

Economic Status of Women of Color in the United States: Key Data Points

This summary highlights key data points on the Economic Status of Women of Color in the United States, compiled by IWPR and published in Excel format on femstats.net. The data are from the 2005 American Community Survey and the 2004-2006 Annual Social and Economic Supplements of the Current Population Survey. To view and/or download the data tables, click on the links provided for each section below.

Earnings and Earnings Ratio: Women of color are at a deep disadvantage in terms of median annual earnings for full-time, year-round work—they earn less than their male counterparts and far less than white men. African American, Native American, and Hispanic women earn the least and have the largest wage gaps with white men (see Table 1).

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- Women of every racial and ethnic group are outearned by their male counterparts, with the largest gaps between white women and men and Asian American women and men.

- Despite large gaps vis-à-vis their male counterparts, Asian American and white women earn the most among women (\$36,500 and \$34,200, respectively), outearning African American, Native American, and Hispanic women by a substantial amount (\$29,600, \$28,000, and \$24,500).

- Asian American women have the highest earnings ratio with white men (78.0 percent), followed by white women (73.1 percent). African American women earn less than two-thirds of what white men earn (63.2 percent), Native American women earn three-fifths of what white men earn (59.8 percent), and Hispanic women earn just over half of what white men earn (52.4 percent).

[View Table 1](#)

Labor Force Participation: Women of color participate in the labor force (either working or actively looking for work) at varying levels. All women are less likely to be in the labor force than their male counterparts, although this gap is smaller for African American women and men (see Table 1).

- African American women have the greatest work effort among women. Nearly two in three (63.1 percent) are in the labor force. Their participation in the labor force is four to six percentage points higher than every other group of women.

- White and Native American women have the next highest labor force participation rates, at 58.8 percent and 58.2 percent, respectively. Asian American and Hispanic women participate in the labor force at lower rates (57.5 percent and 56.6 percent).
- The gap in labor force participation rates for African American women and men is smaller than for women and men in any other racial or ethnic group (5.6 percentage point difference).
- The gaps are much larger between women and men in other racial and ethnic groups. For example, the gap between Hispanic women's and men's labor force participation rates is 22.7 percentage points. For Asian American women and men the gap is 15.8 percentage points, for white women and men the gap is 13.7 percentage points, and for Native American women and men the gap is 10.6 percentage points.

[View Table 1](#)

Managerial/Professional Occupations: Working women of color are far more likely to hold managerial and professional occupations than men of color (with the exception of Asian Americans) and by large margins. However, among women (also with the exception of Asian Americans), women of color are much less likely to hold managerial and professional jobs than white women or white and Asian American men (see Table 1).

- Asian American women lead the way in terms of employment in managerial and professional occupations, with 44.5 percent of employed Asian American women working in these jobs. White women follow closely, at 40.4 percent.
- Employed African American and Native American women are much less likely to be in such occupations, at 30.6 and 31.6 percent, respectively. However, Hispanic women are the least likely, with fewer than one in five in a managerial or professional occupation (22.6 percent).
- With the exception of Asian American women, all women are more likely to work in managerial and professional occupations than their male counterparts. Hispanic, African American, and Native American women are much more likely to do so, outpacing their male counterparts in this occupational category by between 8.6 to 10.6 percentage points.

[View Table 1](#)

Women and Poverty: Women of color are more likely to be poor than white women and their male counterparts, without exception (see Table 1).

- Among women of color, Asian American women are the least likely to be poor, with 88.3 percent living above poverty, compared with 90.3 percent of white women and 89.2 percent of Asian American men.
- Native American women and African American women are the most likely to be poor, with only three in four living above poverty (74.7 and 75.1 percent, respectively). Slightly more three quarters of Hispanic women lives above poverty (77.3 percent).
- The largest gaps in poverty status between women and men are seen among African Americans and Hispanics. African American women are less likely to live above poverty than African American men by 7.9 percentage points and Hispanic women are less likely to live above poverty than Hispanic men by 6.7 percentage points.

[View Table 1](#)

Health Insurance Coverage: Women of color are less likely to have health insurance coverage than white women and men. They are more likely than their male counterparts to have health insurance, though in most cases only by small margins (see Table 1).

- Asian American and African American women have the highest rates of health insurance coverage among women of color at 79.2 percent and 77.3 percent, respectively.
- Two in three Native American women have health insurance (66.8 percent), but just over three in five Hispanic women do (62.5 percent).
- The largest gap in women's and men's health insurance coverage is between Hispanic women and men, with health insurance coverage for Hispanic women 12 percentage points higher than for Hispanic men (62.5 percent versus 54.5 percent).

Educational Attainment: With the exception of Asian American women, women of color are considerably less likely to hold a bachelor's degree (BA) or higher than white women, trailing white women on this indicator by between 10.5 to 15.6 percentage points (see Table 1).

- Asian American women are the most likely of all women to have a BA or higher, and by substantial margins. Nearly 45 percent of Asian American women have this level of education compared with 28.3 percent of white women, 17.8 percent of African American women, 13.7 percent of Native American women, and 12.7 percent of Hispanic women.

- Despite their much lower likelihood of having a college degree or higher, African American, Native American, and Hispanic women do just slightly better than their male counterparts.

- In contrast, while Asian American and white women are more likely to have a college education than other women, their male counterparts are even more likely to have a college degree or higher.

[View Table 1](#)

Educational Distribution and Earnings by Education Level

(Full-time/year-round (FT/YR) Workers 25 and Older): With the exception of Asian American women, women of color have much lower educational attainment than white women. They also earn less than white women with the same education level. Women across the board earn less than similarly educated men; in fact, their earnings often equal those of men with substantially less education (see Table 2).

Educational Distribution

- Women of color are much more likely than white women to have less than a high school education or a high school education only. In starkest contrast, for example, nearly a quarter of Hispanic women have not completed high school (24.8 percent) compared with only 4.1 percent of white women.

- Among women, Hispanic women are the least represented at the highest levels of education (only 25.8 percent have an associate's degree (AA) or higher) and the most represented at the lowest levels (74.2 percent have some college or less), followed by African American women (34.7 percent hold an AA or higher and 65.3 percent have some college or less).

- Asian American women are the most represented (among women) at the highest levels of education (61.1 percent have an AA or higher) and the least represented at the lower levels of education (38.9 percent have some college or less).

- While full-time working women and men 25 years of age and older are about equally likely to hold a BA and a graduate degree (31.9 and 32.5 percent, respectively), African American and Hispanic women are more likely to hold these degrees than their male counterparts.

- While Asian American women are more likely than Asian American men to hold a BA, they are substantially less likely to hold a graduate degree than their male counterparts (18.9 percent compared with 27.2 percent, respectively).

- Native American women are slightly more likely than their male counterparts to hold a BA (13.2 percent versus 12.6 percent), but slightly less likely to hold a graduate degree (6.0 versus 6.5 percent).

- White women are slightly less likely than white men to have either a college or graduate degree.

[View Table 2](#)

Earnings by Education Level (see Table 3)

- Among all women working FT/YR, a BA is needed to earn as much as men with between some college and an AA. Women with an AA earn the same as men with a high school diploma only.
- Similarly, median annual earnings for FT/YR work for white women with a BA are equal to those for white men with some college and earnings for white women with an AA are between earnings for white men who have not completed high school and with a high school education only.
- African American and Hispanic women with a BA earn the same as African American and Hispanic men with an AA. African American women with an AA earn more than African American men with a high school degree only, but less than African American men with some college and Hispanic women with an AA earn more than Hispanic men with a high school education, but substantially less than men with just some college.
- Native American women with a BA earn a bit more than Native American men with some college and those with an AA earn the same as Native American men with a high school diploma.

[View Table 3](#)

Earnings Advantage by Education Level (see Table 4)

- Among women 25 and older working FT/YR, holding a BA brings a substantial earnings advantage over women with only a high school education. The advantage is greatest for Asian American and Hispanic women who earn 83.1 and 73.9 percent more than Asian American and Hispanic with a high school diploma. White, African American, Native American, and Hispanic women see a larger earnings advantage from this educational achievement than do their male counterparts.
- Men benefit more from graduate level education. Whereas women with a graduate degree earn 25.0 percent more than women with a BA, men with a graduate degree earn 33.4 percent more than men with a graduate degree.

- With the exception of African Americans, the earnings advantage of a graduate degree for women of every racial/ethnic group is smaller than the earnings advantage of a graduate degree for their male counterparts.

[View Table 4](#)

Earnings Ratio with White Men by Education Level (see Table 5)

- The earnings ratio between women and white men 25 and older working FT/YR is at its worst at the low and high ends of the educational spectrum. Women with less than a high school education earn only 59.5 percent of what white men at that level of education earn. Women with a graduate degree earn only 64.7 percent of what men at that educational level earn.
- Asian American and white women with an AA come the closest to wage parity with white men, earning 76.6 percent of what white men with an AA earn.
- Native American women come closest to wage parity with white men also at the level of an AA, at 68.1 percent.
- African American women never reach more than 70 percent of white men's earnings, regardless of education level. Native American women never earn more than 68 percent of what white men earn and Hispanic women never earn more than 67 percent of what white men earn, regardless of education level.

[View Table 5](#)

Earnings by Occupation (FT/YR workers): By and large women earn less than men employed in the same occupational category. Out of the 91 occupational categories* presented (made up of hundreds of sub-categories), women earn as much or more than men in only thirteen and typically by small margins. Men outearn women in most occupational categories and many in which females predominate. White and Asian American women and men tend to earn more than African American, Native American, and Hispanic women and men (see Table 6).

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- In the occupational category "Lawyers, judges, magistrates, and other judicial workers" Asian American women earn as much as their male counterparts (\$101,867). Hispanic women earn as much as Hispanic men in this category as well (\$81,493).
- White women outearn white men in the occupational category "Transportation, tourism, and lodging attendants." Asian American women outearn Asian American

men in the categories "Personal appearance workers" and "Food processing workers";

- African American women outearn their male counterparts in "Entertainers and performers, sports, and related workers"; "Media and communication equipment workers"; and "Transportation, tourism, and lodging attendants";
- Hispanic women are the most likely of women to outearn their male counterparts. They show a slight edge over Hispanic men in the occupational categories "Legal support workers"; "Entertainers and performers, sports, and related workers"; "Media and communication equipment workers"; "Therapists"; "Religious workers"; "Supervisors of construction and extraction workers"; "Construction laborers"; and "Electrical equipment mechanics and other installation, maintenance, and repair occupations";
- Women across racial and ethnic groups are outearned by men, and often by substantial margins, in predominantly female occupational categories like "Preschool, kindergarten, elementary, and middle school teachers"; "Secondary school teachers"; "Child care workers"; "Registered nurses"; and "Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides";
- In better paying occupational categories such as, "Top executives"; "Financial managers"; and "Other management occupations, except farmers and farm managers"; men outearn women regardless of racial or ethnic group. Asian American and white women outearn Hispanic and African American women. Native American women are outearned by all other women in the area of "Other management"; but sample sizes are too small to report their earnings in the areas of "Financial managers"; and "Top executives";

View Table 6

*For many occupational sub-categories there are too few women or too few men sampled to report data. Many sub-categories are combined to allow for large enough sample sizes to report the data and make comparisons between women and men and across racial and ethnic groups.

This data summary was prepared by Erica Williams at the Institute for Women's Policy Research, and funded by the Nathan Cummings Foundation.

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