



FACT SHEET

Asian American and Pacific Islander Women in the U.S. Economy

Looking Beneath the Aggregate Numbers

By Kaitlin Holmes and Shilpa Phadke June 9, 2016

In 2014, Asian American women were paid just 84 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.¹ At first glance, this statistic might suggest that Asian American women are doing better than all other women—women overall were paid 79 cents for every dollar earned by men in 2014. But there is more to the story, particularly when one looks behind the numbers and explores differences within the Asian American and Pacific Islander, or AAPI, community.

Although data that combine all ethnicities of AAPI women can make it seem as if they are generally better off economically than other groups, it is important to understand what the overall numbers obscure. Aggregate numbers tend to hide not only the incredibly diverse ethnic backgrounds within the AAPI community—which includes more than 50 ethnic groups and 100 languages²—but also the vast economic, educational, and occupational differences among AAPI women and the challenges facing key subpopulations of AAPI women and families. As a result, these aggregate numbers can effectively erase from the public discourse the facts that many Asian American women are often paid significantly less than their white male counterparts and that wage gap actually widens when controlling for educational differences.

This fact sheet provides a snapshot of the economic diversity within the AAPI community.³

The wage gap

- Asian American women were paid, on average, just 84 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men in 2014.⁴
- Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women made just 62 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.⁵

- The wage gap for Asian American women varies widely among key subpopulations:⁶
 - In 2014, Vietnamese women were paid, on average, just 62 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.
 - Indian American women made \$1.17 for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. Notably, this does not account for the fact that 72.5 percent of Indian Americans have graduated from college and 40 percent hold advanced degrees, compared with only 33.6 percent and 12.8 percent of whites, respectively.⁷
 - Some Asian American women—including Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, and Cambodian women—made just 66 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.
 - Japanese American women made 94 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.
 - Chinese American women had incomes equivalent to those of white, non-Hispanic men.
- When factoring in educational levels, Asian American women lose ground. It is important to note that educational levels vary within the AAPI community. Some subpopulations, such as Indian Americans, are significantly more likely than other Asian American ethnic groups to hold college or advanced degrees. When considering only workers who hold at least a bachelor’s degree, the wage gap widens: Asian American women made 80 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. This suggests that higher education pays off more for white men than Asian American women.⁸
- Additionally, the wage gap widens as Asian American women get older:⁹
 - Among the 45 to 64 age group, Asian American women workers made just 68 cents for every white, non-Hispanic man’s dollar.
 - Asian American women workers ages 65 and older made just 53 cents on every white, non-Hispanic man’s dollar.

Labor force participation

AAPI women are vital to the economy, participating in the labor force at rates near or above the average for U.S. women overall. Average U.S. labor force participation rates for women ages 16 and older in 2013:¹⁰

- Overall: 57.4 percent
- Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander: 67 percent
- Asian American: 57.4 percent

- Key subpopulations:
 - Filipino: 66 percent
 - Vietnamese: 60 percent
 - Chinese: 59 percent
 - Indian: 53 percent
 - Korean: 53 percent
 - Japanese: 50 percent

Working mothers

In 2014, 64.1 percent of Asian American women with children under age 18 were in the labor force compared with 70.8 percent of all women with children under age 18.¹¹

Occupations

- In 2015, 50.2 percent of Asian American working women were employed in management, professional, and related occupations compared with:¹²
 - 23.2 percent in sales and office occupations
 - 20 percent in service occupations
 - 6.2 percent in production, transportation, and material moving occupations
- However, occupational data varies widely among key subpopulations of AAPI men and women workers. From 2008 to 2012:¹³
 - 66 percent of working Indian Americans were employed in management, professional, and related occupations.
 - At least 50 percent of Sri Lankan, Chinese, Japanese, and Malaysian Americans were employed in management, professional, and related occupations.
 - Thai (29 percent), Vietnamese (26 percent), and other Micronesian (29 percent) Americans were more likely to work in service occupations than other Asian American groups.
 - Cambodian (29 percent), Hmong (30 percent), Laotian (34 percent), Samoan (21 percent), and other Micronesian (24 percent) Americans were more likely to work in production, transportation, and material moving occupations than other Asian American groups.

Paid sick days

- Overall, 67 percent of Asian, non-Hispanic women had access to paid sick days in 2015.¹⁴
- However, access to paid sick days varies by occupation and industry. For example, 55 percent of employees in the service occupations do not have access compared with 16 percent of workers in management, professional, and related occupations.¹⁵

Kaitlin Holmes is the Special Assistant and Shilpa Phadke is the Senior Director for the Women's Initiative at the Center for American Progress.

Endnotes

- 1 National Women's Law Center, "Equal Pay for Asian American Women" (2016), available at http://nwl.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/NEW_Equal-Pay-for-Asian-American-Women.pdf.
- 2 Nadia Shilpi Islam and others, "Methodological Issues in the Collection, Analysis, and Reporting of Granular Data in Asian American Populations: Historical Challenges and Potential Solutions," *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* vol. 21 (4) (2010), available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3086449/>.
- 3 For further reading and policy recommendations for disaggregating this data, see Farah Z. Ahmad and Christian Weller, "Reading Between the Data: The Incomplete Story of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2014), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/report/2014/03/03/85055/reading-between-the-data/>.
- 4 National Women's Law Center, "Equal Pay for Asian American Women."
- 5 See endnote 10 in *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Jeff Guo, "Asian American women are closing the gap with white men, but that's not the point," *The Washington Post*, January 6, 2016, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/01/06/why-indian-american-women-make-more-money-than-white-guys/>.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 National Women's Law Center, "Equal Pay for Asian American Women."
- 10 Karthick Ramakrishnan and Farah Z. Ahmad, "Labor-Market Outcomes: Part of the 'State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders' Series" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2014), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/AAPILaborMkt.pdf>.
- 11 Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Women in the labor force: a data-book* (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015), available at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/archive/women-in-the-labor-force-a-databook-2015.pdf>.
- 12 Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Household Data: Annual Averages—10. Employed persons by occupation, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and sex," available at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat10.pdf> (last accessed May 2016).
- 13 Ramakrishnan and Z. Ahmad, "Labor-Market Outcomes."
- 14 Jenny Xia and others, "Paid Sick Days Access and Usage Rates Vary by Race/Ethnicity, Occupation, and Earnings," (Washington: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2016), available at <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/paid-sick-days-access-and-usage-rates-vary-by-race-ethnicity-occupation-and-earnings>.
- 15 Author's calculations based on Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employee Benefits in the United States – March 2015," Table 6, Press release, July 24, 2015, available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ebs2.pdf>. Note: This includes workers in both the public and private sectors, other than workers in private households and the federal government. See BLS technical note for more information.