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Hunger and Poverty in Female-Headed Households

What's the Problem?

Single mothers head just over half of all U.S. low-income households with children—more than 4.7 million families. Female-headed households, particularly those led by women of color, are more likely to be food-insecure and live in poverty than other U.S. households. Being food-insecure, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, means not having regular, reliable access to the foods needed for good health.

Hunger and food-insecurity are caused by poverty. Gender discrimination and, for many, racial/ethnic discrimination make women more likely to be poor. Female-headed households are more than twice as likely as all U.S. households to be poor (30.6 percent vs. 14.8 percent). Census data show that households headed by single African-American women or single Latinas have an even higher risk of poverty (40.2 percent and 40.4 percent, respectively).

Female-headed households are more likely to be food-insecure.

One in three single mothers struggles to feed herself and her children.

FOOD INSECURITY

	General Population	Female-headed households	African-American female-headed households	Latino female-headed households
All households	14%	35.3%	The U.S. Department of Agriculture does not provide disaggregated food-insecurity data by race and household structure.	

Source: Food Security in the United States, 2014. U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service.

We lack statistics on the food-insecurity rates of African-American and Latino female-headed households, but the rates are clearly higher than those for female-headed households overall since poverty rates are higher and incomes lower for these groups.

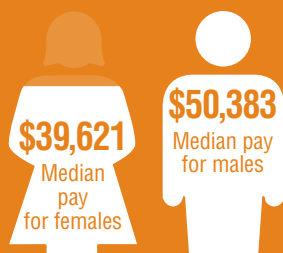
WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO HUNGER AND POVERTY IN FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS?

- Gender discrimination in pay and benefits
- Job segregation
- Unpaid care responsibilities and high childcare costs
- Gender-based violence



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THE \$10,000 WAGE GAP:



40%

Almost 40 percent of working mothers reported that the gender pay gap contributes to poor living conditions, poor nutrition, and fewer opportunities for them and their children.¹

MORE ON THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO HUNGER AND POVERTY:

Gender discrimination in pay and benefits

More than 50 years after the Equal Pay Act, women are still paid less than men in the same jobs.

- Women with a high school diploma or less are paid 76 cents for every dollar paid to men with the same education. African-American and Latina women are paid only 55 cents for every dollar that white men are paid. The gender pay gap in this group totals more than \$7,000 a year that could have gone to help support a struggling family.²
- Women are more likely to hold jobs without benefits, specifically paid leave and employer-provided health insurance.

MEDIAN INCOME

	General Population	Female-headed household	African-American female-headed households	Latino female-headed households
Median income	\$53,657	\$36,151	\$26,169*	\$30,293 ³

Source: Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2014. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2015.

*Data based on 2013 estimates from the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau.

Job segregation

Women are the majority of workers in the 10 low-wage occupations with the most employees.

These include domestic work, food-preparation, and personal care. Many women hold tip-paid jobs, meaning they can legally be paid as little as \$2.13 an hour and are expected to earn the remainder in tips.

- Nine out of 10 women working as tipped-based restaurant workers report not being paid enough to cover basic living expenses for their families.⁴

Lack of access to affordable child care

Single mothers are more likely to forgo work or school due to lack of child care.

- Women with stable, affordable child care are more likely to keep their jobs and be able to support their families.⁵

Gender-based violence

Violence against women—at home, on the job, or in public—is rampant. The consequences include being less able to hold a stable job and more likely to become homeless.

- Every 9 seconds, a woman in the United States is assaulted or beaten.⁶

The number of U.S. women dying from pregnancy or childbirth has more than **DOUBLED** since 1987. Many of these deaths are related to hunger and poverty.

Low-income single mothers are **TWICE AS LIKELY** to die as a result of pregnancy or childbirth as U.S. women as a whole, and African-American and Latina women are **FOUR TIMES AS LIKELY**.

The women in these groups are more likely to lack affordable health insurance through employers and less able to afford medical care because of low wages.

Endnotes

¹ “The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap.” American Association of University Women. Spring 2016. www.aauw.org/files/2016/02/SimpleTruth_Spring2016.pdf

² Ibid.

³ Latinas and the Wage Gap.” National Partnerships for Women and Families. December 2015. www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/latinas-wage-gap.pdf

⁴ “Tipped Minimum Wage and Women’s Economic Security.” Wider Opportunities for Women. June 2013. [www.wowonline.org/blog/2013/06/28/tipped-minimum-wage-](http://www.wowonline.org/blog/2013/06/28/tipped-minimum-wage-and-womens-economic-security/)

[and-womens-economic-security/](http://www.wowonline.org/blog/2013/06/28/tipped-minimum-wage-and-womens-economic-security/)

⁵ “Child Care Matters: Building Economic Security for Low-Income Women.” Women’s Economic Security Campaign. September 2010. www.cofionline.org/COFI/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/wesc_childcarematters.pdf

⁶ Black, M.C., et al. (2011). The national intimate partner and sexual violence survey: 2010 summary report. www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf

⁷ “Maternal Mortality in the United States: A Human Rights Failure.” Association of Reproductive Health Professionals. March 2011. www.arhp.org/publications-and-resources/contraception-journal/march-2011