex

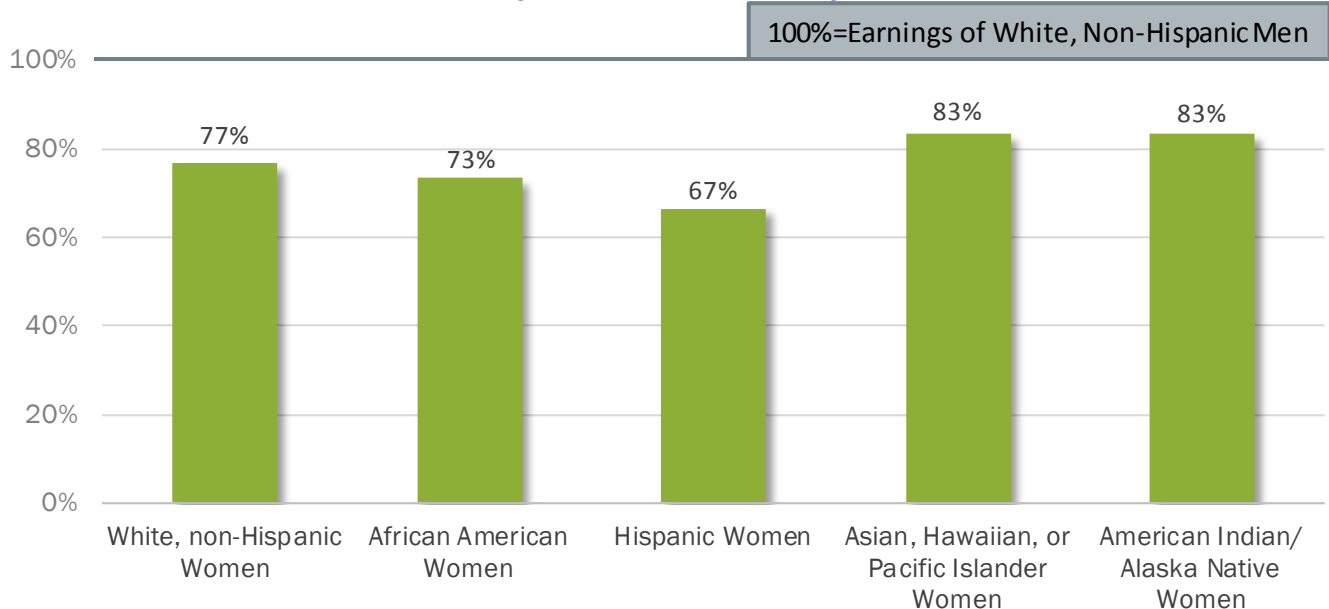


Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures are for full-time, year-round workers. The low-wage workforce is defined here as occupations with median wages of \$10.50 or less per hour based on BLS, Occupational Employment Statistics.



- The wage gap is even worse when compared to white, non-Hispanic men, especially for some groups of women of color.

Wage Gaps in the Low-Wage Workforce by Race and Ethnicity



Source: NWLC calculations based on IPUMS-CPS (2014). Figures compare median annual earnings full-time, year-round workers. The low-wage workforce is defined here as occupations with median wages of \$10.50 or less per hour based on BLS, Occupational Employment Statistics.



Note on methods

“LOW-WAGE JOBS” and the “low-wage workforce” could be defined in different ways; this analysis uses occupations that pay median hourly wages of \$10.50 or less because \$10.50 in 2014 is roughly equivalent to \$12.00 in 2020, which is the proposed new federal minimum wage in the Raise the Wage Act pending in Congress (2015), see David Cooper, John Schmitt, & Lawrence Mishel, Economic Policy Institute, We Can Afford a \$12.00 Federal Minimum Wage in 2020 (April 2015) available at <http://www.epi.org/publication/we-can-afford-a-12-00-federal-minimum-wage-in-2020/>. Median hourly wages for occupations are determined using the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Occupational Employment Statistics data from May 2014 (http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm). Unless otherwise noted, data are National Women’s Law Center calculations based on Current Population Survey (CPS) 2014 using Miriam King et al., Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), Current Population Survey: Version 3.0 [Machine-readable database] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010). Some detailed occupations listed in the BLS Occupational Employment Statistics are not available using CPS data in which case a broader level of occupation is used.

When comparing representation in the low-wage or overall workforces, groups are considered to have the same or similar representation if their ratio is between 1.1 and 0.9 (inclusive). Some differences may appear in the text due to rounding.

It is important to note that these comparisons are of workers. People who are not in the workforce, including incarcerated individuals, are not counted in the data. Young, less-educated men of color, especially African American men, are very disproportionately incarcerated, and thus not counted in a comparison of the types of jobs held by people who are in the workforce. Thus this analysis does not provide a full picture of the employment prospects for some groups of men of color and the impact of high rates of incarceration on their economic security.