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Hunger and Poverty in Female-Headed Households

What's the Problem?

Single mothers head just about half of all U.S. low-income households with children—more than 4.5 million families.¹ 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.

The higher rates of poverty and hunger among female-headed households are direct results of systemic inequity through gender and racial discrimination. Female-headed households are more than twice as likely as all U.S. households to face poverty (27.9 percent vs. 12.3 percent). This reality is compounded for women of color, who experience both gender and racial discrimination. Census data show that households headed by single Indigenous, Latina, African American, and Native Hawaiian women have an even higher risk of poverty (39.7 percent, 37.4 percent, 34.7 percent, and 31.2 percent, respectively).²

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	Indigenous, Latina, African American, and Native Hawaiian female-headed households
All households	11.8%	30.3%	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, 2017. U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service.

Since poverty rates are much higher and income levels are much lower in Indigenous, African American, Latina and Native Hawaiian female-headed households compared to the

general population, we expect that food-insecurity levels are also much higher among Indigenous, African American, Latino and Native Hawaiian female-headed households. This would suggest that strengthened support systems and dedicated efforts to dismantle racial and gender discrimination would reverse this reality, and help economically empower individuals and families of color living in female-headed households.

INEQUITY CONTRIBUTES TO HUNGER AND POVERTY IN FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

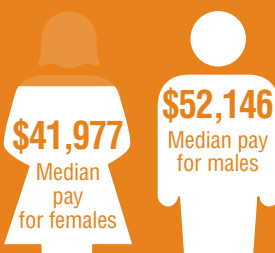
- Gender discrimination in pay, benefits, and employment
- Job segregation by gender and race
- Unpaid care responsibilities and high childcare costs
- Impacts of mass incarceration
- Gender-based violence



Margie Hea for Bread for the World

THE GENDER PAY GAP:

Women are paid 80 percent of what men were paid.



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.³

Source: <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/demo/p60-263.pdf>

ADDITIONAL INEQUITIES CONTRIBUTING TO HUNGER AND POVERTY:

Gender discrimination in pay, benefits, and employment

More than 50 years after the Equal Pay Act, women are still paid less than men in the same jobs. In addition, women are more likely to be unemployed and to hold low-wage jobs with few or no benefits.

- Women with a high school diploma or less are paid 77 cents for every \$1 paid to men with the same education.⁴
- Latina, Indigenous, African American and Native Hawaiian women are paid only between 54 and 62 cents for every dollar that white men are paid. The gender pay gap among women of color totals more than \$22,000 a year that could have gone to help support a struggling family.⁵
- Due to racial inequity, women of color are twice as likely to be unemployed than white women. This compromises her ability to provide for her family.⁶

MEDIAN INCOME

	General households	Latino female-headed households	Indigenous female-headed household	Native Hawaiian female-headed households	African-American female-headed households
Median income	\$61,372	\$30,658*	\$32,782*	\$35,335*	\$35,963*

Source: Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2017. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2018. Median income for all female-headed households is \$41,703.

*Median earnings in the past 12 months by sex. 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Tables B20017C, B20017I, B20017B, and B20017E.

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.

- Two of every three tipped paid workers are women and can legally be paid as little as \$2.13/hour and are expected to earn the remainder in tips. Many report not being paid enough to cover basic living expenses.⁷

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.⁸

Mass Incarceration

Many female-headed households are directly and indirectly impacted by incarceration and over-policing. Soaring incarceration and ticketing rates deplete household resources and money.

- Mothers confront discrimination when they return from incarceration, making it hard to provide for their families. Due to racial discrimination in the workforce, 40 percent of African American and Latina women returning home from incarceration are unemployed, compared to 23 percent for white women.⁹

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.

- 1 in 3 women experience some form of sexual violence during their lifetime, compared to 1 in 6 men.¹⁰ This is higher for women of color.
- Ninety percent of female restaurant workers experience sexual harassment. This increases for women working in states that pay a \$2.13 subminimum wage.¹¹
- More than 70 percent of farmworker and other low-wage immigrant women report that workplace sexual violence is a major problem.¹²

Inequity Contributes to Maternal Mortality

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.

- Single mothers heading low-income households are 2 times as likely to die as a result of pregnancy or childbirth, and African American and Indigenous women are 4 times as likely.^{13,14}

Endnotes

*Note: Latinas include data from all racial groups, increasing hunger and poverty rates.

¹ Food Security in the United States, 2017. U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. September 2018.

² Poverty in the past 12 months of families. 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Table S1702. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_S1702&prodType=table

³ "The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap." American Association of University Women. Spring 2016.

⁴ "The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap." American Association of University Women. Fall 2018.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey. E-16. Unemployment by age, sex, and race. Bureau of Labor Statistics. April 2019. https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm

⁷ Twenty-Three Years and Still Waiting for Change. Economic Policy Institute. 2014. <https://www.epi.org/publication/waiting-for-change-tipped-minimum-wage/>

⁸ "Child Care Matters: Building Economic Security for Low-Income Women."

Women's Economic Security Campaign. September 2010. [www.cofonline.org/COFI/wp-content/](http://www.cofonline.org/COFI/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/wesc_childcarematters.pdf)

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⁹ Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment among formerly incarcerated people. Prison Policy Initiative. July 2018. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>

¹⁰ "National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief – Updated Release." The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. November 2018. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/2015data-brief508.pdf>

¹¹ "The Glass Floor: Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry." Restaurant Opportunity Center. October 2014. https://rocunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/REPORT_TheGlassFloor_Sexual-Harassment-in-the-Restaurant-Industry.pdf

¹² "Farmworker Sexual Violence Facts." Community Alliance for Global Justice. <https://cagj.org/food-justice/food-justice-resources/farmworker-sexual-violence-facts/>

¹³ "Maternal Mortality in the United States: A Human Rights Failure." Association of Reproductive Health Professionals. March 2011. www.arhp.org/publications-andresources/contraception-journal/march-2011

¹⁴ Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pregnancy-mortality-surveillance-system.htm>