



FIGHTING INVISIBILITY CLOSING THE WAGE GAP

An **Equal Pay** Agenda for
Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT NAPAWF

The National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF) is the only national, multi-issue Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women’s organization in the country. NAPAWF’s mission is to build a movement to advance social justice and human rights for AAPI women and girls. To accomplish this, NAPAWF has a vast network of chapters across the country with three policy areas of focus: economic justice, immigrant rights, and reproductive justice.

Following the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the organization was established by 157 Founding Sisters in September 1996. The Founding Sisters identified six issues areas to serve as the platform and foundation for NAPAWF’s work: civil rights; economic justice; educational access; ending violence against women; health; and immigrant and refugee rights. Since then, NAPAWF has grown to a staffed organization with offices in Brooklyn, NY, Washington, DC, Atlanta, GA, and Chicago, IL. The organization has a large member base organized into 15 chapters.

For information on NAPAWF, visit www.napawf.org or email info@napawf.org.

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Executive Summary

“Fighting Invisibility, Closing the Wage Gap: An Equal Pay Agenda for Asian American and Pacific Islander Women” is a comprehensive report on pay discrimination and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women. Despite the myth that AAPI communities have universally achieved economic and professional success in the United States, the lives of AAPI women, transgender, and gender non-conforming people* paint a drastically different picture.

“...myths about our communities have rendered AAPI women, transgender, and gender non-conforming people nearly invisible in wage gap analysis and policy.”

Gender and ethnicity have a significant impact on the job opportunities and incomes of different AAPI communities. These communities face economic hardship and gender discrimination in the workplace; however, myths about our

communities have rendered AAPI women, transgender, and gender non-conforming people nearly invisible in existing wage gap analysis and policy. Additionally, factors such as nationality and immigration status

are often disregarded in mainstream conversations about the wage gap. While it is important to examine the broad impact of race and gender on wage disparities, the AAPI community is not a monolithic group. AAPIs encompass over 50 different ethnic groups and over 100 different languages and dialects. As such, the fight for gender and racial justice for the AAPI community must include combatting the invisibility that exists both outside and within our communities.

This is the first of a series of papers examining gender discrimination and economic justice in the AAPI community. Using various federal data sources, the following report provides an analysis of the wage gap for AAPI women and is divided into three parts:

- Part I provides an overview of the wage gap and profile of the wage gap on AAPI women;
- Part II explores the factors that contribute to the wage gap and their impacts on AAPI women; and
- Part III concludes with policy priorities that address the wage gap for AAPI women.

NAPAWF believes that reproductive justice will be achieved when people have the self-determination and freedom to care for themselves, their families, and communities. Economic injustice is a direct threat to that vision. Moreover, AAPI communities live at the intersection of multiple identities; we need policies and political systems that uplift *all* members of our society. If we want all AAPI women, transgender, and gender non-conforming

* NAPAWF uses the term “woman” as inclusive of cisgender and transgender identities. We separate the term “transgender” in addition to “woman” to encompass the variety of gender identities that exist both within and beyond the gender binary, as well as to acknowledge the specific experiences of transgender communities. We use the term “gender non-conforming” to acknowledge those identities that do not align with mainstream gender categorization, but are impacted by gender norms and discrimination nonetheless.

people to experience sovereignty over their bodies and lives, we have to understand and advocate for those most impacted by gender and racial discrimination.

NAPAWF encourages policymakers, advocates, organizations, and activists to join our organization in creating transformative communities and policies that advance gender equity for all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

Methodology

The following report uses data from national population surveys, including the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS), and the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS). We also use a variety of third party data reporting and analysis.

Wage gap statistics may differ slightly due to differences in data source and measurement. Wage gap estimates in this report are based on the median annual salary of full-time workers, but other sources may base estimates on hourly wages, including part-time workers. Differences in data sources, such as between ACS and CPS surveys, may also slightly impact statistical estimation.

We strive to use the most recent data sets available. The ACS 1-year estimates are used to determine the most recent trends, and includes 12 months of collected data from a small sample size. While ACS 1-year estimates are less reliable than 3-year and 5-year data sets, it provides the most recent income estimates disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and race. When ACS 1-year estimates are not available for specific trends and/or ethnicities, the next most recent estimates are used. The CPS does

not include disaggregated AAPI data, and therefore is used less frequently throughout this report. For more information about the ACS and CPS, please visit [census.gov](https://www.census.gov).

Throughout this report, we provide information on Asian American (AA), Native Hawaiian (NH), and Pacific Islander (PI) communities. We attempted to be as inclusive in our data reporting as possible, given the limitations of the data sets available. While typically we do not focus on Native Hawaiian populations in our publications, the U.S. Census aggregates Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander data. Certain data sets also exclude NH and/or PI ethnicities, and therefore were excluded from parts of this report. Unless otherwise noted, disaggregated AANHPI data is based on specified ethnicity “alone or in any combination.”

Limitations

The following report focuses primarily on gender data collected through the U.S. Census. Due to the limitations of gender identity reporting in population surveys and other data collection tools, nuanced data on the experiences of transgender women and other gender identities are limited.

Without disaggregated data collection on gender identity, there is no way to be certain transgender and gender non-conforming people are represented in the sample(s) used throughout this report, and/or how transgender and gender non-conforming people have chosen to report their gender given the limited options available on the U.S. Census.

While we presume the U.S. Census data includes transwomen and gender non-conforming people, we are unable to report

on wage gap statistics for these communities specifically. NAPAWF advocates for more inclusion of gender diversity in national surveys. The Williams Institute has published best practice recommendations for gender diversity questions on population-based surveys. Visit <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu> for more information.

In this report, statistics on transgender and gender non-conforming communities is predominantly reported through on the National Nondiscrimination Survey (NTDS) and the U.S. Trans Survey (USTS). NTDS was done in collaboration between the National

Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Originally published in 2008, it includes a sample of 6,456 participants from all 50 states, including a subsample of 212 AAPI transgender and gender non-conforming respondents. In 2015, NCTE released another report, the USTS that included a sample of 27,715 respondents over the age of 18 from all 50 states.

For more information on the economic experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming people, please visit <http://www.transequality.org/>.

What is the Wage Gap?

In 2009, President Barack Obama signed into law the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, enacting the first piece of legislation of his presidential administration.¹ In his remarks, President Obama stated:

“...Making our economy work means making sure it works for everyone...Justice isn’t about some abstract legal theory, or footnote in a casebook—it’s about how our laws affect the daily realities of people’s lives: their ability to make a living and care for their families and achieve their goals.”²

LILLY LEDBETTER FAIR PAY ACT

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act was signed into law on January 29, 2009. The Act was named after Lilly Ledbetter, a female supervisor at the Goodyear plant in Alabama. After she experienced over a decade of harassment and discrimination, Ledbetter discovered she had been underpaid compared to other male managers.

While a jury ruled in her favor and awarded over \$3 million of compensation, the Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit overturned the ruling, stating that employees cannot challenge salaries that were set over 180 days prior to the complaint.

Two years later, the House and Senate both passed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and President Obama signed it into law as the first bill enacted in his presidency.

National Women’s Law Center (NWLCC). *Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act*. February 2009, <http://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/lilly-ledbetter-fair-pay-act-of-2009-01.07.2013.pdf>.

Eight years later, we are still fighting for policies to address the complex set of social, political, and systemic barriers that prevent economic equality. While the past eight years saw many gains towards equal pay on both state and federal levels, there has also been backlash leading to stalled progress. Additionally, with a new administration, 2017 brings with it a new batch of policies and rollbacks intended to undermine the pay equity gains of the past decade.

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act is one example of legislation aimed at reducing or addressing what is now known as the **wage gap**. Simply stated, the wage gap refers to earning differences between groups of people. It is generally used to highlight how race and gender discrimination exacerbate economic disparities experienced by marginalized communities. For example, women working full time in the U.S. earn on average about 80 cents for every dollar that a white man earns.³ That discrepancy becomes even more pronounced when other factors—like race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, age, and ability—are factored into the equation.

While defining the wage gap is simple, identifying the origins and causes is less so. Centuries of gender and racial discrimination in the workforce have created disparities in wealth and impacted employment and hiring policies. Additionally, mainstream culture continues to have a significant impact on income disparities—from employment bias to the very criteria of what we consider “work.” Tackling the wage gap requires a clear

understanding of the different ways that policy and culture continue to shape pay disparities.

Profile of Asian American & Pacific Islander Workers

There are over 10 million AAPI women living in the U.S.⁴ More than half a million AAPI women live below the poverty line and make up 4.4 percent of the low-wage workforce.⁵

The majority of Asian women are foreign born and their immigration status plays a role in the economic opportunities afforded to them. There are notable variances in income for different immigrant, refugee, and native populations. For instance, foreign-born AAPI immigrants have higher rates of poverty compared to U.S. born AAPI people.⁶ In general, newly arriving immigrants have high poverty rates that decline over time.⁷ Asian American immigrant women actively participate in the labor force at a rate of 46 percent, higher than the average for immigrant women overall (42.9 percent).⁸

AAPI women are employed across a range of positions—from doctors, chemists, and engineers to nail salon technicians, small business owners, and retail and service industry workers. They occupy various levels of employment—from entry-level positions to managerial and organizational leadership positions. They also contribute to the informal sector (i.e. economic activities not regulated or protected by the state) as sex workers, domestic caretakers, and farm laborers. In order for the labor of AAPI communities to be fully recognized, valued, and compensated for, the realities

of their economic experiences must be made visible and shared.

AAPI Women and the Wage Gap

“The invisibility further disenfranchises AAPI people from social and political advocacy aimed at closing the gender and racial wage gap.”

The wage gap is detrimental to the autonomy and advancement of all women. Following the 2016 election, 87 percent of AAPI people polled agreed that employers should pay women and men equal wages for equal work.⁹

Non-Hispanic white men are the largest demographic in the U.S. labor force and earn disproportionately higher wages than other gender and ethnic groups—therefore, they are often used as a benchmark to assess gender wage disparities between groups. The average woman makes roughly 80 cents for every dollar that a man earns.¹⁰ The wage gap widens for most women of color—African American women are paid 63 cents and Latina women 54 cents for every dollar a white man earns.¹¹

Asian American women as a whole earn more than women at 85 cents for every dollar a white man earns.¹² While many Asian American women experience economic prosperity, many others struggle for their work to be acknowledged and appropriately compensated. The success of high-earning Asian American women

contributes to the myth of the “model minority,” which minimizes the effects of structural racism and sexism and reinforces existing patterns of discrimination. The myth further marginalizes the experiences of AAPI women who do not fit the stereotype, stigmatizes their experiences of economic insecurity and continues to devalue their work in both the formal and informal sectors. Ultimately, their invisibility disenfranchises AAPI people from social and political advocacy aimed at closing the gender and racial wage gap.

While full time, year round AAPI women workers are some of the highest paid in the U.S., many AAPI women experience wage disparities worse than those of white women—and Bhutanese, Marshallese, and Burmese women experience the highest wage gaps compared to all other racial groups (Figure 1). Bhutanese women only earn 38 percent of what white men earn annually, while Marshallese and Burmese women earn 44 percent.¹³ Asian women overall experience a loss in wages greater than \$6,500 over the course of the year—and it takes approximately 14 months for them to earn what a white, non-Hispanic man earns in 12 months. Bhutanese women, on the other hand, experience a \$33,163 loss in wages annually—and what a white man earns in one year, a Bhutanese woman has to work more than 2.5 years to earn.¹⁴

The pay gap increases for Asian American women even more with age. The National Women’s Law Center estimated that Asian American women ages 45-64 years make just 68 cents to each dollar earned by a white man, while working Asian American women 65 years and old make a mere 53 cents.¹⁵

Over a lifetime, pay inequities accumulate to \$365,440 in lost wages for the average Asian American woman in the workforce.¹⁶ This inequity contributes to the higher poverty rates for Asian American women over the age of 65 (16 percent) compared to both white, non-Hispanic men (5.3 percent) and Asian American men (13.1 percent) of the same age.¹⁷ These disparities in earnings have a devastating impact on Asian American women who need fiscal resources to support their families and save for retirement. It is particularly devastating on AAPI women who are the sole wage earner in their families. For these women and their families, every dollar counts.

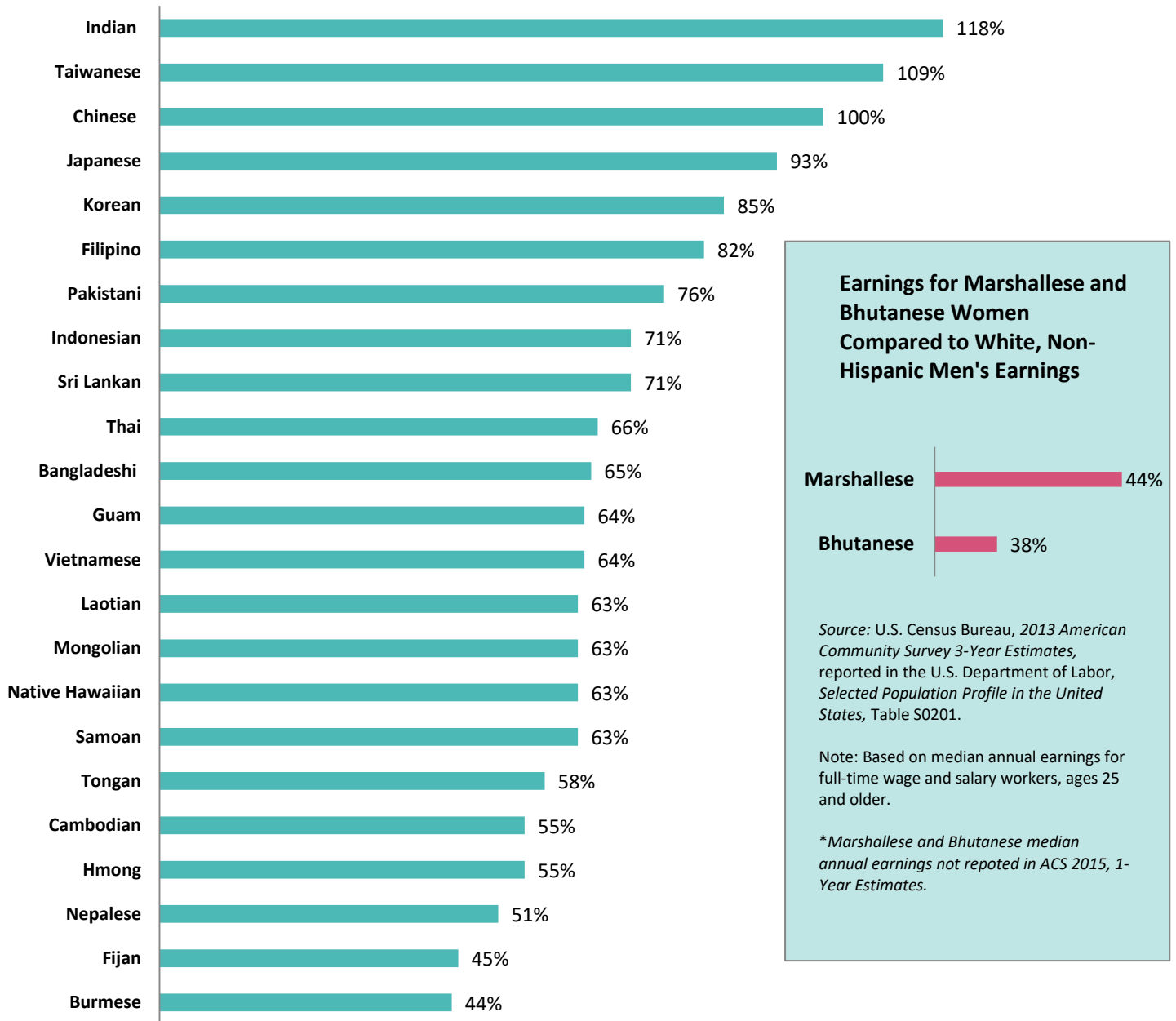
Additionally, a significant portion of the Asian American population live and work in states with a high cost of living, such as California, Hawaii, New Jersey, and New York (Figure 2).¹⁸ In fact, almost one-third of all AAPI people live in California, a state ranked second in terms of cost of living in 2016.¹⁹ The income of Asian American women as compared to other racial and ethnic groups does not take into consideration geographic concentrations. Higher wages could be due in part to the higher cost of living, and not a representation of wealth.

Within-Ethnicity Wage Disparities

While wages earned between AAPI men and women of the same ethnic background reveal different patterns, AAPI women overall experience one of the widest within-ethnicity wage gaps compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Asian women earn roughly 81 percent of what Asian men earn—lower than most other racial and ethnic groups.²⁰ This trend has been consistent over time.²¹

FIGURE 1

Earnings for AAPI Women Subgroups Compared to White, Non-Hispanic Men's Earnings



Earnings for Marshallese and Bhutanese Women Compared to White, Non-Hispanic Men's Earnings

Marshallese 44%

Bhutanese 38%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates, reported in the U.S. Department of Labor, Selected Population Profile in the United States, Table S0201.

Note: Based on median annual earnings for full-time wage and salary workers, ages 25 and older.

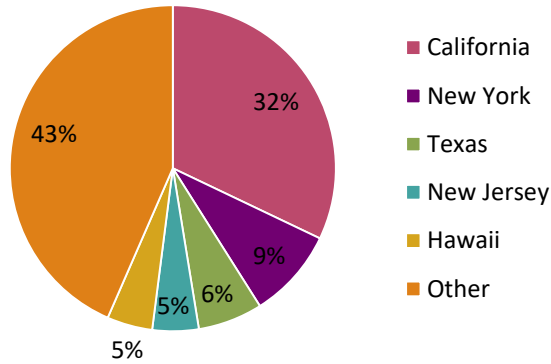
*Marshallese and Bhutanese median annual earnings not reported in ACS 2015, 1-Year Estimates.

Source: NAPAWF calculations based on 2015 American Community Survey 1-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. The typical white, non-Hispanic man earned \$55,000 in 2015.

FIGURE 2

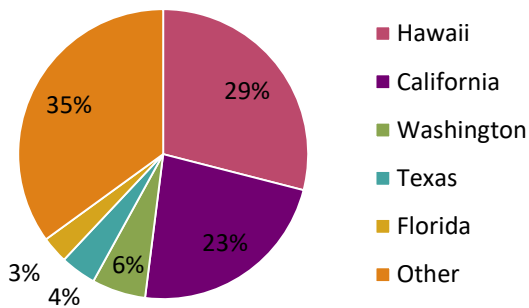
Profile of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Island Population in the United States

Top Five States with Highest Population of Asian Americans



Cities in the U.S. with the Largest Number of Asian Americans	
New York, NY	1,134,919
Los Angeles, CA	483,585
San Jose, CA	326,627
San Francisco, CA	288,529
San Diego, CA	241,293
Urban Honolulu CDP, HI	230,071

Top Five States with Highest Population of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders



Cities in the U.S. with the Largest Number of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders	
Honolulu, HI	233,637
Hawaii, HI	62,487
Los Angeles, CA	54,169
Maui, HI	42,264
San Diego, CA	30,626
Clark, NV	27,088

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census

Disaggregated data on the AAPI community, often not collected or reported on, provides a more nuanced and authentic portrayal of income disparities in the AAPI community. For some Asian subgroups, the wage gap increases when comparing the within-ethnicity wages of men and women, while others subgroups see a decrease (Figure 3). For example, the median salary for an Indian women is on average more than the median salary of white, non-Hispanic men—\$62,389 and \$55,166, respectively.²² However, Indian women only earn 73 percent of what Indian men earn on average, disproportionately less than what white women earn in comparison to white men.²³ Bangladeshi women, however, earn nearly the same as Bangladeshi men—\$36,888 and \$36,920 respectively.²⁴

While the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) EEO-1 reporting requirements implemented under former President Obama necessitate racial and gender data collection in relation to wages, the questionnaire does not disaggregate AAPI communities and categorizes “multiracial” as a standalone ethnicity.²⁵ The current requirements fail to collect the necessary information needed to fully understand wage disparities within the AAPI community, and render AAPI workers from multiracial families invisible. In order to create policies that serve AAPI communities, there must be research equity in how data on AAPIs are categorized, collected, and reported.

AAPI Transgender Workers and Income Disparities

The federal population surveys used for this report, primarily CPS and ACS, do not currently collect data based on gender

identity. Survey respondents can only identify within a gender binary (male/female). The lack of comprehensive and inclusive data collection on salary and income for transgender and gender non-conforming communities creates limitations in our ability to calculate comparable wage gap analysis for these communities—and renders wage gap analysis for transgender and gender non-conforming people by AAPI ethnicity nearly impossible.

While there is no comprehensive data for transgender people specifically on the wage gap, the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey reported that transgender and gender non-conforming communities experience high rates of poverty. Almost a third of transgender respondents reported living in poverty and 30 percent reported a household income less than \$10,000—higher than the overall U.S. population.²⁶

Asian American transgender respondents were more likely to report living in poverty (32 percent) compared to white respondents (24 percent), and 15 percent of Asian transgender and gender non-conforming respondents reported a household income of less than \$10,000—compared to only 9 percent of white transgender and gender non-conforming respondents and 12 percent of the overall sample.²⁷

Based on the salaries reported in these surveys, we project wage gap discrepancies for AAPI transgender and gender non-conforming people to be significant; however, more nuanced gender identity data collection would help to identify specific trends and allow for a more robust

comparison to other racial and gender identity groups.

Transgender Employment Discrimination

Transgender and gender non-conforming people experience high rates of employment discrimination—one national survey found that 15 percent of participants reported harassment and assault at work and 30 percent reporting being fired, denied a promotion, or not hired due to their gender identity and/or expression.²⁸ Another survey found that while overall, transgender respondents reported high rates of hiring and promotion discrimination (44 percent and 23 percent respectively) — Native, Black, Latinx*, and multiracial transgender respondents reported higher rates of discrimination than white transgender respondents did.²⁹

Even once transgender and gender non-conforming people enter the workforce, they may often experience hostile work environments that can force them out of certain occupations or fields. For example, AAPI transgender and gender non-conforming communities face high rates of violence and harassment at work. One survey revealed 49 percent of AAPI transgender and gender non-conforming people had experienced harassment at work, 8 percent were physically assaulted, and 10 percent sexually assaulted.³⁰ Harassment and assault can force workers to take time off and even leave their jobs, contributing to wage loss.³¹

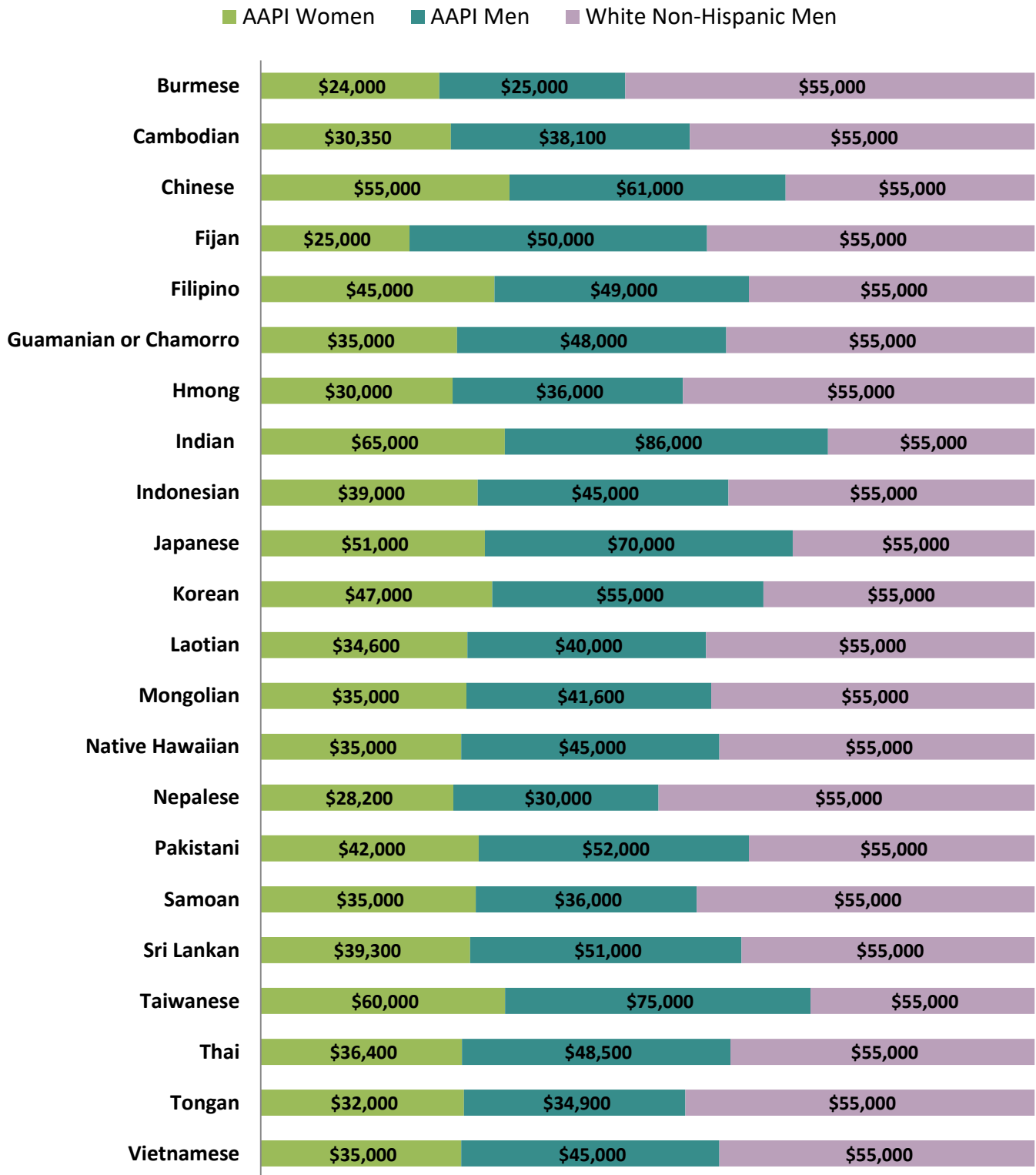
Currently, there are no federal laws that specifically protect transgender workers from employment discrimination—despite

multiple attempts at introduction to Congress. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) currently interprets provisions in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 against sex discrimination as encompassing both sexual identity and gender identity.³² However, formal federal protections could ensure uniformity of protections for all transgender and gender non-conforming workers.

* *Latinx* is used as a gender neutral alternative of Latino/a.

FIGURE 3

Earnings for AAPI Women, AAPI Men, and White, Non-Hispanic Men



Source: NAPA WF calculations based on 2015 American Community Survey 1-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. The typical white, non-Hispanic man earned \$55,000 in 2015.

Factors Influencing the Wage Gap

There is no single explanation for the wage gap. Both social and political factors shape occupational and income trends. Among other factors, (a) disparities in educational opportunities; (b) occupational segregation; (c) workplace discrimination; and (d) the devaluation of “invisible labor” contribute to gender and racial wage disparities.

Disparities in Educational Opportunities

Higher educational attainment is associated with increased wages and lifetime earnings.³³ However, having a college education does not eliminate the wage gap. On average, women make less at every educational level compared to men.³⁴ In fact, men and women with graduate degrees experience the widest income gap compared to those with lower levels of educational attainment.³⁵ People of color also experience barriers to accessing and engaging in higher education, as well as a lower income post-graduation.³⁶

Income differences for college-educated men and women can be attributed in part to college majors. Men are more likely to major in higher paying fields, such as engineering and computer science.³⁷ Women, on the other hand, are more likely to major in social sciences and “helping fields”—careers that are undervalued in the United States.³⁸ Yet women who major in male-dominated academic fields still report discrimination and stereotyping.³⁹

These factors have long-term consequences. For example, due to the discrepancy in wages post-college, it takes longer for women and people of color to

complete their student loan repayments and pay off debt.^{40,41} Considering how women, particularly women of color, have historically been excluded from educational and workplace opportunities, generational accumulation of debt and lack of savings contribute to the further disenfranchisement of women of color. Pay equity would help AAPI women overcome this heavier burden of debt.

AAPI Women and Gendered Educational Attainment

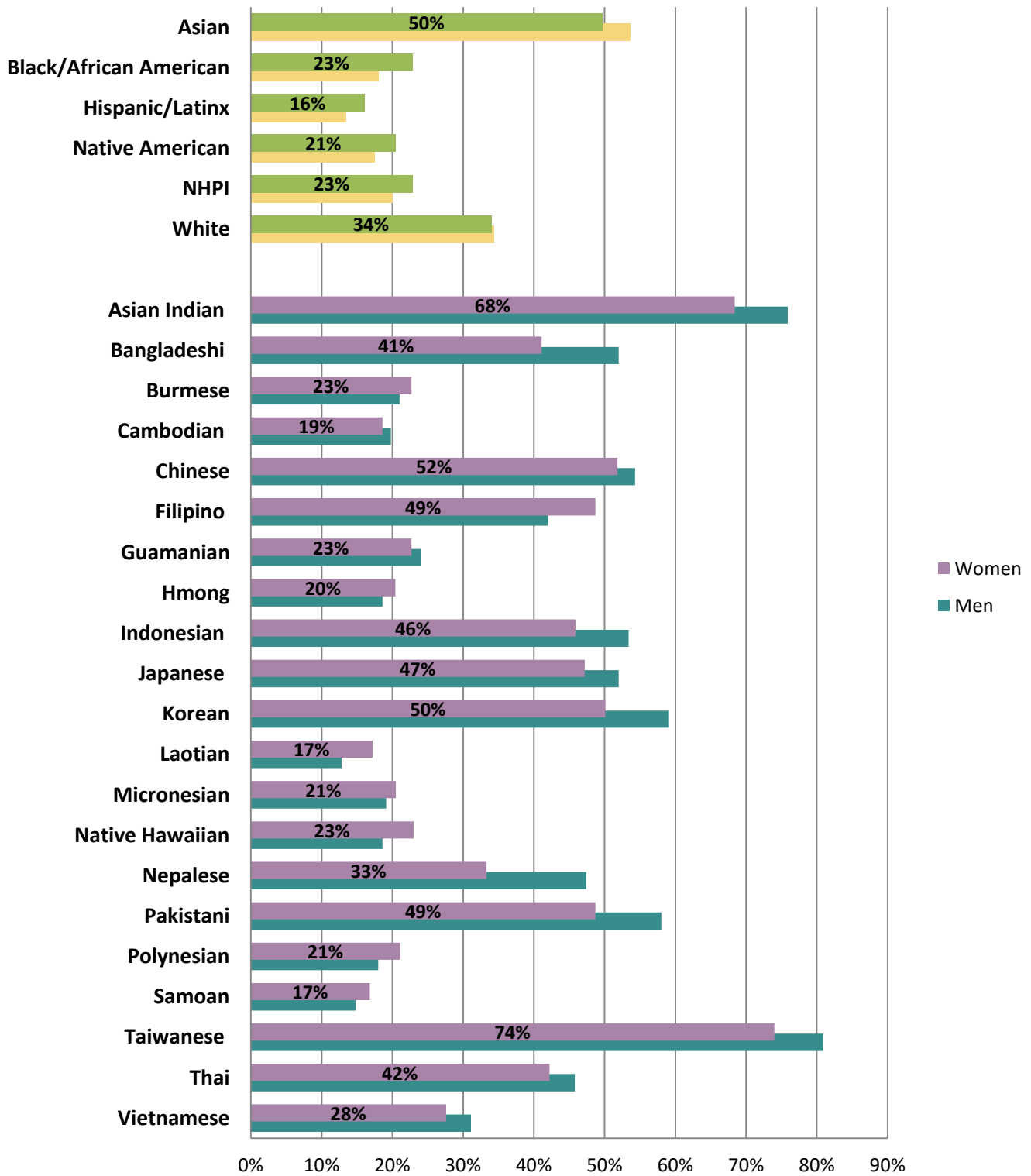
“Ensuring educational success means advocating against transphobia and gender discrimination in the U.S. education system.”

The model minority myth frames Asian Americans as well educated—and for many, this is a reality. In the aggregate, Asian Americans are more likely than other racial and ethnic groups to have at least a four-year college degree.⁴² Yet this overall trend

of Asian American college attainment masks the differences in educational achievement across ethnic and gender groups.

AAPI women across various ethnic groups are less likely than AAPI men to have a 4-year college degree (Figure 4), and there is wide variance among AAPI ethnic groups in educational attainment.⁴³ For example, Indian women age 25 years and older have high rates of college degree attainment and

FIGURE 4
AAPI 4-Year College Degree Attainment



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, reported in the U.S. Department of Labor, Selected Population Profile in the United States, Table S0201.

post-graduate study, but one-fifth of Indian adults have never attended college.⁴⁴

Undocumented AAPI women immigrants also face additional barriers to educational attainment. Undocumented Asian women are less likely to get a 4-year college degree compared to Asian immigrant men—including naturalized citizens and undocumented immigrants.⁴⁵ Additionally, while data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) reveals that earnings for both foreign-born and native-born workers increase with higher educational achievement, more in-depth research has shown that educational achievement does not significantly increase the wages of Asian immigrant women.^{46,47}

Occupational Segregation

While women are employed in a diverse range of occupations, data reveal a concentration of women in certain fields, especially in lower wage occupations. Women currently make up two-thirds of the low-wage workforce.⁴⁸ This gendered concentration is often referred to as **occupational segregation**.

It is a common myth that a woman's occupational choices result in gender pay disparities. In reality, multiple factors outside of individual choice influence occupational segregation. Historically, women were denied access to certain career paths while women were explicitly recruited for others. While social expansion of gender roles as well as workplace non-discrimination policies have resulted in increased **occupational integration**, occupational segregation continues to shape wage setting and pay equity.

Wage setting refers to how society decides the worth of an occupation. Occupations that predominantly employ women are sometimes valued less than male-dominated professions. When women move into certain career fields, the value and compensation rate of those fields decreases, while the opposite trend occurs when men enter into certain occupations.⁴⁹ For example, women once dominated the computer programming sector, but when it shifted to be predominately men, the wages increased.⁵⁰ Women and men both pay penalties for working in predominately female occupations, but in general, men across skill-level and occupation earn higher median hourly wages than women in the same occupation.⁵¹

AAPI Women and Occupational Gender Segregation

Occupational segregation accounts for some but not all of the variance in wages between men and women. Overall, a greater percentage of women work in sales and office jobs compared to men in the same ethnic group, and AAPI men tend to dominate construction, production, and transportation occupations.⁵²

Aggregated AAPI data is effective in understanding broad trends; however it is necessary to complement broad analyses with disaggregated data highlighting the ways in which occupational segregation manifests similarly and differently within AAPI subgroups. For example, AAPI men overall are more likely to work in production, transportation, and material moving occupations, while Laotian, Cambodian, Hmong, and Vietnamese women are much more likely than women of other Asian identities to work in these fields (Figure 5).⁵³ These careers can range

FIGURE 5
Disaggregated Occupational Segregation



	MANAGEMENT BUSINESS SCIENCE & ARTS OCCUPATIONS		SERVICE OCCUPATIONS		SALES & OFFICE OCCUPATIONS		FARMING FISHING & FORESTRY		NATURAL RESOURCES CONSTRUCTION & MAINTENANCE		PRODUCTION TRANSPORTATION & MATERIAL MOVING	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Asian Indian	61%	52%	6%	11%	18%	29%	0.2%	0.2%	4%	0.4%	11%	8%
Bangladeshi	31%	29%	19%	16%	26%	43%	0.1%	0%	5%	0.4%	19%	12%
Cambodian	20%	16%	15%	18%	18%	31%	1%	0.3%	10%	1%	38%	34%
Chinese	53%	48%	15%	13%	16%	28%	0.1%	0.1%	5%	0.4%	10%	11%
Fijian	18%	19%	24%	35%	21%	37%	0.1%	0.3%	15%	0.3%	22%	9%
Filipino	33%	40%	17%	18%	23%	33%	1%	0.4%	10%	1%	16%	8%
Guamanian	24%	29%	18%	19%	19%	43%	1%	0.4%	16%	1%	22%	8%
Hmong	18%	16%	15%	18%	15%	29%	1%	0.3%	8%	1%	45%	37%
Indonesian	44%	40%	15%	20%	19%	34%	0.2%	0.0%	8%	0.4%	14%	6%
Japanese	50%	45%	12%	14%	19%	37%	1%	0.2%	9%	1%	9%	4%
Korean	43%	34%	10%	20%	26%	34%	0.2%	0.2%	8%	1%	13%	11%
Laotian	13%	14%	14%	16%	14%	26%	1%	1%	10%	1%	48%	42%
Malaysian	49%	46%	19%	18%	16%	30%	1%	0.2%	6%	0.0%	9%	6%
Melanesian	18%	19%	24%	35%	21%	36%	0.3%	0.3%	14%	0.2%	22%	9%
Micronesian	22%	27%	20%	21%	18%	43%	2%	1%	15%	1%	23%	8%
Native Hawaiian	22%	29%	21%	21%	17%	43%	2%	0.4%	19%	1%	19%	6%
Pakistani	41%	39%	7%	13%	28%	40%	0.1%	0.1%	5%	0%	18%	8%
Polynesian	21%	27%	21%	22%	18%	43%	1%	0.3%	19%	1%	21%	7%
Samoaan	18%	21%	18%	21%	21%	46%	1%	0.2%	16%	1%	26%	11%
Sri Lankan	62%	49%	8%	17%	20%	31%	0.0%	0.2%	4%	0.2%	6%	3%
Thai	36%	31%	20%	28%	20%	27%	0.2%	0.2%	9%	1%	15%	14%
Tongan	12%	20%	24%	28%	15%	40%	0.3%	0.2%	24%	1%	26%	12%
Vietnamese	29%	25%	15%	24%	15%	24%	1%	0.2%	10%	1%	30%	26%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 American Community Survey, reported in the U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupation by Sex in the United States*, Table QTP27.
Note: Data collected from full-time workers age 16 or older.

from flight attendants and taxi drivers to food processing workers and quality control inspectors. Thai, Mongolian, Malaysian, Bangladeshi, Burmese and Indonesian are more likely than the average woman worker to be employed in the restaurant industry.⁵⁴ Vietnamese, Tongan, Fijian and Mongolian women are overrepresented in personal care and service occupations, which include manicurists, hairstylists, childcare workers and personal care aides.⁵⁵ Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Nepalese, Korean and Mongolian women occupy retail jobs at higher rates than other racial and ethnic groups.⁵⁶

Additionally, foreign-born women are more likely to work in the service industry, as well as production, transportation, and material moving occupations compared to native-born workers.⁵⁷ As we draft policies that support equal pay and opportunity for Asian women, we must first understand why Asian women dominate certain sectors and how that impacts equity and opportunity in that field.

Workplace Discrimination and Harassment

Even accounting for differences in race, region, unionization, education, work experience, occupational choice, and other factors, there is still a significant portion—an estimated 38 percent—of the wage gap that cannot be explained.⁵⁸ **Workplace discrimination** is believed to be one of the “unexplained” causes of the wage gap. This percentage is likely greater considering the role of discrimination in shaping many of the aforementioned factors.

Despite non-discrimination employment laws, studies show continued racial and gender discrimination in hiring practices.

One study found that the “whitening” of applications—the practice of obscuring or omitting information that would reveal one’s racial identities—resulted in an increase in application response by employers.⁵⁹ Multiple research studies have exposed potential gender and racial bias—favoring white male candidates over people of color and women—in resume evaluation.^{60,61,62}

Immigrant communities also experience employment discrimination, but experiences vary depending on intersecting factors including education, language proficiency, citizenship status, and country of origin.⁶³ For example, studies have shown that English-speaking workers receive higher wages compared to those with lower English language proficiency, and women immigrants who speak intermediate English experienced the greatest earning penalties.⁶⁴

AAPI Women and Workplace Discrimination

Workplace discrimination continues to create hostile employment conditions for women of color. Employment discrimination begins during the application process. In one study, 40 percent of Asian respondents reported that they “whitened” their job applications—including changing their name, omitting experiences that could indicate their ethnic identity, and adding activities that are more mainstream and coded as “white.”⁶⁵ Researchers found that participants who whitened their resumes were more likely to get a call back from a potential employer.⁶⁶

Asian American women also experience discrimination once they enter the workforce. For example, white women

working in technology in Silicon Valley are represented in professional and executive positions at similar percentages, while Asian women occupy almost 8 percent of professional positions and only 3.1 percent of executive level positions.⁶⁷ AAPI women are also disproportionately represented in low-wage caregiving work, and AAPI domestic workers earn lower median hourly wages than other racial/ethnic groups including white and Black domestic workers.⁶⁸ The majority of domestic workers in the United States are women of color and 6 percent are Asian.⁶⁹ Almost half are foreign born, and 35 percent are non-citizens.⁷⁰

Immigration and citizenship status also have an impact on the wages and opportunities afforded to AAPI women in domestic care work and other low-wage positions.⁷¹ The types of occupations available to AAPI women and immigrants, as well as the values associated with those roles, contribute to income inequality.

Devaluation of “Invisible Labor”

“Invisible labor” describes the often unpaid and unrecognized work of parenting, caregiving, and community building. A common misconception is that individual choices about pregnancy and parenting account for gender wage disparities. Yet employers and policymakers have done little to create workplaces that support workers who become pregnant or have caretaking responsibilities. While the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 is intended to protect pregnant workers from workplace discrimination, women continue to report being laid off after becoming pregnant and denied necessary workplace accommodations to balance pregnancy with

work.⁷² Poor family leave policies also negatively impact the career trajectories and pay outcomes of women. In what Ann Crittenden refers to as the **mommy tax**, employed mothers tend to earn less than women who do not have children and working fathers.^{73, 74}

Women also shoulder much of the caregiving responsibilities for families and children. Almost 70 percent of mothers with children are currently in the workforce.⁷⁵ An AARP study estimated that 60 percent of caregivers to adult relatives or friends, as well as children with disabilities, are women.⁷⁶ Over time, the invisibility and devaluation of caregiving contributes to less wages, fewer promotions, and even job loss. Without appropriate workplace protections—not to mention a cultural change resulting in the distribution of and compensation for caregiving responsibilities—the wage gap will continue to persist.

AAPI Women and Parenting and Caregiving Responsibilities

“Without appropriate workplace protections, these sudden shifts in caretaking responsibilities can have long-term impacts on the career trajectories and income potential of Asian immigrant women.”

Asian Americans are more likely than white individuals to live in multigenerational households.⁷⁷ Many AAPIs also have different expectations for family caregiving as compared to white communities. For example, AAPIs are more likely to take on the

responsibility of taking care of older, adult family members in the home.⁷⁸ Making the work of AAPI communities visible, acknowledging its value in our society, and advocating for fair compensation for unpaid labor would be steps in the right direction for advocating for worker's rights and pay equity.

Immigration and deportation policies also highlight an important intersection between economic and immigrant rights. Asian immigrants predominantly come to the United States seeking family reunification, and Asian American citizens sponsor one-third of all family-based visas.⁷⁹ Many of these families live in fear of separation, with over 400,000 Asian American children living with at least one undocumented parent in the United States.⁸⁰ In 2013, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deported over 70,000 parents to U.S.-born children, and it is estimated that over 90 percent of deportees are men.^{81,82}

Children with a deportable parent sometimes leave with the parent, but the Urban Institute found that most families surveyed chose to stay in the U.S following parental deportation. According to the study, when fathers were deported, the family was usually experienced increased financial hardship.⁸³ In many of these families, the women were called upon to take over family caregiving responsibilities.⁸⁴ If they are also detained, other relatives, such as siblings or aunts, were often called to care for the children left behind.⁸⁵ Without appropriate protections, these sudden shifts in caretaking responsibilities can have long-term impacts on the career trajectories and

income potential of Asian immigrant women.

Short- and Long-term Implications of Wage Gap

The immediate consequences of the pay gap are obvious—women earn less money for the same work that white, non-Hispanic men do. Even based on conservative estimates of the wage gap, the loss of income for Asian American women adds up \$133 per day and over \$6,000 per year.⁸⁶ For some workers, like Burmese and Bhutanese women, the loss of wages due to the pay gap each year adds up to more than their annual income. Even when disparities are not as drastic, such as the \$4,000 that Japanese women lose each year, the disparity adds up to \$160,000 over the course of a 40-year career.⁸⁷

While this loss of income contributes to the overall economic insecurity of women, the implications extend past immediate concerns of income and wealth. For example, retirement savings are often generated as a percentage of income, meaning that the wage gap translates into less retirement savings and less in Social Security.⁸⁸ One study found that the retirement income for women was over 55 percent less than men in the same age group.⁸⁹ This contributes to the high rates of poverty for women of color. The poverty rate for white, non-Hispanic men age 65 and older is 5.3 percent compared to 13.1 percent for Asian American men and 16 percent for Asian American women.⁹⁰ Women also tend to live longer than men in the United States, meaning women must make their already limited income stretch even further.⁹¹

In order to make up for the loss in wages, women may be called upon to work longer hours, multiple jobs, and past retirement age.⁹² For those taking care of children, family members, and loved ones, the extra burden posed by the wage gap creates additional barriers for those workers to provide emotional and economic support to their families and communities.

Economic insecurity impacts the safety and wellbeing of already vulnerable workers—including low-wage and immigrant workers—who are prone to workplace violations, employer retaliation, and compensation violations.⁹³ Because the wage gap disproportionately impacts the overall economic security of low-income women of color and other marginalized communities, advocating for better workplace policies is a key aspect of addressing the wage gap. Such policies include increasing the minimum wage, overtime hours, access to workplace compensation, and paid leave.⁹⁴

Conclusion

Understanding the underlying systemic issues that influence the gender and racial pay gap for AAPI communities is the critical first, but not last, step in closing the wage gap for AAPI women. Income disparities have devastating short- and long-term consequences for AAPI communities. Economic security allows some AAPI

women to apply for citizenship, take leave to care for their sick child or family member, obtain an abortion, or leave an abusive relationship. On the other hand, economic insecurity can prevent other AAPI women from affording basic medical care, housing, and nourishment for herself and her family members. Differences in pay can have an impact on how often AAPI women seek prenatal care, formula, and diapers for a new child. It can also determine if and when an AAPI woman can retire.

This report was written in a time of political and civil upheaval. Reproductive, immigration, LGBTQ, and labor rights are all under threat. Racial and religious profiling are blatantly being institutionalized and a surge of identity-based hate crimes have been reported across the country. While the prospects for instituting new protections during the current federal landscape looks bleak, many states continue to advance policies that promote the freedom and autonomy of women, LGBTQ communities, Muslims, and people of color. Importantly, cross-movement building and mass political engagement are strategies that have forged key alliances and successful acts of resistance. It is as important as ever that we fight for economic policies that move our communities forward and together. The wage gap is a piece of that fight, but it occurs within a broader movement for human rights and transformative equality.

Closing the Gap: A Call to Action

“Our ultimate objective in learning about anything is to try to create and develop a more just society.”

-Yuri Kochiyama, Activist

Pay inequity is the result of centuries of gender and racial oppression and disenfranchisement. The solutions, therefore, must be complex, creative, and multifaceted. When advocating for fair wages, a gender analysis alone is not sufficient. For many AAPI communities, wage disparities differ by ethnicity, as well as other aspects of their identity such as age, immigration status, and gender identity. Policies aimed at reducing the wage gap must work holistically to address the barriers that prevent all women from achieving equal and fair compensation for their work. In order for all our communities to achieve economic security, the diversity of our community must be reclaimed, shared, and made visible. NAPAWF has a vision for every member of the AAPI community to live free of gender and racial oppression. Fighting for equal pay is one step in that direction.

NAPAWF seeks to create strong partnerships across movements with policymakers, allied organizations, advocates, activists, and the AAPI community. The following policy recommendations are meant to be a launching point for collaborative and strategic action as we seek transformative systems that serve *all*, not just some, members of the AAPI community. While the following recommendations highlight specific policies related to economic rights, we recognize that intersecting issues like racial justice, gender equity, LGBTQ rights, environmental rights, and other critical policies impact and influence pay equity and economic security.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



1. Support federal legislation aimed directly at reducing pay inequity and fighting against employer retaliation.

We call for a **comprehensive** federal policy that would amend the Equal Pay Act of 1963, require the EEOC to collect data on compensation, hiring, termination and promotion based on gender and ethnicity, and protect against employee retaliation for pay discrimination reporting. It is also important for any piece of equal pay legislation to require employers who are found to have discriminated against workers to fairly compensate them for their work.

We also call for federal legislation that would make it unlawful to screen or seek prospective employees based on previous wages or salary histories. Such legislation would ensure that previous wage discrimination would not be replicated and exacerbated in future job searches and would mitigate employer bias in setting wages.



2. Demand that federal agencies collect and report disaggregated data on AAPI subgroups as well as transgender and gender-nonconforming communities.

Since AAPI people do not live single issue lives, our communities need data that show how complex intersections of identity impact economic opportunities. As such, all government agencies, including the Department of Education, Department of Labor, and the EEOC, must identify and use current best practices to implement data disaggregation for the broadest number of AAPI subgroups, as well as include transgender and gender non-conforming identities in federal surveys.



3. Support federal legislation aimed at supporting caregivers.

AAPI workers need policies that help them take care of their health, as well as the health of their families and loved ones. Without supportive workplace policies, those with caretaking responsibilities will continue to fall behind other workers. Encourage federal lawmakers to pass legislation that would make discrimination against pregnant workers unlawful and require employers to offer and carry through with reasonable accommodations for pregnant workers.

Additionally, we call for legislation that would allow workers to earn paid sick leave for illness, family caregiving, medical appointments, and/or assistance following intimate partner violence, assault, or stalking. We demand that workplace leave policies pass with the most inclusive family definitions to reflect the diversity of AAPI families and communities.



4. Support safe, healthy, and fair work environments.

Discrimination, harassment, and assault create hostile work environments for women, transgender, and gender non-conforming individuals. These workers may be forced to take time off work or leave their job altogether, contributing to a loss of wages and gaps in employment. Demand that the Department of Labor and EEOC improve its oversight and enforcement practices to prevent the further harassment, assault, discrimination, and workplace isolation that AAPI women, transgender, and gender non-conforming people experience. This includes increasing employer and employee trainings, collecting data, protecting workers who report, and holding employers accountable.

We also call on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to acknowledge discrimination and violence as a workplace health and safety issue, and to allocate funds to for intervention and prevention strategies. We demand that OSHA adopt standards to protect women and transgender workers, including allocating funds to research reproductive hazards, as well as track injuries and illnesses among women and gender non-conforming people.



5. Encourage legislation to support and protect immigrant workers.

Immigration status uniquely impacts workplace opportunities and wages, affecting the 500,000 undocumented AAPI immigrant women in the U.S. We call for a **broad path to citizenship** and policies that protect the labor rights of immigrant workers experiencing wage theft. We demand that Congress strengthen Title VII to ensure that all immigrant workers, including those who work for small business that do not meet the current standards of 15 or more employees, be protected under Title VII non-discrimination rights.

We also ask advocates and elected officials to protect against attacks to immigrant workers, including recent attempts to undermine H1-B visa recipients in the U.S., and **to oppose legislation** that targets H1-B visa requirements. Threats to H1-B visas would impact the economic security and wages for thousands of Asian American immigrants.



6. Support state legislation aimed at eliminating the gender wage gap and at increasing the minimum wage.

We call on advocates to support state efforts at closing the racial and gender pay gap—including anti-discrimination, non-retaliation, pay transparency, and no salary history laws. Other state-based legislation includes data collection and reporting laws, as well as implementation of advisory committees on pay equity. There are four states that have no equal pay or comparable worth statutes: Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, and Utah. While we wait for federal protections, we encourage advocates and lawmakers to move forward with state legislation.

We also call for a federal and state movement on raising the minimum wage. Certain AAPI women are concentrated in low-wage jobs, such as domestic and restaurant work. Supporting \$15 minimum wage laws, or laws that move towards a \$15 minimum wage, will improve the economic security of low-income women and transgender people.

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