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Asian American and Pacific Islander Women Lose \$10,000 Annually to the Wage Gap

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Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women¹ are typically paid just 85 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.² This gap in pay, which typically amounts to a loss of \$833 every month, \$10,000 every year, and \$400,000 over a 40-year career, means that AAPI women have to work more than 14 months to make as much as white, non-Hispanic men were paid in the previous calendar year alone.

Data in this factsheet comes from multiple sources. The term “Asian” is used where the data refers to those who self-identified as Asian alone. The term “AAPI” is used where the data refers to those who self-identified as Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander. See footnote 1 for more information.

The wage gap varies widely among AAPI women and many AAPI communities experience much larger wage gaps compared to white, non-Hispanic men than AAPI women overall. For example, among full-time, year-round workers, Burmese women typically make just 52 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, while Japanese women are typically paid 95 cents.³

As workers, AAPI women are overrepresented on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis, and as a result are among those disproportionately affected by the pandemic’s health and economic impacts. The pandemic has exposed how the work performed primarily by women has long been and continues to be undervalued, even as the rest of the country is depending on it as never before. Women make up nearly two-thirds of workers risking their lives to provide health care, child care, and other essential services, and AAPI women are overrepresented in a variety of these occupations. They are also overrepresented in many of the occupations that have borne the brunt of COVID-related job loss. Lost earnings due to the gender wage gap are exacerbating the effects of COVID-19 for AAPI women — and for the families who depend on their income. These lost earnings leave AAPI women without a financial cushion to weather the current crisis.

More than one in four AAPI women is a front-line worker, but many are being paid less than their white male peers.

AAPI women are overrepresented in the front-line workforce providing essential public services during COVID-19, making up 3.8 percent of workers in front-line industries despite making up only 2.9 percent of the workforce overall. More than 1 in 4 AAPI women are working in a front-line job (26.6 percent).⁴ But AAPI women are too often paid less than white, non-Hispanic men in the same jobs. For example, AAPI women are 4.8 percent of dental assistants, and among those working full-time, year-round in these jobs, AAPI women are typically paid just 72 cents for every dollar typically paid to white, non-Hispanic men in the same occupation. Similarly, AAPI women make up 3.6 percent of cashiers and retail salespeople in grocery stores but among full-time, year-round workers, they typically make just 89 cents for every dollar white, non-Hispanic men typically make in the same jobs.

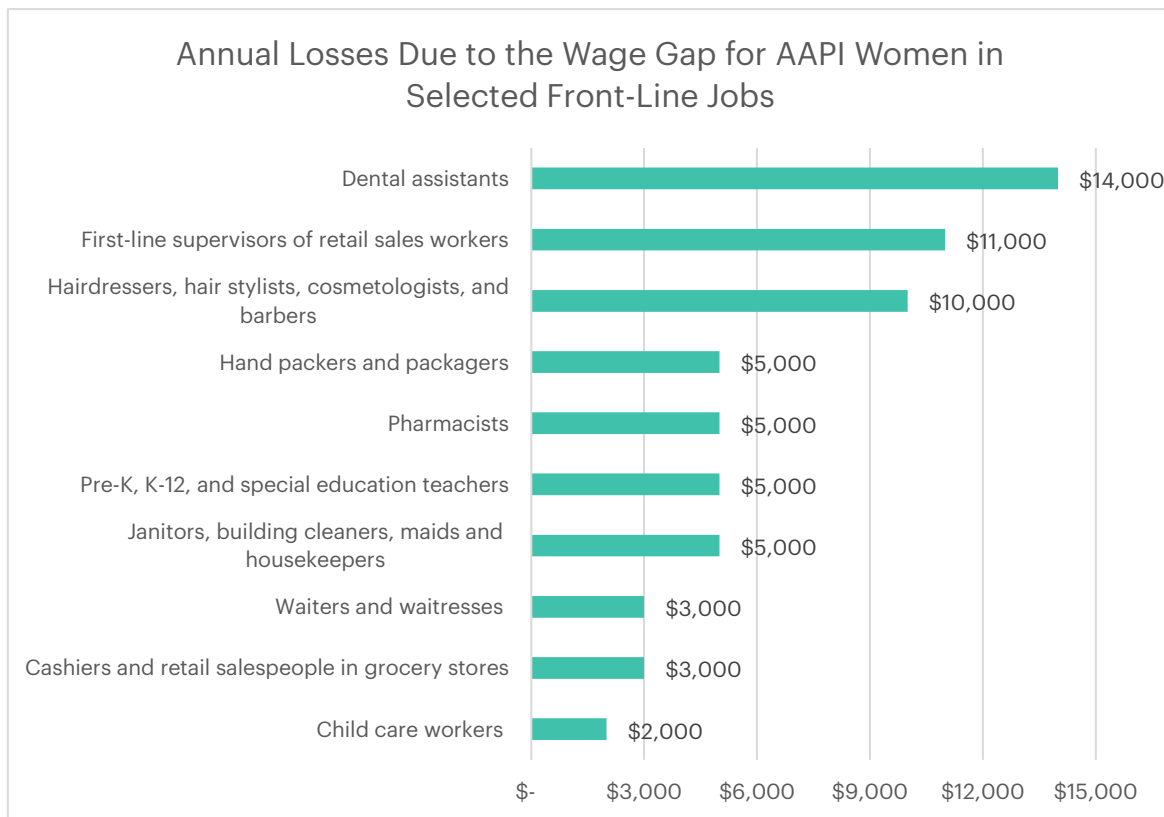
THE WAGE GAP FOR AAPI WOMEN IN SELECTED FRONT-LINE OCCUPATIONS

Occupation	Percent of workers who are AAPI women	Median hourly wage for AAPI women in occupation	Median hourly wage for white, non-Hispanic men in occupation	What an AAPI woman makes for every dollar a white, non-Hispanic man makes
Pharmacists	12.1%	\$57.69	\$60.10	\$0.96
Hairdressers, hair stylists, cosmetologists, and barbers	4.8%	\$12.02	\$16.83	\$0.71
Dental assistants	4.8%	\$17.31	\$24.04	\$0.72
Waiters and waitresses	4.3%	\$11.54	\$12.98	\$0.89
Hand packers and packagers	3.9%	\$12.02	\$14.42	\$0.83
Cashiers and retail salespeople in grocery stores	3.6%	\$11.54	\$12.98	\$0.89
Child care workers	3.5%	\$11.06	\$12.02	\$0.92
Pre-K, K-12, and special education teachers	2.4%	\$24.04	\$26.44	\$0.91
First-line supervisors of retail sales workers	2.2%	\$18.75	\$24.04	\$0.78
Janitors, building cleaners, maids and housekeepers	2.1%	\$13.94	\$16.35	\$0.85

Source: NWLC calculations based on 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimate using IPUMS. Median hourly wages are for full-time, year-round workers. Hourly wages are derived by dividing median annual earnings by 2,080 hours, which assumes a 40-hour work week for 52 weeks.

AAPI women are also overrepresented in industries such as restaurants, hotels,⁵ and retail that have seen significant job losses as pandemic-related restrictions and fear of exposure to COVID weakened demand. And in these jobs, too, AAPI women are frequently paid less than their white, non-Hispanic male counterparts. For example, AAPI women make up 4.3 percent of people working as waiters and waitresses. And among those working full-time, year-round, AAPI women are typically paid just 89 cents for every dollar white, non-Hispanic men working in these jobs are typically paid.

Many AAPI women were struggling to make ends meet before this crisis ever started: in 2018, nearly one in six AAPI women working in any job was living below 200 percent of the federal poverty line and for AAPI women working in a low-paid job, that rate was more the double – 34 percent.⁶ The wage gap, then, results in an annual loss that can be devastating for AAPI women and their families. AAPI women in a low-paid front-line occupation such as cashiers and retail salespeople in grocery stores typically lose \$3,000 due to the wage gap, while AAPI women working as supervisors of retail sales workers lose \$11,000 due to the wage gap.⁷



Asian women are experiencing high unemployment.

Wage gaps leave AAPI women less able than their white, non-Hispanic male counterparts to successfully weather COVID-related income loss. And many Asian women are experiencing just such income loss: in January 2021, nearly half of Asian, non-Hispanic women (47.2 percent) reported someone in their household had lost employment income since March 2020 and another 30.4 percent expect to lose income in the next month.⁸ Almost 8 percent of Asian women were unemployed in January 2021 (7.9 percent).⁹ While this represents substantial improvement in their unemployment rate since it peaked at 16.4 percent in May 2020, it is still more than double their pre-pandemic unemployment rate of 3.0 percent in February 2020.¹⁰ Additionally, in January 2021, nearly 2 in 5 unemployed Asian women (37.7 percent) had been unemployed for six months or more¹¹ and unemployed Asian women had typically been looking for work for nearly 18 weeks. By comparison, white men had typically been looking for work for 14 weeks.¹²

Over their career, AAPI women typically lose \$400,000 to the wage gap.¹³

A loss of fifteen cents on the dollar adds up over a month, a year, and a lifetime. If today's median wage gap does not close, AAPI women stand to lose \$833 each month, \$10,000 a year, and \$400,000 over the course of a 40-year career. Assuming an AAPI woman and her white, non-Hispanic male counterpart both begin work at age 20, the wage gap means she would have to work until she is 67 years old to be paid what a white, non-Hispanic man has been paid by age 60.¹⁴

Losses due to the wage gap add up and mean that AAPI women not only have less money in their pocket right now --it also means they are denied key opportunities throughout their lifetimes to build wealth and future economic security for themselves and their families. The wage gap means many cannot save enough to afford a down payment on a home, cannot afford to pay for their own or a child's higher education, cannot start a business or save for retirement.

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Losses due to gender and racial wage gaps are devastating for AAPI women and their families, many of whom were struggling to make ends meet even before the current crisis. This pandemic threatens to deepen these inequities. AAPI women have been shortchanged and their work has been undervalued for far too long; neither they nor their families can afford to wait for change during an unprecedented public health and economic crisis that has no end in sight.

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- 1 Data in this analysis comes from the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey (CPS) and American Community Survey (ACS) and U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey. Because data comes from multiple data sources, there are some instances where the data refers to Asian women alone. In those instances, the term "Asian women" is used. In instances where the data refers to Asian American and Pacific Islander women, the term "AAPI women" is used. Asian women alone include those who only self-identified in one of the above surveys as Asian alone. "AAPI women" are those who self-identified as Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or Asian Hawaiian/Pacific Islander in the ACS survey and Asian and/or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander in the CPS Survey. People in all surveys self-identified as either male or female. Please reference the individual sources cited for further detail.
 - 2 National Women's Law Center (NWLC) calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplement [hereinafter CPS, 2020 ASEC], using IPUMS, available at <https://cps.ipums.org/cps/>. In 2019, the median earnings of AAPI women working full-time, year-round were \$55,000 and for white, non-Hispanic men it was \$65,000.
 - 3 NWLC calculations based on 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS), 5-year estimates, using Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas, and Matthew Sobek, IPUMS USA, Version 10.0, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.
 - 4 NWLC calculations based on 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS), 5-year estimates, using Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas, and Matthew Sobek, IPUMS USA, Version 10.0, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org. "Front-line workforce" is defined using the methodology outlined in Hye Jin Rho, Hayley Brown, & Shawn Fremstad, Center on Economic and Policy Research, A Basic Demographic Profile of Workers in Front-line Industries (Apr. 2020), available at <https://cepr.net/a-basic-demographic-profile-of-workers-in-frontline-industries/>.
 - 5 Amanda Fins, NWLC, Women in Leisure and Hospitality Are Among the Hardest Hit by Job Losses and Most at Risk of Covid-19 Infection (Nov. 2020), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/women-in-leisure-and-hospitality-are-among-the-hardest-hit-by-job-losses-and-most-at-risk-of-covid-19-infection/>.
 - 6 Jasmine Tucker and Julie Vogtman, NWLC, When Hard Work is Not Enough: Women in Low-Paid Jobs (Apr. 2020), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/when-hard-work-is-not-enough-women-in-low-paid-jobs/>.
 - 7 NWLC calculations based on 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS), 5-year estimates, using Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas, and Matthew Sobek, IPUMS USA, Version 10.0, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.
 - 8 Jasmine Tucker & Claire Ewing-Nelson, NWLC, Over 61.2 Million Women Live in a Household That Has Lost Work Income Since March 2020 (Feb. 2021) available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/over-61-2-million-women-live-in-a-household-that-has-lost-work-income-since-march-2020/>.
 - 9 Claire Ewing-Nelson, NWLC, Another 275,000 Women Left the Labor Force in January (Feb. 2021), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/january-jobs-day-2021/>.
 - 10 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, BLS Data Finder, LNU04032267, available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU04032267>.
 - 11 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Situation Summary – January 2021, Table A-36, available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea36.htm> (last visited Feb. 5, 2021).
 - 12 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Situation Summary – January 2021, Table A-36, available at <https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea36.htm> (last visited Feb. 5, 2021).
 - 13 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, CPS, 2020 ASEC, using IPUMS, available at <https://cps.ipums.org/cps/>. In 2019, the median earnings of AAPI women working full-time, year-round were \$55,000 and for white, non-Hispanic men it was \$65,000. The lifetime wage gap assumes a wage gap of \$10,000 each year for 40 years. Figures are not adjusted for inflation.
 - 14 This assumes workers begin work at age 20 and work for 40 years, retiring at age 60. In order to make up the \$400,000 lost to the wage gap, AAPI women would need to work more than 7 more years in order to catch up.