



**NATIONAL
WOMEN'S
LAW CENTER**

Justice for Her. Justice for All.

MARCH 2021 | FACT SHEET

The Wage Gap Has Robbed Women of Their Ability to Weather COVID-19

BY JASMINE TUCKER

March 24 is Equal Pay Day, the day that marks how far into this year women must work to catch up to what men made last year alone. Women working full-time, year-round are typically paid just 82 cents for every dollar paid to men.¹ And one year into a global health crisis with devastating health and economic consequences, part of the story of the pandemic's impact on women and the families who depend on them is the story of racial and gender wage gaps, which are especially harmful right now. A gender wage gap exists in 94 percent of occupations.² Women, and women of color are overrepresented in front-line jobs and are being paid less than men in the same jobs – which means we are undervaluing their work even as we depend on it more than ever before.

The wage gap costs women tens of thousands of dollars every year and hundreds of thousands over a lifetime.

Racial and gender wage gaps have been around forever – but the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting recession have exacerbated the longstanding racial and gender inequities in the U.S. economy and thus threaten to widen these gaps. Before the pandemic started (the most recent annual data available is from 2019), the wage gap typically cost women \$846 per month or \$10,157 a year – sharply compromising their ability to weather the severe economic crisis that has gone hand-in-hand with COVID-19. The \$10,157 women lost to the wage gap would have been enough to pay for more than 9 months of rent³ when over 5.6 million women recently reported being behind on their payments.⁴ Or it could have paid for over 13 months' worth of groceries⁵ when 12.1 million women recently reported they did not have enough to eat.⁶

Over a 40-year career, a woman starting her career today stands to lose a staggering \$406,280 to the wage gap. But Latinas face typical lifetime losses that total over \$1.1 million and for Black and Native American women, it is nearly \$1 million.⁷

HOW MUCH WOMEN ARE LOSING TO THE WAGE GAP, BY RACE/ETHNICITY

Women by race/ethnicity	What women were paid for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men in 2019	Typical monthly losses	Typical annual losses	Typical lifetime losses
Asian American and Other Pacific Islander (AAPI) women	\$ 0.85	\$ 833	\$ 10,000	\$ 400,000
Black women	\$ 0.63	\$ 2,009	\$ 24,110	\$ 964,400
Latinas	\$ 0.55	\$ 2,425	\$ 29,098	\$ 1,163,920
Native American women	\$ 0.60	\$ 2,055	\$ 24,656	\$ 986,240
White, non-Hispanic women	\$ 0.79	\$ 1,157	\$ 13,884	\$ 555,360

Source: Figures for AAPI women, Black women, Latinas, and white, non-Hispanic women are NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Table PINC-05, available at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-05.html>. Figures for Native American women are NWLC calculations based on 2019 American Community Survey, Tables B20017H, B20017C, and B20017E, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>. Respondents to both surveys self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race and whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.

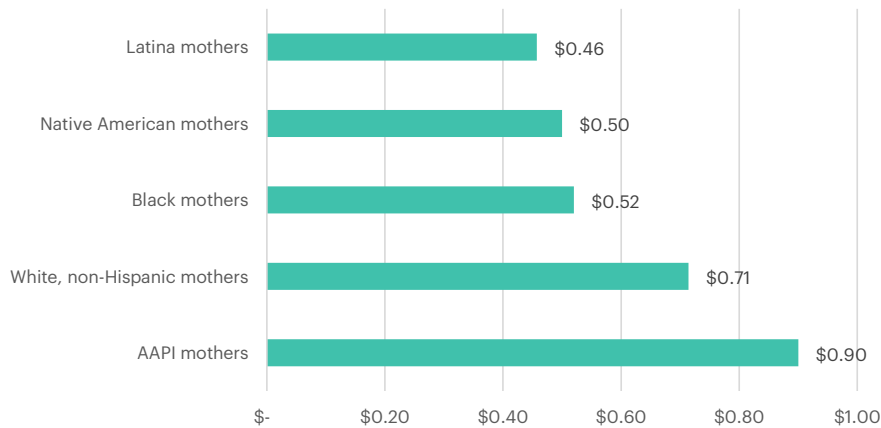
To be clear: the figures in this factsheet reflect 2019 annual data (or, in some cases, an average of 2015-2019 data) and paint a picture of the situation *before* the COVID-19 pandemic ever began. Since then, over 2.3 million women have completely dropped out of the labor force, meaning they are neither working nor looking for work. More than two out of every five women who were unemployed in February 2021 had been unemployed for 6 months or longer.⁸ Unemployment rates for Black women and Latinas remain much higher than for workers overall and many of them have also dropped out of the labor force over the past year.⁹ It is likely, then, that when these women return to the workforce, many are going to be willing to accept the first job offer they receive because they cannot afford to be out of work any longer; employers, in turn, may pay lower wages to employees who have been unemployed or out of the workforce for long stretches of time. The pandemic also means women will be less likely to afford education and training that would allow them to move up or into another field. Both mean women may face larger wage gaps moving forward.

Mothers lost over \$15,000 annually to the wage gap—before the pandemic made everything harder.

While women in the U.S. who work full time, year-round are typically paid just 82 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts, the wage gap between mothers and fathers is even larger. Mothers working full-time, year-round outside the home are typically paid just 75 cents for every dollar paid to fathers, a gap that translates to a loss of \$1,275 a month or \$15,300 annually.¹⁰

While mothers are paid less than fathers overall, the wage gap is even wider for many mothers of color as compared to white, non-Hispanic fathers. Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) mothers are paid 90 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers; white, non-Hispanic mothers are paid 71 cents; Black mothers are paid 52 cents; Native American mothers are paid 50 cents; and Latina mothers are paid just 46 cents.¹¹

What Mothers are Paid for Every Dollar Paid to White, non-Hispanic Fathers



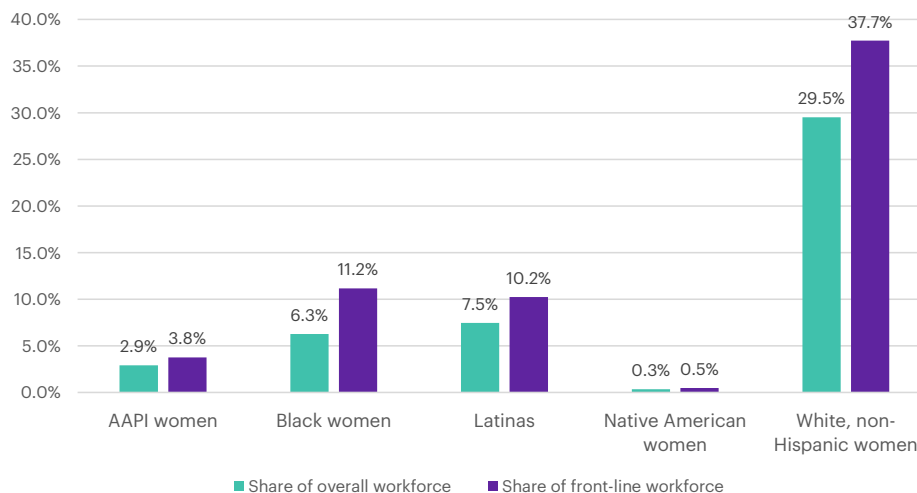
Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home. Figures are median annual earnings for full-time, year-round workers in 2018. Respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race.

Lost earnings due to the wage gap are making the economic impact of COVID-19 worse for many mothers and mothers of color, and for the families who depend on their income. The wage gap jeopardizes families' economic security and deepens poverty and economic suffering during this crisis.

Nearly two in three front-line workers is a woman, but they are being paid less than their male peers.

Women are on the front lines of defense against COVID-19 and its devastating consequences, as the first responders and people providing essential services – like those in child care,¹² health care,¹³ and grocery stores – as well as overrepresented in the industries that have shed jobs as a result of this crisis – such as those in restaurants, hotels,¹⁴ and retail.¹⁵ Women make up nearly two in three front-line workers, and women of every race and ethnicity – but especially Black women, Native American women, and Latinas – are overrepresented in the front-line workforce.¹⁶

Women's Share of Overall and Front-Line Workforces, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: NWLC calculations based on 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS), 5-year estimates, using IPUMS-USA. "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). Respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race and whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.

Nearly 3 in 10 women is in a front-line job (28.1 percent), including 26.4 percent white, non-Hispanic women, 26.6 percent of AAPI women, 28.4 percent of Latinas, 29.6 percent of Native American women, and 36.8 percent of Black women.¹⁷

The overrepresentation of women and women of color on the front lines of COVID-19 defense means they are being undervalued even as they do the work that the rest of the country is depending on as never before: women working in many front-line jobs are being paid less than men in the same jobs. For example, 88 percent of registered nurses, 79 percent of teachers, and 69 percent of waiters and waitresses are women. Many of the women in front-line jobs are women of color; for example, most women working as home health aides, personal care aides, and nursing assistants are women of color, along with women working as maids and housekeepers, janitors and building cleaners. Across each of these essential jobs, women are paid less than the men in the same occupation.

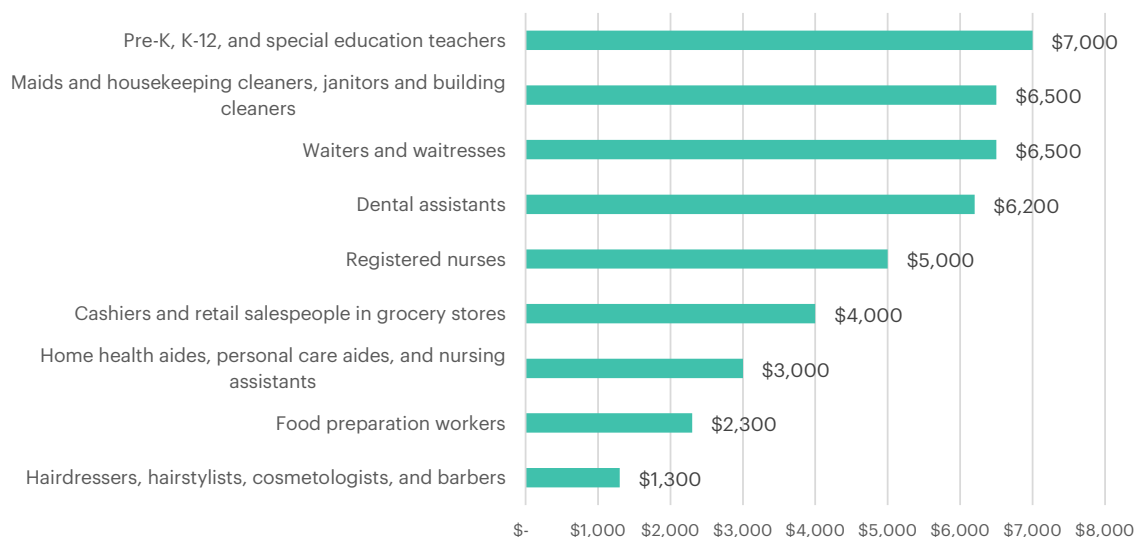
THE WAGE GAP FOR WOMEN IN SELECTED FRONT-LINE OCCUPATIONS

	Share of occupation that is women	Share of women in occupation who are women of color	Median hourly earnings for women in occupation	Median hourly earnings for men in occupation	What women make for every dollar men make
Dental assistants	94%	41%	\$ 16.25	\$ 19.23	\$ 0.85
Registered nurses	88%	30%	\$ 32.69	\$ 35.10	\$ 0.93
Home health aides, personal care aides, and nursing assistants	87%	60%	\$ 12.98	\$ 14.42	\$ 0.90
Hairdressers, hairstylists, cosmetologists, and barbers	83%	35%	\$ 13.80	\$ 14.42	\$ 0.96
Pre-K, K-12, and special education teachers	79%	26%	\$ 24.04	\$ 27.40	\$ 0.88
Waiters and waitresses	69%	39%	\$ 10.96	\$ 14.09	\$ 0.78
Cashiers and retail salespeople in grocery stores	68%	46%	\$ 11.54	\$ 13.46	\$ 0.86
Food preparation workers	58%	50%	\$ 10.58	\$ 11.68	\$ 0.91
Maids and housekeeping cleaners, janitors and building cleaners	55%	66%	\$ 11.54	\$ 14.66	\$ 0.79

Source: NWLC calculations based on 2019 American Community Survey 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.

Indeed, women experience a gender wage gap in 94 percent of occupations, including low- and high-wage jobs.¹⁸ But the wage gap in front-line occupations is yet another burden on the women taking on additional risk at work. For instance, women who working as home health aides, personal care aides, or nursing assistants before the pandemic started typically lost \$250 per month, or \$3,000 per year due to the gender wage gap. Moreover, some of these occupations are also at heightened risk of job loss, meaning that the women and women of color are less able to make ends meet when faced with job loss, because of the gender wage gap. Waitresses, for instance, have faced high rates of unemployment and, prior to the pandemic, typically lost \$542 per month, or \$6,500 per year, to the gender wage gap.

Annual Losses Due to the Wage Gap for Women in Selected Front-Line Jobs



Those lost earnings take on new meaning in the ongoing current crisis, as they leave women and mothers of color with no financial cushion to deal with job loss and the continued loss of income their households were recently expecting. In January, more than one in four women (26 percent) expected their household to lose employment income in the next 4 weeks. Over four in ten Latinas (41 percent) and over three in ten Asian, non-Hispanic women (30 percent) and Black, non-Hispanic women (32 percent) reported expecting someone in their household to lose employment in the next 4 weeks.¹⁹

The unfolding impacts of COVID-19 reveal that women, and especially women of color, are bearing the brunt of the longstanding gaps and underinvestment in our workplace laws, economic and social infrastructure, and policy choices that failed to center the needs of women. This harms not only women, but the families who depend on their income. The COVID-19 crisis underscores the need to close the wage gap.

1 National Women's Law Center (NWLC), *The Wage Gap: The Who, How, Why, and What to Do* (Oct. 2020), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/the-wage-gap-the-who-how-why-and-what-to-do/>. In 2019, women working full-time, year-round made \$47,299 and men working full-time, year-round made \$57,456.

2 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, Table 1. Full-Time, Year-Round Workers and Median Earnings in Past 12 Months by Sex and Detailed Occupation, available at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/industry-occupation/median-earnings.html>. Occupations in this analysis were limited to those categorized as detailed and that had an earnings ratio.

3 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, Table DP04. Median gross rent in 2019 was \$1,097.

4 Jasmine Tucker and 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/>.

5 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, *USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food Report for January 2021*, available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp/usda-food-plans-cost-food-reports-monthly-reports>. A month's worth of groceries on a low-cost food plan in January 2021 for a family with two young children was \$753.40.

6 Jasmine Tucker and 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/>.

7 Figures for AAPI women, Black women, Latinas, and white, non-Hispanic women are NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Table PINC-05, available at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-05.html>. Figures for Native American women are NWLC calculations based on 2019 American Community Survey, Tables B20017H, B20017C, and B20017E, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>. Respondents to both surveys self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race and whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. The cost of the wage gap over a 40-year career, or the "lifetime wage gap," is based on the latest data on the difference between women's and men's median annual earnings for full-time, year-round workers, multiplied by 40 years. For example, the difference in annual earnings between women overall and men overall in 2019 was \$10,157. Figures are not adjusted for inflation. Respondents to both surveys self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race and whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.

- 8 Claire Ewing-Nelson and Jasmine Tucker, NWLC, A Year Into the Pandemic, Women Are Still Short Nearly 5.1 Million Jobs (Mar. 2021), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/feb-jobs-2021/>.
- 9 Claire Ewing-Nelson and Jasmine Tucker, NWLC, A Year Into the Pandemic, Women Are Still Short Nearly 5.1 Million Jobs (Mar. 2021), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/feb-jobs-2021/>.
- 10 NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA, available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. Respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female. 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 2019.
- 11 NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA, 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 2019. Respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female. Black mothers are those who self-identified in the survey as Black or African American. Native American 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 who are not of Hispanic, Latin, or Spanish origin.
- 12 Claire Ewing-Nelson, NWLC, One in Five Child Care Jobs Have Been Lost Since February, and Women Are Paying the Price (Aug. 2020), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/one-in-five-child-care-jobs-have-been-lost-since-february-and-women-are-paying-the-price/>.
- 13 Claire Ewing-Nelson, NWLC, More Than Three in Four of the Health Care Workers Fighting COVID-19 Are Women (Dec. 2020), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/more-than-three-in-four-of-the-health-care-workers-fighting-covid-19-are-women/>.
- 14 Amanda Fins, NWLC, Women in Leisure and Hospitality Are Among the Hardest Hit by Job Losses and Most at Risk of Covid-19 Infection (Sept. 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/>.
- 15 Amanda Fins, NWLC, COVID-19 and the Ensuing Recession Puts Women in Retail at Risk (Jul. 2020), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/covid-19-and-the-ensuing-recession-puts-women-in-retail-at-risk/>.
- 16 NWLC calculations based on 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS), 5-year estimates, using IPUMS USA, 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/>. Respondents to the ACS self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race and whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.
- 17 NWLC calculations based on 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS), 5-year estimates, using IPUMS USA, 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/>. Respondents to the ACS self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race and whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.
- 18 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, Table 1. Full-Time, Year-Round Workers and Median Earnings in Past 12 Months by Sex and Detailed Occupation, available at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/industry-occupation/median-earnings.html>. Occupations in this analysis were limited to those categorized as detailed and that had an earnings ratio.
- 19 Jasmine Tucker and 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/>.