



**NATIONAL  
WOMEN'S  
LAW CENTER**

Justice for Her. Justice for All.

**JUNE 2024 | FACT SHEET**

# **Black Women Have Been Undervalued and Underpaid for Far Too Long**

**JASMINE TUCKER**

Sixty years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Black women continue to face racist and sexist barriers that leave them undervalued and underpaid as compared to white, non-Hispanic men. Among full-time, year-round workers in 1967, the earliest year for which data is available, Black women were paid just 43 cents for every dollar white, non-Hispanic men were paid. By 2022, that figure had only narrowed by 26 cents, leaving Black women making 69 cents for every dollar made by white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the wage gap widens when part-year and part-time workers are included: Black women typically make just 66 cents for every dollar white, non-Hispanic men make.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Black women working full time, year-round make 96 cents for every dollar paid to Black men.<sup>3</sup>

We need public investments and economic policies that support economic opportunity and address the problematic inequities failing Black women every day, robbing them of hundreds of thousands of dollars over their lifetime, and preventing them and their families from building wealth.

## **The wage gap will typically cost a Black woman working full time nearly \$900,000 dollars over a lifetime of work.**

A loss of 31 cents on the dollar to the racist and sexist wage gap experienced by Black women working full time, year-round adds up. Black women working full time, year-round lose \$1,843 each month—or \$22,120 each year.<sup>4</sup> This annual loss could have paid for over seven months of a family's groceries,<sup>5</sup> seven months of child care,<sup>6</sup> and seven months of rent.<sup>7</sup> And a Black woman starting her career today stands to lose \$884,800 over the course of a 40-year career if we don't close the gap. This money could be lifechanging for Black women and their families, offering them opportunities to invest in their education or their children's, purchase a home, or save for retirement.

## Black women experience a wage gap at every education level, including those who have earned a graduate degree.

Educational attainment is often seen as a path to economic stability. Women account for more than half of college-educated adults in the U.S. labor force.<sup>8</sup> And Black women’s educational attainment has steadily increased in recent decades; nearly four times as many Black women received bachelor’s degrees during the 2021–22 academic year than the 1976–77 school year, compared to less than 1.1 times as many white men in the same time frame.<sup>9</sup> However, despite these educational gains, Black women are still typically paid less than white, non-Hispanic men with lower educational attainment:

- Black women working full time, year-round who have a high school diploma are typically paid just 73 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men with the same diploma.
- Black women working full time, year-round with a bachelor’s degree are typically paid \$60,900, which is less than what white, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round with some college but no degree are typically paid (\$61,400).
- Black women working full time, year-round must earn a master’s degree (\$72,450) to make more than white, non-Hispanic men with only an associate’s degree (\$67,190).
- Also striking is the typical difference in wages between the most educated Black women and their white, non-Hispanic male counterparts with bachelor’s or graduate degrees. Among professional degree holders, such as those with juris doctorate degrees or medical doctor degrees, a Black woman working full time, year-round typically makes 60 cents for every dollar made by a white, non-Hispanic man with the same education working full time—an annual loss of \$61,030, or more than \$2.4 million over the course of a 40-year career.<sup>10</sup>

### BLACK WOMEN’S WAGE EQUALITY BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG FULL-TIME, YEAR-ROUND WORKERS

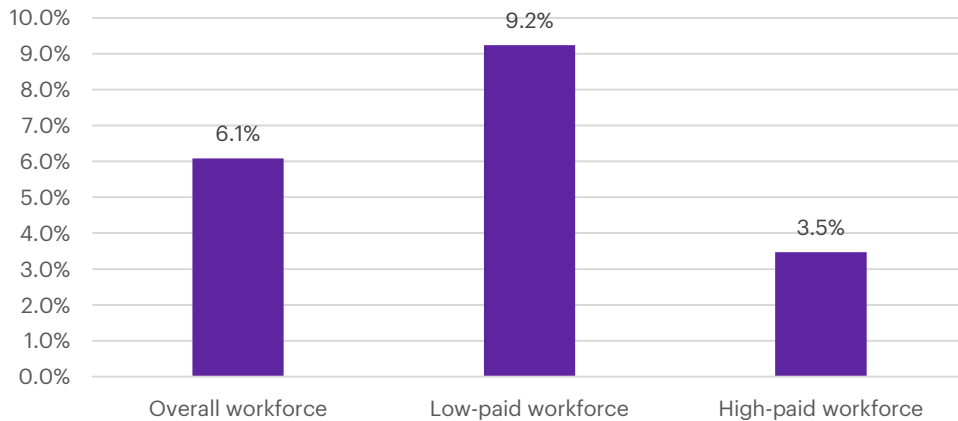
Educational Attainment	Black Women's Earnings	White, non-Hispanic Men's Earnings	What Black Women Are Paid for Every Dollar Paid to White, non-Hispanic Men	Lifetime Loss for Black Women
No high school diploma	\$31,910	\$48,950	\$0.65	\$681,600
High school diploma	\$38,060	\$52,280	\$0.73	\$568,800
Some college, no degree	\$40,740	\$61,400	\$0.66	\$826,400
Associate's degree	\$46,430	\$67,190	\$0.69	\$830,400
Bachelor's degree or more	\$66,470	\$100,500	\$0.66	\$1,361,200
Bachelor's degree	\$60,900	\$93,930	\$0.65	\$1,321,200
Master's degree	\$72,450	\$108,000	\$0.67	\$1,422,000
Doctorate degree	\$96,800	\$121,900	\$0.79	\$1,004,000
Professional degree	\$92,370	\$153,400	\$0.60	\$2,441,200

Source: NWLC’s calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2023 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Table PINC-03. Educational Attainment, People 18 years old and over, by total money earnings in 2022*, available at <http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-03.html>. “What Black Women Are Paid for Every Dollar Paid to White, non-Hispanic Men” is the ratio of Black female and white, non-Hispanic male median earnings for full-time, year-round workers. Earnings are in 2022 dollars. Workers without a high school diploma exclude those who have not completed at least 9th grade.

## It doesn't matter where they work, Black women face a wage gap.

Despite Black women's educational gains, continued structural barriers to degree attainment,<sup>11</sup> coupled with sexism, racism, and lack of support for caregiving responsibilities, lead to many Black women experiencing occupational segregation, often in low-paid jobs. Black women are overrepresented in low-paid jobs and underrepresented in high-paid jobs.<sup>12</sup> They accounted for 6.1% of the overall workforce but 9.2% of the low-paid workforce in the United States in 2022. In contrast, Black women made up just 3.5% of the workforce in high-paid occupations in 2022.<sup>13</sup>

Black Women's Share of Overall, Low-paid, and High-paid Workforces, 2022



Source: NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey using IPUMS.

Black women face wage gaps no matter where they work. Even when they enter high-paying occupations, they make much less than white, non-Hispanic men in those same jobs. Among full-time, year-round workers in low-paid jobs, Black women make just 78 cents for every dollar white, non-Hispanic men make. Among full-time, year-round workers in high-paid jobs, Black women in these jobs make just 67 cents for every dollar white, non-Hispanic men make.<sup>14</sup>

## We can't wait to close the wage gap for Black women.

Racism, sexism, and structural inequalities rob Black women and their families of tens of thousands of dollars every single year. We need public investments and public policies that allow Black women to succeed and thrive. There are many steps we could take to close the wage gap for Black women. Among them:

- Strengthen equal pay laws so that women are better able to fight back against pay discrimination;<sup>15</sup>
- Improve wages for low-paid workers by increasing the minimum wage and ensure tipped workers receive the regular minimum wage;<sup>16</sup>
- Increase pay range transparency, which can empower workers and attract a more diverse workforce;<sup>17</sup>
- Protect workers' ability to unionize, which has been shown to increase wages, reduce race and gender wage gaps, and improve workers' access to employee benefits;<sup>18</sup>
- Increase the availability of high-quality, affordable child care so people can work knowing their children are being cared for;<sup>19</sup>

- Provide paid family and medical leave that will help ensure working people can care for themselves and their families without risking their jobs or their economic security;<sup>20</sup>
- Ensure access to reproductive health care, including abortion care, to ensure people’s health, well-being, and economic security;<sup>21</sup>
- Support diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the workplace, which can expand economic opportunity and combat occupational segregation; and
- Expand and strengthen protections against workplace harassment to prevent people from being pushed out of the workplace as a result of harassment or retaliation.<sup>22</sup>

\* \* \*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sarah Javaid contributed to and factchecked this analysis. The author thanks Gaylynn Burroughs, Joi Chaney, Eun Kim, Marissa Moore, Marybeth Onyeukwu, Maria Patrick, Katherine Sandson, Arvia Walker, Hilary Woodward, and the rest of NWLC Communications Team for their review, formatting, and dissemination of this factsheet.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2023 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS, 2023 ASEC), Table P-38. Full-Time, Year-Round Black Workers by Median Earnings and Sex: 1967 to 2022, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-people.html>.
- 2 NWLC calculations using CPS, 2023 ASEC, Table PINC-05. Figure is the ratio between median earnings for working Black women, including part-time and part-year, (\$40,450) and white, non-Hispanic men (\$60,830) in 2022.
- 3 NWLC calculations using CPS, 2023 ASEC, Table PINC-05. Figure is the ratio between median earnings for Black women working full time, year-round (\$49,470) and Black men (\$51,640) in 2022.
- 4 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, CPS, 2023 ASEC, Table PINC-05, Work Experience-People 15 Years Old and Over, by Total Money Earnings, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex. Figure assumes a median wage gap of \$22,120—the gap in median earnings between full-time, year-round working Black women (\$49,470) and white, non-Hispanic men (\$71,590) in 2022—each year for 40 years. Figures are not adjusted for inflation. New data for 2023 will be available in September 2024. Respondents to the CPS self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race and whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.
- 5 “Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Three Levels, U.S. Average, April 2024,” (U.S. Department of Agriculture, May 2024 <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp/usda-food-plans-cost-food-monthly-reports>). Figure is based on a low-cost monthly meal plan for a male ages 19 to 50, female ages 19 to 50, child ages 2 to 3, and child ages 4 to 5, which totals \$896 per month.
- 6 NWLC calculations using Appendix I from Child Care Aware, Catalyzing Growth: Using Data to Change Child Care <https://www.childcareaware.org/catalyzing-growth-using-data-to-change-child-care-2022/>. The average price of child care in 2022 was \$10,853.

- 7 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics, <https://data.census.gov/table?q=DPO4:%20SELECTED%20HOUSING%20CHARACTERISTICS&y=2022>. Median gross rent in 2022 was \$1,300 per month.
- 8 “Women Now Outnumber Men in the U.S. College-Educated Labor Force” (Pew Research Center, September 2022), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/09/26/women-now-outnumber-men-in-the-u-s-college-educated-labor-force/#:~:text=Women%20now%20outnumber%20men%20in%20the%20U.S.%20college%20educated%20labor%20force&text=Women%20have%20overtaken%20men%20and,Center%20analysis%20of%20government%20data>.
- 9 “Bachelor’s degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected academic years, 1976–77 through 2021–22” Table 322.20. (National Center for Education Statistics) [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23\\_322.20.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_322.20.asp). Figures were calculated by dividing the total number of Black women who received degrees in 2021–22 (130,424) by the number who received degrees in 1976–77 (33,489) and by dividing the total number of white men who received degrees in 2021–22 (479,308) by the number who received degrees in 1976–77 (438,161).
- 10 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2023 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Table PINC-03. Educational Attainment, People 18 years old and over, by total money earnings in 2022, available at <http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-03.html>. “What Black Women Are Paid for Every Dollar Paid to White, non-Hispanic Men” is the ratio of Black female and white, non-Hispanic male median earnings for full-time, year-round workers. Earnings are in 2022 dollars. Workers without a high school diploma exclude those who have not completed at least 9th grade.
- 11 “Raising Undergraduate Degree Attainment Among Black Women and Men Takes on New Urgency Amid the Pandemic,” (The Education Trust, May 2021) <https://edtrust.org/resource/national-and-state-degree-attainment-for-black-women-and-men/>.
- 12 “Still Bearing the Cost: Black and Hispanic Women Lose Billions Due to Job Segregation” (U.S. Department of Labor, March 2024), <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/media/BearingTheCostReport2024.pdf>.
- 13 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey one-year estimates using ipums.org. NWLC defines low-paid jobs as the 40 occupations with the lowest hourly median wages and high-paid occupations as the 40 occupations with the highest hourly median wages, according to U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), May 2023 National Occupational Employment & Wage Estimates (NOWES), [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_nat.htm](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm).
- 14 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey one-year estimates using ipums.org.
- 15 “How the Paycheck Fairness Act Will Strengthen the Equal Pay Act,” National Women’s Law Center (Jan. 2021), <https://nwlc.org/resource/how-the-paycheck-fairness-act-will-strengthen-the-equal-pay-act/>.
- 16 Sarah Javaid, “One Fair Wage: Women Fare Better in States with Equal Treatment for Tipped Workers” (National Women’s Law Center, June 2024), <https://nwlc.org/resource/one-fair-wage/>.
- 17 Sarah Javaid, “Legislators Can Empower Workers With Pay Range Transparency Laws,” National Women’s Law Center (March 2024), <https://nwlc.org/resource/legislators-can-empower-workers-with-pay-range-transparency-laws/>.
- 18 Adrienne DerVartanian and Sarah Javaid, “Unions Are Good for Women,” National Women’s Law Center (April 2024), <https://nwlc.org/resource/unions-are-good-for-women-2/>.
- 19 “Building a Comprehensive Child Care and Early Learning System: The Case for a \$450 Billion Investment in Child Care Over the Next 10 Years” National Women’s Law Center (Aug. 2021), <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/450B-Justification-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.
- 20 “Time to Care: Paid Family and Medical Leave and the FAMILY Act,” National Women’s Law Center (May 2023), <https://nwlc.org/resource/time-to-care-paid-family-and-medical-leave-and-the-family-act/>.
- 21 “The Women’s Health and Protection Act Will Help Ensure that Abortion Is Available and Accessible in Our Communities,” National Women’s Law Center (May 2023), <https://nwlc.org/resource/the-womens-health-protection-act-will-help-ensure-that-abortion-is-available-and-accessible-in-our-communities/>.
- 22 Jasmine Tucker and Jennifer Mondino, “Coming Forward: Key Trends and Data from the TIME’S UP Legal Defense Fund,” National Women’s Law Center (Oct. 2020), <https://nwlc.org/resource/coming-forward-key-trends-and-data-from-the-times-up-legal-defense-fund/>.