

# AAPI WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY

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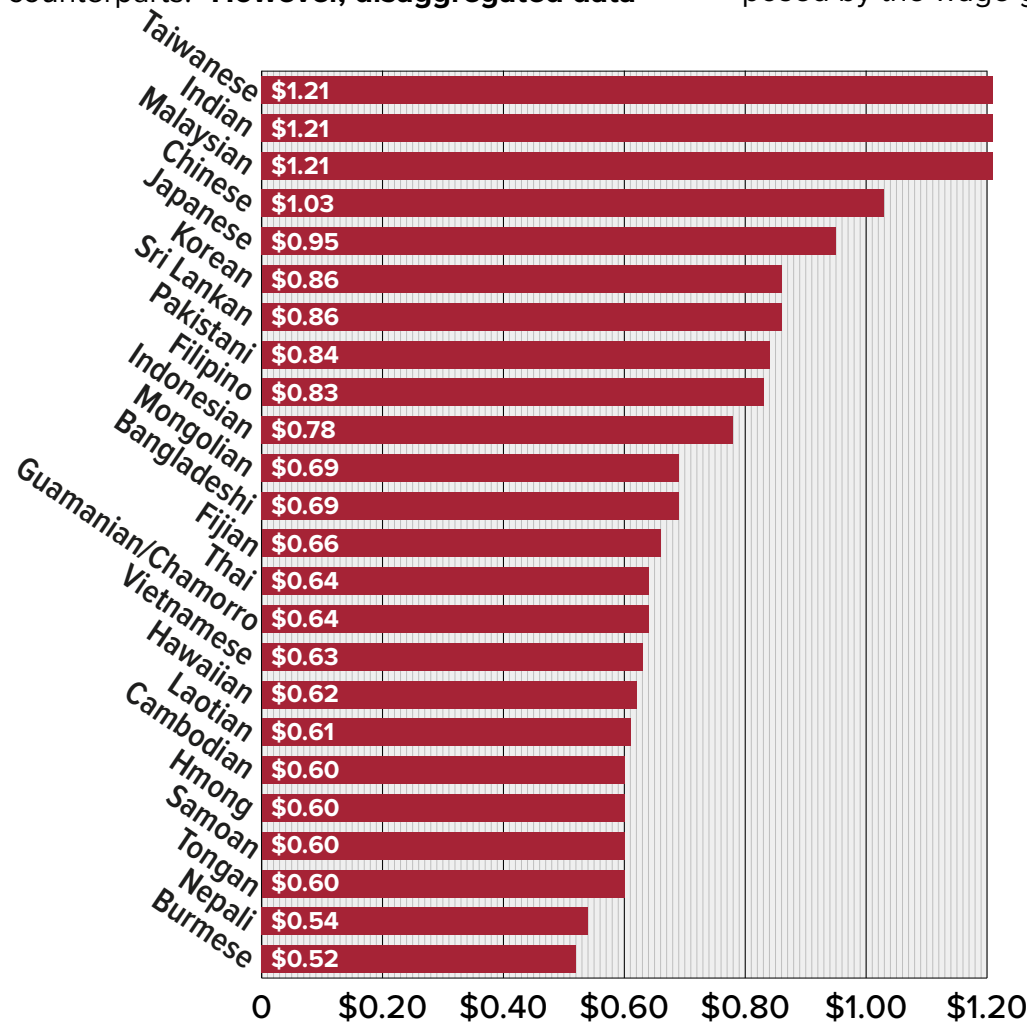
## The Wage Gap: A Closer Look

The wage gap plays a large role in hindering women's economic agency and autonomy. Women in the U.S. who work full-time, year-round are typically paid only 82 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts.<sup>1</sup> Women of color face even larger wage gaps compared to their white counterparts.

Asian American and Pacific Islander women working full-time are typically paid, on average, 85 cents for every dollar paid to their white male counterparts.<sup>2</sup> **However, disaggregated data**

**from 2015 to 2019 reveals that many AAPI women experience much larger wage gaps, particularly Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander women.** For example, Burmese women earn only 52 cents for every dollar paid to their white male counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

Due to the wage gap, AAPI women typically lose \$400,000 over a 40-year career.<sup>3</sup> In order to make up for lost wages, they have to work longer hours, multiple jobs, and often, past retirement age. For those taking care of children, family members, and loved ones, the extra burden posed by the wage gap makes it difficult for



Source: Center for American Progress <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2021/03/04/496703/economic-status-asian-american-pacific-islander-women/>. Analysis of median earnings for full-time, year-round workers by AAPI subpopulation based on Steven Ruggles and others, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, U.S. Census Data for Social, Economic, and Health Research, 2015-2019 American Community Survey: 5-year estimates: Version 10.0" (Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center, 2021), available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. White, non-Hispanic men made \$58,000 annually, on average, between 2015 and 2019. Indian women represent those who self-selected "Asian Indian" as their race.

AAPI women to provide emotional and economic support to their families and communities. Many AAPI women in the workplace face the double negative effect of the “glass ceiling,” a term referring to barriers to advancement due to gender-based discrimination, what many refer to as the “bamboo ceiling,” an advancement barrier experienced by AAPI women due to race and national origin-based biases.<sup>4</sup>

Employers' racial and gender biases have significant impacts on different AAPI communities and their income and employment opportunities. The “model minority” myth falsely assumes all Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) have achieved economic and professional success. Due to the pervasiveness of these dangerous stereotypes, the lived experiences of AAPI women are often rendered invisible in conversations about poverty, economic security, and wage disparities. Of the 129 million women of working age in the United States, 7.6 million are AAPI.<sup>5</sup> The fight for gender and racial justice within AAPI communities must include combatting the invisibility that exists both outside and within our communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased economic insecurity and reduced labor force participation, especially among AAPI women who disproportionately fill retail worker, personal care aide, and restaurant worker roles. Economic security is crucial to ensuring that AAPI women and girls have the autonomy to make critical decisions about if or when to become a parent and provide for our families so that we can truly thrive.

## **COVID-19 and AAPI women's economic security**

### **AAPI women are overrepresented in the front-line workforce.**

- AAPI women make up 3.8 percent of the front-line workforce, despite only making up 2.9 percent of the overall workforce, and are generally paid less than their white male counterparts in the same occupations.<sup>6</sup>
- AAPI women are more likely to work in service, sales, and office jobs compared to men in the same ethnic group.<sup>7</sup>
  - These occupations tend to be low-paying jobs that rarely provide workplace protections and benefits, including paid leave and sick days.
  - A lack of workplace benefits burdens AAPI women with low incomes by forcing them to choose between their or their family's health and their employment.

### **AAPI women's immigration statuses play a role in the economic opportunities afforded to them.**

- Foreign-born AAPI immigrants have higher rates of poverty compared to U.S.-born AAPI people.<sup>8</sup>
- Generally, newly arriving immigrants have high poverty rates that decline over time.<sup>9</sup>
- Asian American immigrant women actively participate in the labor force at a rate of 46 percent compared to the average for immigrant women overall (42.9 percent).<sup>10</sup>
- Many women come to the U.S. as spouses of immigrants and are issued dependent visas, which may or may not grant work authorization. A lack of work authorization leaves many immigrant women reliant on their spouses for both their livelihoods and their ability to stay in the U.S.

## Raising the Minimum Wage

In addition to occupational segregation and unequal pay for equal work, current minimum wage standards make it difficult for AAPI women to be financially secure. Over the past 40 years, wages in the U.S. have remained stagnant while basic living costs have skyrocketed.

Minimum wage policies have the greatest impact on frontline and essential workers with low incomes,<sup>11</sup> a population that has faced a disproportionately higher burden on health and finances due to the impact of COVID-19.<sup>12</sup> These occupations include, but are not limited to, home health aides, restaurant workers, retail workers, and personal care aides<sup>13</sup>—occupations disproportionately filled by AAPI women.<sup>14</sup> Raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour would increase the pay for 36 percent of retail workers, 35 percent of residential or nursing home workers, and 64 percent of food preparation workers.<sup>14</sup>

The majority of these workers earning less than \$15 an hour are adults of reproductive age. They are women who are not financially prepared to have a child or who have a child/children and are struggling to provide for them with low wages. Additionally, many minimum wage jobs, particularly retail, restaurant, and other service sectors, do not have set working schedules and instead workers are scheduled to “just-in-time” scheduling. This type of work practice gives employers the power to dismiss staff early and without pay during slow periods. It also makes it challenging for low-wage workers to pick up a second job to help contribute to their economic stability or seek out educational or training programs that could help them be hired for higher paying jobs.<sup>15</sup> Lastly, unreliable work schedules that come with minimum wage jobs make it difficult for parents to plan childcare and transportation, forcing workers and their families to choose between earning a wage and being able to care for their families.<sup>16</sup>

Increasing the minimum wage would help AAPI women earn a living wage to support themselves and their families. For immigrant women who have had family members deported, bringing home a consistent paycheck allows them to visit their loved ones in detention centers, pay for health care services if they had been covered by their spouse's employer, or pay for legal fees to seek justice for their families. Without fair wages, AAPI women not only struggle financially but are robbed of their agency to do what is best for themselves and their families.

## Endnotes

- 1 National Women's Law Center (NWLC) calculations based on U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, Current Population Survey, 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplement [hereinafter CPS, 2020 ASEC], Table PINC-05, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-05.html> (last visited Sept. 15, 2020). Women working full-time, year-round had median annual earnings of \$47,299 in 2019. Men working full-time, year-round had median annual earnings of \$57,456 in 2019.
- 2 Center for American Progress (CAP) analysis of median earnings for full-time, year-round workers by AAPI subpopulation based on Steven Ruggles and others, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, U.S. Census Data for Social, Economic, and Health Research, 2015-2019 American Community Survey: 5-year estimates: Version 10.0" (Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center, 2021), available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. Figures are based on women's and men's median earnings for full-time, year-round workers. White, non-Hispanic men made \$58,000 annually, on average, between 2015 and 2019. Indian women represent those who self-selected "Asian Indian" as their race.
- 3 Jasmine Tucker, "Asian American and Pacific Islander Women Lose \$10,000 Annually to the Wage Gap." National Women's Law Center (March 2021). <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AAPI-EPD-2021-v1.pdf>.
- 4 Peggy Li, Recent Developments: Hitting the Ceiling: An Examination of Barriers to Success for Asian American Women, 29 Berkeley J. Gender L. & Just. (2014) available at <https://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1326&context=bglj>
- 5 Women's Bureau, "Latest Annual Data: Women of Working Age." United States Department of Labor (June 2016). <https://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/NEWSTATS/latest/demographics.htm#LF-SecRaceEthnicity>
- 6 Jasmine Tucker, "Asian American and Pacific Islander Women Lose \$10,000 Annually to the Wage Gap." The National Women's Law Center (March 2021). <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AAPI-EPD-2021-v1.pdf>
- 7 U.S. Census Bureau, "Table C24010: Sex Occupation for the Civilian Employed Population 16 years and Over," 2011-2015 American Community Survey Selected Population Tables.
- 8 U.S. Department of Labor. "The Economic Status of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the Wake of the Great Recession." Last modified August 28, 2014.
- 9 Raphael, Steven and Eugene Smolensky. "Immigration and poverty in the United States." Focus 26(2) (2009): 27-31. <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/pdfs/foc262e.pdf>
- 10 Zhou, Huiquan, and Sungkyu Lee. "Effects of U.S. Citizenship on Wages of Asian Immigrant Women." International Journal of Social Welfare 22, no. 2 (2013): 420-430. doi: 10.1111/ijsw.12010.
- 11 The National Employment Law Project, "Why the U.S. Needs a \$15 Minimum Wage" (January 2021). [https://www.nelp.org/publication/u-s-needs-15-minimum-wage/#\\_edn14](https://www.nelp.org/publication/u-s-needs-15-minimum-wage/#_edn14)
- 12 Brookings Institution, "Essential Workers Comprise About Half of All Workers in Low-Paid Occupations. They Deserve a \$15 Minimum Wage" (February 2021). <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2021/02/05/essential-workers-deserve-minimum-wage-increase/>
- 13 Marcus Smith, "Fact Sheet: The State of Asian American Women in the United States," Center for American Progress (November 7, 2013), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2013/11/07/79182/fact-sheet-the-state-of-asian-american-women-in-the-united-states/>
- 14 NAPAWF Calculations based on the U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey, Table C24010.

15 Bridget Ansel, "Reforms to 'just-in-time' scheduling practices now before Congress," Washington Center for Equitable Growth (July 16, 2015), <https://equitablegrowth.org/reforms-just-time-scheduling-practices-now-congress/>

16 Nancy Cauthen, "Scheduling Hourly Workers: How Last Minute, 'Just-in-Time' Scheduling Practices Are Bad for Workers, Families, and Business," Demos (2011), [https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Scheduling\\_Hourly\\_Workers\\_Demos.pdf](https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Scheduling_Hourly_Workers_Demos.pdf)