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The Wage Gap Robs Mothers of What They're Owed

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Among full-time, year-round workers, mothers are typically paid 74 cents for every dollar paid to fathers.¹ This means the wage gap typically robs mothers working full time, year-round of \$1,500 a month or \$18,000 a year. When part-time and part-year workers are included, mothers are typically paid just 62 cents for every dollar paid to fathers.² When we compare women of color working full time, year-round with white, non-Hispanic fathers, the wage gap is even larger for Black women, Latinas, and Native women.³

One reason for the maternal wage gap is occupational segregation;⁴ mothers are overrepresented in low-paid jobs. But when we compare mothers and fathers working in the same occupation, we still see racist and sexist wage gaps. Indeed, the wage gap persists and, in some cases, widens in the most common occupations for mothers.

The wage gap costs mothers working full time, year-round \$18,000 annually, and many mothers of color lose even more.

The loss of 26 cents on the dollar typically costs mothers working full time, year-round about \$18,000 a year. An extra \$18,000 could have paid for nine months of rent,⁵ five months of groceries,⁶ and three months of child care.⁷

Racial inequities compound the maternal wage gap for many mothers of color.⁸ For example, Latina mothers working full time, year-round are paid just 51 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers. Native mothers and Black mothers working full time, year-round are paid only 49 cents and 53 cents, respectively, for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers. Many mothers of color working full time, year-round therefore lose tens of thousands of dollars to the wage gap each year, with Native mothers typically losing \$38,000, Latina mothers typically losing \$37,000, and Black mothers typically losing \$35,000 annually compared to white, non-Hispanic fathers. These larger annual losses are even more devastating for mothers of color who experienced the brunt of unemployment in 2022 and who, because of the wage gap, had less savings to sustain them until they were employed again. For example, in 2022, the unemployment rate for Black mothers (6.3%) was nearly twice the rate for all mothers (3.4%).⁹

HOW MUCH MOTHERS WORKING FULL TIME, YEAR-ROUND LOSE TO THE WAGE GAP BY RACE/ETHNICITY

Mothers by Race/Ethnicity	What Mothers Are Paid for Every Dollar Paid to White, non-Hispanic Fathers in 2020	Typical Monthly Losses	Typical Annual Losses
Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) mothers	\$0.93	\$416.67	\$5,000.00
Black mothers	\$0.53	\$2,916.67	\$35,000.00
Latina mothers	\$0.51	\$3,083.33	\$37,000.00
Native mothers	\$0.49	\$3,166.67	\$38,000.00
White, non-Hispanic mothers	\$0.73	\$1,666.67	\$20,000.00

Source: NWLC calculations using 2021 American Community Survey 1-year estimates using IPUMS-USA. Respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race, whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, and whether they have children under 18 in their home.

Mothers experience a wage gap compared to fathers at every education level, even when they have earned a graduate degree.

Educational attainment is considered one of the main paths towards economic stability—and nearly half of employed mothers (45.8%) have at least a bachelor’s degree compared to just over two in five employed fathers (40.6%).¹⁰ But despite mothers’ educational gains, they are still typically paid less than fathers with less educational attainment.

- Mothers working full time, year-round who have a high school diploma are typically paid just 72 cents for every dollar paid to fathers with the same diploma.¹¹
- Mothers working full time, year-round with a bachelor’s degree are typically paid \$61,000, which is less than what fathers working full time, year-round with an associate’s degree are typically paid (\$62,000).
- Mothers working full time, year-round (\$75,000) typically have to earn a master’s degree to make more than fathers with just an associate’s degree (\$62,000).
- For some mothers, as they gain educational attainment, the wage gap not only persists, but widens. Mothers with a bachelor’s degree are typically paid just 66 cents for every dollar paid to fathers with a bachelor’s degree—an annual loss of \$31,000. Among master’s degree holders, mothers are typically paid 68 cents for every dollar paid to fathers. Mothers with a bachelor’s degree or an associate’s degree face a wider wage gap when compared to mothers without a high school diploma.

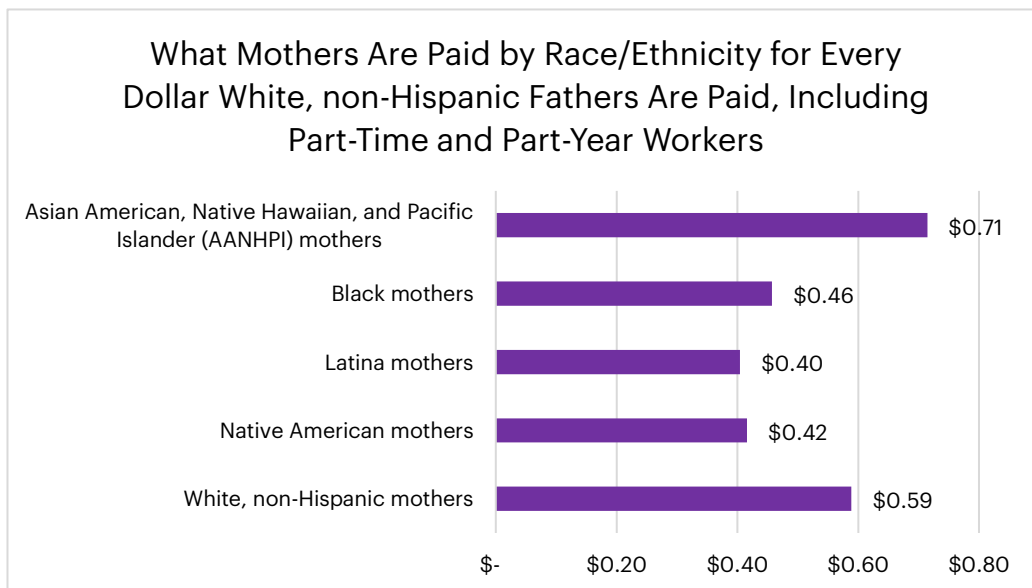
MOTHERS' WAGE EQUALITY BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG FULL-TIME, YEAR-ROUND WORKERS

Educational Attainment	Mothers' Earnings	Fathers' Earnings	What Mothers Are Paid for Every Dollar Paid to Fathers
No high school diploma	\$28,600	\$40,000	\$0.72
High school diploma	\$32,000	\$50,000	\$0.64
Some college, no degree	\$38,000	\$60,000	\$0.63
Associate's degree	\$43,600	\$62,000	\$0.70
Bachelor's degree or more	\$70,000	\$100,000	\$0.70
Bachelor's degree	\$61,000	\$92,000	\$0.66
Master's degree	\$75,000	\$110,000	\$0.68
Professional degree	\$115,000	\$162,000	\$0.71
Doctorate degree	\$100,000	\$125,000	\$0.80

Source: NWLC calculations based on 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year estimates using IPUMS-USA. "What Mothers Are Paid for Every Dollar Paid to Fathers" is the ratio of mothers' and fathers' median earnings for full-time, year-round workers. Earnings are in 2021 dollars. Workers without a high school diploma exclude those who have not completed at least 9th grade.

When mothers and fathers working part time and part year are included, the wage gap is even larger.

Nearly one in four part-time workers (23.9%) have children under 18 years old and over eight in ten of these parents working part time are women (80.4%). When part-time and part-year workers are included, the wage gap gets even wider. When comparing all mothers who worked in 2021 with all fathers who worked, regardless of how many hours or weeks they worked, mothers were typically paid just 62 cents for every dollar paid to fathers, and the gaps were even wider for many mothers of color when compared to white, non-Hispanic fathers.



Source: NWLC calculations using 2021 American Community Survey 1-year estimates using IPUMS-USA. Respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race, whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, and whether they have children under 18 in their home.

Mothers face a wage gap in each of the ten occupations where they were most likely to work, many of which are low-paid.

Mothers and fathers tend to do different jobs, for a variety of reasons, including sexism and racism, and mothers taking on the lion's share of family caregiving responsibilities.¹³ Moreover, mothers experience pay inequity within the jobs they commonly hold even compared to fathers in the same jobs.

- Over two in five mothers (40.2%) are employed in one of ten occupations; in all ten of the occupations, mothers working full time, year-round are paid less than fathers working full time, year-round.¹⁴
- Mothers working full time, year-round as cashiers and retail salespeople (the sixth most common occupation for mothers) make just 56 cents for every dollar a full-time, year-round father makes.
- For mothers, the highest paying occupations among the ten most common were (1) accountants, auditors, and financial managers and (2) registered nurses and licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses—but mothers working full time, year-round in these roles are still paid less than their counterparts who are fathers working full time, year-round in these roles.
- Among the ten most common occupations, the wage gap is smallest for mothers working full time, year-round as preschool and kindergarten teachers and child care workers. But these are low-paid jobs and so greater pay equity is not enough to achieve economic security.¹⁵

TEN MOST COMMON OCCUPATIONS FOR MOTHERS

	Occupation	Percent of Employed Mothers	Median Hourly Wage for Mothers	Median Hourly Wage for Fathers	What a Mother is Paid for Every Dollar a Father is Paid
1	Elementary and middle school teachers, secondary school teachers, teaching assistants	7.4%	\$25.00	\$29.33	\$0.85
2	Registered nurses and licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses	5.8%	\$31.25	\$36.54	\$0.86
3	First-line supervisors of retail sales workers, first-line supervisors of office and administrative support workers, other managers	5.4%	\$26.44	\$39.90	\$0.66
4	Secretaries and administrative assistants, except legal, medical, and executive; receptionists and information clerks; bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks	4.8%	\$18.27	\$24.04	\$0.76
5	Nursing assistants, personal care aides, home health aides, psychiatric aides and orderlies	3.8%	\$14.42	\$18.27	\$0.79
6	Cashiers, retail salespersons	2.9%	\$13.41	\$24.04	\$0.56
7	Maids and housekeeping cleaners, janitors and building cleaners	2.7%	\$12.02	\$16.83	\$0.71
8	Accountants and auditors, financial managers	2.7%	\$33.65	\$50.48	\$0.67
9	Customer service representatives	2.4%	\$17.31	\$24.04	\$0.72
10	Preschool and kindergarten teachers, child care workers	2.3%	\$14.42	\$16.15	\$0.89

Source: NWLC calculations based on 2021 American Community Survey using IPUMS. Figures are in 2021 dollars. Median hourly wages are for full-time, year-round workers. "What a Mother Makes for Every Dollar a Father Makes" is the ratio of mothers' and fathers' median earnings 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.

Mothers need action that closes the wage gap.

As mothers continue to recover from the massive job losses brought on by the pandemic, they are also confronted with an ongoing care crisis, increasing restrictions on access to abortion, and other forms of reproductive health restrictions, occupational segregation, and persistent pay inequity. The racist and sexist wage gap continues to rob mothers—especially mothers of color—of tens of thousands of dollars a year, money that could have been used to build economic security. We need public investments and public policies that allow mothers to succeed and thrive.

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- 1 National Women's Law Center (NWLC) calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 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. Employed respondents are all over the age of 16. Median annual earnings for mothers working full time, year round in 2021 was \$50,000 and for fathers was \$68,000, the ratio of which is 74 cents.
- 2 National Women's Law Center (NWLC) calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey (ACS), using IPUMS-USA, available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>. The median wage for mothers regardless of how much they worked in 2021 was \$37,000 and for fathers was \$60,000, the ratio of which is 62 cents.
- 3 White, non-Hispanic mothers also face a maternal wage gap when compared to white, non-Hispanic fathers.
- 4 "Bearing the Cost: How Overrepresentation in Undervalued Jobs Disadvantaged Women During the Pandemic" (U.S. Department of Labor, March 2022) <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/media/BearingTheCostReport.pdf>.
- 5 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=DPO4%3A%20SELECTED%20HOUSING%20CHARACTERISTICS&tid=ACSDP5Y2020.DP04>. Median gross rent in in 2021 was \$1,191 per month.
- 6 NWLC calculations using "Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Three Levels, U.S. Average, May 2023," (U.S. Department of Agriculture, May 2023) <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/media/file/CostofFoodMay2023LowModLib.pdf>. Figure is based on a low-cost monthly meal plan for a male ages 19-50, female ages 19-50, child ages 2-3, and child ages 4-5 which totals \$889.60 per month.
- 7 NWLC calculations using Appendix I from "Price of Care: 2021 Child Care Affordability Analysis," (Child Care Aware of America, 2023), <https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/Child%20Care%20Affordability%20Analysis%202021.pdf>. The median cost of center-based toddler child care across all 50 states and DC was \$11,284 per year or \$940.33 per month in 2021. Data for California and Colorado were not included.
- 8 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.
- 9 "Unemployment rate – Women with own children under 18" <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/FMUP4078853> and "Unemployment rate – Black or African American women, With own children under 18" <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/FMUP4092254> from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Marital and family labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey
- 10 NWLC calculations based on 2021 American Community Survey (ACS), accessed through Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Sophia Foster, Ronald Goeken, Jose Pacas, Megan Schouweiler and Matthew Sobek, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series USA (IPUMS USA): Version 11.0 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V11.0>.
- 11 NWLC calculations based on 2021 American Community Survey (ACS), accessed through Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Sophia Foster, Ronald Goeken, Jose Pacas, Megan Schouweiler and Matthew Sobek, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series USA (IPUMS USA): Version 11.0 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V11.0>. "What Mothers Are Paid for Every Dollar Paid to Fathers" is the ratio of mothers and fathers median earnings for full-time, year-round workers. Earnings are in 2021 dollars. The "wage gap" is the additional money a woman would have to make for every dollar made by a man in order to have equal annual earnings. Workers without a high school diploma exclude those who have not completed at least 9th grade.
- 12 Brooke LePage, "Part-Time Workers are Facing Heightened Uncertainty During COVID—and Most Are Women" (National Women's Law Center, February 2022) <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Part-time-workers-factsheet-v2-2.1.22.pdf>.
- 13 See "Bearing the Cost: How Overrepresentation in Undervalued Jobs Disadvantaged Women During the Pandemic" (U.S. Department of Labor, March 2022).
- 14 NWLC calculations using 2021 American Community Survey using IPUMS. Figures are in 2021 dollars. Median hourly wages are for full-time, year-round workers. "What Mothers Are Paid for Every Dollar Paid to Fathers" is the ratio of mothers' and fathers' median earnings 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.
- 15 Brooke LePage "The Child Care and Early Learning Workforce is Underpaid and Women are Paying the Price" (National Women's Law Center, May 2023) <https://nwlc.org/resource/the-child-care-and-early-learning-workforce-is-underpaid-and-women-are-paying-the-price/>.

