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WOMEN'S
LAW CENTER**

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Even Before This Disastrous Year for Mothers, They Were Still Only Paid 75 Cents for Every Dollar Paid to Fathers

By Claire Ewing-Nelson

May 5 is Mother's Equal Pay Day, which marks how far into the year mothers must work to catch up to what fathers made last year alone. Among full-time, year-round workers, mothers are typically paid only 75 cents for every dollar paid to fathers. Even before a global health crisis with devastating economic consequences, the pay gap for mothers resulted in monthly losses of \$1,275 and annual losses of \$15,300, meaning mothers had to work more than 16 months to make as much as fathers were paid in 12.¹

Racial inequities compound the motherhood pay gap for many mothers of color.² For example, Latina mothers are paid just 46 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers. Native American mothers and Black mothers are paid only 50 cents and 52 cents, respectively, for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers.³

The figures in this factsheet are based primarily on data collected in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic began. Earnings lost to the wage gap limited mothers' ability to build a financial cushion to weather the pandemic, which has exacerbated the health and economic crises of the past year, particularly for women of color and the families who depend on their income.

The unemployment rate for mothers more than doubled between 2019 and 2020.

As our nation's already unstable care infrastructure broke down in March 2020, many working mothers have been unable to manage caregiving for children and other family members, remote learning, and other responsibilities on top of their jobs. These impossible pressures, combined with massive job losses, have pushed many mothers out of the labor force entirely. The unemployment rate for mothers in 2020 was 7.5%, more than double their unemployment rate of 3.5% in 2019.⁴ For many mothers of color, unemployment rates were even higher: In 2020, 8.1% of Asian mothers,⁵ 10.3% of Black mothers,⁶ and 10.4% of Latina mothers were unemployed.⁷ Between 2019 and 2020, 575,000 mothers left the labor force entirely, meaning they were no longer working or looking for work and are not included in unemployment rates.⁸

Mothers are essential to the front-line workforce, but many are paid less than fathers working in the same jobs.

Many mothers who kept working through the pandemic are providing essential services in education, health care, and other front-line industries – all while being paid only a fraction of what fathers are paid for the same work.

While mothers make up 15.5% of the overall workforce, they account for over one in five (22.5%) of the front-line workers providing essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ Yet even within these vital front-line occupations, mothers are losing income to the wage gap. For example, more than one in three (33.7%) preschool, K-12, and special education teachers are mothers, but they are paid only 83 cents for every dollar paid to fathers working as teachers. Home health aides, personal care aides, and nursing assistants have been risking their lives to provide essential care during the pandemic. Nearly three in ten (28.8%) workers in these jobs are mothers, who are typically paid only 84 cents for every dollar paid to fathers in the same occupations. Nearly one in five (19.6%) janitors, building cleaners, maids, and housekeepers are mothers (and 75.9% of those mothers are women of color), and they are paid only 65 cents for every dollar paid to their counterparts who are fathers.

Wage Gaps for Mothers in Selected Front-Line Occupations

Occupation	Percent of Workers Who Are Mothers	Percent of Mothers Who Are Mothers of Color	Median Hourly Wage for Mothers in Occupation	Median Hourly Wage for Fathers in Occupation	What a Mother Makes for Every Dollar a Father Makes
Registered Nurses	34.6%	32.4%	\$31.25	\$37.02	\$0.84
Preschool, K-12, and Special Education Teachers	33.7%	25.3%	\$24.04	\$28.85	\$0.83
Home Health Aides, Personal Care Aides, and Nursing Assistants	28.8%	64.5%	\$12.50	\$14.90	\$0.84
Pharmacists	24.2%	31.8%	\$57.69	\$61.54	\$0.94
Janitors, Building Cleaners, Maids & Housekeepers	19.6%	75.9%	\$10.58	\$16.35	\$0.65
Waiters & Waitresses	16.3%	44.3%	\$11.01	\$16.35	\$0.67

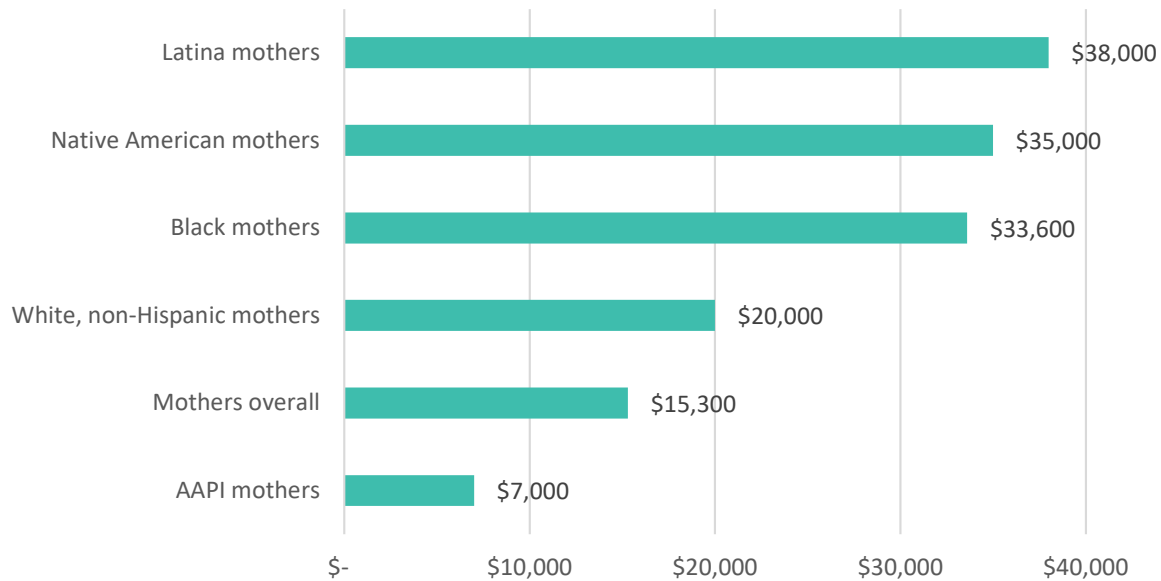
Source: NWLC calculations based on 2019 American Community Survey, using IPUMS-USA. Median hourly wages are for full-time, year-round workers. Mothers and fathers have at least one child under the age of 18 at home. Hourly wages for mothers and fathers are calculated by dividing median annual earnings by 2,080 hours, which assumes a 40-hour work week for 52 weeks.

Mothers typically lose over \$15,000 annually due to the wage gap, and many mothers of color lose even more.

- Latina mothers are paid only 46 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers.
- Native American mothers are paid only 50 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers.
- Black mothers are paid only 52 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers.
- White, non-Hispanic mothers are paid 71 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers.
- Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) mothers are paid only 90 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers.¹⁰

Based on the current wage gap, mothers typically stand to lose \$1,275 per month and \$15,300 per year compared to fathers. These wage gaps are even worse for many mothers of color, with Latina mothers typically losing \$38,000 annually, Native American mothers losing \$35,000 annually, and Black mothers losing \$33,600 annually compared to white, non-Hispanic fathers.

Annual Losses Due to the Wage Gap for Mothers in Selected Demographics



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

These losses compound the financial insecurity many mothers were facing even before the COVID-19 crisis began. In 2018, more than one in four working mothers (27%) had incomes near or below the poverty line. For mothers in low-paid jobs (those that typically paid less than \$12 per hour), the share with incomes near or below the poverty line jumped to nearly six in ten (57%). Rates of poverty or near-poverty were even worse for Black mothers in low-paid jobs (73%), Native American mothers in low-paid jobs (67%), and Latina mothers in low-paid jobs (63%).¹¹

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, mothers were losing thousands of dollars annually due to the wage gap. Since the pandemic began, many have continued to work in front-line jobs while caring for children through school and child care closures and managing other caregiving responsibilities. Many others have lost their jobs entirely. This impossible situation has been devastating for mothers' careers, labor force participation, and long-term earning potential. As women return to work, those who lost jobs or left the labor force may be forced to take jobs that are lower-paying or lower-quality than the ones they left. For women facing additional financial insecurity due to the pandemic, it will be more difficult to afford the education and training that would allow them to advance or transition to a career in a different field. These far-reaching effects of the COVID-19 crisis will reverberate for years to come, and threaten to exacerbate pre-existing racial, gender, and motherhood wage gaps. It is long past time to start paying mothers what they are owed and to stop robbing their families of the financial security they needed to weather the past year.

- 1** National Women's Law Center (NWLC) calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey (ACS), using IPUMS-USA, available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>. Mothers are women with at least one child under the age of 18 at home, and fathers are men with at least one child under the age of 18 at home. Respondents to the ACS self-identify as either male or female. Please refer to the ACS questionnaire for further detail: <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/methodology/questionnaires/2019/quest19.pdf>. Median annual earnings for fathers working full-time, year-round in 2019 were \$60,000 and median annual earnings for mothers working full-time, year-round in 2019 were \$44,700.
- 2** Respondents to the ACS self-identify their race and whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Latina mothers are those who self-identified as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin and may be of any race. Black mothers are those who self-identified 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. White, non-Hispanic mothers and fathers are those who self-identified as white and not of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin. Please refer to the ACS questionnaire for further detail.
- 3** NWLC calculations based on 2019 ACS. Median annual earnings for Latina mothers working full-time, year-round in 2019 were \$32,000. Median annual earnings for Native American mothers working full-time, year-round in 2019 were \$35,000. Median annual earnings for Black mothers working full-time, year-round in 2019 were \$36,400. Median annual earnings for white, non-Hispanic fathers working full-time, year-round in 2019 were \$70,000.
- 4** Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), U.S. Department of Labor, Marital and Family Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/FMUP4078853>. Figures are annual averages, are not seasonally adjusted, and are for women with their own children under the age of 18.
- 5** BLS, Marital and Family Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Unemployment Rate – Asian Women, With Own Children Under 18, <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/FMUP4092257>. Figure is an annual average and is not seasonally adjusted.
- 6** BLS, Marital and Family Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Unemployment Rate – Black or African American Women, With Own Children Under 18, <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/FMUP4092254>. Figure is an annual average and is not seasonally adjusted.
- 7** BLS, Marital and Family Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Unemployment Rate – Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity Women, With Own Children Under 18, <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/FMUP4092260>. Figure is an annual average and is not seasonally adjusted.
- 8** BLS, Marital and Family Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Civilian Labor Force – Women With Own Children Under 18, <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/FMUP1078853>. Figures are annual averages and are not seasonally adjusted.
- 9** NWLC calculations based on 2019 ACS. “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/>.
- 10** Median annual earnings for AAPI mothers working full-time, year-round in 2019 were \$63,000.
- 11** Jasmine Tucker and Julie Vogtman, NWLC, When Hard Work is Not Enough: Women in Low-Paid Jobs (Apr. 2020), <https://nwlc.org/resources/when-hard-work-is-not-enough-women-in-low-paid-jobs/>. “Incomes at or near the poverty line” include those below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) for 2018.