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Some Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Women Lose Over \$1 Million Over a Lifetime to the Racist and Sexist Wage Gap

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Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) women¹ who worked full time, year round in 2020 (the most recent year for which we have data) were typically paid just 95 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.² But figures for AANHPI women vary widely by community. For example, Burmese women make just 50 cents and Indian women make \$1.22 for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.³ Whatever the wage gap for AANHPI women, lost earnings due to the racist and sexist wage gap has robbed them of the economic security they needed in the pandemic amid job loss, food insecurity, and general uncertainty about their health and safety.

With the massive job losses experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among low-paid workers, there were substantially fewer people who worked full time, year round in 2020, and many who continued to work full time, year round worked in higher paying positions.⁴ Because the women who remained in the labor force and worked full time for all of 2020 often had higher earnings than their counterparts who lost their jobs, 2020's data gives the appearance of closing wage gaps for some groups of women compared to 2019. However, given these major shifts in the labor market, 2020's data is not comparable to wage gap data for prior years.

The labor market shifted dramatically in 2020. Millions of jobs were lost, particularly among low-paid workers, and many people left the labor force altogether. The loss of so many low-paid workers caused median earnings for women working full time, year round to rise in 2020,⁵ and doesn't reflect the reality of many AANHPI women who lost jobs that year, or who were forced into part-time work. When we compare workers, regardless of how many hours or weeks they worked, AANHPI women were typically paid only 75 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men in 2020.⁶

Racist and sexist wage gaps have always existed – but the pandemic drove new, harmful economic fissures along racial and gender lines. As we recover from the economic fallout of COVID-19, we must address our long underinvestment in economic and social infrastructure and the inadequate protections that left many women stranded at the intersection of the racial and gender inequities laid bare by the pandemic.

Many Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Other Pacific Islander women are still in crisis.

Unequal pay has left AANHPI women less able than their white, non-Hispanic male counterparts to successfully weather COVID-related income loss. And many AANHPI women lost jobs in the pandemic: At its peak, the unemployment rate for Asian women ages 20 and older reached 16.4% in May 2020 and was in the double digits for 5 months in 2020 (between April and August 2020).⁷ And while Asian women's unemployment is now below its February 2020 rate, nearly 2 in 5 unemployed Asian women ages 16 or older (37.7%) in March 2022 had been looking for work for six months or more, compared to 25.1% of white men ages 16 or older. And unemployed Asian women ages 16 or older have typically been out of work nearly 2 weeks longer than white men ages 16 and older (13.5 weeks compared to 11.6 weeks).⁸

In addition, some AANHPI women continue to experience income loss: between March 2 and March 14, 2022, nearly 1 in 10 Asian, non-Hispanic women reported that their household had lost employment income in the last four weeks.⁹ In a recent NWLC poll, of AAPI women who lost a job in the pandemic, only 47% said they have gotten a new job.¹⁰ And while the data shows the crisis is not as severe as it once was, the economic impact of the pandemic may be long lasting as employers may pay lower wages to employees who have been out of work for long stretches of time. Lost earnings during the pandemic also mean some women will be less likely to afford education and training that would allow them to move up or into another field. This means the pandemic may lead women to face larger wage gaps in the years to come.

The wage gap varies widely among Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Other Pacific Islander women.

Although AANHPI women working full time year round typically make 95 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, the wage gap varies widely and women of many AANHPI communities experience much larger wage gaps compared to white, non-Hispanic men than AANHPI women overall. The most recent figures for women by specific community are from 2015-2019 and are therefore not reflective of the pandemic. But it shows how many of these communities of AANHPI women faced steep wage gaps and thousands in lost annual income heading into the pandemic, which threatened their ability to weather the economic fallout of COVID-19. For example, among full-time, year-round workers, Burmese women typically made just 50 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, while Indian women were typically paid \$1.22.¹¹

As a group, AANHPI women working full time, year round typically lose \$3,000 a year to the wage gap. If this wage gap does not close, an AANHPI woman starting her career today stands to lose \$120,000 over the next 40 years. But those figures can be substantially larger for women of many AANHPI communities. If these wage gaps do not close, Burmese women stand to lose \$1.2 million, Nepalese women over \$1.1 million, and Hmong and Cambodian women nearly \$1 million dollars to the wage gap over the course of their careers.

Losses due to the wage gap add up and mean that AANHPI women not only have less money in their pocket right now – it also means they are denied key opportunities throughout their lifetimes to build wealth and future economic security for themselves and their families. The wage gap means many cannot save enough to afford a down payment on a home, cannot afford to pay for their own or a child's higher education, cannot start a business or save for retirement.

How much AANHPI women working full time, year round lose to the wage gap

Community	AANHPI women's earnings	What AANHPI women make for every dollar white, non-Hispanic men make	AANHPI women's typical annual losses	AANHPI women's typical losses over a 40-year career
Bangladeshi	\$42,615	\$0.71	\$17,385	\$695,400
Burmese	\$30,000	\$0.50	\$30,000	\$1,200,000
Cambodian	\$36,000	\$0.60	\$24,000	\$960,000
Chinese	\$61,087	\$1.02	-	-
Fijian	\$39,632	\$0.66	\$20,368	\$814,720
Filipino	\$50,000	\$0.83	\$10,000	\$400,000
Guamanian/Chamorro	\$38,768	\$0.65	\$21,232	\$849,280
Hawaiian	\$37,546	\$0.63	\$22,454	\$898,160
Hmong	\$35,634	\$0.59	\$24,366	\$974,640
Indian	\$73,006	\$1.22	-	-
Indonesian	\$45,815	\$0.76	\$14,185	\$567,400
Japanese	\$57,361	\$0.96	\$2,639	\$105,560
Korean	\$53,268	\$0.89	\$6,732	\$269,280
Laotian	\$37,288	\$0.62	\$22,712	\$908,480
Malaysian	\$70,000	\$1.17	-	-
Mongolian	\$40,725	\$0.68	\$19,275	\$771,000
Nepalese	\$31,961	\$0.53	\$28,039	\$1,121,560
Pakistani	\$50,000	\$0.83	\$10,000	\$400,000
Samoaan	\$37,000	\$0.62	\$23,000	\$920,000
Sri Lankan	\$51,110	\$0.85	\$8,890	\$355,600
Taiwanese	\$72,000	\$1.20	-	-
Thai	\$38,688	\$0.64	\$21,312	\$852,480
Tongan	\$36,503	\$0.61	\$23,497	\$939,880
Vietnamese	\$38,589	\$0.64	\$21,411	\$856,440

NWLC calculations based on 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimates using IPUMS-USA available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/> (IPUMS). Figures are based on women's and men's median earnings for full-time, year-round workers. White, non-Hispanic men typically made \$60,000. Respondents to the American Community Survey self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race or whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Dashes indicate no annual or career loss compared to white, non-Hispanic men.

Losses due to gender and racial wage gaps are devastating for AANHPI women and their families, many of whom lose tens or thousands of dollars annually to the wage gap. This harms not only AANHPI women, but the families who depend on their income. The COVID-19 crisis underscores the need to close the wage gap now. AANHPI women cannot afford to wait.

- 1 Data in this analysis comes from the American Community Survey (ACS), the Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey, the Census Bureau, and other sources, which means there are multiple sources of data on women identifying as Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Other Pacific Islander. In all sources, people self-identify their sex as either male or female and their race and ethnicity. We use the term Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Other Pacific Islander (or AANHPI) throughout this resource where we are able but some specific sources permit only an analysis of Asian American and Pacific Islander women (or AAPI women) or Asian women. Please refer to each source for more information.
- 2 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 American Community Survey 1-year estimates microdata, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>.
- 3 NWLC calculations based on 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS), 5-year estimates, using Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas, and Matthew Sobek, IPUMS USA, Version 10.0, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.
- 4 Ariane Hegewisch and Eve Mefferd, "The Gender Wage Gap by Occupation, Race, and Ethnicity 2020" (Institute for Women's Policy Research, March 2021), <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-Occupational-Wage-Gap-Brief-v2.pdf>.
- 5 Charles Hokayem, Ethan Krohn, and Matthew Unrath, "Fewer Low-Wage Full-Time, Year-Round Workers During COVID-19 Causes Increase in Median Earnings Among Those Still Employed," (U.S. Census Bureau, Sept. 2021), <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/09/workers-earnings-decline-overall-during-pandemic-but-increase-for-full-time-year-round-workers.html>.
- 6 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 American Community Survey 1-year estimates microdata, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>.
- 6 NWLC calculations using BLS, Table B-1 in *March 2022 Employment Situation Summary* and BLS, Table B-5 in *March 2022 Employment Situation Summary*. Figures are seasonally adjusted.
- 7 NWLC calculations using BLS, "(Unadj) Unemployment Rate - Asian, Women," Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey (Washington, DC: April 1, 2022), <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU04032342>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 8 NWLC calculations based on BLS, "Unemployed Persons by Age, Sex, Race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, Marital Status, and Duration of Unemployment," Table A-36 in Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey (Washington, DC: April 1, 2022), <https://www.bls.gov/web/emp/sit/cpseea36.htm>. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.
- 9 Brooke LePage and Saraj Javaid, "Economic, Food, and Housing Insecurity Remain High for Women and Families Entering the Third Year of the Pandemic" (National Women's Law Center, April 2022), <https://nwlc.org/resource/economic-food-and-housing-insecurity-remain-high-for-women-and-families-entering-the-third-year-of-the-pandemic/>.
- 10 "Women and Work Two Years Into the Pandemic" (GQR, March 2022), <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FINAL-GQR-NWLC-survey-slides-3.29.22.pdf>.
- 11 NWLC calculations based on 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS), 5-year estimates, using Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas, and Matthew Sobek, IPUMS USA, Version 10.0, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.