

A PROJECT OF MOTHER'S OUTREACH NETWORK

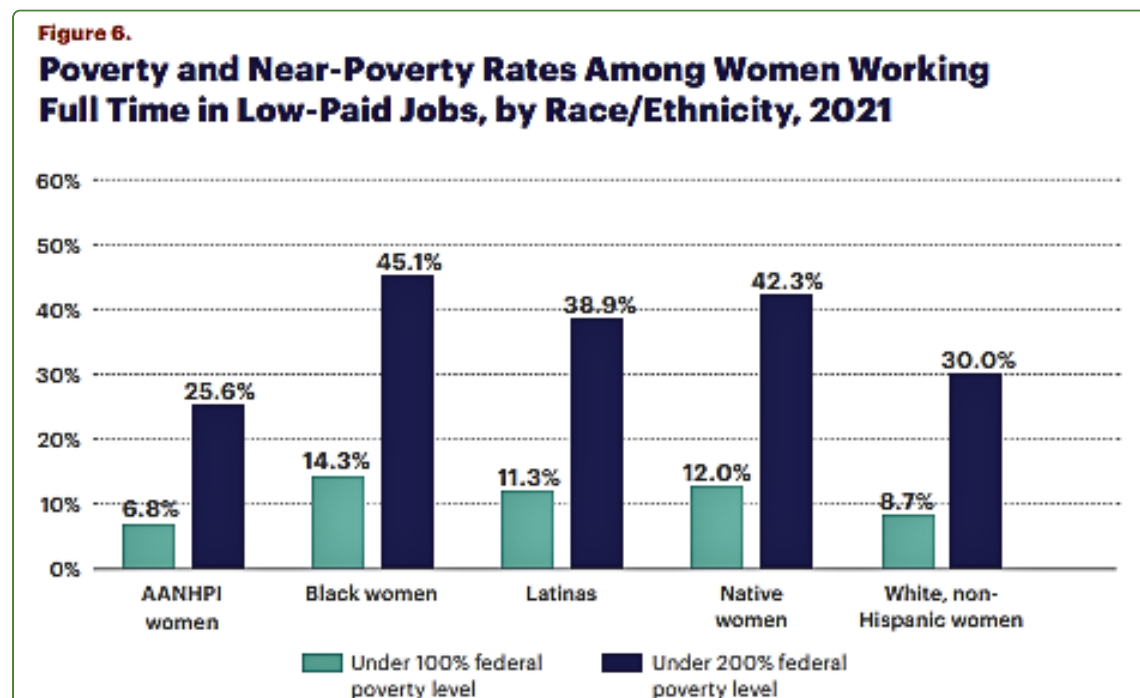
LOW WAGE WORK

Women represent just under half of the total US workforce, but fill [roughly two-thirds](#) of the country's lowest wage jobs, which, nationally, have average hourly wages below \$15/hour. Women of color are especially overrepresented in the low-wage workforce. Latinas make up just 8% of the overall workforce, but 15.9% of the low-wage workforce. Black women hold 6% of all jobs, but 8.9% of low-wage positions.

Women in the low-wage workforce are overwhelmingly adults and are frequently [the primary breadwinner](#) in their family. **Nearly 70% of women working for low-wages are over the age of 25.** **Nearly 20% of women in the low-wage workforce have a postsecondary degree** – an Associate's, Bachelor's, or higher. Another 25.6% have some college credits, but no degree.

Even within the low-wage workforce, women are paid less than their male counterparts. Among those working full-time, year round, **women in low-paid jobs [earn just 83 cents](#) for every dollar men in low-paying professions are paid.**

Among full time workers, Black women are paid [only 67% of white men's earnings](#) and [80% of white women's](#). **Black women also earn only 86% of what Black men are paid, despite having [higher average educational attainment](#).**



Source: Hard Work is Not Enough, National Women's Law Center (2023)

34.8% of [women working full-time in low-wage jobs](#) and 40.4% of women working part-time in low-paid jobs live below 200% of the federal poverty line, compared to [28.6%](#) of the total population.

Low-wage mothers fare even worse. 52.4% of these women had household incomes below 200% of the poverty line in 2021, compared to 43.0% of fathers in the low-paid workforce and 23.9% of working mothers overall. Low-wage women of color are also particularly likely to experience economic hardship.

Low-wage jobs often disadvantage workers from achieving economic stability in multiple ways, such as by offering unstable work hours and few benefits or job protections.

Because of a lack of access to full-time job opportunities, more than half of the women working must accept part-time, low-wage jobs. Research suggests that as much as 40% of the part-time workforce would prefer to work more hours. Among those who “choose” to work part-time, the choice is often driven by other responsibilities, such as childcare or other care work.

Only [38% of the lowest-paid workers](#) have access to an employer-sponsored health care plan, compared to 70% of all workers. Among employees who do have the option of employer-sponsored health care, low-wage workers typically have to cover a larger share of the cost than their higher-wage counterparts.

Low-wage workers are far less likely to have access to paid leave, in the form of sick leave, holidays, or vacation time, than other workers. **[55% of low wage workers](#) have access to paid sick time, compared to 77% of workers overall.**

Low wage-workers, especially those in the service sector, are more likely to have unstable and unpredictable work schedules. This leads to a host of issues, including income volatility and difficulty finding reliable childcare. [Workers with more variable and unpredictable hours are also more likely to report experiencing at least one material hardship](#), such as hunger, housing insecurity, or foregoing needed medical treatment— over the prior year.

The District of Columbia should act immediately to expand guaranteed income programs in order to support the immediate and long-term economic wellbeing of women in low-wage work.

- Approximately half of workers deemed “essential” during the Covid-19 Pandemic were low-wage workers, speaking to the indispensable nature of this undervalued work.
- Guaranteed income can [offer workers the financial freedom](#) to exert power in their workplaces, allowing them to demand higher wages and better benefits.
- Guaranteed income has also been shown to [increase participants’ full-time employment](#), giving participants the stability necessary to pursue higher-paid or full-time jobs.

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