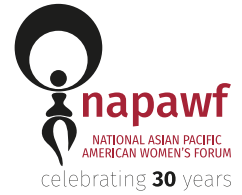


AANHPI Women’s Equal Pay Day: Fact vs. Fiction About the Wage Gap

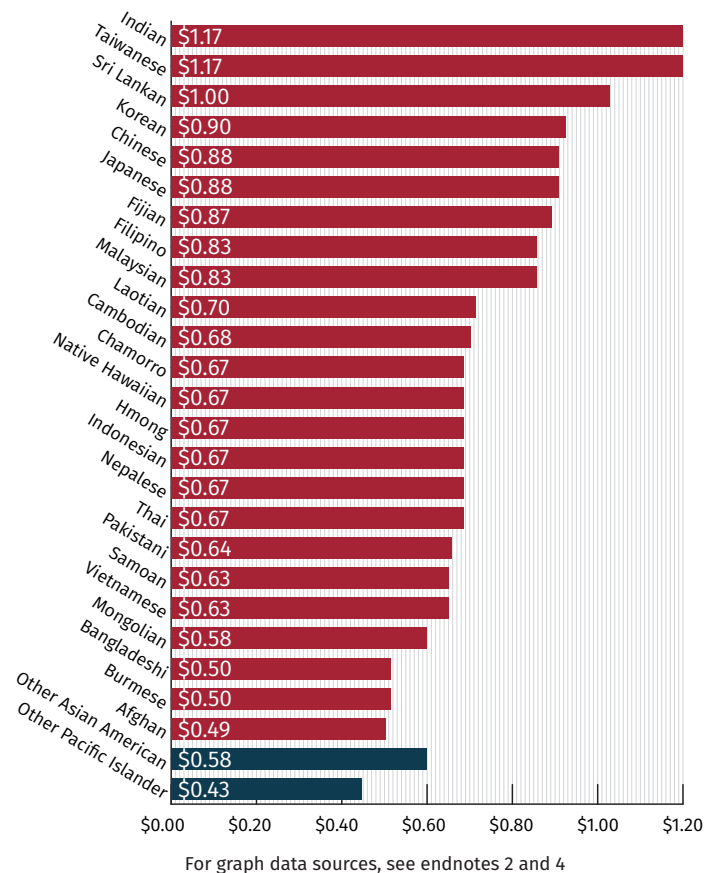


Factsheet | April 2026

In 2026, April 9 marks Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Women’s Equal Pay Day—recognizing the continued inequality of AANHPI women’s earnings.¹

Despite persistent wage gaps, AANHPI women are often invisible in discussions about pay equity, due in part to the “model minority” myth, which falsely portrays AANHPI communities as uniformly successful and economically secure. This factsheet cuts through the myths and misconceptions, highlighting the real economic disparities faced by AANHPI women across different education levels, ethnicities, and communities.

The Wage Gap for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, & Pacific Islander Women



Myth: AANHPI women don’t face a wage gap.

Fact: AANHPI women are paid about 83 cents for every dollar paid to non-Hispanic white men.²

However, this average masks significant disparities within the AANHPI community. When earnings data is disaggregated by ethnicity, it is clear that some AANHPI women, such as Afghan,³ Bangladeshi, and Burmese women, experience much larger pay gaps.

The misconception that AANHPI women do not experience economic inequality is reinforced by false narratives that rely on broad averages and overlook differences within AANHPI communities. When disparities are hidden in the data, they are also more likely to be overlooked in decision-making, contributing to persistent underinvestment in disaggregated data collection, research, and targeted economic policy solutions.

Myth: The wage gap is only about gender and race.

Fact: The wage gap is shaped by the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and other structural barriers such as immigration status, language access, disability, and caregiving responsibilities.

Immigration status and limited English proficiency can restrict access to stable employment, often pushing immigrant women into low-wage or informal sectors where labor protections are limited such as the domestic work sector. Disabled women are also disproportionately represented in minimum and subminimum wage jobs and face significant time and financial barriers that nondisabled workers do not, with few supports to access work, health care, child care, or accommodations.

Caregiving responsibilities, especially in AANHPI households, also disproportionately fall on

women, and these responsibilities can lead to career interruptions, reduced work hours, or reliance on flexible but lower-paying jobs, which cumulatively depress earnings over their lifetime.

We can also see the specific impact that gender, separate from race, has on pay inequity. AANHPI women experience a wage gap not only in comparison to white men, but also compared to men of the same ethnicity for each community we observe. For example, analysis by IWPR shows that in 2024, Chinese women earned approximately 76 cents for every dollar paid to Chinese men, and Indian women earned about 65 cents for every dollar paid to Indian men. This demonstrates that gender inequality persists even within communities that are often perceived as economically successful.

Myth: Educational attainment explains the wage gap.

Fact: At every level of education, AANHPI women earn less than white men with the same level of educational attainment, showing that the AANHPI wage gap can't be addressed by education.

While increased levels of education can improve potential earnings, it does not shield AANHPI women from systemic gender and race-based pay inequities.

This pattern reveals how workplace discrimination, occupational segregation, and unequal access to leadership opportunities continue to shape earnings, even among highly educated workers. Occupational segregation refers to the concentration of certain groups, often divided by gender, race, or immigration status, into specific types of jobs or industries.

This concentration isn't random, but reflects longstanding inequities, including historical discrimination, social and cultural expectations around work, unequal access to professional networks, and structural barriers within the labor market. As a result, many AANHPI women are more likely to be overrepresented in lower-paid roles and underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions, contributing

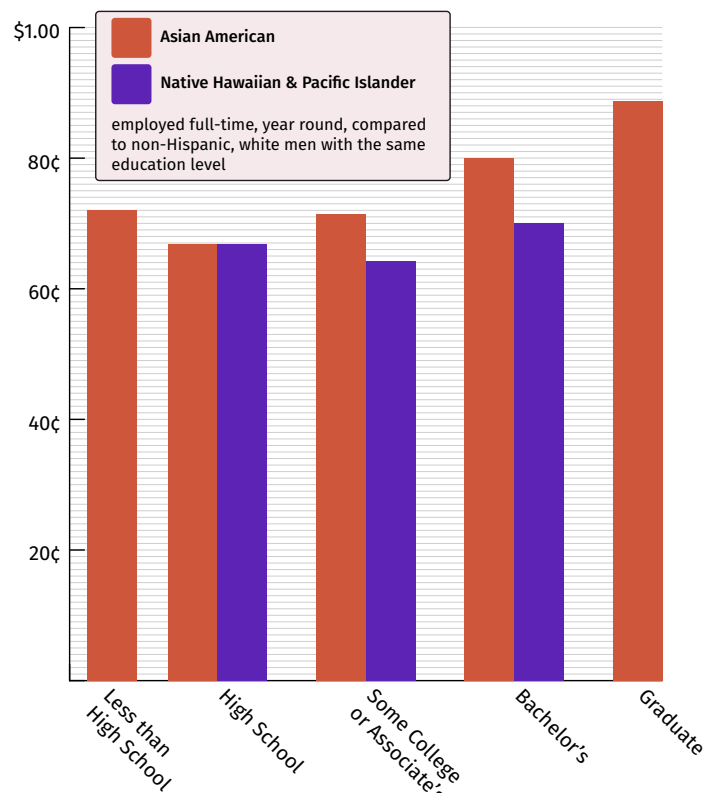
to persistent wage gaps regardless of higher educational attainment.⁶

Myth: The wage gap can be fixed by a single policy change.

Fact: The wage gap is the result of multiple, overlapping systems of inequality, and closing it requires more than a single policy solution.

Economic justice is deeply intertwined with the other issues that shape people's abilities to provide for their families. Barriers related to caregiving responsibilities, immigration status, workplace discrimination, and access to health care impact economic outcomes for AANHPI women. Addressing the wage gap therefore requires comprehensive policy solutions, such as pay equity protections, paid family and medical leave, affordable and accessible health care, and investments in caregiving infrastructure. Achieving wage justice requires confronting the structural barriers that shape economic opportunity. Only by addressing these interconnected challenges can we build an economy where AANHPI women, and all workers, can thrive.

The Wage Gap for AANHPI Women, by Education Level⁵



Endnotes

1. The data used to calculate the wage gap is based on the reported earnings by sex in the American Community Survey, which does not capture differences between cisgender and transgender women, and those with other non-binary or gender expansive identities. It's important to recognize that transgender women and gender expansive people, especially people of color, face an additional axis of oppression through transphobia and experience an even larger wage gap as compared to their cisgender counterparts. For more, see Miranda Peterson, Victoria Gianopoulos, and Brigid Rawdon, "Data Under Threat: Why Undercounting LGBTQIA+ Workers Fuels Inequality," Institute for Women's Policy Research, September 4, 2025, <https://iwpr.org/data-under-threat-why-undercounting-lgbtqia-workers-fuels-inequality/>.

2. IWPR analysis of 2024 1-Year American Community Survey microdata as made available on IPUMS (Integrated Public Use Microdata) by Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Matthew Sobek, Daniel Backman, Grace Cooper, Julia A. Rivera Drew, Stephanie Richards, Renae Rodgers, Jonathan Schroeder, and Kari C.W. Williams. IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 [1-Year ACS 2024]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0>. The wage gap is computed using Equal Pay Today methodology, as the ratio of median annual earnings of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander women, to the median annual earnings of white non-Hispanic men, aged 16 and above, for workers with positive earnings, including full-time, part-time, and part-year workers.

3. Based on updated Census Bureau guidance following the 2020 Census, Afghans are now classified as Asian rather than White.

4. Wage gaps calculated by IWPR using 2024 1-Year American Community Survey microdata as cited in endnote 2, disaggregated for women of different ethnici-

ties within the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities. In this figure, the underlying sample for Fijian, Malaysian, and Mongolian women is too small to be representative of the population, and the wage gap should be interpreted with caution.

5. Wage gaps calculated by IWPR using 2024 1-Year American Community Survey microdata as cited in endnote 2, as the ratio of median annual earnings of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander women to the median annual earnings of white non-Hispanic men, aged 25 and older, working full-time year-round, by highest level of education completed. "Full-time year-round workers" are defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as those who work 35 or more hours a week, for at least 50 weeks a year. The underlying sample sizes for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women with less than a high school education, and with a graduate degree and above are too small to report wage gaps.

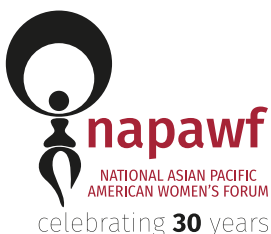
6. IWPR analysis of 2024 1-Year American Community Survey microdata as cited in endnote 2, shows that only 10% of civilian employed AANHPI women, aged 16 and older, work in Managerial jobs compared to more than 15% of white non-Hispanic men. Managerial workers are defined as those employed in "Management Occupations" per the BLS in the Census Occupation Classification Code List 2018; <https://www.bls.gov/tus/iocodes/census18ocodes.pdf>. For more, see Melissa Mahoney, Cristy Mendoza, Miranda Peterson, and Mrinmoyee Chatterjee, "Breaking Barriers: Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Women and the Fight for Equal Pay," Institute for Women's Policy Research, April 7, 2025, <https://iwpr.org/breaking-barriers-asian-american-native-hawaiian-and-pacific-islander-women-and-the-fight-for-equal-pay/>.

About the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR)



The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is the nation's leading think tank working to win economic equity for all women and eliminate barriers to their full participation in society. Through evidence-based research, policy solutions, and advocacy, IWPR is advancing the power and economic well-being of women and families across the US. · www.iwpr.org

About NAPAWF



The National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF) is the only multi-issue organization dedicated to building power for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women, girls, and gender expansive people through community organizing, research, and policy advocacy. Founded in 1996, NAPAWF advances reproductive justice, economic justice, and immigration and racial justice by building collective power through organizing, advocacy, and strategic communications. · www.napawf.org