



JULY 2020 | FACT SHEET

# It's 2020 and Black Women Aren't Even Close to Equal Pay

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Despite their foundational role in building America and its economy, Black workers have always faced discrimination in the U.S. workforce. Today, it takes longer for Black workers to find jobs<sup>1</sup> and when they do, they're paid less than their peers. This is especially so for Black women, who face not only race discrimination, but also sex discrimination, as the wage gap between Black women working full time, year round compared to white, non-Hispanic men makes clear: Black women typically make just 62 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men,<sup>2</sup> and that disparity has not narrowed over the last quarter century.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, from 1967 to 2018, the most recent year for which data are available, the wage gap for Black women narrowed by just 19 cents.<sup>4</sup>

As workers, Black women are on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis, and as a result are disproportionately affected by the pandemic's health and economic impacts. The pandemic has exposed how the work performed primarily by women, and particularly Black women, has long been and continues to be undervalued, even as the rest of the country is depending on it as never before. Women are the majority of workers risking their lives to provide health care, child care, and other essential services, and Black women are overrepresented in a variety of these occupations. They are also overrepresented in many of the occupations feeling the brunt of COVID-related job loss. Lost earnings due to the gender wage gap are exacerbating the effects of COVID-19 for Black women — and for the families who depend on their income. These lost earnings not only leave Black women without a financial cushion to weather the current crisis, they also make it harder for Black women to build wealth, contributing to the racial wealth gap and barriers to Black families' economic prosperity.

## **Black women are a large percentage of COVID-19 front-line workers, but they are being paid less than their white male peers, and are experiencing high unemployment.**

Black women are disproportionately represented in front-line jobs providing essential public services during COVID-19, making up 11 percent of the front-line workforce despite only making up 6.3 percent of the workforce overall. More than 1 in 3 (37 percent) Black women is in a front-line job.<sup>5</sup> But Black women are still paid less than white, non-Hispanic men in the same jobs. For example, Black women are 26.1 percent of personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants, and among those working full time, year round in these jobs, Black women are typically paid just 89 cents for every dollar typically paid to white, non-Hispanic men in the same roles. Similarly, Black women make up 8.8 percent of cashiers and

retail salespeople in grocery stores but among full time, year round workers, they typically make just 72 cents for every dollar white, non-Hispanic men typically make in the same jobs.

Black women are also overrepresented in industries like restaurants, retail, and hotels that have seen massive job losses as pandemic-related restrictions closed businesses. And in these jobs, too, Black women are paid less than their white, non-Hispanic male counterparts. For example, Black women make up 11.2 percent of people working as hairdressers, hairstylists and cosmetologists. And among those working full time, year round, Black women are typically paid just 63 cents for every dollar white, non-Hispanic men working in these jobs are typically paid.

## THE WAGE GAP FOR BLACK WOMEN IN SELECTED FRONT-LINE OCCUPATIONS

Occupation	Percent of workers who are Black women	Median hourly wage for Black women in occupation	Median hourly wage for white, non-Hispanic men in occupation	What a Black woman makes for every dollar a white, non-Hispanic man makes
Personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants	26.1%	\$12.84	\$14.42	\$0.89
Cashiers and retail salespeople in general merchandise stores	14.8%	\$9.62	\$12.36	\$0.78
Healthcare social workers	14.5%	\$19.23	\$21.63	\$0.89
Childcare workers	13.0%	\$11.06	\$12.02	\$0.92
Hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks	11.5%	\$10.53	\$11.54	\$0.91
Hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists	11.2%	\$12.02	\$19.23	\$0.63
Registered nurses	10.4%	\$31.25	\$33.65	\$0.93
Cashiers and retail salespeople in grocery stores	8.8%	\$10.10	\$13.99	\$0.72
Janitors, building cleaners, maids and housekeepers	8.1%	\$11.06	\$16.83	\$0.66
Pre-K, K-12, and special education teachers	7.8%	\$20.58	\$27.40	\$0.75
Waiters and waitresses	6.1%	\$10.10	\$13.85	\$0.73

Source: NWLC calculations based on 2018 American Community Survey using IPUMS. Figures are in 2018 dollars. 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.

This difference in wages results in an annual loss that can be devastating for Black women and their families that were already struggling to make ends meet before the public health crisis. For example, Black women in a low paid frontline occupation such as waiters and waitresses lost \$7,800 due to the wage gap in 2018. Black women working as teachers lost a staggering \$14,200 due to the wage gap in 2018.

## Annual Losses Due to the Wage Gap for Black Women in Selected Front-Line Occupations in 2018



These wage gaps leave Black women less able than their white, non-Hispanic male counterparts to successfully weather COVID-related income loss. And many Black women are experiencing just such income loss: nearly one in seven Black women was unemployed in June 2020. While this represents some improvement in their unemployment rate over previous months, as more and more states lift restrictions and coronavirus cases surge, the very jobs that have been added back, 6 in 10 of which are in the leisure and hospitality and retail sectors, are at risk of being lost all over again if states need to reimpose lockdowns.<sup>6</sup> That has sobering implications for Black women's long-term economic security; in the Great Recession, the economic downturn from 2007 to 2009, Black women experienced higher unemployment rates and longer stints of unemployment than other groups.<sup>7</sup> And while white men's unemployment rate never reached double digits in the Great Recession and subsequent recovery, Black women's unemployment remained over 10 percent for 5 years – 60 consecutive months – from February 2009 to January 2014.<sup>8</sup> Unemployment impacts Black women's health as well as their finances, because as COVID has led to layoffs, many workers lost their employer-sponsored health insurance along with their jobs.<sup>9</sup>

### **COVID-19 threatens particular economic harm to Black mothers, who were already facing a higher risk of poverty and steeper wage gap than Black women overall.**

Even before COVID-19 hit, Black mothers were paid just 50 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers but were more likely than other mothers to be primary breadwinners or co-breadwinners for their families.<sup>11</sup> Even when they were working full time, Black mothers were four times more likely than white, non-Hispanic mothers working full time to be living below the poverty line in 2018 (12 percent versus 3 percent). And nearly 2 in 5 Black moms working full time were living below twice the poverty line.<sup>12</sup> In other words, millions of Black women and families were struggling to make ends meet before the pandemic ever started – but its economic and health impacts, which have fallen particularly hard on Black families, have made things far worse.

The ongoing Census Household Pulse Survey shows that in wake of COVID-19, 1 in 5 Black, non-Hispanic people in households with children reported not having enough to eat in the past 7 days,<sup>13</sup> and food insecurity across the country is projected to increase, particularly for low-income households and for those working in the service sector.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, nearly than 1 in 4 (24 percent) Black, non-Hispanic people reported missing either a mortgage or rent payment last month.<sup>15</sup>

Many of those Black mothers who are fortunate enough to still have a job in the midst of the pandemic must not only put their own and their family's health at risk to provide for their families but are also simultaneously shouldering increased caregiving responsibilities as schools and other care providers remain closed—and they are trying to make this work for pennies on every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.

## The wage gap will typically cost a Black woman nearly \$1 million dollars over a lifetime of work and contributes to the racial wealth gap.

A loss of thirty-eight cents on the dollar adds up over a month, a year, and a lifetime. If today's median wage gap does not close, Black women stand to lose \$1,962 each month, \$23,540 a year, and a staggering \$941,600 over the course of a 40-year career. Assuming a Black woman and her white, non-Hispanic male counterpart both begin work at age 20, the wage gap means a Black woman would have to work until she is 85 years old to be paid what a white, non-Hispanic man has been paid by age 60.<sup>16</sup> In other words, she would have to work 6.5 years beyond her life expectancy in order to catch up.<sup>17</sup>

Because these amounts add up, unequal pay means more than Black women having less money in their pocket right now. It also means they miss key opportunities throughout their lifetimes to build wealth and future economic security for themselves and their families. The wage gap means many can't save enough to afford a down payment on a home, can't afford to pay for their own or a child's higher education, can't start a business or save for retirement. It's no surprise, then, that white families have ten times the wealth of Black families<sup>18</sup> or that single Black women own \$200 in wealth for every \$28,900 single white men own.<sup>19</sup>

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Losses due to gender and racial wage gaps are devastating for Black women and their families, many of whom were struggling to make ends meet even before the current crisis. The pandemic has magnified these inequities and deepened these harms. Black 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.

1 Christian Walker, Center for American Progress, African Americans Face Systematic Obstacles to Getting Good Jobs, Dec. 2019, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2019/12/05/478150/african-americans-face-systematic-obstacles-getting-good-jobs/>.

2 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2019 Annual Social and Economic Supplement [hereinafter CPS, 2019 ASEC], Table PINC-05, available at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-05.html>. CPS, 2019 ASEC respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race/ethnicity.

3 Black women in 1993 were typically paid 62 cents for every dollar paid to their white male peers — the same amount they're typically paid today.

4 In 1967, the earliest year for which data are available, a Black woman working full time, year round made less than half (43 cents for every dollar) of what white men made. NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Historical Data, Table P-38: Full-Time, Year-Round Workers by Median Earnings and Sex, available at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-people.html>. Median earnings are in 2018 dollars. Figures may differ from those in other reports due to rounding or updated Census estimates. Data for Black women are "Black alone" from 2002-2018 and "Black" for years prior to 2002. Data for white, non-Hispanic men are "white alone, not Hispanic" from 2002-2018, "white, not Hispanic" from 1987-2001 and "white" for years prior to 1987.

5 NWLC calculations based on 2014-2018 American Community Survey (ACS), 5-year estimates, using IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://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/>.

6 Claire Ewing-Nelson, NWLC, June Brings 2.9 Million Women's Jobs Back, Many of Which Are At Risk of Being Lost Again (July 2020), available at <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/june-jobs-fs-1.pdf>.

7 National Women's Law Center (NWLC), Employment Crisis Worsens for Black Women during the Recovery (Aug. 2011), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/employment-crisis-worsens-black-women-during-recovery/>.

- 8 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Historical Table A-2, *available at* <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsatabs.htm>.
- 9 Ben Zipperer and Josh Bivens, Economic Policy Institute, 16.2 Million Workers Likely Lost Their Employer-Provided Health Insurance Since the Coronavirus Shock Began (May 2020), *available at* <https://www.epi.org/blog/16-2-million-workers-have-likely-lost-employer-provided-health-insurance-since-the-coronavirus-shock-began/>.
- 10 Amanda Fins, NWLC, Effects of COVID-19 Show Us Equal Pay Is Critical for Mothers (May 2020), *available at* <https://nwlc.org/resources/equal-pay-for-mothers-is-critical-for-families-factsheet/>.
- 11 Sarah Jane Glynn, Center for American Progress, Breadwinning Mothers Continue to Be the U.S. Norm (May 2019), *available at* <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2019/05/10/469739/breadwinning-mothers-continue-u-s-norm/>.
- 12 Jasmine Tucker and Julie Vogtman, NWLC, When Hard Work is Not Enough (Apr. 2020), *available at* <https://nwlc.org/resources/when-hard-work-is-not-enough-women-in-low-paid-jobs/>.
- 13 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey: July 9 – July 14, Food Sufficiency and Food Security Table 3b, *available at* <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp11.html>.
- 14 Feeding America, The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity (Apr. 2020), *available at* [https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Brief\\_Impact%20of%20Covid%20on%20Food%20Insecurity%204.22%20%28002%29.pdf](https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Brief_Impact%20of%20Covid%20on%20Food%20Insecurity%204.22%20%28002%29.pdf).
- 15 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey: July 9 – July 14, Housing Tables 1a and 1b, *available at* <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp11.html>.
- 16 NWLC calculations based on CPS, 2019 ASEC, *supra* note 1. Figure assumes a median wage gap of \$23,540—the gap in median earnings between full time, year round working Black women (\$38,036) and white, non-Hispanic men (\$61,576) in 2018—each year for 40 years. Figures are not adjusted for inflation.
- 17 U.S. Center for Disease Control, National Vital Statistics Reports, United States Life Tables, 2017 (June 2019), *available at* [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68\\_07-508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68_07-508.pdf).
- 18 Prosperity Now, The Racial Wealth Gap Infographic (June 2019), *available at* <https://prosperitynow.org/resources/racial-wealth-gap-infographic-2019>.
- 19 Heather McCulloch, Closing the Women's Wealth Gap, What it Is, Why It Matters, and What Can Be Done About It (Jan 2017), *available at* <https://womenswealthgap.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Closing-the-Womens-Wealth-Gap-Report-Jan2017.pdf>.