

ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER WOMEN EARN LESS THAN WHITE NON-HISPANIC MEN IN ALL* BUT ONE STATE

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- In 2019, Asian American and Pacific Islander women were paid just 84.6 cents per dollar earned by White non-Hispanic men, even though Asian women are 40 percent more likely to have at least a Bachelor's degree.¹
- In California, the state with the largest Asian American and Pacific Islander population, women earned just 76 cents on the dollar earned by White Non-Hispanic men, and in 18 states they earned 75 cents or less than White men.

In 2019, the median earnings of Asian American and Pacific Islander women for a year of full-time work were just 84.6 percent of White non-Hispanic men's, and just 73.3 percent of the median annual earnings of Asian American and Pacific Islander men.² While Asian American and Pacific Islander women had the highest median annual earnings for full-time year-round women of the largest racial and ethnic groups in the United States, \$55,000³ compared to \$47,299 for all women workers,⁴ this hides large differences in the labor market experiences for different groups of women. The earnings of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Pacific Islander women were just barely half or less than the earnings of the highest-earning groups of Taiwanese, Indian, and Malaysian women.⁵



* Of all 44 states and Washington DC with sufficient data to allow earnings estimates.

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women earned less than White men in all but one of the 44 states and the District of Columbia for which data are available (Table 1).

- Alaska is the state with the worst wage gap for AAPI women compared to White men, with a gender earnings ratio of just 58.1 percent. In six other states, earnings are less than two thirds of White men's.
- In California, the state with the largest AAPI population, AAPI women only made 76 cents on the dollar; other states with high shares of AAPI populations such as Washington, with an earnings ratio of 76.9 percent, and Texas, with an earnings ratio of 78.1 percent, also have large gaps in earnings.
- In the District of Columbia, AAPI women on average earned \$25,000 less per year than White men, a gender earnings ratio of 75.0 percent; yet median earnings, at \$75,000, were also substantially higher than elsewhere.
- In Delaware, AAPI women's earnings slightly exceeded those of White men (a gender earnings ratio of 101.8 percent), and in five other states, the gender earnings ratios were at least 90 percent of White men's earnings.

The earnings disparities faced by AAPI women are due to a number of factors:

- **Stereotyping:** The model minority stereotype perpetuates the belief that Asian Americans no longer experience racial discrimination and that the institutional barriers they face are less important or severe than those faced by other racial and ethnic groups.⁶ For women specifically, this stereotype reinforces the belief that Asian women are small, quiet, submissive, and exotic, and that they are not fit for leadership positions.⁷
- **Discrimination in access to promotions and advancement:** Data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission shows that while Asian women are well represented in the non-managerial professional workforce, they are severely underrepresented at the executive levels.⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic, moreover, has intensified racism faced by Asian women and men.⁹
- **Disproportionately high employment in lower paid service occupations:** AAPI women are more likely than White women to work in low wage occupations, including occupations such as beauty technicians and other service industry workers.¹⁰ In addition to often providing low pay and poor conditions of employment, these jobs were also particularly hard hit during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹ Proportionately, Asian women are a third more likely to be unemployed long-term during the COVID-19 pandemic than White women.¹²
- **Immigration status:** As a result of immigration Asian Americans have been the fastest growing population group in the United States since 2000.¹³ An estimated 27 percent of Asian women do not have U.S citizenship,¹⁴ and one in seven undocumented workers are estimated to be Asian, much higher than their share of the general population.¹⁵ Immigrant women, particularly those who are undocumented or on work permits, are even more likely to be targets of sexual harassment,¹⁶ while not having U.S. citizenship further reduces the likelihood of being promoted to management positions.¹⁷



Asian American and Pacific Islander women's earnings matter to the economic security of themselves and their families. Well over four in ten (43 percent) AAPI mothers of children younger than 18 are breadwinners for their family, as a single mother or contributing at least 40 percent of household earnings.¹⁸ Lower earnings mean less capacity to build wealth, save for emergencies, or be economically independent. It leaves women much more vulnerable during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Tackling the gender wage gap requires comprehensive policies that address discrimination, raise the minimum wage, and improve job quality, including universal access to healthcare, paid family leave, and earned sick days, and that ensure that all who need it have access to quality and affordable childcare and elder care. Such policies will lift up Asian American and Pacific Islander women and all of society.

Table 1: AAPI Women Earn Less Than White, Non-Latino Men in All States*

Median Annual Earnings and Ratio of AAPI Women's to White Non-Latino Men's Earnings, Full-Time Year-Round Workers, Aged 16 and Older, 2015-2019

State	Full-time Year-round earnings		Annual Earnings Gap	Earnings Ratio
	AAPI Women	White, Non-Hispanic Men		
Alabama	\$40,000	\$50,000	\$10,000	80.0%
Alaska	\$36,000	\$62,000	\$26,000	58.1%
Arizona	\$48,000	\$56,000	\$8,000	85.7%
Arkansas	\$32,000	\$45,000	\$13,000	71.1%
California	\$57,000	\$75,000	\$18,000	76.0%
Colorado	\$45,000	\$60,000	\$15,000	75.0%
Connecticut	\$60,000	\$71,000	\$11,000	84.5%
Delaware	\$58,000	\$57,000	-\$1,000	101.8%
District of Columbia	\$75,000	\$100,000	\$25,000	75.0%
Florida	\$40,000	\$50,000	\$10,000	80.0%
Georgia	\$44,500	\$55,000	\$10,500	80.9%
Hawaii	\$40,000	\$59,000	\$19,000	67.8%
Idaho	\$33,000	\$49,800	\$16,800	66.3%
Illinois	\$58,000	\$62,000	\$4,000	93.5%
Indiana	\$41,000	\$50,000	\$9,000	82.0%
Iowa	\$37,500	\$50,000	\$12,500	75.0%
Kansas	\$33,000	\$51,000	\$18,000	64.7%
Kentucky	\$40,000	\$47,400	\$7,400	84.4%
Louisiana	\$35,000	\$57,000	\$22,000	61.4%
Maryland	\$60,000	\$72,000	\$12,000	83.3%
Massachusetts	\$62,000	\$70,000	\$8,000	88.6%
Michigan	\$50,000	\$53,000	\$3,000	94.3%
Minnesota	\$41,000	\$60,000	\$19,000	68.3%
Mississippi	\$30,000	\$50,000	\$20,000	60.0%
Missouri	\$40,000	\$50,000	\$10,000	80.0%
Nebraska	\$35,000	\$50,000	\$15,000	70.0%

Table 1: AAPI Women Earn Less Than White, Non-Latino Men in All States*

Median Annual Earnings and Ratio of AAPI Women's to White Non-Latino Men's Earnings,
Full-Time Year-Round Workers, Aged 16 and Older, 2015-2019

State	Full-time Year-round earnings		Annual Earnings Gap	Earnings Ratio
	AAPI Women	White, Non-Hispanic Men		
Nevada	\$38,000	\$56,000	\$18,000	67.9%
New Hampshire	\$50,000	\$59,000	\$9,000	84.7%
New Jersey	\$69,000	\$76,000	\$7,000	90.8%
New Mexico	\$45,000	\$55,000	\$10,000	81.8%
New York	\$55,000	\$65,000	\$10,000	84.6%
North Carolina	\$42,000	\$50,000	\$8,000	84.0%
Ohio	\$47,200	\$51,000	\$3,800	92.5%
Oklahoma	\$33,000	\$50,000	\$17,000	66.0%
Oregon	\$42,300	\$55,000	\$12,700	76.9%
Pennsylvania	\$48,000	\$55,000	\$7,000	87.3%
Rhode Island	\$42,000	\$60,000	\$18,000	70.0%
South Carolina	\$36,000	\$50,000	\$14,000	72.0%
Tennessee	\$41,000	\$48,000	\$7,000	85.4%
Texas	\$50,000	\$64,000	\$14,000	78.1%
Utah	\$36,000	\$60,000	\$24,000	60.0%
Virginia	\$57,000	\$62,000	\$5,000	91.9%
Washington	\$50,000	\$65,000	\$15,000	76.9%
West Virginia	\$38,000	\$46,000	\$8,000	82.6%
Wisconsin	\$39,000	\$52,000	\$13,000	75.0%

Notes: *Sample of AAPI women too small for statistical analysis in the following states: Maine, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, Wyoming. Earnings are adjusted to 2019 dollars.

Source: IWPR analysis of 2015-2019 American Community Survey microdata (Integrated Public Use Microdata).

ENDNOTES

¹ IWPR calculation based on U.S. Census Bureau. 2020. "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2019." Table 1 Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2019; <<https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/data/tables/2019/demo/educational-attainment/cps-detailed-tables.html>> (accessed February 2021); data are for Asian women only; data including Pacific Islander women are not published. 57 percent of Asian American women ages 25 or older have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 37 percent of all women, and 40 percent of White non-Hispanic women and men.

² Microdata analysis of Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC) through <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>, prepared by Jasmine Tucker, National Women's Law Center, January 2021; official earnings data published by the U.S. Census Bureau based on CPS ASEC is for Asian women only, not including American Pacific Islanders; median annual earnings for Asian American women without Pacific Islanders were \$56,807 in 2019. Median annual earnings for full-time year-round workers are defined as those working at least 35 hours per week for at least 50 weeks per year.

³ As above.

⁴ See Ariane Hegewisch and Halie Mariano. 2020. "Same Gap, Different Year, The Gender Wage Gap: 2019." Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research <<https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Gender-Wage-Gap-Fact-Sheet-2.pdf>> (accessed February 2021).

⁵ See Robin Bleiweis. 2021. "The Economic Status of Asian American and Pacific Islander Women." Fact Sheet. Center for American Progress <<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2021/03/04/496703/economic-status-asian-american-pacific-islander-women/>> (accessed March 2021).

⁶ See Alejandro Covarrubias and Daniel D. Liou. 2014. "Asian American Educational Attainment and Earning Power in Post-Racial America." New York, NY: Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund <<https://www.aaldef.org/uploads/pdf/EdAttainment.pdf>> (accessed March 2021).

⁷ See Shruti Mukkamala and Karen L. Suyemoto. 2018. "Racialized sexism/sexualized racism: A multimethod study of intersectional experiences of discrimination for Asian American women." *Asian American Journal of Psychology* 9(1): 32-46 (accessed March 2021).

⁸ See Buck Gee and Denise Peck. 2017. *The Illusion of Asian Success: Scant Progress for Minorities in Cracking the Glass Ceiling from 2007-2015*. New York, NY: Ascend Foundation <<https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ascendleadership.org/resource/resmgr/research/TheIllusionofAsianSuccess.pdf>> (accessed March 2021).

⁹ See, for example, California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative. 2020. "A Survey of Nail Salon Workers and Owners in California During COVID-19." Berkeley, CA: UCLA Labor Center <<https://www.labor.ucla.edu/publication/a-survey-of-nail-salon-workers-and-owners-in-california-during-covid-19/>> (accessed March 2021); Terry Tang . 2021. "Victims of Anti-Asian attacks reflect a year into the pandemic." March 4; PBS Newshour <<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/victims-of-anti-asian-attacks-reflect-a-year-into-pandemic>> (accessed March 2021).

¹⁰ See National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum. 2019. "Asian American and Pacific Islander Women and Sexual Harassment in the Workplace." Chicago, IL: National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum <<https://www.napawf.org/our-work/content/2019/10/31/issue-brief-sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace>> (accessed March 2021).

¹¹ IWPR calculations based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Table A-2. Usual weekly earnings of employed full-time wage and salary workers¹ by intermediate occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity and Non-Hispanic ethnicity, Annual Average 2020 (Source: Current Population Survey; unpublished), and Ariane Hegewisch and Adiam Tesfaselassie. 2020. "The Gender Wage Gap by Occupation 2019." Washington DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research <<https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/employment-and-earnings/the-gender-wage-gap-by-occupation-2019/>> (accessed February 2021); see also Bleiweis 2021, note 5 above.

¹² Data including Pacific Islander women not available; see Eve Mefferd. 2021. "COVID-19 Related Long-Term Unemployment Could Lead to Long-Term Scarring, Especially for Women of Color." In the Lead IWPR Blog, March 1; Institute for Women's Policy Research < <https://iwpr.org/media/in-the-lead/covid-19-related-long-term-unemployment-could-lead-to-long-term-scarring-especially-for-women-of-color/> > (accessed March 2021).

¹³ See Gustavo Lopez, Neil G. Ruiz, and Eileen Patten. 2017. "Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population." Washington, DC: Pew Research Center <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>> (accessed March 2021).

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. 2020. "The Asian Alone Population in the United States: 2019." Table 4 < <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2019/demo/race/ppl-aa19.html> > (accessed March 2021).

¹⁵ Estimates based on American Community Survey 2014-2018; Migration Policy Institute. n.d. "Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States." < <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/US> > (accessed March 2021).

¹⁶ See National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum. 2019. "Asian American and Pacific Islander Women and Sexual Harassment in the Workplace." Chicago, IL: National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum <<https://www.napawf.org/our-work/content/2019/10/31/issue-brief-sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace>> (accessed March 2021).

¹⁷ See Huiquan Zhou and Sungkyu Lee. 2013. "Effects of US citizenship on wages of Asian immigrant women." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 22 (4): 420-430.

¹⁸ See Elyse Shaw, C. Nicole Mason, Valerie Lacarte, and Erika Jauregui. 2020. *Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, & Breadwinners During COVID-19*. Washington DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research < <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Holding-Up-Half-the-Sky-Mothers-as-Breadwinners.pdf> > (accessed March 2021).

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