



CHILD CARE

A SNAPSHOT OF WORKING MOTHERS

It is an undeniable fact of American life today that a large majority of women with children—married and single, with children of all ages from infants to teens—are working outside the home. Most of these mothers work full time or would like full-time work. The income that working mothers provide is crucial to supporting their families. Yet many mothers work in low-wage jobs that leave them struggling to meet their families' basic needs. It is essential that all of these working mothers, including those in low-wage jobs, have access to affordable, high-quality child care that provides a safe and nurturing environment for their children during working hours.

A large majority of mothers—both single and married—are working outside the home.

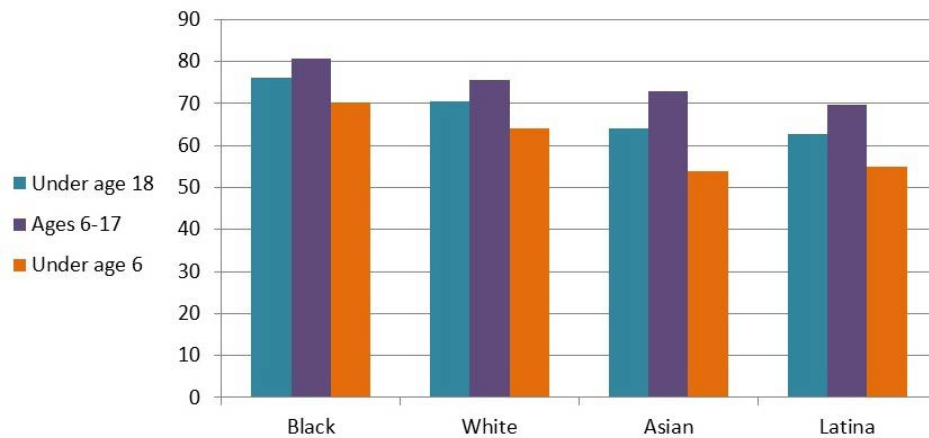
- Nearly seven in ten (69.9 percent) American women with children under age 18—74.4 percent of women with children ages 6 to 17 and 64.2 percent of women with children under age 6—are in the labor force.¹ Close to six in ten (58.1 percent) women with infants (under age 1) are in the labor force.²
- More than three in four (76.2 percent) single mothers with children under age 18—80.3 percent of those with children ages 6 to 17 and 70.7 percent of those with children under age 6—are in the labor force.³ Nearly six in ten (59.1 percent) single mothers with infants are in the labor force.⁴
- Nearly seven in ten (68.4 percent) married women with children under age 18—73.8 percent of those with children ages 6 to 17 and 61.5 percent of those with children under age 6—are in the labor force.⁵ A majority of married mothers with infants (57.6 percent) are in the labor force.⁶
- The percentage of mothers who are in the labor force has risen significantly over the past 40 years. In 1975, less than half (47.4 percent) of mothers with children under age 18—54.9 percent of women with children ages 6 to 17 and 39.0 percent of women with children under age 6—were in the labor force.⁷

A majority of mothers of all races, including those with young children, work outside the home.

- Black mothers are more likely to be in the labor force than mothers of any other race. Over three-quarters (76.2 percent) of Black mothers with children under age 18—80.7 percent of Black mothers with children ages 6 to 17 and 70.3 percent of Black mothers with children under age 6—are in the labor force.⁸
- Over seven in ten (70.6 percent) white mothers with children under age 18—75.5 percent of white mothers with children ages 6 to 17 and 64.1 percent of white mothers with children under age 6—are in the labor force.⁹
- Nearly two-thirds (64.1 percent) of Asian mothers with children under age 18—72.9 percent of Asian mothers with children ages 6 to 17 and 53.9 percent of Asian mothers with children under age 6—are in the labor force.¹⁰
- Over six in ten (62.6 percent) Latina mothers with children under age 18—69.6 percent of Latina mothers with children ages 6 to 17 and 54.9 percent of Latina mothers with children under age 6—are in the labor force.¹¹



PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS IN THE LABOR FORCE BY RACE AND AGE OF YOUNGEST CHILD

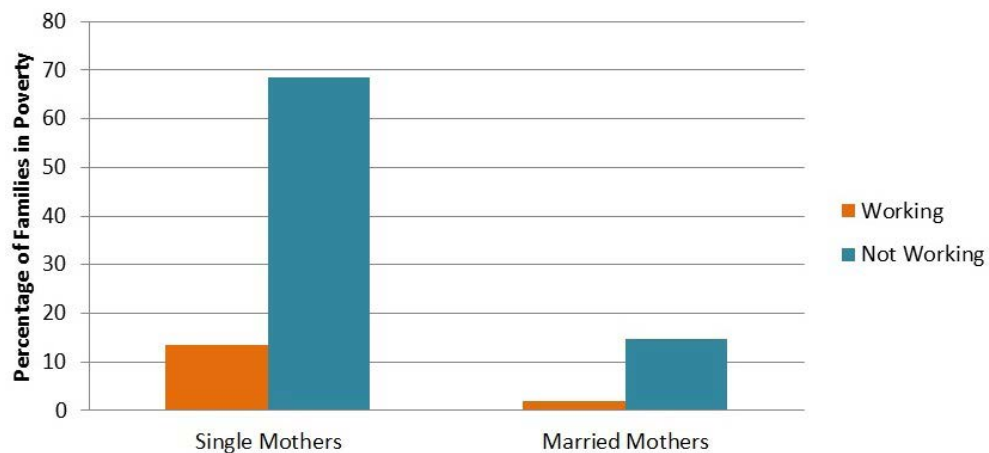


Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook (2015 Edition)*, Table 5.

Most mothers who work, even those with infants and toddlers, are employed full time.

- More than three-quarters (76.0 percent) of all employed women with children under age 18—77.7 percent of those with children ages 6 to 17 and 73.6 percent of those with children under age 6—are working full time.¹² Among mothers who are employed and have infants, 72.6 percent work full time.¹³
- Among single mothers who have children under age 18 and are employed, 77.0 percent work full time.¹⁴ Among single mothers who are employed and have infants, 69.2 percent work full time.¹⁵
- Among married mothers who have children under age 18 and are employed, 75.5 percent work full time.¹⁶ Among married mothers who are employed and have infants, 74.0 percent work full time.¹⁷
- Among employed mothers with children under age 18, 23.9 percent work part time. Nearly one in four (24.5 percent) employed married women with children under age 18, and 22.9 percent of employed single mothers with children under age 18, work part time.¹⁸

POVERTY RATES FOR SINGLE AND MARRIED MOTHERS BY WORK STATUS



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2015 Detailed Poverty Tables, POI5 & POI6*.



Families in which mothers do not work are far more likely to live in poverty.

- Families headed by single mothers who work outside the home are more likely to escape poverty than if they do not work outside the home. Nearly seven in ten (68.6 percent) families headed by single women who have children under age 18 and who do not work outside the home live in poverty, while 13.4 percent of families headed by single women who have children under age 18 and who work full time, year round live in poverty.¹⁹ Similarly, more than three-quarters (76.6 percent) of families headed by single women who have children under age 6 and who do not work outside the home live below the poverty line, while one out of five (19.6 percent) families headed by single women who have children under age 6 and who work full time, year round live in poverty.²⁰
- The income a married mother earns working outside the home often determines whether her family lives below the poverty line or above it. More than one in seven (14.7 percent) married-couple families with children under age 18 where the mother does not work live in poverty, while only 2.0 percent of families where both parents work live in poverty.²¹ Similarly, 16.8 percent of married-couple families with children under age 6 where the mother does not work live in poverty, while 2.6 percent of families with children under age 6 where both parents work live in poverty.²²

Families depend on women's earnings—frequently as the primary or sole source of income.

- Less than one-third (30.8 percent) of married-couple families with children under age 18—26.1 percent with children ages 6 to 17 and 37.0 percent with children under age 6—live in a household where only the father works.²³

- Families increasingly depend on women's income. Women are now the primary or co-breadwinners in nearly two-thirds (64.4 percent) of families with children under age 18, including 42.0 percent of families in which the mother is the sole or primary breadwinner and 22.4 percent of families in which the mother earns 25 to 49 percent of the household income.²⁴
- Single mothers must earn a living in order to feed, clothe, house, and otherwise sustain themselves and their children. The average amount of child support received, for custodial parents who receive it, is \$3,950 annually,²⁵ a boost to family income. But 47.7 percent of custodial mothers do not have a child support award, and 25.9 percent of custodial parents owed child support receive nothing.²⁶

Mothers are disproportionately likely to work in low-wage jobs, making it hard to provide for their families.

- Nearly one in six (16.3 percent) working mothers who have children under age 18 are in low-wage jobs.²⁷ Nearly one in five (18.3 percent) working mothers who have children age 3 and under are in low-wage jobs.²⁸ About half of mothers who have children under age 18 and work in low-wage jobs are single mothers and half are married.²⁹ In addition to providing limited pay, these jobs often entail evening, night, weekend, or variable hours, making it difficult for these mothers to find child care that matches their work schedules.³⁰



- 1 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Employment Characteristics of Families in 2015, Table 5, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.t05.htm>. These percentages understate how many women raising children are in the paid labor force because they reflect only women raising their own children, and do not include the many women who are raising grandchildren, nieces, and nephews, or other related children. Note that the labor force includes those who are working and those who are looking for work.
- 2 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Employment Characteristics of Families in 2015, Table 6, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.t06.htm>.
- 3 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Women in the Labor Force: A Databook (2015 Edition), Table 6, available at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/archive/women-in-the-labor-force-a-databook-2015.pdf>. Single mothers in this dataset include those never married, divorced, separated, and widowed. Data are for March 2014.
- 4 Employment Characteristics of Families in 2015, Table 6, *supra* note 2. Single mothers in this dataset include those never married, divorced, separated, widowed, or those that are married, spouse absent.
- 5 Women in the Labor Force: A Databook, Table 6, *supra* note 3.
- 6 Employment Characteristics of Families in 2015, Table 6, *supra* note 2.
- 7 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Women in the Labor Force: A Databook, Table 7 (2015 Edition), available at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/archive/women-in-the-labor-force-a-databook-2015.pdf>. The Bureau of Labor Statistics began collecting data on mothers in the workforce in 1975.
- 8 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Women in the Labor Force: A Databook, Table 5 (2015 Edition), available at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/archive/women-in-the-labor-force-a-databook-2015.pdf>. Data are for March 2014.
- 9 *Id.*
- 10 *Id.*
- 11 *Id.*
- 12 National Women's Law Center (NWLC) calculations based on data from Employment Characteristics of Families in 2015, Table 5, *supra* note 1. Of all mothers of children under age 18, 50.4 percent work full time; of all mothers of children ages 6 to 17, 55.2 percent work full time; of all mothers of children under age 6, 44.2 percent work full time.
- 13 NWLC calculations based on data from Employment Characteristics of Families in 2015, Table 6, *supra* note 2. Mothers of infants have a child under age 1. Of all mothers of children under age 1, 39.3 percent work full time.
- 14 NWLC calculations based on data from Employment Characteristics of Families in 2015, Table 5, *supra* note 1.
- 15 NWLC calculations based on data from Employment Characteristics of Families in 2015, Table 6, *supra* note 2.
- 16 NWLC calculations based on data from Employment Characteristics of Families in 2015, Table 5, *supra* note 1.
- 17 NWLC calculations based on data from Employment Characteristics of Families in 2015, Table 6, *supra* note 2.
- 18 NWLC calculations based on data from Employment Characteristics of Families in 2015, Table 5, *supra* note 1.
- 19 U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2015 Detailed Poverty Tables, POV15, available at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pov/pov-15.html>. These percentages are for households in which there were no other workers.
- 20 U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2015 Detailed Poverty Tables, POV16, available at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pov/pov-16.html>. These percentages are for households in which there were no other workers.
- 21 U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 Detailed Poverty Tables, POV15, *supra* note 19.
- 22 U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 Detailed Poverty Tables, POV16, *supra* note 20.
- 23 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Employment Characteristics of Families in 2015, Table 4, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.t04.htm>.
- 24 Sarah Jane Glynn, Breadwinning Mothers are Increasingly the U.S. Norm (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2016), 1, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2016/12/19/295203/breadwinning-mothers-are-increasingly-the-u-s-norm/>.
- 25 Timothy Grall, Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2013 (P60-255) (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), 1, available at <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/P60-255.pdf>.
- 26 NWLC calculations based on data from Grall, 3, *supra* note 25.
- 27 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 Current Population Survey using IPUMS.
- 28 *Id.*
- 29 *Id.*; see also 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. In this analysis, "low-wage" occupations are defined as those with median hourly wages of \$10.50 or less per hour. Single mothers are defined as those never married, divorced, separated, widowed, or those that are married, spouse absent.
- 30 Julie Vogtman & Karen Schulman, Set Up to Fail: When Low-Wage Work Jeopardizes Parents' and Children's Success (Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center, 2016), 6-8, 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>.

