

STILL BEARING THE COST

BLACK AND HISPANIC WOMEN LOSE BILLIONS DUE TO JOB SEGREGATION

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Women are nearly half¹ of the United States (U.S.) labor force and contribute significantly both to their families' economic security and the U.S. economy. Yet women, especially women of color, have long experienced disparities in the labor force that result in markedly lower wages than those paid to men. And these wage gaps are particularly significant for Black, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and some subsets of Asian women.

A major contributor to these wage disparities is job segregation – the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of women and people of color in certain occupations and industrial sectors.² Examples of this segregation abound: According to the 2022 American Community Survey, men are about 35 times more likely to be carpenters than women, while women are 17 times more likely than men to be childcare workers. Among women workers, white women are almost twice as likely as Black women or Latinas to work as elementary or middle school teachers, and Latinas are more than six times as likely as white women to work as maids and housekeepers. Meanwhile, Black women are four times as likely to be nursing assistants as white women, and 40 times as likely to be nursing assistants as white men.³ Especially when combined with the devaluation of women-dominated jobs, the impact of job segregation can be economically devastating.

In 2023, Black women lost \$42.7 billion and Hispanic women lost \$53.3 billion in wages compared to white men due to the impacts of segregation by occupation and industrial sector.⁴ In other words, these estimates—from the 2023 Current Population Survey—illustrate the amount of potential earnings that Black and Hispanic women lose out on annually, due to the fact that they are segregated into lower-paying jobs.

Many mechanisms contribute to job segregation:

- [Social norms can pressure workers into jobs stereotypical for their gender](#) or race/ethnicity – for example, the belief that women are better at “caring” occupations, or that men are more suited to more physically demanding work.
- Educational attainment, sorting, and training gaps can create barriers for women to enter certain occupations: They are [less likely to graduate with degrees in math or science](#) or complete vocational training programs and [registered apprenticeships](#).
- Family caregiving duties that are disproportionately performed by women limit the [time they can spend on paid work and the types of jobs](#) they can accept. And beyond that, the [discriminatory perception](#) that a woman may at some point take on caregiving responsibilities, or that her caregiving responsibilities will hinder her work, may [impact the jobs and duties that she is offered by employers](#).
- Discrimination based on gender, race or other characteristics [is prevalent in all areas of work](#), from recruitment to hiring to promotions, and can impact both the types of jobs women are offered, and how they are evaluated in the workplace.
- [Gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work](#) are detrimental to women's recruitment and retention, especially in occupations and industries with [risk factors such as toxic work cultures, work performed in isolation, and workplaces with few women](#).



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- The fact that [women often have limited networks and mentors](#), especially of the same gender or race/ethnicity or in traditionally male-dominated fields, means that they get fewer referrals for job openings, hiring and promotions.

Job segregation creates and perpetuates many inequities in the labor market. It results in lower wages for women, people of color, and their families, and is thus a significant contributor to gender and racial wage gaps.

It also comes at a broader cost to the economy: Job segregation prevents many people from working in positions that best match their skills and [reduces productivity in our economy](#). Moreover, it inhibits innovation, makes the labor force less adaptable to change, and reduces economic growth. Coupled with other sociocultural and policy-related factors that make it harder for women to fully participate in the labor force – including the absence of a national paid leave policy and insufficient investments in child care⁵ – it is clear that the U.S.’ potential for economic growth is hampered by a lack of supports for working women, and especially women of color.

The Biden-Harris Administration has made addressing job segregation a chief goal and seeks to achieve a truly equitable economy that centers the needs of workers, raises job quality and supports workers in entering jobs that best fit their interests and skills. As the [once-in-a-generation investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act](#) are implemented, we must ensure women have opportunities to access new, good-paying, high-quality jobs in sectors where they have been historically underrepresented. The Administration and the Department of Labor are working to ensure that federal investments are not just creating jobs, but also creating equitable pathways to those jobs open to all interested workers. This includes using [strategies with a proven track record of increasing the hiring and retention of women](#), like supporting pre-apprenticeship programs with direct entry to registered apprenticeship programs; providing supportive and wraparound services, such as child care, during workforce training; and developing focused outreach and recruitment programs.

And at the same time, it is vital to improve pay and conditions in the fields where women work currently. The Administration believes that all workers deserve paid family and medical leave, earned sick time, workplace flexibility, overtime protections and predictable scheduling. The Administration has improved job quality, especially in women-dominated jobs, by raising the minimum wage for federal workers, expanding access to workplace benefits, ensuring safe working conditions and strengthening collective bargaining and unions. These efforts also include centering the rebuilding of the care economy, which is being achieved through actions like the [Executive Order on Increasing Access to High-Quality Care and Supporting Caregivers](#).

Two years ago, the Department of Labor published *Bearing the Cost: How Overrepresentation in Undervalued Jobs Disadvantaged Women During the Pandemic*, a report detailing how women, especially women of color, were impacted by the COVID-19 economic crisis and how job segregation resulted in greater economic losses for women compared to men.⁶

Job segregation by industry and occupation continues to have a strong impact on women, especially women of color, even as overall the jobs lost during the pandemic have returned and unemployment remains consistently low. Labor force participation among women – especially women with young children – still lags far behind that of similarly-situated men.⁷ The same is true of wages among full-time, year-round workers: Women are paid about 84% of what men are overall,⁸ and the chasm in wages is wider still for Black and Hispanic women, who are paid about 69% and 57% of what non-Hispanic white men are paid, respectively.⁹

Endnotes

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, “Civilian Labor Force by Sex.” <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/data/lfp/civilianlfbyssex>. Accessed 22 Feb. 2024.

² For more on this, see U.S. Department of Labor, “The Impact of Gender and Racial Inequality On Women Workers.” <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/impact>. Accessed 22 Feb. 2024.

³ Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey (IPUMS). <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/acs.shtml>. Accessed 22 Feb. 2024.

⁴ Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 Current Population Survey. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/data.html>. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.

⁵ U.S. Department of Labor, “The Cost of Doing Nothing, 2023 Update: The Price We STILL Pay without Policies to Support Working Families.” <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/paid-leave/CostofDoingNothing2023.pdf>. Accessed 22 Feb. 2024.

⁶ The original report is available here: <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/media/BearingTheCostReport.pdf>.

⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, “Labor Force Participation Rates of Men and Women by Presence and Age of Youngest Child.” <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/data/mothers-families/laborforceparticipationrates-childage>. Accessed 29 Feb. 2024.

⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, “Gender Earnings Ratio and Wage Gap by Race and Hispanic Ethnicity.” <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/data/earnings/earnings-ratio-wage-gap-race-ethnicity>. Accessed 29 Feb. 2024.

⁹ U.S. Department of Labor, “Women’s Earnings by Race and Ethnicity as a Percentage of White, Non-Hispanic Men’s Earnings.” <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/data/earnings/race-percentage-white-hispanic>. Accessed 29 Feb. 2024.