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# Equal Pay for Mothers Is Critical for Families

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Nearly 25 million mothers with children under 18 are in the workforce, making up nearly 1 in 6—or 16.1 percent—of all workers.<sup>1</sup> And a record number of these mothers – about 3 in 4 mothers in the workforce (75.6 percent)—are working full time.<sup>2</sup> As a result, families are increasingly relying on their earnings. In 2017, 41 percent of mothers were the sole or primary breadwinners in their families, while 23.2 percent of mothers were co-breadwinners.<sup>3</sup> While women in the U.S. who work full time, year round are typically paid just 80 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts,<sup>4</sup> the wage gap between mothers and fathers is even larger. Mothers working full time, year round outside the home are paid just 69 cents for every dollar paid to fathers, [a gap that translates to a loss of \\$18,000 annually.](#)<sup>5</sup> The wage gap between mothers and fathers exists across race, state, and occupation, and compromises families' economic security.

## Mothers of every race are typically paid less than white, non-Hispanic fathers.

While overall, mothers are paid less than fathers, the wage gap is even wider for many mothers of color as compared to white, non-Hispanic fathers. Asian American and Pacific Islander mothers are paid 92 cents;<sup>6</sup> white, non-Hispanic mothers are paid 72 cents; Black mothers are paid 54 cents; Native mothers are paid 48 cents; and Latina mothers are paid just 46 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers.<sup>7</sup>



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home. Figures are median annual earnings for full time, year round workers in 2017

## Mothers experience a wage gap in every single state.

Nationwide, mothers are paid just 69 cents for every dollar paid to fathers. But the wage gap varies by state. In Vermont, where the wage gap between mothers and fathers is smallest, mothers are paid 80 cents for every dollar paid to fathers, translating to a typical loss of about \$10,500 annually.<sup>8</sup> In Louisiana and Utah, where the gap is largest, mothers are paid just 59 cents and 61 cents respectively for every dollar paid to fathers. In these states, mothers typically lose more than \$23,000 annually.<sup>9</sup> Many mothers of color experience even wider gaps [depending on their state](#). For example, in the District of Columbia, Black mothers lose about \$85,000 and Latina mothers lose more than \$98,000 annually compared to white, non-Hispanic fathers.

## Mothers experience a wage gap across occupations.

In a wide variety of occupations—those that are well-paid and poorly paid, those that are female-dominated and those that are non-traditional for women—mothers working full time, year round are paid less than fathers.

Nearly 2 in 5 mothers (38.1 percent) are employed in one of ten occupations; in every one of those occupations, mothers are paid between 51 cents and 85 cents for every dollar paid to fathers. In addition, two of the common occupations for mothers—janitors, building cleaners, maids and housekeepers and cashiers and retail salespeople—typically pay mothers a low wage—less than \$11.50 per hour. Of the top ten most common occupations for mothers, these two occupations are where mothers face the steepest wage gaps compared to fathers.<sup>10</sup>

Lower wages can leave families below or dangerously close to the poverty line, particularly when mothers support children on their own. A single parent with two children needs to make \$20,231 per year – about \$9.72 per hour for someone working full time, year round—just to lift their family above the poverty line.<sup>11</sup> Indeed,

### COMMON OCCUPATIONS FOR WORKING MOTHERS

	Occupation	Percent of mothers employed in occupation	Median hourly wage for mothers in occupation	Median hourly wage for fathers in in occupation	What a mother makes for every dollar a father makes
1	Pre-K, K-12, and special education teachers	7.5%	\$23.08	\$27.40	84¢
2	Secretaries, administrative assistants, office clerks, receptionists, and information clerks	6.1%	\$15.87	\$19.23	83¢
3	Registered nurses	4.6%	\$30.29	\$35.58	85¢
4	Nursing, psychiatric, and home health, and personal care aides	4.4%	\$12.02	\$14.42	83¢
5	Cashiers and retail salespeople	3.9%	\$11.06	\$21.63	51¢
6	Janitors, building cleaners, maids, and housekeepers	3.2%	\$9.62	\$15.38	63¢
7	Misc. managers such as postmasters, mail super intendants, and funeral service managers	2.3%	\$34.13	\$44.71	76¢
8	Customer service representatives	2.3%	\$15.38	\$21.63	71¢
9	Retail sales supervisors	1.9%	\$16.83	\$24.04	70¢
10	Accountants and auditors	1.9%	\$28.85	\$43.75	66¢

Source: NWLC calculations based on 2017 American Community Survey using IPUMS. Figures are in 2017 dollars. Median hourly wages are for full time, year round workers. Mothers and fathers have at least one child under 18 at home. Hourly wages for mothers and fathers are derived by dividing median annual earnings by 2,080 hours, which assumes a 40-hour work week for 52 weeks.

nearly one in eight unmarried mothers who held full time jobs throughout 2017 were poor.<sup>12</sup> Nearly six in ten poor children lived in families headed by women in 2017, and female-headed households with children were much more likely to be poor in 2017 (34 percent) than households headed by unmarried fathers (16 percent) or households headed by married couples (6 percent).<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, fathers tend to be concentrated in occupations that are more highly paid. In the ten most common occupations for fathers, none typically pay fathers less than \$14.42 per hour. And while there is overlap between the most common occupations for mothers and fathers, fathers are more likely than mothers to be in high paying occupations and mothers are more likely to be in lower paid occupations. For example, fathers are 3.5 times more likely than mothers to be a CEO or legislator. In contrast, mothers are 11 times more likely than fathers to be nursing, psychiatric, home health, and personal care aides. And, again, when fathers and mothers work in the same occupation, fathers are nearly always paid more; in nine out of ten most common occupations for fathers, mothers are typically paid between 63 and 86 cents for every dollar paid to fathers.

### COMMON OCCUPATIONS FOR WORKING FATHERS

	Occupation	Percent of mothers employed in occupation	Median hourly wage for mothers in occupation	Median hourly wage for fathers in occupation	What a mother makes for every dollar a father makes	What a mother makes for every dollar a father makes
1	Misc. managers such as postmasters, mail super intendants, and funeral service managers	7.5%	\$23.08	\$27.40	84¢	76¢
2	Truck drivers and driver sales workers	6.1%	\$15.87	\$19.23	83¢	67¢
3	Construction Laborers	4.6%	\$30.29	\$35.58	85¢	86¢
4	Retail sales supervisors	4.4%	\$12.02	\$14.42	83¢	70¢
5	Carpenters	3.9%	\$11.06	\$21.63	51¢	70¢
6	Janitors, building cleaners, maids, and housekeepers	3.2%	\$9.62	\$15.38	63¢	63¢
7	Software developers	2.3%	\$34.13	\$44.71	76¢	83¢
8	Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers	2.3%	\$15.38	\$21.63	71¢	71¢
9	Grounds maintenance workers	1.9%	\$16.83	\$24.04	70¢	\$1.00
10	CEOs and legislators	1.9%	\$28.85	\$43.75	66¢	79¢

Source: NWLC calculations based on 2017 American Community Survey using IPUMS. Figures are in 2017 dollars. Median hourly wages are for full time, year round workers. Mothers and fathers have at least one child under 18 at home. Hourly wages for mothers and fathers are derived by dividing median annual earnings by 2,080 hours, which assumes a 40-hour work week for 52 weeks.

**Families can't afford for mothers to be shortchanged any longer. It's time to close the gap.**

- 1 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 Current Population Survey using IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, <https://ipums.org/>. The wage gap is calculated as the median earnings of mothers working full time year round as a percentage of the median earnings of fathers working full time year round, provided they have at least \$1 in earnings. Median earnings are the earnings made by an individual at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile – the worker right in the middle. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home.
- 2 Ibid. 65.1 percent of working mothers were employed full time in 1976.
- 3 Center For American Progress, Breadwinning Mothers Continue to be the U.S. Norm (May 2019), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2019/05/10/469739/breadwinning-mothers-continue-u-s-norm/>
- 4 NWLC, The Wage Gap: The Who, How, Why, and What to Do (Sept. 2018), <https://nwlc.org/resources/the-wage-gap-the-who-how-why-and-what-to-do/>
- 5 NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, *available at* <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home. Figures are median annual earnings for full time, year round workers in 2017.
- 6 Some communities of Asian American and Pacific Islander mothers experience a larger wage gap than is reflected in the figure for Asian American and Pacific Islander mothers overall. For more information on the wage gap for AAPI women by subgroup. For more information, NWLC, Equal Pay for Asian American and Pacific Islander Women (Mar. 2019), <https://nwlc.org/resources/equal-pay-for-asian-pacific-islander-women/>.
- 7 NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, *available at* <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home. Figures are median annual earnings for full time, year round workers in 2017. Black mothers are those who self identified in the survey as Black or African American. Native mothers are those who self identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native. Asian American and Pacific Islander mothers are those who self identified as Asian and/or Pacific Islander. Latina mothers are those who self identified as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin and may be of any race. White, non-Hispanic mothers and fathers are those who self identified as white and not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.
- 8 NWLC, The Wage Gap for Mothers, State by State (May 2019), <https://nwlc.org/resources/the-wage-gap-for-mothers-state-by-state/>.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, *available at* <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home. Figures are median annual earnings for full time, year round workers in 2017. Hourly wages are derived by dividing median annual earnings by 2,080 hours, which assumes a 40-hour work week for 52 weeks.
- 11 U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty Thresholds for 2018 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years (Sept. 2018), <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html>.
- 12 Meika Berlan and Morgan Harwood, NWLC, National Snapshot: Poverty Among Women & Families, 2018 (Sept. 2018), <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/National-Snapshot.pdf>.
- 13 Ibid.