



**NATIONAL  
WOMEN'S  
LAW CENTER**

Justice for Her. Justice for All.

MAY 2020 | FACT SHEET

# Effects of COVID-19 Show Us Equal Pay Is Critical for Mothers

BY AMANDA FINS

The vast majority of working mothers—about 3 in 4 (76.8 percent)—work full time,<sup>1</sup> and many are the sole or primary breadwinner for their families.<sup>2</sup> The COVID-19 crisis has exposed how the work performed primarily by women, and particularly women of color, has long been and continues to be undervalued, even as the rest of the country is depending on it as never before. Women are the vast majority of workers risking their lives to provide health care, child care, and other essential services.<sup>3</sup>

For example, while mothers with children under 18 constitute 15.9 percent of all workers,<sup>4</sup> they are 34.8 percent of all registered nurses and 27.7 percent of child care workers.<sup>5</sup> Many essential occupations, such as grocery store cashiers and nursing assistants, are low paid and often fail to provide adequate protective measures, benefits, or paid leave. During this pandemic, many mothers are being forced to put their own and their family's health at risk to provide for their family and are also shouldering increased caregiving responsibilities as schools and other care providers close—all for a fraction of what their male counterparts are being paid.<sup>6</sup> In addition, both women and mothers are overrepresented in those jobs as well as in the industries shedding jobs as a result of the public health crisis—like restaurants, retail, and hotels—and because they are paid less than their male counterparts, they are less able to weather this crisis.<sup>7</sup>

While women in the U.S. who work full time, year-round are typically paid just 82 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts,<sup>8</sup> the wage gap between mothers and fathers is even larger.

**Mothers working full time, year round outside the home are typically paid just 70 cents for every dollar paid to fathers, a gap that translates to a loss of \$1,500 a month or \$18,000 annually.<sup>9</sup> The wage gap between mothers and fathers exists across race, state, and occupation.**

Lost earnings due to the gender wage gap, on top of low wages in many essential jobs, are exacerbating the economic impact of COVID-19 for many mothers and mothers of color, and for the families who depend on their income. The wage gap jeopardizes families’ economic security and deepens poverty and economic suffering during this crisis.

**Mothers are a large percentage of COVID-19 essential and frontline workers but are being paid less than their male counterparts.**

In a wide variety of occupations – those that are well-paid and low paid, those that are female-dominated and those that are traditionally male-dominated – mothers working full time, year-round are paid less than fathers. To add insult to injury, mothers make up a large portion of workers providing essential services to the public during COVID-19 and are being paid less than their male counterparts in the same occupations. Many of those mothers are women of color.<sup>10</sup>

Mothers are 12.6 percent of cashiers and retail salespeople in grocery stores (74 percent of whom are mothers of color) and yet among full-time year round workers are typically paid \$11.54 per hour, only 72 cents for every dollar paid to fathers in these occupations. Additionally, mothers are significantly overrepresented as personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants, making up 29.6 percent of the workforce (63.1 percent of whom are mothers of color). Yet mother working full time year round in these jobs typically paid \$12.31 per hour, only 85 cents for every dollar a father makes in these occupations.

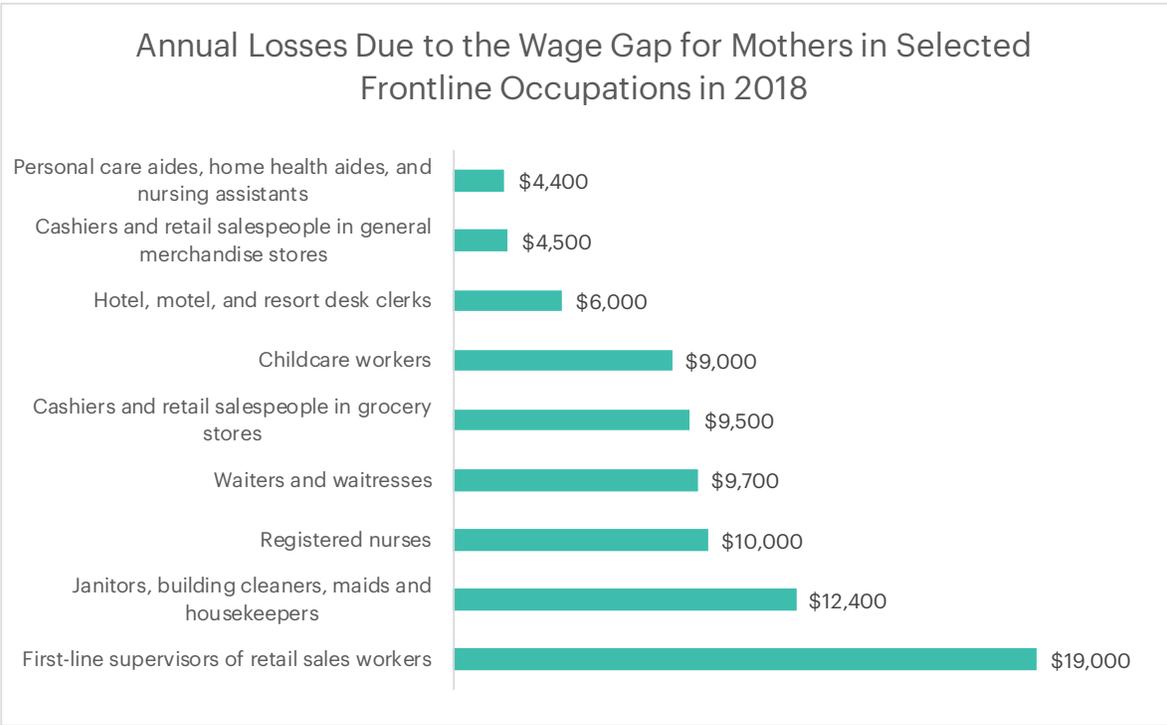
In higher paying essential occupations too, mothers experience a wage gap. Mothers who are registered nurses are typically paid \$31.25 per hour while fathers in the same role are typically paid \$36.06 per hour – meaning mothers are paid 87 cents for every dollar paid to fathers.<sup>11</sup>

**THE WAGE GAP FOR MOTHERS IN SELECTED FRONTLINE OCCUPATIONS**

Occupation	Percent of workers who are mothers	Percent of mothers who are women of color	Median hourly wage for mothers in occupation	Median hourly wage for fathers in occupation	What a mother makes for every dollar a father makes
Janitors, building cleaners, maids and housekeepers	19.0%	74.0%	\$10.38	\$16.35	\$0.64
First-line supervisors of retail sales workers	15.7%	38.0%	\$17.31	\$26.44	\$0.65
Waiters and waitresses	18.0%	42.9%	\$10.34	\$15.00	\$0.69
Childcare workers	27.7%	46.8%	\$10.10	\$14.42	\$0.70
Cashiers and retail salespeople in grocery stores	12.6%	58.5%	\$11.54	\$16.11	\$0.72
Hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks	17.5%	47.9%	\$11.06	\$13.94	\$0.79
Cashiers and retail salespeople in general merchandise stores	17.1%	57.7%	\$10.82	\$12.98	\$0.83
Personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants	29.6%	63.1%	\$12.31	\$14.42	\$0.85
Registered nurses	34.8%	32.3%	\$31.25	\$36.06	\$0.87

Source: NWLC calculations based on 2018 American Community Survey using IPUMS. Figures are in 2018 dollars. Median hourly wages are for full time, year round workers. Mothers and fathers have at least one child under 18 at home. Hourly wages for mothers and fathers are derived by dividing median annual earnings by 2,080 hours, which assumes a 40-hour work week for 52 weeks.

This difference in wages results in an annual loss that could be devastating for mothers and their families that were already struggling to make ends meet before the public health crisis. For example, mothers in a low paid frontline occupation such as cashiers and retail salespeople in grocery stores lost \$9,500 due to the wage gap in 2018. Mothers who are first-line supervisors of retail sales workers lost a staggering \$19,000 due to the wage gap in 2018.



Source: NWLC calculations based on 2018 American Community Survey using IPUMS. Figures are in 2018 dollars. Wages are for full time, year round workers. Mothers and fathers have at least one child under 18 at home. Annual loss for mothers is derived by subtracting mothers median annual earnings from fathers median annual earnings in 2018.

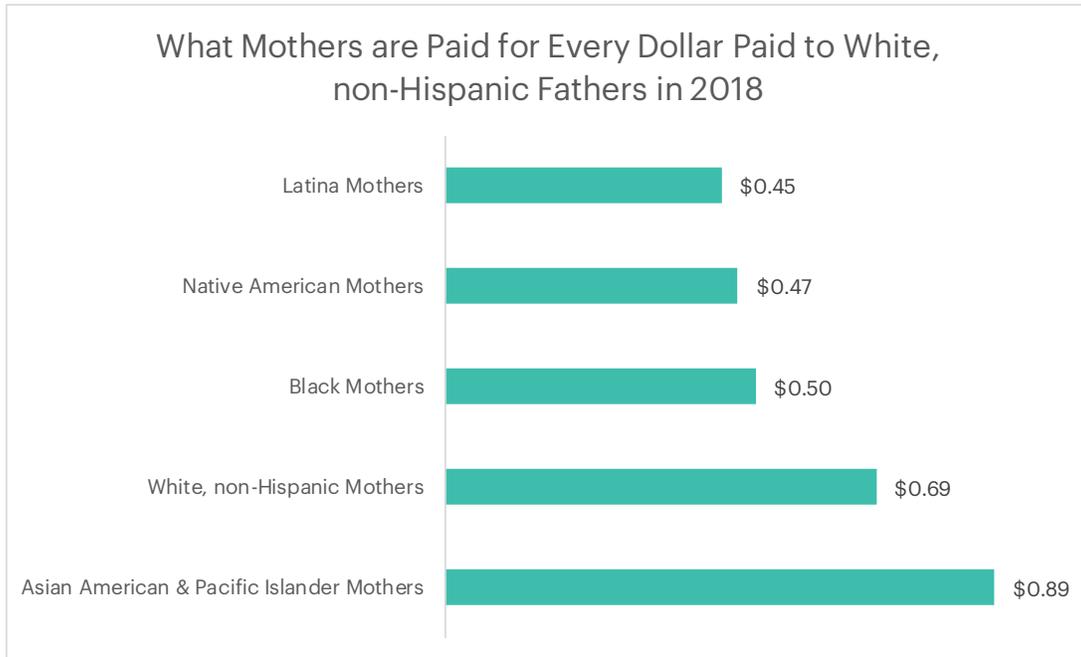
**Lower wages for mothers contribute to family poverty, particularly for mothers of color.**

Lower wages for mothers can leave families below or dangerously close to the poverty line, particularly when mothers support children on their own. A single parent with two children needs to make \$20,598 per year – about \$9.90 per hour for someone working full time, year round – to keep their family above the poverty line.<sup>12</sup>

More than one in eight single mothers (13 percent) who held full time jobs throughout 2018 were poor.<sup>13</sup> Nearly three in five poor children (58 percent) lived in families headed by unmarried women in 2018, and the poverty rate for families with children headed by unmarried mothers was 34 percent, compared to 17 percent for families with children headed by unmarried fathers and 6 percent of married couple families with children.<sup>14</sup> Families headed by unmarried mothers of color had even higher rates of poverty: for example, nearly two in five Black families headed by unmarried mothers (38 percent) and more than two in five Native American families headed by unmarried mothers (43 percent) lived in poverty in 2018.<sup>15</sup>

**Mothers of every race are typically paid less than white, non-Hispanic fathers.**

While overall, mothers are paid less than fathers, the wage gap is even wider for many mothers of color as compared to white, non-Hispanic fathers. Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) mothers are paid 89 cents;<sup>16</sup> for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers, white, non-Hispanic mothers are paid 69 cents; Black mothers are paid 50 cents; Native American mothers are paid 47 cents; and Latina mothers are paid just 45 cents.<sup>17</sup>



*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home. Figures are median annual earnings for full time, year-round workers in 2018. ACS survey respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race.*

**Mothers experience a wage gap in every single state.**

Nationwide, mothers are paid only 70 cents for every dollar paid to fathers. However, the wage gap varies by state. In Vermont, where the wage gap between mothers and fathers is smallest, mothers are typically paid 81 cents for every dollar paid to fathers, translating to a typical loss of about \$10,543 in earnings annually.<sup>18</sup> In Louisiana and Utah, where the gap is largest, mothers are typically paid just 59 cents for every dollar paid to fathers. Mothers’ annual losses typically amount to \$24,429 in Louisiana and \$25,455 in Utah.<sup>19</sup> Mothers of color experience even wider gaps, depending on the state in which they live. For example, in Washington, D.C., Black mothers are typically paid only 35 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers, and Latina mothers are typically paid only 27 cents. In D.C., Black mothers typically lose about \$85,000 and Latina mothers lose more than \$98,000 annually compared to white, non-Hispanic fathers.<sup>20</sup>

\* \* \*

The wage gap for mothers in 2018 was only two cents smaller than it was in 2008, very little progress over the course of 10 years.<sup>21</sup> Since 2007, before the start of the Great Recession, the gap has closed by only four cents. In the current economic crisis, mothers can’t afford to have their work devalued. It’s time to close the wage gap.

- 1 NWLC calculations based on 2018 American Community Survey using IPUMS, *available at* <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>.
- 2 Center For American Progress, Breadwinning Mothers Continue to be the U.S. Norm (May. 2019), *available at* <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2019/05/10/469739/breadwinning-mothers-continue-u-s-norm/>
- 3 Hye Jin Rho, Hayley Brown, & Shawn Fremstad, Center on Economic and Policy Research, A Basic Demographic Profile of Workers in Frontline Industries (Apr. 2020), *available at* <https://cepr.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020-04-Frontline-Workers.pdf>. Under CEPR's definition, women are 64 percent of all workers in front-line industries, including 77% of all health care workers, and 85% of workers in child care and social services.
- 4 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 Current Population Survey using IPUMS-USA, *available at* <https://ipums.org/>. The wage gap is calculated as the median earnings of mothers working full time year round as a percentage of the median earnings of fathers working full time year round, provided they have at least \$1 in earnings. Median earnings are the earnings made by an individual at the 50th percentile – the worker right in the middle. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home.
- 5 NWLC calculations based on 2018 American Community Survey using IPUMS, *available at* <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>.
- 6 Claire Ewing-Nelson, NWLC, “After a Full Month of Business Closures, Women Were Hit Hardest By April’s Job Losses”(May 2020) *available at* <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Job-Drop-April-Factsheet.pdf>.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 NWLC, The Wage Gap: The Who, How, Why, and What to Do (Sept. 2019), *available at* <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Wage-Gap-Who-How-Why-and-What-to-Do-2019.pdf>.
- 9 NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA, *available at* <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home. Figures are median annual earnings for full time, year round workers in 2018.
- 10 Hye Jin Rho, Hayley Brown, and Shawn Fremstad, A Basic Demographic Profile of Workers in Frontline Industries (April 2020), *available at* <https://cepr.net/a-basic-demographic-profile-of-workers-in-frontline-industries/>.
- 11 NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA, *available at* <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home. Figures are median annual earnings for full time, year round workers in 2018. Hourly wages are derived by dividing median annual earnings by 2,080 hours, which assumes a 40-hour work week for 52 weeks.
- 12 U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty Thresholds for 2018 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years (Sept. 2019), *available at* <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html>.
- 13 Amanda Fins, NWLC, National Snapshot: Poverty Among Women & Families, 2019 (Oct. 2019), *available at* <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/PovertySnapshot2019-1.pdf>.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Some subgroups of Asian American and Pacific Islander women experience a larger wage gap than is reflected in the figure for Asian women overall. See: Equal Pay for Asian and Pacific Islander Women for more information, *available at* <https://nwlc.org/resources/equal-pay-for-asian-pacific-islander-women/>.
- 17 NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA, *available at* <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home. Figures are median annual earnings for full time, year round workers in 2018. Black mothers are those who self identified in the survey as Black or African American. Native American mothers are those who self identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native. Asian American and Pacific Islander mothers are those who self identified as Asian and/or Pacific Islander. Latina mothers are those who self identified as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin and may be of any race. White, non-Hispanic mothers and fathers are those who self identified as white and not of Hispanic, Latin, or Spanish origin.
- 18 NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA, *available at* <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home. Figures are median annual earnings for full time, year round workers in 2018.
- 19 Ibid. Mothers’ median annual earnings in Utah were \$37,048 while fathers’ median annual earnings were \$62,503. In Louisiana, mothers’ median annual earnings were \$35,000, while fathers’ median annual earnings were \$59,429. Figures are in 2018 dollars.
- 20 State wage gaps calculated by National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) are based on the U.S. Census Bureau 2014-2018 American Community Survey using IPUMS. National wage gap calculated by NWLC is based on 2018 American Community Survey. Figures are median annual earnings for full time, year round workers. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home. Black mothers are those who self-identified as Black or African American. Latina mothers are those who self-identified as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Latinas may be of any race. White, non-Hispanic fathers refer to those who have self-identified as white but who are not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.
- 21 NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2018 American Community Survey using IPUMS-USA, *available at* <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. Mothers and fathers have at least one related child under 18 at home. Figures are median annual earnings for full time, year round workers from 2010 - 2018.