

# Asian American and Pacific Islander Women and the Wage Gap

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Conversations around the wage gap tend to over-focus on the numbers while ignoring the causes. But these numbers are more than facts and figures, they represent the tangible consequences of sexism and white supremacy in the United States and how our country systematically devalues women of color and their labor. While racism and sexism are often thought of as individual bias, history shows us that systemic discrimination in pay and exploitation of workers based on race, class, gender and immigration status can be traced all the way back to this country's immigration policies, from the Page Act of 1875, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Immigration Act of 1924, to the Trump administration's Muslim bans. Many of these policies stemmed from our horrific past of enslaving Africans and their descendants; and colonial attempts to destroy Native communities.

Today this means that overall, Asian American<sup>1</sup> women in the United States who work full time, year-round are typically paid just 90 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men,<sup>2</sup> and wage gaps are even larger for some Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women depending on their ethnic and national backgrounds.

The wages of AAPI women are driven down by a number of current factors including gender and racial discrimination, workplace harassment, job segregation and the devaluing of jobs dominated by women, and the lack of support for family caregiving, which is still most often performed by women.<sup>3</sup>

## **Data for Asian American and Pacific Islander women show gender and racial wage gaps persist.**

- Among 23 select subgroups of AAPI women working full time, year-round, pay ranges from 50 cents to 125 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>4</sup>
- The largest wage gaps among these groups are for Nepalese women (50 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men), Burmese women (52 cents) and Fijian women (55 cents).<sup>5</sup>
- The wage gap between some groups of AAPI and white, non-Hispanic men may appear to be small or nonexistent, but women are still paid less than men within the same group. For example, among full-time, year-round workers, Malaysian women are paid 75 cents, Indian

women 73 cents and Chinese women 83 cents for every dollar paid to men within their groups.<sup>6</sup>

- The largest groups of Asian Americans in the United States, based on self-reported ancestry or ethnicity, are Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese and Korean.<sup>7</sup> While the wage gap between Chinese and Indian women and white, non-Hispanic men is small or nonexistent, Filipina, Vietnamese and Korean women are paid less. Filipina women are paid 83 cents, Vietnamese women 67 cents and Korean women 90 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>8</sup>

<b>Wage Gaps for Asian American and Pacific Islander Women by Subgroup</b>					
Wage gaps among subgroups of AAPI women compared to white, non-Hispanic and AAPI men					
<b>Self-Reported Ancestry or Ethnicity</b>	<b>Total Number in the United States</b>	<b>Median Wages for Women</b>	<b>Annual Wage Gap Compared to White, Non-Hispanic Men</b>	<b>Cents-on-the-Dollar Versus White, Non-Hispanic Men</b>	<b>Cents-on-the-Dollar Versus AAPI Men's Wages (Within Subgroup)</b>
Nepalese	167,468	\$30,000	\$30,000	50	81
Burmese	178,490	\$31,000	\$29,000	52	103
Fijian	39,103	\$33,000	\$27,000	55	59
Cambodian	240,379	\$34,000	\$26,000	57	85
Bangladeshi	203,845	\$36,000	\$24,000	60	86
Hmong	305,323	\$36,800	\$23,200	61	97
Samoan	110,606	\$37,100	\$22,900	62	84
Hawaiian	186,996	\$38,000	\$22,000	63	95
Guamanian/Chamorro	104,219	\$39,500	\$20,500	66	92
Laotian	203,494	\$40,000	\$20,000	67	100
Thai	218,514	\$40,000	\$20,000	67	80
Vietnamese	1,862,395	\$40,000	\$20,000	67	80
Tongan	40,538	\$45,000	\$15,000	75	125
Indonesian	70,851	\$47,300	\$12,700	79	79
Filipino	2,920,160	\$50,000	\$10,000	83	96
Pakistani	487,937	\$53,000	\$7,000	88	88
Korean	1,468,279	\$54,000	\$6,000	90	86
Sri Lankan	52,183	\$54,000	\$6,000	90	68
Japanese	782,776	\$55,000	\$5,000	92	73
Chinese	4,217,892	\$60,000	\$0	100	83
Indian	4,161,088	\$72,000	-\$12,000	120	73
Taiwanese	178,020	\$74,000	-\$14,000	123	100

Malaysian	20,599	\$75,000	-\$15,000	125	75
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Sources: U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). *2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Geographies: All States within United States, Table B02015 Asian Alone by Selected Groups Universe: Total Asian alone population; Table B02016 Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone by Selected Groups Universe: Total Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone population*; National Women’s Law Center. (2019, March). *Equal Pay for Asian American and Pacific Islander Women*.

Note: The wage gap estimates use the 1-year estimate of earnings for white, non-Hispanic men, which is \$60,000 annually.

## How Does the Wage Gap Harm Asian American Women?

Median wages for Asian American women in the United States are \$55,569 per year, compared to median wages of \$61,576 annually for white, non-Hispanic men. This amounts to a difference of \$6,007 each year.<sup>9</sup> These lost wages mean Asian American women and their families have less money to support themselves and their families, save and invest for the future, and spend on goods and services. Families, businesses and the economy suffer as a result.

For example, if the wage gap were eliminated, on average, an Asian American woman working full time, year-round would have enough money for approximately:

- Nearly eight additional months of child care;<sup>10</sup>
- Two-thirds of a year of tuition and fees for a four-year public university, or nearly the full cost of tuition and fees for a two-year community college;<sup>11</sup>
- More than four months of premiums for employer-provided health insurance;<sup>12</sup>
- Nearly four months of mortgage and utilities payments;<sup>13</sup>
- Nearly six additional months of rent;<sup>14</sup>
- Nearly five additional years of birth control;<sup>15</sup> or
- Enough money to pay off student loan debt in just over five years.<sup>16</sup>

## Asian American Women at the Margins Are Hurt the Most

Eliminating the wage gap would provide much-needed income to Asian American women whose wages sustain their households.

- Nearly 45 percent of Asian American mothers bring in 40 percent or more of their families’ income, which means their households rely heavily on their wages to make ends meet and get ahead.<sup>17</sup>
- The poverty rate for Asian Americans is 12 percent overall and many subgroups experience much higher rates. For example, 35 percent of Burmese people and nearly 30 percent of Hmong people live in poverty.<sup>18</sup> Women in these families are already struggling and can’t afford unfair pay.

- More than 1 in 4 Asian Americans (26 percent) live in multigenerational households, compared to just 19 percent of U.S. households overall. Bhutanese people (53 percent), Cambodians (41 percent) and Laotians (38 percent) are particularly likely to live in multigenerational families, which means family incomes, including women’s wages, support more people.<sup>19</sup>

## Asian American and Pacific Islander Women Are Demanding Change

- Asian American and Pacific Islander women experience workplace harassment and discrimination at high rates. In a recent survey conducted by the YWCA, 4 in 10 AAPI women (40 percent) reported experiencing discrimination at work due to their race or ethnicity, and nearly half (48 percent) due to their gender.<sup>20</sup>
- Asian American and Pacific Islander women want Congress to act. Eight in 10 AAPI women (80 percent) say it is very important for Congress to strengthen equal pay laws, and nearly three-quarters (73 percent) strongly agree that Congress should pass paid family and medical leave legislation.<sup>21</sup>
- It is past time for Congress to enact policies that promote fair pay, address workplace discrimination and harassment, and ensure the economic security of working families.
  - The **Paycheck Fairness Act** would strengthen the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and help eliminate the discriminatory pay practices that plague employed women.
  - The **Family And Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act** would create a national paid leave insurance program to provide up to 12 weeks of paid leave when a new child arrives or a serious personal or family medical need arises.
  - The **Healthy Families Act** would allow workers to earn seven paid sick days to use to recover from illness, access preventive care or care for a sick family member.
  - The **Ending the Monopoly of Power Over Workplace Harassment through Education and Reporting (EMPOWER) Act** would address certain issues related to workplace harassment.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to varying categories used in underlying data sources, this fact sheet uses various terminology to describe “racial” and “ethnic” categories throughout. This fact sheet draws on data from the U.S. Census, Current Population Survey and American Community Survey and, through secondary sources, data from the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, and from a national public opinion survey. All of these are based on respondents’ self-reported identity and ancestry, but each source records, categorizes and reports those responses differently. In this fact sheet, where an underlying source refers to women with self-reported Asian ancestry alone, we use “Asian American women.” Where a source refers to Asian and Pacific Islander women, we use “Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women.” Where possible, we include disaggregated data for specific sub-categories based on self-reported national or ethnic ancestry.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement: Table PINC-05: Work Experience in 2018 – People 15 Years Old and Over by Total Money Earnings in 2018, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Disability Status*. Retrieved 1 February 2020, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-05.html> (Unpublished calculation based on the median earnings for all women and men who worked full time, year-round in 2018; full time is defined as 35 hours a week or more.)

<sup>3</sup> Glynn, S. J. (2018, April 9). *Gender wage inequality: What we know and how we can fix it*. Retrieved 1 February 2020 from Washington Center for Equitable Growth website: <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/gender-wage-inequality/?longform=true>

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<sup>4</sup> National Women's Law Center. (2019, March). *Equal Pay for Asian American and Pacific Islander Women*. Retrieved 1 February 2020, from <https://nwlc.org/resources/equal-pay-for-asian-pacific-islander-women/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2018, Geographies: All States within United States, Tables B02015 and B02016*. Retrieved 1 February 2020, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=b02015&g=&lastDisplayedRow=24&table=B02015&tid=ACSDT1Y2018.B02015> and <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=b02016&g=&lastDisplayedRow=14&table=B02016&tid=ACSDT1Y2018.B02016>

<sup>8</sup> See note 4.

<sup>9</sup> See note 2.

<sup>10</sup> Child Care Aware of America. (2019). *The U.S. and the High Price of Child Care: An Examination of a Broken System*. Retrieved 1 February 2020, from <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/3957809/2019%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Final-TheUSandtheHighPriceofChildCare-AnExaminationofaBrokenSystem.pdf>; Estimate of \$9,254 based on the average cost of center-based child care for a four-year-old. This average is not representative of the mean and is an approximation calculated by weighting state child care cost averages by the number of programs by type reported by each state. It is not to be considered a "national average."

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2018, November). *Digest of Education Statistics (Table 330.10, Average undergraduate tuition and fees and room and board rates charged for full-time students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution: Selected years, 1963-64 through 2017-18)*. Retrieved 1 February 2020, from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18\\_330.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_330.10.asp) (The average total annual cost of undergraduate tuition and required fees is \$9,037 for a four-year public college or university or \$3,243 for a two-year college.)

<sup>12</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.) *Average Annual Single Premium per Enrolled Employee For Employer-Based Health Insurance, 2018*. Retrieved 1 February 2020, from <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/single-coverage/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2018, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics*. Retrieved 1 February 2020, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=dp04&g=&lastDisplayedRow=28&table=DP04&tid=ACSDP1Y2018.DP04&hidePreview=true&d=ACS%201-Year%20Estimates%20Data%20Profiles> (Calculation uses median monthly owner costs for housing units with a mortgage.)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. (Calculation uses median gross rent for occupied units paying rent.)

<sup>15</sup> Center for American Progress. (2012, February 15). *The High Costs of Birth Control: It's Not As Affordable As You Think*. Retrieved 1 February 2020, from [https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/02/pdf/BC\\_costs.pdf](https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/02/pdf/BC_costs.pdf) (Calculated from a survey of retail costs of oral contraceptives for the uninsured and average copays, combined with the average cost of doctor visits to obtain the prescription. While the Affordable Care Act greatly advanced access to birth control by requiring coverage of contraceptives without cost sharing, many women still must pay out of pocket because they lack insurance, because their plan is grandfathered and does not cover contraceptives without a copay, or because their plan only covers generics.)

<sup>16</sup> Siegel Bernard, T., & Russell, K. (2018, July 11). The New Toll of American Student Debt in 3 Charts. *The New York Times*. Retrieved 1 February 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/your-money/student-loan-debt-parents.html> (The average debt load at graduation for a student receiving a bachelor's degree was \$30,301 in 2015-2016.)

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, J. (2016, September 8). *Breadwinner Mothers by Race/Ethnicity and State*. Retrieved 1 February 2020 from Institute for Women's Policy Research website: <https://iwpr.org/publications/breadwinner-mothers-by-raceethnicity-and-state/>

<sup>18</sup> López, G., Ruiz, N. G., & Patten, E. (2017, September 8). *Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population*. Retrieved 1 February 2020 from Pew Research Center website: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> YWCA USA. (2019, December). *YWWomenVote 2020*. Retrieved 29 January 2020, from [https://ywomenvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/YWWomenVote-Report\\_FNL\\_12-11-19.pdf](https://ywomenvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/YWWomenVote-Report_FNL_12-11-19.pdf). Lake Research Partners conducted a national survey, commissioned by YWCA USA, with oversamples of Black women, Latinas, Asian/Pacific Islander women, and Native American women. The margin of error for the sample as a whole is plus or minus 3.1 percent but was higher for subgroups.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality, affordable health care and policies that help all people meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [NationalPartnership.org](http://NationalPartnership.org).

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