Exploring the Intersections of Gender, Race and Ethnicity in Unpaid Care Labor and Paid Labor in the US

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INTRODUCTION: UNSEEN WORK, UNMET NEEDS
The US continues to grapple with the challenge of achieving gender and racial labor equity. Women continue to bear the brunt of unpaid care work. Women experience large wage disparities and occupational segregation. Across the country, women (and especially women of color) navigate unpaid care responsibilities alongside their paid work commitments.

Oxfam America and Prosperity Now have embarked on a comprehensive joint research project to explore the dynamics of women’s paid and unpaid labor in the US, particularly for women of color, who are disproportionately affected by the dual impact of paid work and unpaid care responsibilities. This report adopts an intersectional lens to delve into the disparities in unpaid care and the inequities in the paid labor force. The relationship between paid and unpaid labor reveals significant challenges, with many facing systemic barriers in accessing essential support such as workplace flexibility, equitable pay, and affordable care services. Particularly, the interplay of gender and race/ethnicity in this context spotlights the unique and disproportionate challenges women of color encounter in both paid and unpaid labor.

The research focuses on both paid and unpaid labor, shedding light on the often invisible or underappreciated roles women play in the economy. Paid labor is commonly understood and recognized, but unpaid labor, including care work for children and adults, remains largely unseen and unvalued, despite its critical role in the economic and social fabric of our society. This study is rooted in the principles of intersectional feminism and labor economics, recognizing that gender, race, ethnicity, and class are not isolated factors but intersect and interact, influencing the experiences of women in the U.S. labor market.

The study seeks to bring visibility to this work and underscore its significance in economic policy. The urgency of the project is highlighted by the recent social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly affected unpaid care work, altering its distribution among men and women as well as across racial and ethnic groups. Much of the data used in this report relies on information collected during the pandemic, and in some instances, we depict developments since the height of the pandemic in 2021.
Section 1: Women of color spend considerably more time on unpaid caregiving than white women and men of all races and ethnicities.

1. Gender disparities: Women are shouldering a significantly higher share of unpaid caregiving than men, irrespective of race and ethnicity.

2. Racial and ethnic differences: Black and Hispanic women demonstrate higher involvement in unpaid caregiving than other racial/ethnic subgroups as well as their male counterparts. In contrast, Asian communities present a more gender-balanced child care distribution compared to other racial/ethnic subgroups.

3. Sociodemographic influences: Disparities are further shaped by employment status, income, and education. For instance, gender gaps in reported child care hours are narrower for individuals with at least a college degree compared to those without.

Section 2: There are large gender and ethnoracial disparities in labor force participation and earnings

1. Gender-based labor trends: Women have lower labor force participation rates compared to men. Yet, once in the labor force, they have slightly better employment rates than men.

2. Racial and ethnic differences in labor: While other ethnoracial female groups have lower labor force participation rates, Black women exhibit high rates, closely matching Black men. Despite this, Black men and women face notably high unemployment rates, almost double that of their white and Asian peers.

3. Earnings gap: A striking gender pay gap persists across all races. Hispanic women are at a particular disadvantage, earning only 49 cents for every dollar made by white non-Hispanic men.

4. Occupational segregation and earnings: There’s significant occupational segregation by gender and ethnicity. Women earn less than men across all occupations, with wage discrepancies being prominent in specific job categories.

5. Intersectional challenges: Women of color, particularly Hispanic women, experience compounded challenges, facing both gender and racial biases. They often work in occupations with fewer benefits, face higher poverty rates, and consequently experience more significant economic vulnerabilities.
Section 3: Unpaid care labor has a significant effect on paid labor, especially for women of color

1. Gender differences in work due to caregiving: There’s a marked gender difference in work abstention due to unpaid caregiving responsibilities. A considerable number of women, particularly Hispanic and Black women, reported limiting their paid work hours due to caregiving responsibilities.

2. Pandemic spotlight: The COVID-19 pandemic saw child care disruptions, leading to significant shifts in women’s employment patterns. For instance, many women, particularly from Black and Brown communities, either left or lost jobs due to these disruptions. Even though the health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic no longer poses serious policy concerns, the gaps exposed in the care economy by the pandemic remain salient.

3. Part-time work: Women are more likely to work part-time, often referring to caring responsibilities as the reason, and in these part-time roles they consistently dedicate more daily hours to unpaid care work than part-time men across almost all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

4. Impact on unpaid care: Poor working conditions such as lack of job flexibility and limited access to benefits in female-dominated occupations can also limit women’s ability to provide the desired level of unpaid care.

Section 4: Policy recommendations based on research findings and profiles

1. Policy recommendations expand across broad and diverse issue areas, including calls for more nuanced data, bold public investments, expansive tax credits, and intentional implementation of policies.

2. Many recommendations are part of the “care economy” and the broader labor movement, including reforms to child and elder care, paid sick and safe days, paid family and medical leave, livable wages, and dignified benefits for all workers.

3. Recommendations, while covering a diverse spread of issue areas, also cite specific legislation that takes key steps towards creating an equitable economy that redresses the issues outlined by the research and profiles.

A note on how we use “gender” in this report

Because this research project relies on government and other publicly available data, the demographic parameters reflect the limitations around expressing one’s identity. In terms of gender, most surveys only offer options within the binary of male versus female, which are biological designations, often referred to as a person’s sex, and not forms of self-expression often associated with expressions of gender. However, because the census allows an individual to choose for themselves the assignment, throughout this report we use the term women, which is considered a more expansive gender identity. We are cognizant that when filling out a survey form not all people are thinking of their biology, and they may choose instead the category that best aligns with their gender identity. As the term sex is misleading, we refer to male and female respondents as gender and not sex, but it is important to identify and acknowledge the difference between expressions of identity and the weight they carry. While biological sex is assigned at birth, gender is an expression of self. While we acknowledge the importance of inclusive and diverse gender experiences in research, the constraints in the datasets we use necessitate this limited approach to gender in this study.

A note on the use of race/ethnicity

Throughout this report, we use the following mutually exclusive racial/ethnic groups: “white” refers to non-Hispanic whites, “Black” refers to non-Hispanic Blacks, and “Asian” refers to non-Hispanic Asians. We recognize that these classifications have limitations. They can oversimplify the complex differences within and between groups. For instance, the broad category of “Hispanic” encompasses a wide array of cultural and national backgrounds, from Mexican to Puerto Rican to Cuban, each with distinct experiences and socioeconomic contexts. Furthermore, due to sample size limitations, we exclude multiracial individuals who may identify with more than one racial or ethnic group. Another significant limitation in the way the U.S. Census Bureau and other statistical agencies handle race and ethnicity data involves the recoding process. When information is missing, unclear, or does not align with the predefined categories, these agencies often reclassify individuals into different racial or ethnic groups.
This project is rooted in Oxfam America’s and Prosperity Now’s ongoing efforts to address gender and racial disparities, and to promote economic equity. It fits within Oxfam America’s focus on labor and care policies that directly or disproportionately affect low-wage workers, who are often women and people of color. This research project aligns with Prosperity Now’s mission to address wealth-building’s intersectionality of race and gender, focusing on the systemic factors that limit opportunities for women, particularly women of color. By exploring unpaid care work, disparities in labor market experiences, and the impact of unpaid labor on labor force participation and economic outcomes, the study supports Oxfam America’s and Prosperity Now’s advocacy for equitable economic policies, thereby advancing its broader goal of promoting financial security for marginalized and disadvantaged communities.

**Why focus on paid employment and unpaid care work for women of color?**

We focus on gender and racial disparities in care work due to the significant yet often overlooked role of unpaid care work in the economy. This invisible labor is the foundation upon which other economic activities rest. However, despite its critical role, especially during moments of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, this work is frequently undervalued, leading to long-term economic disadvantages for those who perform it, primarily women—particularly women of color. By combining the strength of quantitative data with qualitative narratives, we present a robust picture of the labor experiences of women in the US, providing a strong foundation for policy recommendations.

The intersectionality of race and ethnicity brings an additional layer of complexity to the issue. Women of color often find themselves at the intersection of gender, racial, and ethnic discrimination, which exacerbates disparities in both paid and unpaid work. They are frequently relegated to low-wage jobs and perform a higher share of unpaid care work compared to their white counterparts.

The findings from this research will provide an evidence base to advocate for policies that recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work, ensuring an equitable labor market that values all forms of work.

**Methodology**

This research combines rigorous quantitative analysis with qualitative narratives to address three key research questions:

1. How does unpaid care work impact various demographic groups across gender, race, and ethnicity, particularly low-wage women?

2. How do disparities in paid work manifest across gender, race, and ethnicity, especially within low-wage sectors?

3. How do paid work and unpaid care work interact and influence each other across gender, race, and ethnicity, especially for low-wage women?

The quantitative analysis in this report leverages information from several publicly available datasets as described in the chart below.

Profiles: To supplement the quantitative findings, we include individual profiles that illustrate the lived experiences of women, particularly women of color, in low-wage work situations and unpaid care responsibilities. By combining the strength of quantitative data with qualitative narratives, we provide a strong foundation for policy recommendations.

A note on this report’s profiles: names and some identifying characteristics of our participants have been changed to protect their privacy and allow them to speak as openly as possible. Additionally, some quotes have been edited for clarity. Prosperity Now would like to thank A Better Balance and Caring Across Generations who were incredibly helpful in connecting us with some of our participants who were such an integral and important part of this report.
How we define unpaid care work

Unpaid care work is an essential aspect of social functioning and plays a critical role in supporting both children and adults within and outside of households. In this report, unpaid care work is structured based on the 2022 American Time Use Survey (ATUS), encompassing two primary categories of direct care: “caring for and helping household children and adults” and “caring for and helping non-household children and adults.” We also include the travel time associated with care work, such as daycare drop-offs.

To comprehensively analyze unpaid care work, this report will include two specific measures for each item:

a. The number of hours devoted to unpaid caregiving as both a primary and supervisory activity, focusing on people who invested at least one hour in unpaid care work, either inside or outside the household.

b. The average percentage of the population aged 15+ engaged in unpaid caring or helping children and adults, both inside and outside the household.

While the ATUS data allows us to break down the time spent on caregiving activities by sociodemographic factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, income, etc., it does not allow for intrahousehold comparisons, as only one member of each household is interviewed during the data collection process.
Child care
The first aspect of unpaid care work we focus on is primary and supervisory child care both inside and outside households. Unpaid child care activities cover a diverse set of tasks and responsibilities, such as:

- Providing physical care for children.
- Engaging with children through play and reading.
- Assisting with homework and attending children’s events.
- Managing children’s health needs.
- Activities related to dropping off, picking up, and waiting for children.
- Supervisory child care, defined as having a child under age 13 in one’s care while doing other activities, aside from primary child care.

It is important to note that we include both primary and supervisory child care. Primary child care refers to instances when an individual is actively engaged in caring for a child and the child is the main focus of the individual’s attention. Activities that fall under primary child care would include feeding, bathing, teaching, or playing with a child—essentially, any time when the child’s care is the direct and principal task at hand. Supervisory child care, on the other hand, refers to instances when an individual is responsible for a child’s care while simultaneously engaged in another activity, but the child care itself is not the primary focus. For example, a parent might be performing household chores, working from home, or cooking while also monitoring their children playing in the next room. Given that the adult is still responsible for the child’s well-being during this time, we include both aspects under caregiving for children.

Unpaid care work for adults
The second aspect of unpaid care work focuses on primary caring for and helping adult members both inside and outside households. This includes activities such as:

- Providing physical and medical care to other household and nonhousehold adults.
- Obtaining medical services for others.
- Helping activities that primarily benefit individual members, rather than the whole household (e.g., filling out an insurance application for a spouse).
- However, not all activities performed for adults are classified as helping activities. Actions that benefit the whole household, like “helping my spouse cook dinner,” are considered household activities, not care activities.5
UNSEEN WORK AN EXAMINATION OF UNPAID CARE LABOR
Unpaid care labor, often overlooked in economic evaluations, plays a crucial role in society’s functioning, the lives of individuals and families, and the broader economy. This segment of labor predominantly includes responsibilities like child care and elder care, which, although not monetized, are essential for the social and economic well-being of a community. The value of unpaid care labor goes beyond mere monetary quantification and represents a fundamental cornerstone of our social fabric.

However, the weight of this responsibility is not evenly distributed across demographic groups, leading to a critical question:

How does unpaid care work impact various demographic groups across gender, race, and ethnicity, particularly low-wage women?

The unequal distribution of unpaid care work not only reflects broader societal inequities but also has a large impact on the lives and opportunities of those undertaking these responsibilities, particularly women of color. This inequality influences their professional growth, ability to care for themselves and be healthy, and financial stability. Understanding these dynamics can help forge policies that recognize and address these disparities, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Section 1 of this report will delve into data from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), highlighting the stark disparities in both:

- The number of hours devoted to unpaid caregiving
- The average percentage of the population engaged in these activities.

The analysis will break down findings by gender, race, and ethnicity, providing a comprehensive view of how these intersections work in unpaid care labor.

SECTION 1 KEY FINDINGS:

Gender-based disparities

Across the board, there is a significant gender disparity in unpaid caregiving. Men across all racial and ethnic groups more often report performing no care work at all, and when they spend time on unpaid care, they spent comparatively little time. Women, in general, shoulder more of both child care and adult care responsibilities.

Racial and ethnic disparities

Black and Hispanic women show higher involvement in unpaid caregiving when compared to other ethnic and racial groups, and when compared to their male counterparts. For instance, on average, Hispanic women spent considerably more time on child care than Hispanic men. Meanwhile, Black women have the highest average amount of time spent on adult care responsibilities across ethnoracial groups. Asian communities often present more gender-balanced child caregiving roles, especially compared to white, Black, and Hispanic men and women. Asian women, however, provide more unpaid adult care than Asian men.

- Ethnoracial gender disparities are influenced by underlying sociodemographic factors such as employment, income, and education:
  - Impact of employment status: Unemployed women, or those not in the labor force, across most racial and ethnic groups, tend to spend more time on caregiving than their employed counterparts. This is especially pronounced when considering unpaid child care, potentially impeding their reentry into the workforce.
  - Income disparities: Families earning over $100,000 display a more equitable distribution of child care responsibilities between men and women. In contrast, families earning below $100,000 show wider gender disparities in care.
  - Educational Influence: On average, women shoulder more child care responsibilities, regardless of education. In the case of Black and Asian respondents, the level of educational attainment influences the gender distribution of child care.
Providing unpaid care work

Before delving into how much time is spent on unpaid caregiving by those who performed some degree of care, it’s important to first look at whether there are ethnic/racial and gender differences in whether people participate in care work at all. When examining the share of respondents who reported performing no child care or adult care (Figure 1) on a given diary day, we observe that a higher percentage of men indicate a complete absence from any caregiving tasks, whether directed towards children or adults. This pattern remains consistent across all racial and ethnic groups, pointing towards a prevalent gender-based distribution of unpaid caregiving responsibilities. Black respondents show up as the only exception, with men and women reporting almost similar rates of participation in caregiving tasks.

Time spent on unpaid care for children and adults by gender and race/ethnicity

We now turn our focus to understanding the gender, race, and ethnic differences in time spent on unpaid care for children and adults. In our subsequent analyses, we include individuals who reported performing child care or adult care activities on the diary day. Thus, all reported averages are conditional on the respondent participating in unpaid care activities.

Figure 2 presents the average daily hours spent on primary and supervisory child care broken down by gender, race, and ethnicity. We find that across almost all races and ethnicities, women spend more time caring for children than men. The near-equal time allocation among Asian respondents stands out as an exception to this overall finding.

The following Figure 3 largely mirrors these findings for child care, with clear gender and ethnoracial disparities in time allocation for adult care.

This indicates that within these communities, women are more deeply entrenched in caregiving roles, possibly due to cultural, economic, or societal factors specific to these groups.

While the data from this survey does not showcase multigenerational care responsibilities, research from the National Alliance for Caregiving estimates that 11 million caregivers—28 percent of all caregivers—provide unpaid care to an adult while also caring for children living in their home. These individuals are known as sandwich caregivers. Sandwich caregivers report spending an average of 22 hours per week caring for their loved ones. Notably, Black, Latina/Hispanic, and Asian women are all more likely to be sandwich caregivers than nonsandwich caregivers. And not surprisingly, over a third of sandwich caregivers report a high level of emotional stress, and 20 percent of these caregivers report a high level of financial strain.

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**FIGURE 1. SHARE OF RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED PERFORMING NO CARE WORK ON THE DIARY DAY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s calculation of American Time Use Survey (ATUS) 2022 Microdata files

**FIGURE 2. AVERAGE HOURS PER DAY SPENT DAILY ON PRIMARY AND SUPERVISORY CHILD CARE BY GENDER, RACE AND ETHNICITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s calculation of American Time Use Survey (ATUS) 2022 microdata files
While women overall tend to spend more time on adult care, underscoring an overarching trend where women predominantly shoulder caregiving responsibilities, Black and Asian women particularly stand out in their involvement with adult care.

Considering other sociodemographic factors

As we delve deeper into unpaid care work, our focus remains on the average time spent daily on child and adult care, examining it against the backdrop of gender, race, and ethnicity. However, we fold in additional dimensions—employment status, income, and educational background—to truly comprehend the gender and ethnoracial dynamics at play. This will help us discern whether the pattern of women, especially women of color, investing more time into caregiving holds firm once these mediating factors come into play or if they reshape this narrative. The inclusion of these additional factors is pivotal, as they often intersect with care responsibilities, potentially amplifying or attenuating the observed disparities. For instance, employment status can drastically alter the time available for caregiving. Furthermore, the need to provide care can heavily impact the likelihood of working and the type of work. Similarly, income and educational background might influence one’s perspective on care roles or afford access to alternative caregiving resources, like professional child care services.

### PROFILE: DELANEY

**Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner**

38 years old | Black woman

Delaney is a proud mother and healthcare provider in Louisiana who has worked with veterans and in community-based clinics providing psychiatric care. She became an A Better Balance Community Advocate after having her son, who was born with DiGeorge Syndrome. Her then-employer and national policies failed to support her as she attempted to manage the care of her three children. After using all employer-offered benefits, she turned to the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), but that leave is unpaid and she experienced hostility in the workplace in response to her use of leave. As a result, she quit her job. She took a new position that required home visits to patients, where she experienced uncomfortable interactions and unsafe conditions. When speaking about her time providing home-based care, she said, “I was trying to find something flexible, and it was flexible and that’s what working mothers try to do ... but it’s so hard, and these are the jobs that we have to degrade ourselves to.” She was so passionate about her long career as a nurse practitioner and her relationship with patients but felt disrespected and uncared for when providing home-based care.

With her son’s increased needs and her father, who is disabled after a stroke years ago, Delaney spoke about the way her family manages care needs and said that, “I guess it all goes back to my race. Being Black, we are family first.... We help each other.” She cited specific challenges she faces as a parent of a child with disabilities, from increased doctor’s appointments and different needs. She said, “Parents of children with disabilities, we need grace.”

She feels her voice is unheard and our policies lack the grace people need; she explains that there are “so many things they can do to make the workplace better because a happy employee makes a happy working environment, a more productive environment.” Throughout our conversation, she spoke with such determination and motivation to make the world work for all families. She reflected that “there’re so many things I want to do to make it a better place for working mothers, working fathers, working caregivers.... There’s so much work to be done.”

![Figure 3](image)

**FIGURE 3. AVERAGE HOURS PER DAY SPENT DAILY ON PRIMARY ADULT CARE BY GENDER AND RACE**

Source: Author’s calculation of American Time Use Survey (ATUS) 2022 Microdata files
Employment status

Figure 4 below shows pronounced variations depending on employment status. Given sample size constraints, we combined those not in the labor force with the unemployed, even though they represent distinct groups (those willing and able to work, and those opting out of the labor force for other reasons). We find that while women across almost all races and ethnicities consistently invest more time than men in child care, the gender gap broadens markedly for individuals who are unemployed or not in the labor force. White women who are unemployed or not in the labor force report spending 3.4 hours daily on primary child care, the highest among all subgroups. There is an hour more than the daily average reported by similar white men. The gender gap is the widest among Black respondents, with Black women spending 1.2 hours more daily on primary child care than Black men. The pronounced gender differences in child care times diminish among those who are employed but are not eliminated entirely.

These disparities underscore the compounded challenges faced by unemployed women or those outside the labor force, highlighting the pressing need to consider these nuances when devising policies or interventions. The pronounced gap in unpaid child care responsibilities between unemployed women and their male counterparts carries significant ramifications. When women shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care, they often face restricted opportunities to reenter the workforce, hampering their economic independence and future earning potential. This imbalance not only perpetuates traditional gender roles, deepening existing societal inequalities, but also poses risks to women’s mental and physical well-being.

The difference in time allocation for adult care based on employment status presents a less pronounced contrast across most racial and ethnic groups (Figure 5). However, two groups demand particular attention: Black and Asian women. Black and Asian women invest substantially more time than their male counterparts in caring for both household and nonhousehold adults when unemployed or not part of the workforce. To illustrate, unemployed Black women or those not in the labor force commit over three hours daily to adult care. In contrast, their male counterparts average just 1.6 hours. Similarly, Asian men who are unemployed or not in the labor force allocate roughly half an hour each day for adult care.

**FIGURE 4. AVERAGE HOURS PER DAY SPENT DAILY ON PRIMARY CHILD CARE BY GENDER, RACE AND ETHNICITY, AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                  |     |       |
| **Unemployed/Not in labor force** | | |
| All              | 2.3 | 2.1   |
| White            | 2.4 | 2.2   |
| Black            | 3.1 | 2.9   |
| Asian            | 2.9 | 2.6   |
| Hispanic         | 1.8 |

**FIGURE 5. AVERAGE HOURS PER DAY SPENT DAILY ON PRIMARY ADULT CARE BY GENDER, RACE AND ETHNICITY, AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                  |     |       |
| **Unemployed/Not in labor force** | | |
| All              | 1.7 | 1.8   |
| White            | 1.9 | 1.8   |
| Black            | 1.8 | 1.6   |
| Asian            | 3.3 |       |
| Hispanic         | 0.5 | 1.8   |

Source: Author’s calculation of American Time Use Survey (ATUS) 2022 microdata files
This figure pales in comparison to unemployed Asian women, who, on average, dedicate nearly two hours daily to such responsibilities. This disparity accentuates the gendered nuances in caregiving roles within specific racial and ethnic communities.

Care responsibilities associated with children and adults show up as a significant time commitment for women who are unemployed or not in the labor force. This is in sharp contrast to men, who report spending similar amounts of time on caregiving tasks irrespective of their employment status. This distinction is especially true in the case of primary child care, where women who are unemployed/not in the labor force are estimated to spend roughly three hours daily compared to 2.4 hours by women who are employed. Meanwhile, men are estimated to spend around two hours daily on child care irrespective of their employment status. These trends reassert findings from previous studies that indicate a divide in how men and women spend their time even in the absence of job-related commitments.

We also observe that women of color often report larger spikes in caregiving hours when they are unemployed or out of the labor force. For instance, Black women who are unemployed or out of the labor force spend 1.7 hours more daily on adult care compared to employed Black women. This gap is far narrower (0.6 hours daily) for white women.

**Income**

In our subsequent analysis, we study child care and adult care disparities, examining them through the lens of family income, cross-referenced with gender, race, and ethnicity. Owing to sample size constraints, and in a bid to ensure robustness across groups, we classified families into three income brackets: those earning less than $50,000, those between $50,000–$99,000, and those earning over $100,000. We acknowledge this categorization’s limitations, as it doesn’t account for underlying household size or regional cost-of-living variations. Given the constraints of the ATUS dataset, a more nuanced breakdown was not feasible.

As illustrated in Figure 6 on the next page, the gender and race/ethnicity disparities in care responsibilities present across all income groups. On average, women in the low- and middle-income groups almost always report spending more time on primary child care compared to men. This changes for the highest income group, where Black men are found to spend slightly more time on daily child care compared to their female counterparts.
On the other hand, a unique trend surfaces among Asian respondents. In both low- and high-income brackets, Asian men commit similar or higher hours to child care than women. However, in the middle-income segment, Asian women spend more time on child care than their male peers.

For adult care (Figure 7), women of all races or ethnicities tend to invest slightly more time in adult care, but this is predominately observed in families with annual household incomes under $50,000. Yet, as with child care, particular disparities surface within specific racial groups.

Black women’s contributions are notably pronounced. In low-income households, Black women dedicate an average of over 3.5 hours daily to adult care. This contrasts with Black men from the same income bracket, who spend 2.4 hours on caring for adults. Interestingly, as we move up the income ladder, the tables turn. In medium- and high-income families, Black men outpace their female counterparts in time allocated for adult care.

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In the case of adult care (Figure 9), we observe that within the group of respondents without a college degree, women spend slightly more time on average on such care responsibilities relative to their male counterparts. This gender gap is most apparent in the case of Black respondents. Black women without a college degree spend an hour more daily on adult care compared to Black men with similar educational qualifications. This gap is approximately 0.4 hours among white and Asian respondents. Once we turn our focus to respondents who have at least a college degree, the tables seem to turn, with men spending more time on adult care than women on average. However, within the Black community, there is still a tendency for women to shoulder a larger share of these responsibilities than men.

3. Education
When analyzing the influence of education on caregiving patterns using the ATUS sample (Figures 8 and 9), our categorization is bifurcated into two main groups due to sample size considerations: those with at least a college degree and those without a college degree. Across this educational divide, a recurring trend emerges across nearly all racial and ethnic categories: women typically shoulder a greater share of child care responsibilities compared to men.\(^{13}\)

The Asian demographic presents an intriguing deviation. Among those without a college degree, Asian men contribute more hours to child care than Asian women. Yet, when considering those with more than a college education, there is a more even gender division of child care responsibilities. Among Black respondents without a college degree, women are seen to devote significantly more hours to daily child care activities than men. This is reversed in the case of Black respondents who have a college degree, with men taking on a greater share of the child care.

Source: Author’s calculation of American Time Use Survey (ATUS) 2022 microdata files
UNMET NEEDS: DISPARITIES IN PAID WORK
The previous section of this report addressed unpaid work. In Section 2, we turn our attention to the dynamics of paid labor, bearing in mind the key question:

**How do disparities in paid work manifest across gender, race, and ethnicity, especially within low-wage sectors?**

The characteristics of paid work and its intersections with gender, race, and ethnicity are important to understanding broader economic and social dynamics. As we delve into the disparities of paid work, we are inevitably unpacking deeply rooted systemic issues pertaining both to gender and race/ethnicity. By studying disparities across gender, race, and ethnicity, we gain insight into the underlying structures that perpetuate inequality.

In particular, Section 2 focuses on several areas that underscore the extent and the intersectionality of these disparities:

- Labor force participation and unemployment rates.
- Median earnings.
- Occupational segregation and median earnings.
- Access to benefits.
- Working and being poor.

As we move through these different topic areas, we focus on the intersectionality of gender and race/ethnicity. In line with Section 1, we do not just focus on the gender wage gap but recognize and highlight the added layers of race and ethnicity that exacerbate disparities.

### SECTION 2 KEY FINDINGS:

**Gender-based disparities**

- Women, in general and across nearly all ethnic and racial groups, exhibit lower participation rates in the labor force in comparison to men.
- Men’s labor force participation remains relatively constant, irrespective of the age of children, while women’s participation varies greatly. The age of children, especially the critical age of under 3, seems to be a significant determinant for women across all racial and ethnic groups.
- The gender-based unemployment pattern shows that women generally fare slightly better than men across most racial groups, excluding Hispanic individuals. In other words, once they join the labor force, white, Black, and Asian women have higher employment rates than their male counterparts.
- A significant and concerning gender pay gap remains, with women earning substantially less than similarly situated men. Median earnings highlight systemic gender biases and societal norms impacting pay.

**Racial and ethnic disparities**

- Among women, Black women have the highest labor force participation, matching rates with Black men. Black, Asian, and Hispanic women all demonstrate higher workforce engagement than white women. The presence and age of children, especially those under 3, significantly influence all women’s labor force participation.
- Despite high labor force participation rates, Black individuals face alarmingly high unemployment rates—almost double the rates of their white and Asian counterparts.
- Earnings disparities are stark when race and ethnicity are taken into account. Hispanic women, in particular, earn the least, making only 49 cents for every dollar earned by white non-Hispanic men and 73 cents for every dollar earned by white non-Hispanic women.
- While white women have seen a narrowing earnings gap over time compared to men, trends for Black and Asian women have stagnated, and alarmingly, the earnings disparity for Hispanic women has widened, especially post-2010, emphasizing the distinct and complex challenges each racial and ethnic group faces in the labor market.
• There are high levels of occupational segregation by gender and race/ethnicity. For instance, Black men were notably concentrated in production roles, while white men dominated management positions, and Black women were overrepresented in service roles.

• Occupational earnings show women earning less than men across all job categories. While earnings are relatively high across the board in occupations like “management, business, and financial operations occupations,” wage discrepancies are prominent in “natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations” and “service occupations.”

**Intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender in the workforce**

• The intersection of gender, race and ethnicity brings compound challenges. Hispanic women earn less than all other demographic groups, facing dual challenges of gender and racial biases.

• Occupational disparities are evident, with women of color facing substantial pay gaps.

• In the realm of benefits, women, particularly women of color, are predominantly concentrated in occupations with lower access to essential benefits like retirement, medical care, and paid leave. For instance, service occupations, which have an overrepresentation of Hispanic women, offer notably fewer benefits compared to male-dominated sectors. This disparity underscores a deeper issue of occupational segregation, which can further widen the earnings and benefits gap across genders and ethnicities.

• Women, especially Black and Hispanic women, faced higher poverty rates compared to men, even when engaged in the labor force for extended periods.

• The labor market conditions described above explain economic vulnerabilities and translate into severe hardships: Black and Hispanic women experienced significantly higher food insecurity and were more likely to fall behind on rent and mortgage payments than their white male counterparts.

These findings emphasize the pressing need to address systemic inequalities, biases and disparities in the labor market. The varying degrees of disparities across gender and racial/ethnic lines call for comprehensive interventions and policy reforms.

In general, women exhibit lower participation rates in the labor force compared to men, a trend evident across almost all ethnic and racial subgroups. This disparity underscores long-standing, gender-based socioeconomic dynamics, potentially rooted in systemic inequalities, cultural expectations, or a combination of both.

**Labor force participation**

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) defines the labor force as all people aged 16 and older who are either working or actively seeking work. The labor force includes two main categories: employed and unemployed individuals.¹⁴

Among women of color, Black women stand out as an exception (Figure 10): they have the highest labor force participation rate among all female and ethnic groups and are almost on par with Black men. Black, Asian, and Hispanic women all surpass white women in terms of their engagement in the workforce.

While many underlying factors influence this distribution, one of the critical determinants of labor force participation that we examine in the following is the presence of children in the household. By factoring in the presence and age of children, we can better understand the socioeconomic and cultural dynamics at play. Based on Figure 11, we find that while men’s labor force participation remains relatively constant, irrespective of the age of children, occupational disparities are evident, with women of color facing substantial pay gaps.

• In the realm of benefits, women, particularly women of color, are predominantly concentrated in occupations with lower access to essential benefits like retirement, medical care, and paid leave. For instance, service occupations, which have an overrepresentation of Hispanic women, offer notably fewer benefits compared to male-dominated sectors. This disparity underscores a deeper issue of occupational segregation, which can further widen the earnings and benefits gap across genders and ethnicities.

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These findings emphasize the pressing need to address systemic inequalities, biases and disparities in the labor market. The varying degrees of disparities across gender and racial/ethnic lines call for comprehensive interventions and policy reforms.

**FIGURE 10. PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION 16 YEARS AND OVER WHO ARE IN THE LABOR FORCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table S020, 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year estimates selected population profiles
women’s participation varies greatly. The age of children, especially the critical age of under 3, seems to be a significant determinant for women across all racial and ethnic groups. Black women show a consistent pattern of higher labor force participation compared to their white, Asian, and Hispanic female counterparts when children are under 18 and between 6 to 17 years.

The data underscores the importance of support systems, child care availability and affordability, and policy reforms to balance child-rearing responsibilities and enable greater labor force participation for women.

### FIGURE 11. LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES BY GENDER, RACE/ETHNICITY, AND PRESENCE OF CHILDREN

**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor force characteristics by race and ethnicity, 2020, Table 11

Emma is a single mom of two living in Northern California and is currently the front office manager at a school. While her kids are teenagers now, Emma spoke about how “when I found out I was pregnant, we chose for me not to go back to work because we knew me going back to work and him [her then-boyfriend] being at work and being able to afford child care wasn’t something that we could do and afford our apartment, our food, everything else.”

She explained that when she first had her children, she “really struggled. I ended up on all the aid there was, and I’m very grateful for that. It definitely kept us afloat, but it did not by any means put us in a different bracket, but we at least had food, water, etc.”

After having her two children, she explained that, “I absolutely wanted to go back to work,” and she briefly attempted to do so, finding work at Target but quickly realized, “I had to quit because we couldn’t afford child care.” While she was a stay-at-home mom, Emma reflected that, “I was married to someone who believed ‘he worked; I did everything else.’”

While she has gone from making ends meet at a deli counter to an office manager today, she explains that recently, with getting “more money and more hours,” she was “really close to losing my insurance because I run a really fine line financially, even though I was still in the $30,000 bracket.” Emma still receives aid from California and the federal government, which she celebrates. She explained that, “I am blessed to have qualified to live in federal housing, and I pay 50 percent of what market price would be for a two-bedroom apartment.”

When thinking back on the early years and what would’ve helped her, she says that, “I would’ve loved help to access affordable and quality child care.”

**PROFILE: EMMA**

School Office Manager
39 years old | Woman of Japanese and Spanish descent

School Office Manager
39 years old | Woman of Japanese and Spanish descent
This disparity in earnings between men and women reflects multiple intertwined factors, from workplace discrimination and bias to societal norms and expectations about gender roles, as well as differences in industries and roles that men and women predominantly occupy. Regardless of racial or ethnic backgrounds, a consistent gender gap in median earnings prevails, underscoring the profound and persistent gender biases in the workforce.

Unemployment rate
Having discussed labor force participation, which casts a wide net over both the employed and those actively seeking employment, we now narrow our focus to the unemployment rates. The unemployment rate is a metric that gauges the proportion of individuals in the labor force who are actively seeking employment but have not secured a job.

Most troublingly, the findings (Figure 12 below) show that unemployment is particularly pronounced among Black workers. Black men face an unemployment rate of 7.6 percent, while Black women are not far behind at 7.2 percent, putting these groups at almost twice the unemployment of Asian and white men and women. The elevated unemployment rates among the Black community corroborates with myriad studies, spotlighting the entrenched challenges they encounter in the job market. Across most racial and ethnic groups, with the exception of Hispanic workers, women seem to fare slightly better than men, boasting marginally lower unemployment rates. This trend dovetails with previous research, which has repeatedly observed that, on average, men experience higher unemployment.

When looking solely at women across various ethnicities, we see that both Black and Hispanic women grapple with unemployment rates that eclipse those of their white counterparts.

Median earnings
The question of median earnings, differentiated by race, ethnicity, and gender, sheds light on the intersectionality of how different groups are paid. Studying these figures is not only about understanding how much different groups earn but also about recognizing the structural inequalities, biases, and systemic challenges that can shape earning outcomes.

In prior research, a recurring theme has been the enduring gender pay gap that is further exacerbated by racial and ethnic boundaries.

As we see in Figure 13, women’s median earnings are substantially less compared to men. Adding on a race/ethnicity lens, we find that white women experience a pronounced pay discrepancy compared to their male counterparts, with a median earnings gap of $17,073, closely trailed by Asian women, who face a gap of $16,659. While the gender gap in earnings is largest for white and Asian women, a particularly concerning finding is the position of Hispanic women, whose median earnings are not only substantially lower than their male counterparts, but also the lowest among all demographic subgroups, highlighting the compounded challenges at the intersection of gender, race, and ethnicity. The Black community is also at a particular disadvantage, with both Black men and women earning less than women identifying as white or Asian.
The most concerning trend is observed among Hispanic women. Their earnings as a percentage of Hispanic men started at 72 percent in 1979 and rose to a high of 91 percent in 2007. However, post-2010, there has been a discernible decline, dropping to 86 percent in 2022, indicating a widening disparity in recent years.

In general, there are many reasons why women might earn less than men. For instance, prior research has shown that women of color often engage in fewer hours of paid employment and are inclined to opt for part-time positions, which exacerbates the wage disparity, as they lead to these women receiving lesser hourly pay compared to full-time employees and men. Compared to white men and women, women of color are somewhat less frequently involved in work weeks exceeding 45 hours and are considerably less likely than men to work these extended hours.

However, even after accounting for underlying factors that might explain the ethnoracial and gender gap in earnings, vast disparities remain. For instance, Table 1 highlights that regardless of education level, women still earn a much lower share of white men’s wages. These pay discrepancies are starkest for Black women, who face the highest pay gaps at every level of education. Such trends indicate that these wage gaps are not alleviated by merely ensuring equal opportunities to higher education. Deeper structural reforms are required to address the gender and ethnoracial inequities.

Providing further perspective, when juxtaposed with the earnings of white non-Hispanic men, white women earn 67 cents to the dollar, Black women stand at 58 cents, Asian women at 78 cents, and notably, Hispanic women are at a significant disparity, earning just 49 cents. These figures amplify the urgent need for action in addressing wage disparities and systemic inequalities.

As shown in Figure 14 above, from 1979 to 2022, a review of the earnings of women across various racial and ethnic groups as a percentage of men’s earnings reveals that, for white women, there’s been a consistent upward trajectory, marking a 21-percentage point growth, from 62 percent in 1979 to 83 percent in 2021. This progression indicates a narrowing earnings gap, especially from the early 1990s onwards. Black women, starting at 74 percent of Black men’s wages in 1979, saw their earnings relative to Black men peak at 94 percent in 2009. Although there has been a significant improvement over the years, the percentages between 2009 and 2022 indicate some stagnation, hovering between 89 percent and 94 percent.

On the other hand, data for Asian women’s earnings, available from 2000, has shown a mix of rises and dips, suggesting a degree of stagnation. Starting at 80 percent in 2000, the percentage fluctuated over the years, hitting a low of 73 percent in 2012, and later bouncing back to 79 percent in 2022.

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Median earnings by occupation

Looking at median earnings data across broad occupational groups (Table 2), a clear trend emerges: women consistently earn less than men, across all occupational categories and races/ethnicities. However, the extent of this disparity varies and is influenced both by the occupation as well as the interplay of race and ethnicity.

At an overall level, workers in “management, business, and financial occupations” fare the best in terms of median earnings. However, there remain significant gender pay gaps within these occupations across all races and ethnicities. Furthermore, Black and Hispanic workers in these occupations earn significantly lower wages than their white and Asian counterparts, highlighting the dual wage discrimination faced by women of these communities.

“Service occupations,” which typically employ a significant share of women of color, stand out as paying the lowest median wages of all occupations. The reported gender pay gap for these occupations is also considerably narrower in most cases compared to “natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations,” which are traditionally male-dominated.

Occupational segregation

Occupational segregation refers to the distribution of groups, defined by characteristics like race/ethnicity or gender, into different types of jobs. In essence, occupational segregation takes place when certain groups are overrepresented in some occupations and underrepresented in others. The significance of occupational segregation in connection with earnings is profound, as jobs traditionally dominated by certain groups (e.g., women or specific racial groups) may be undervalued and thus offer lower wages compared to jobs dominated by other groups (often men or dominant racial groups). In addition, occupations dominated by certain groups might offer limited opportunities for career advancement and lack benefits. This phenomenon has deep historical roots, notably shaped by the legacy of chattel slavery and subsequent discriminatory practices. Slavery in the United States, for example, entrenched a system whereby African Americans were confined to labor-intensive, low-paying jobs. Post-abolition, systemic racism continued to restrict their occupational mobility, a pattern that has persisted over generations. Similarly, women have historically been channeled into roles deemed “suitable” for their gender, often with less pay and prestige. This history has set the stage for modern-day occupational segregation, whereby certain groups disproportionately occupy less-desirable jobs, a reflection of entrenched societal biases and historical inequalities.

The persistent presence of the ethnoracial and gender earning gap results in women of color consistently receiving less compensation. Over time, these financial shortfalls compound, hindering their ability to build wealth, amass savings, navigate economic challenges, and attain a semblance of financial security.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than a high school diploma</th>
<th>High school graduate</th>
<th>Some college or associate degree</th>
<th>Bachelor’s degree only</th>
<th>Advanced degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>White</strong></td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black</strong></td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asian</strong></td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hispanic</strong></td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2022, the occupational distribution across racial and gender lines (see Figure 15 below) highlighted clear disparities in the U.S. workforce. First of all, Black and Hispanic people are underrepresented in the higher-paying sectors of management, business, financial, and professional occupations. This inequity not only amplifies the wage gap but also hinders diverse leadership and perspectives in key decision-making roles.

Black men stood out with a significant 28 percent working in production, transportation, and material-moving roles, suggesting a disproportionate concentration in these sectors. In contrast, white men were notably represented in management, professional, and related occupations (39 percent), pointing towards greater access to professional and leadership roles. 

Black women exhibited a higher likelihood of being employed in service occupations at 25 percent, notably outpacing their white counterparts. Within this category, a significant segment of Black women was found in healthcare support roles. On the other hand, white women displayed a balanced occupational spread, with significant representation in management, professional, and related roles (48 percent).

Hispanic women and men, while showcasing diverse occupational engagements, were both substantially present in service occupations, with women at 30 percent and men at 18 percent. Hispanic men also showed a strong presence in production, transportation, and material-moving occupations at 21 percent.

Asian representation in the workforce presented a different distribution. Both Asian men and women had a pronounced presence in management, professional, and related occupations, with women at 57 percent and men at 59 percent. Their lower representation in service and production roles contrasts with Black and Hispanic people.

### TABLE 2. MEDIAN WEEKLY EARNINGS BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND GENDER FOR BROAD OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Occupation Category</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Wage Gap</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Wage Gap</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Wage Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Management, business, and financial operations</td>
<td>$1,862</td>
<td>$1,669</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>$1,649</td>
<td>$1,249</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>$1,249</td>
<td>$989</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional and related occupations</td>
<td>$1,443</td>
<td>$1,241</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>$1,241</td>
<td>$851</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>$851</td>
<td>$844</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>$1,194</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>$632</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>$632</td>
<td>$766</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sales and related occupations</td>
<td>$1,194</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>$632</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>$632</td>
<td>$766</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Office and admin support</td>
<td>$1,194</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>$632</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>$632</td>
<td>$766</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natural resources, construction and maintenance</td>
<td>$1,194</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>$632</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>$632</td>
<td>$766</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Production, transportation, and material moving</td>
<td>$1,194</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>$632</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>$632</td>
<td>$766</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Management, business, and financial operations</td>
<td>$1,462</td>
<td>$1,355</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>$1,355</td>
<td>$703</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>$703</td>
<td>$909</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional and related occupations</td>
<td>$1,194</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>$632</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>$632</td>
<td>$766</td>
<td>84%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>$1,194</td>
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<td>$632</td>
<td>90%</td>
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<td>$766</td>
<td>84%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sales and related occupations</td>
<td>$1,194</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>$1,101</td>
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<td>Office and admin support</td>
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<td>Natural resources, construction and maintenance</td>
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<td>Production, transportation, and material moving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
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<td>86%</td>
<td>$1,985</td>
<td>$763</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>$763</td>
<td>$915</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Professional and related occupations</td>
<td>$1,734</td>
<td>$1,576</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>$1,576</td>
<td>$661</td>
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<td>$661</td>
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<td>Service</td>
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<td>Natural resources, construction and maintenance</td>
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<td>Production, transportation, and material moving</td>
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<td>$661</td>
<td>$768</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>$613</td>
<td>88%</td>
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<td>$1,192</td>
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<td>88%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Production, transportation, and material moving</td>
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<td>$1,116</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>$1,116</td>
<td>$613</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>$613</td>
<td>$696</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 15. DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYED WORKERS ACROSS BROAD OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS BY GENDER, RACE/ETHNICITY

Due to rounding, columns might not add up to 100%.

TABLE 3. PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS WITH ACCESS TO DIFFERENT BENEFITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Retirement</th>
<th>Medical care</th>
<th>Life insurance</th>
<th>Paid sick leave</th>
<th>Paid vacation</th>
<th>Paid holidays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management, professional, and related occupations</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service occupations</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>57%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales and office occupations</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production, transportation, and material-moving occupations</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Access to employer-provided benefits

Table 3 analyzes the connection between occupations and access to employer-provided benefits such as retirement benefits, medical care, paid sick leave, paid vacation days, etc. We find that occupations dominated by women often provide lower levels of paid benefits. For instance, service occupations exhibit the lowest access rates across all benefits. Only 48 percent of the workers in this sector have access to retirement benefits, and 49 percent to medical care. This sector also sees a significant representation of women of color, with 30 percent of Hispanic and 25 percent of Black women working in service occupations, a stark contrast to just 19 percent of white women and 12 percent of white men.

Women’s concentration in part-time work can explain some of the differences observed in access to employer-provided benefits. While part-time work can allow caregivers to participate in the labor market and fulfill their caring responsibilities, it often comes with fewer benefits and weaker job security. The segregation of women in occupations that provided limited access to benefits combined with their concentration in part-time work serves to compound the challenges women face in the labor market.

Focusing just on paid and unpaid leave access, Table 4 highlights the disparities in access to both paid and unpaid leave across various gender and ethnoracial categories. Among white and Black groups, women consistently have slightly lower access to paid leave than their male counterparts. However, this trend is reversed within the Asian community, where women noticeably lead, with 73.3 percent having access to paid leave compared to 69.9 percent of Asian men. When considering the Hispanic population, the disparity is marginal, with both genders having roughly equal access to paid leave.

On the racial and ethnic front, the Asian demographic, both men and women, leads in terms of access to paid leave, followed closely by the white population. Black men and women are slightly behind, with 63.9 percent and 61.4 percent access, respectively. However, the Hispanic community exhibits the most significant disparity from the rest, with less than half, around 49.8 percent for men and 49.9 percent for women, having access to paid leave.

Given these variations, it’s evident that focusing on paid and unpaid leave is crucial when addressing gender and ethnoracial disparities in benefit access. The unequal access across these groups emphasizes the pressing need to develop policies promoting workplace equity and fairness.

Direct care and child care workers

It is critical to note that women, particularly women of color, are overrepresented in the paid care sector while simultaneously experiencing the challenges of unpaid care responsibilities. Direct care—workers who are paid to care for older adults and people with disabilities, including personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants—and child care workers are both critical to our economy and care needs. These jobs are some of the fastest-growing in the economy but continue to be defined as low-skill and paid low wages.

Both the direct care and child care workforces are predominantly women—85 percent and 94.9 percent respectively—and disproportionately Black and Latina women and immigrant workers. Moreover, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for all direct care workers is $12.27 per hour, and median annual earnings are just $20,200—considering high rates of part-time work. Child care workers make slightly higher wages, with annual wages in 2019 at $26,000, or approximately $12.50 per hour, but added research shows that Black women and Latinas working full time in child care were typically paid even less:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Access to paid leave</th>
<th>Access to unpaid leave only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White men</td>
<td>66.8%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White women</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black men</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black women</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian men</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian women</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic men</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic women</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau. Calculations based on data from 2017–18 ATUS leave and job flexibilities module
critical care these workers provide, care workers continue to be defined as low-skill and are poorly compensated. The marginalization and devaluing of direct care and child care workers intersect with an ongoing societal devaluing of care that disproportionately impacts women of color as both paid workers and unpaid caregivers.

This data reveals a workforce predominantly made up of intersectionally marginalized workers—immigrant women of color—who are systematically underpaid and devalued. Despite the growing need for and approximately $25,000 annually, or $12.02 per hour. Additionally, about 15 percent of direct care workers and 9.5 percent of child care workers live in poverty, compared to 4.5 percent of workers overall.25, 26

PROFILE: VIVIAN

Licensed Psychologist | 59 years old
Black woman

Vivian and her husband live in North Carolina, and at one point in their lives were primary caregivers for four “super seniors”—Vivian’s mom and dad and her husband’s mom and elder cousin. When describing her role as a caregiver, she emphasized she was constantly “communicating between the elders and the doctors, as well as with the wonderful paid care workers who assumed extra day-to-day care.” Two super seniors lived in their own residences and two resided in assisted living facilities.

She explained that “it was a lot of communication, it was a lot of medication management, a lot of comfort and being present, a lot of making sure supplies and materials were in the home and a lot of emotional care—for the elders and the care workers.”

As emergencies and new medical conditions arose across multiple states, Vivian and her husband learned new ways to remain agile and responsive—traveling with little notice, assuming the roles of long-distance and in-person care partnering simultaneously, adjusting care-partner schedules as needed, procuring household and personal supplies and materials, and reviewing treatment notes and communicating with medical teams.

As Vivian and her husband came of age, they learned bits and pieces about the harms of racism that the super seniors in their lives had experienced in general and with the medical profession in particular. Now that Vivian and her husband were in a position to support their loved ones, they were committed to doing all that they could to ensure that their elders experienced the high-quality care they deserved, were listened to, and were treated with respect and dignity. Reading about cancers, Alzheimer’s, renal failure, amputations, and other medical needs and keeping up with the latest treatment approaches consumed a lot of their “leisure time.”

Vivian spoke so passionately about the incredible care that women provided for her family members. Because she was responsible for hiring and interfacing with care workers, she observed that “there were practically no ladders in the home-care agencies and facilities … direct care workers were paid at or near minimum wage. Moreover, there was a real racial divide where many of the direct care workers were women of color and many of the supervisors or intake specialists were white females, and there was an incredible pay and status differential.” In the face of that discrepancy, Vivian said that “we made the decision to hire more independent care partners directly and pay, in some cases, more than double what the facilities or agencies paid their staff. Still, it still felt inadequate for what they did—loved our family members fiercely, protected them as their own, and made sure each day was as enjoyable as possible.”

When reflecting on her care journey, Vivian closed by reflecting that “caring up close is heart work and head work and takes a physical toll even when it’s a labor of love.”
Working poor women

Analyzing the socioeconomic dynamics of a nation involves not just evaluating the overall wealth and prosperity but also understanding the depth and breadth of poverty for those who work. In 2020, a startling 11.4 percent of the U.S. population found themselves living beneath the official poverty threshold as identified by the U.S. Census Bureau.

While poverty predominantly affects those not actively participating in the labor market, a significant portion of this demographic, numbering 6.3 million, is what the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) terms the "working poor." These are individuals who have engaged with the labor force for at least 27 weeks, either working or actively seeking work, yet their earnings do not suffice to lift them above the poverty line.

In the following graph, we look at working-poor rates, to understand the challenges faced by those who work yet remain ensnared in poverty’s grip, with a particular focus on women of color.

Based on Figure 16, in 2021, a distinct disparity in working-poor rates emerged across gender, race, and ethnicity lines. Hispanic men and women experienced some of the highest working-poor rates among all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Working-poor rates were also significantly higher in the Black community, particularly for Black women, relative to their white and Asian counterparts. Furthermore, women almost always exhibited higher working-poor rates than men. This gendered difference is particularly pronounced within the Black community. Specifically, 7.7 percent of Black women were living in poverty, compared to 4.9 percent of Black men.

These patterns can be attributed to several interconnected factors. As demonstrated above, a significant contributor to these disparities is the occupational segregation witnessed in the job market. We have demonstrated that women, especially women of color, often find themselves in lower-wage occupations. For instance, they are underrepresented in high-paying management, business, and financial roles, and conversely overrepresented in lower-wage sectors such as service occupations.

Moving forward, we further explore hardships by race/ethnicity and gender that might emerge due to these conditions, shedding light on the real-world implications of such structural inequalities.

Figure 17 illustrates the pronounced disparities in hardships faced by different racial and gender groups. Rates of food insecurity were highest among the Black population, followed by the Hispanic population. Black men and women were more than twice as likely to experience food insecurity relative to their white counterparts. When considering housing, the discrepancies remain evident. We find that white men lagged in rent payments at a rate of 0.6 percent. Meanwhile, this figure was 2.2 percent for Black men and 4.5 percent for Black women. As for mortgage payments, while the overall percentages were lower across the board, Black respondents still faced higher challenges at 1.4 percent and 1.9 percent respectively compared to just 0.7 percent for white men and 0.8 percent for white women.


![FIGURE 17. SHARE WHO REPORTED ...](Source: Financial struggles in the last seven days, by select characteristics, Week 61 (August 23–September 4, 2023), https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/hhp/hhp61.html)
INTERPLAY OF UNPAID CARE WORK AND PAID WORK
In Sections 1 and 2, the prevailing dynamics of the labor landscape have been laid bare, especially concerning the disparities faced by women, and often more so by women of color. In Section 1, we delved into the challenges of unpaid labor that disproportionately falls on the shoulders of these women. For instance, key findings highlighted how women, particularly women of color, are frequently expected to provide higher levels of care for both children and adults. Similarly, when we turned our lens to paid labor characteristics, women, especially women of color, confront a multitude of challenges like lower median earnings and being confined to certain lower-paying occupations due to occupational segregation. Compared to white women and men in general, they are at a stark disadvantage, echoing findings from previous research that illustrated how occupational roles, median earnings, and other labor market conditions like access to benefits are skewed against them.

In this section, our objective is to dissect the interplay between paid work and unpaid care work, understanding how they influence one another. We pose the question:

**How do paid work and unpaid care work interact and influence each other across gender, race, and ethnicity, especially for low-wage women?**

We leverage recent data from the American Time Use Survey, Current Population Survey, and the Census Household Pulse Survey, the latter spanning three crucial years of the pandemic—2021, 2022, and 2023. This data sheds light on the ramifications of unpaid care responsibilities on paid labor. The Household Pulse Survey especially can address pandemic-related topics such as job losses attributed to caregiving responsibilities, reduced work hours, challenges of working while supervising children, and other related matters.

Beyond the immediate impact of the pandemic, we also examine how various income and education levels influence the relationship between unpaid labor and paid work. It’s essential to discern whether these factors amplify or mitigate the challenges women face in balancing these dual responsibilities.

Following this section, we will present a set of policy recommendations. These will be rooted in our findings and will aim to address and alleviate the challenges faced by women in the workforce, especially those from marginalized communities of color.

**SECTION 3 KEY FINDINGS:**

- Significant gender differences were observed across all racial and ethnic groups regarding abstaining from paid work due to unpaid care duties. For instance, almost 10 percent of Hispanic women reported refraining from paid work due to caregiving, compared to two percent of Hispanic men. A similar trend was observed among Asian, white, and Black respondents.

- Women in part-time jobs dedicated more daily hours to care work (2.6 hours) than men (two hours) across almost all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

- Women who reduce their paid work hours due to unpaid caregiving responsibilities often experience stunted career advancement, especially during child-rearing years, which leads to a widening gender earnings gap.

**Pandemic’s amplification of disparities**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, child care emerged as a significant area of concern. The pandemic accentuated the existing gender disparities in child care responsibilities:

- Women faced more significant disruptions, with a notable proportion having to leave jobs, take leaves, cut work hours, or supervise children while working due to these disruptions. Black and Hispanic women were particularly hard hit.

- Many individuals, especially women from the Hispanic and Asian communities, refrained from working due to caregiving obligations during the pandemic. This further underscores the broader implications of caregiving responsibilities on women’s economic participation and independence.

- Over time, certain racial and ethnic groups, like Black women, saw an increased percentage leaving or losing jobs due to child care interruptions.

- While we extensively document the impact of unpaid care responsibilities on paid labor, it’s essential to recognize that poor working conditions could also limit women’s capacity to provide desired levels of care.
Unpaid caregiving and paid labor

The relationship between unpaid caregiving and paid labor has long been a topic of research. At the heart of this conversation is a fundamental question: How do unpaid caregiving responsibilities, often shouldered disproportionately by women, impact their participation and success in the paid workforce?

Unpaid caregiving often demands a significant amount of time and energy, effectively reducing the hours available for paid work and compelling many caregivers to reduce their hours in paid employment. For many women, especially those with intense caregiving roles such as looking after elderly relatives or children, full-time employment becomes almost untenable. Consequently, many are left with no choice but to opt out of the workforce or go for part-time roles, which often come with lower hourly wages and fewer benefits. Furthermore, factors such as lower wages for paid work relative to men and high costs of child care can reinforce women’s decisions to not participate in the labor market.

Based on 2021 data from the Census Household Pulse Survey, we calculate the share of individuals who refrained from working or had to drop out of the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities, whether that care pertained to children or the elderly.

The data highlights pronounced gender differences across all racial and ethnic groups in terms of abstaining from work because of unpaid care duties.

The starkest contrast was observed within the Hispanic community: 9.9 percent of Hispanic women reported they refrained from work due to caregiving responsibilities, in contrast to only two percent of Hispanic men (Figure 18). Black women followed closely, with 7.3 percent indicating they were not engaged in paid or profit-driven work because of care responsibilities, as compared to just 2.2 percent of Black men. Such disparities are not confined to these communities alone; significant discrepancies are evident among white and Asian populations as well.

In addition, there are wide discrepancies in who works full- or part-time. To understand the intricacies of labor market behavior and decision-making by race/ethnicity and gender, examining those who work part-time for noneconomic reasons offers a distinct perspective. Typically, a “part-time” job is characterized by working less than 35 hours per week. The metric of “part-time for noneconomic reasons” provides insight into the segment of the employed population that has chosen part-time roles due to personal reasons, such as caregiving responsibilities or schooling, rather than economic conditions like the unavailability of full-time jobs.

Table 5 shows that in 2022, a significantly larger share of women, irrespective of their racial or ethnic background, tended to work part-time for personal and family-related reasons compared to men. While nine percent of all employed men work part-time for noneconomic reasons, the rate for all women is notably higher at 19 percent. White women display a notable inclination towards part-time roles for personal reasons, with 20 percent representation, more than double the nine percent of white men. Black women, at 13 percent, also surpass their male counterparts, who stand at nine percent. The difference is most stark among Hispanic respondents: 9.9 percent of Hispanic women reported they refrained from work due to caregiving responsibilities, in contrast to only two percent of Hispanic men (Figure 18). Black women followed closely, with 7.3 percent indicating they were not engaged in paid or profit-driven work because of care responsibilities, as compared to just 2.2 percent of Black men. Such disparities are not confined to these communities alone; significant discrepancies are evident among white and Asian populations as well.

The absence of family-friendly policies, including paid family leave and sick days in many job sectors frequented by women, especially women of color, intensifies the difficulties many face in balancing caregiving and work. This also contributes to lower labor force participation rates for women.

Women who are engaged in part-time jobs are found to dedicate more daily hours to primary care activities, averaging 2.6 hours in contrast to the two hours reported by men working part-time jobs. As illustrated by Figure 19, this trend is consistent across almost all racial and ethnic categories, highlighting the universality of the caregiving gender divide.
Working part-time provides an option for caregivers to participate in the labor market while balancing their caregiving responsibilities. However, in certain circumstances, caregiving responsibilities may be so time-consuming as to preclude caregivers from participating in the labor market entirely. Figure 21 illustrates the gender and racial inequalities among those who are not searching for paid employment opportunities as they are unable to arrange for child care, or due to family responsibilities. Roughly 14.2 percent of respondents who mentioned caregiving responsibilities as the key reason why they were not searching for paid work were women, while only 4.8 percent were men. When we break down these figures by race and ethnicity, we observe that these trends hold across all subgroups, with women being more likely than men to not participate in the labor market because of caregiving. Hispanic women particularly stand out in these figures as being significantly more likely than average to not participate in the labor force as a result of caregiving responsibilities.

Reducing hours in paid work due to unpaid responsibilities can hinder women’s career advancement. Long work hours are often equated with dedication and play a crucial role in promotion decisions for managerial roles. While the gender earnings gap is evident early on, it widens during child-rearing years and continues to grow until the child reaches age 10, with many women’s career progress stalling as they juggle responsibilities. Conversely, many men, less likely to reduce work hours, continue ascending in their careers.

Figure 20 highlights the significance of caregiving responsibilities in determining why women opt for part-time jobs. Across all racial and ethnic groups, 13.7 percent of women reported working part-time for reasons related to child care or family obligations. However, research finds that people working part-time, for the caregiving reasons explained previously, experience a wage penalty of 18 percent and a benefits disadvantage. This figure was 3.2 percent for men. This gender gap persists consistently within each racial and ethnic subgroup, with the highest differences observed among Asian (11.5 percentage points) and Hispanic (11 percentage points) respondents.

Working part-time provides an option for caregivers to participate in the labor market while balancing their caregiving responsibilities. However, in certain circumstances, caregiving responsibilities may be so time-consuming as to preclude caregivers from participating in the labor market entirely. Figure 21 illustrates the gender and racial inequalities among those who are not searching for paid employment opportunities as they are unable to arrange for child care, or due to family responsibilities. Roughly 14.2 percent of respondents who mentioned caregiving responsibilities as the key reason why they were not searching for paid work were women, while only 4.8 percent were men. When we break down these figures by race and ethnicity, we observe that these trends hold across all subgroups, with women being more likely than men to not participate in the labor market because of caregiving. Hispanic women particularly stand out in these figures as being significantly more likely than average to not participate in the labor force as a result of caregiving responsibilities.

| TABLE 5. SHARE OF RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED PERFORMING NO CARE WORK ON THE DIARY DAY |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| All Men | All Women | White Men | White Women | Black Men | Black Women | Asian Men | Asian Women | Hispanic Men | Hispanic Women |
| 9% | 19% | 9% | 20% | 9% | 13% | 8% | 18% | 7% | 19% |


Source: Author’s calculation based on American Time Use Survey (ATUS) 2022 microdata files

Source: Author’s calculations based on CPS 2022 microdata files
In a 2023 study by the Urban Institute for the Department of Labor, findings revealed that women’s unpaid caregiving for children and adults leads to significant long-term economic consequences. On average, mothers incur employment-related costs amounting to $295,000 throughout their lifetime, based on 2021’s inflation-adjusted value. This caregiving role decreases a mother’s lifetime earnings by 15 percent, subsequently impacting retirement income. Notably, the losses are particularly profound for mothers with lower education levels and for Hispanic mothers. For those without a high school diploma, caregiving results in a loss of 26 percent of potential lifetime earnings, while Hispanic mothers see a reduction of 19 percent. The authors attribute these pronounced effects to factors like higher child numbers and employment constraints, such as inflexible job roles and inability to afford paid child care. The researchers found that men, in general, were much less inclined than mothers to adjust their labor commitments in response to child care necessities.

While the effect of unpaid caregiving on paid labor is well-documented, the opposite relationship also merits attention. The conditions of paid work, particularly for women in low-wage roles with minimal benefits and inflexible hours, can impede their ability to provide the level of unpaid care they desire, or their family requires. Often, the demands of inflexible jobs, combined with the lack of supportive workplace policies, mean that women find themselves unable to care for their loved ones in the manner they wish. This dilemma is especially pronounced for single mothers or those without extended family support.

In the absence of comprehensive data examining whether women indeed provide less unpaid care due to the constraints of their paid roles, this

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### PROFILE: VIVIAN

**Licensed Psychologist | 59 years old**

**Black woman**

Within days of realizing the potential implications of the pandemic on the elderly, the private care partners that worked with two of her super seniors approached her with plans to form a protective bubble around them. The care partners literally began living inside of an assisted living facility and at one home. They made sure as few people as possible entered their loved ones’ spaces to minimize transmission. When the care partners went home to rest, they remained vigilant so as to not catch COVID. Specifically, when thinking about the ways the agency and facility care partners supported her loved ones, Vivian said, “There was a lot for them to juggle. The ways in which people expected them to deliver high-quality care no matter what they were going through and how few PPE [personal protective equipment] supplies they were given.”

Then the unthinkable happened: “I was in a car accident myself, a really bad accident. Just when I thought I was managing well, I had me to worry about. Because of the accident, I had some serious limitations and many medical appointments, so it became a matter of how many of the care responsibilities could I let go—shift to others or leave undone—because now my health was in the equation through no fault of my own.” Vivian’s experience is a testament to the difficulty of managing one’s own health needs when you are already a critical caregiver to others around you.

While she continued to recover from her own accident and provide care to the elders in her family during the pandemic, Vivian continued to interact with what she described as “new level of brokenness in the system”—underappreciated, underpaid, dehumanized, and overworked frontline care providers were suddenly deemed “essential.” She remembered hearing and seeing (via FaceTime) care providers being so kind and humane to her loved ones, all while not being treated as humans themselves.

“We just need to do better as a country; we need to figure out how to care for care workers. It’s a partnership.”

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Source: Author’s calculations based on CPS 2022 microdata files
report primarily focuses on the effects of unpaid labor on paid work. Yet it’s crucial to acknowledge the bidirectional nature of this relationship as it emphasizes the need for policies that enable individuals to choose—whether it be providing more care or participating in the labor force.

**The COVID-19 pandemic undeniably reshaped the landscape of caregiving, be it for children or adults. It has vividly underscored the indispensable nature of unpaid care—a domain where women of color overwhelmingly take the lead as primary caregivers within their families and households.**

**Pandemic spotlight: Unpaid care responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic**

In this “pandemic spotlight” section, we focus on unpaid care responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. For this exploration, our primary data source is the Census Household Pulse Survey, a timely and crucial tool initiated by the U.S. Census Bureau during the pandemic. This survey was designed to swiftly gauge the social and economic impacts of the pandemic on American households, capturing real-time data on a range of subjects, including employment, child and adult care needs, food security, housing, and education.

Our analysis revolves around data from Weeks 28–40, which spans from April 14 to Dec. 13, 2021. This period is especially pertinent as it represents some of the peak moments of the pandemic, with widespread disruptions in child care and the economy overall. Emphasizing this time frame allows us to dissect the profound implications of the pandemic on the fabric of unpaid labor, highlighting its relevance even now.

In this “pandemic spotlight” section, our emphasis predominantly shifts towards child care rather than adult care, a departure from the broader focus of our previous sections. This narrowed lens is necessitated by the data available from the Census Household Pulse Survey. While a significant portion of our analysis and the subsequent graphs concentrate on unpaid child care during the pandemic, we also take into account individuals who abstained from working due to broader caregiving responsibilities, encompassing both child care and care for elderly persons.

The seismic shifts in daily routines and heightened need for care, coupled with uncertainties related to care provision, health, and employment, accentuated the challenges faced by caregivers. As we navigate through the subsequent sections, we’ll probe into five pivotal facets that underscore the magnitude of the pandemic’s impact on unpaid caregiving, broken down by gender and race/ethnicity:

1. **Interruptions in child care:** With schools transitioning to remote learning and many daycare centers shuttering their doors, families grappled with sudden and prolonged child care needs.

2. **Job losses attributed to child care interruptions:** A significant portion of the workforce had to make the difficult decision to leave, or lost their jobs due to these unprecedented child care challenges.

3. **Cutting work hours/ supervised children while working due to child care interruptions**

4. **Taking paid/unpaid leave due to child care interruptions:** To balance the pressing demands of child care and work, numerous employees had to resort to taking leaves—both paid and unpaid.

5. **Inability to work for pay or profit due to caregiving responsibilities:** The heightened caregiving responsibilities, whether for adults or children, rendered many unable to commit to their professional roles, leading to forgoing work altogether.

The repercussions of the pandemic on caregiving responsibilities underscore the urgent need for systemic support and adaptive policies, ensuring that households can weather such storms in the future without compromising on either care or career.

![FIGURE 22. SHARE OF RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED INTERRUPTIONS IN CHILD CARE DUE TO THE PANDEMIC](Source: Author’s calculations based on Household Pulse Survey microdata files for Weeks 28–40 (April 14–December 13, 2021))
In examining the share of respondents who reported interruptions in child care due to the pandemic, the following Figure 22 shows significant gender and ethnic/racial discrepancies.

Overall, women were 1.5 times more likely to report disruptions in child care relative to men, with 5.3 percent of women as opposed to 3.4 percent of men indicating such disruptions. When this data is delved into with a racial and ethnic lens, the disparities become even more pronounced, particularly within the Black community. A staggering 7.8 percent of Black women noted child care disruptions, starkly contrasting with the 3.6 percent of Black men who reported the same.

Conversely, the Asian community portrayed a contrasting narrative, consistent with some of the patterns observed in our prior evaluations. The gap between Asian men and women concerning child care interruptions is noticeably narrower. In essence, Asian men faced comparable levels of disruptions due to child care challenges, suggesting a more evenly distributed caregiving responsibility within this demographic during the pandemic.

**Left or lost job**

Below, we explore the share of respondents who either left or lost their jobs among those who reported interruptions in child care in 2021 (Figure 23). Echoing the trends from our previous graph on experiences with child care disruptions, a notably high rate of Black and Hispanic women reported job departures or losses tied to child care issues. Roughly 16.8 percent of Black women conveyed that they either left or lost their jobs due to child care interruptions, in sharp contrast to less than 7.5 percent of Black men. Similarly, while Hispanic men reported such occurrences at a rate of 6.2 percent, a significant 12.4 percent of Hispanic women found themselves leaving or losing their jobs due to child care-related disruptions. Consistent with previous observations, the gender disparities are least pronounced within the Asian population. Additionally, research shows that hundreds of thousands of Black and Hispanic women who left the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic have yet to return, citing caregiving responsibilities and the lack of workplace flexibility and remote work compounded with experiencing systematic discrimination and microaggressions as key reasons.

When examining the graph over time (Appendix Figure A1), using data from the Census Household Pulse Survey spanning 2021 to 2023, a consistent trend emerges across these three years. Irrespective of race or ethnicity, apart from Asian respondents, all other groups of women have been more likely to leave or lose their jobs due to child care interruptions. This pattern holds true across all surveyed years. However, a particular point of note in the 2023 data is the pronounced increase among Black women. There’s a significant uptick in the percentage of Black women who reported job losses due to child care interruptions, rising from about 17 percent in 2021 to over 20 percent in 2023.

**Taking paid/unpaid leave due to child care interruptions**

Similar to previous insights, Figure 24 below delves into the share of respondents who had to rely on (or opted to rely on) paid or unpaid leave among those who reported child care interruptions in 2021. Mirroring earlier findings in this report, women again find themselves disproportionately impacted. Across all races and ethnicities, more than 20 percent of women were compelled to take either paid or unpaid leave because of child care disruptions.
When observing the data trends from 2021 to 2023 (Appendix Figure A2), a general pattern emerges: a larger proportion of female respondents indicated that they had taken either paid or unpaid leave due to child care interruptions. This trend remained consistent across these years, with one notable exception in 2023. During this year, a sharp increase was observed in the percentage of Hispanic men who reported taking paid or unpaid leave because of child care-related disruptions. Intriguingly, this uptick contrasted with a slight decline in the proportion of Hispanic women reporting the need to take such leaves in the same year.

Additionally, when dissecting the data by racial and ethnic lines, a distinct pattern becomes evident. White respondents consistently reported higher instances of taking paid or unpaid leaves due to child care interruptions when compared to nonwhite respondents. This disparity might reflect the comparatively greater access that white individuals have to leave options without the looming threat of job loss, suggesting underlying systemic advantages in leave policies.

Cut work hours/supervised children while working due to child care interruptions

In our subsequent analysis, depicted in Figure 25, we investigate the 2021 share of respondents who reduced their working hours or found themselves supervising children while working among those who reported child care interruptions. Across all racial and ethnic groups, women consistently reported higher rates of having to make such adjustments. On average, women experienced approximately 1.5 times the rate compared to males. Although the gap between Asian men and women was relatively narrow, significant disparities emerged between Black men and women.

![Figure 25](source: Author’s calculations based on Household Pulse Survey microdata files for Weeks 28–40 (April 14–December 13, 2021))

As well as Hispanic men and women. White women led the statistics, with 28.4 percent reporting cuts in work hours or simultaneously supervising children while working. This is in comparison to 24.5 percent for Black women, 21.4 percent for Hispanic women, and 27.8 percent for Asian women, emphasizing the varied experiences of these groups during these challenging times. However, it is important to note here that some of these observed differences could be a result of differences in access to remote work.

Over the period from 2021 to 2023, trends reveal that women consistently reported higher rates of reducing work hours or managing their children simultaneously while working (Appendix Figure A3). The latest data from 2023 specifically highlights a significant surge in the proportion of white and Black women who had to cut down on their work hours or oversee their children during work due to disruptions in child care. Conversely, the numbers for white men and Black men saw a small decline over time.

PROFILE: FLORA

Nonprofit Employee

While the pandemic created heightened health concerns for Flora and her parents, the transition to a remote workplace has been a tremendous tool for Flora. She explains that a remote workplace "offers flexibility, and so when I have to take a couple of hours to accompany my father to a doctor’s appointment, I am able to do and make up that time whenever I need to rather than be limited to the hours an office would be open."

Prior to the pandemic, Flora was working in health care, and when her father had a stroke she was “expected to come back to work the next day.” She talked about the intense stress of working while knowing her father was hospitalized and not feeling like she could give 100 percent but having financially no other option.

In contrast, she says one day while working virtually from her home in Georgia she “was on a call, leading a great discussion, and then all of a sudden in the middle of the call my father had a stroke,” and she was able to take the time off she needed to care for her father and return to work when she was able. On top of the ability to take time off, she spoke about how grateful she was that she was home and able to call paramedics immediately, something her mom with Alzheimer’s couldn’t do—remote work allowed her to provide lifesaving care.
POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 4
This research explored the impact of unpaid work, paid work, and their intersection. In each of the three sections, it was abundantly clear that women, especially women of color, are being hurt on all sides. It’s important to recognize that not any singular policy can fix these disparities and that challenges as entrenched and intricate as these require systemic and wide-ranging policy solutions. The following recommendations aim to address the inequities in our economic system and take critical steps towards building a just and equitable economy, particularly for those left behind by the current status quo.

**Robust, nuanced, and integrated data**
To fully recognize the value of unpaid care work, we need more robust and nuanced data on unpaid care work. Ideally, data would look outside of the gender binary, not rely on self-reporting, and include intrahousehold analysis. Additionally, unpaid care work should be integrated into data and research on labor and the economy. Analysis from the National Partnership for Women and Families found that female caregiving in wages alone is worth $625 billion. Another way to quantify unpaid care work is to include it in key figures like Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The International Labour Organization estimates that if care work were valued at an hourly minimum wage, it would amount to nine percent of global GDP or roughly $11 trillion.

**Strong investments in public infrastructure**
Investments in public infrastructure can reduce the time women, particularly women of color and low-income women, spend on unpaid care work. This includes making increased federal financial investments in already existing programs and agencies like Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS), before- and after-school programs, and more. There should also be public investments in new programs like universal preschool and safe, accessible, affordable, and quality child care. Deep and sustainable investment in public infrastructure, both new and old, is an essential tool to solving this multifaceted problem.

**Tax credits**
Under our capitalist economic system, a critical way to recognize the value of unpaid care work is to compensate people for that work. One way to do this would be in the form of expanded tax credits. Some existing tax credits already get at this idea, such as the Child Tax Credit and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. Both credits should be expanded to be fully refundable, provide monthly payments, include mixed-status families with Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs), and reach more families who need and greatly benefit from the credits. Additionally, a broader and more holistic care credit that isn’t tied to employment or income would allow all caregivers to receive compensation—from grandmothers watching the kids while parents work to single mothers and everyone in between.

**Guaranteed income**
Implementing a national guaranteed income program would provide recurring and unrestricted cash payments to individuals, allowing them to use those payments for whatever they need. A guaranteed income program focused on low- and moderate-income individuals, such as the Guaranteed Income Pilot Program Act of 2023, would allow them baseline compensation disconnected from their employment to pay for basic necessities and recognize the baseline work every family has to do. Additionally, guaranteed income programs could be a critical step in redressing the historical inequities felt in Black and Brown families today.

When discussing her experience with leaving the workforce to care for her ill parents, profile participant Flora explained that, “people link it to me having high moral character, but it’s not viewed as high enough on the scale of skills and experience.” This is a severe devaluation of the skills required to provide care for loved ones. Fully understanding the scope of unpaid work and including its worth when looking at key economic indicators are critical steps to bringing unpaid work into the spotlight.
Paid sick days
Recent research has shown that paid sick leave mandates increase the probability of caregiving leave taken by men, and more specifically for men with children and men who were less likely to have had access to paid sick leave—like Hispanic workers and men without a bachelor’s degree. Creating a national sick day standard would give access to the workers least likely to have paid sick days, such as low-income workers and workers of color. The Healthy Families Act would create a national legal right for many working people to earn up to seven days of paid sick time off per year to use when they or their families need it and would be a huge step in addressing these devastating gaps.

Safe, accessible, affordable child care
In most places in the US, early childhood education is not a universal public benefit until age 5 when children start kindergarten. Child care costs for children under 5 are among the highest in the 38 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). A 2023 report from the Department of Labor found that in 2018 the child care prices ranged from eight percent to 19.3 percent of a family’s income per child. The current ad-hoc state of child care fails to meet many working families’ needs and the diverse needs of children, especially those with disabilities. For example, many early child care programs operate only half a day or until early evening—but many low- and moderate-income families work outside of the “traditional” 9 to 5 schedule and are left with nowhere to turn. Despite child care costs being astronomical, child care providers are critically underpaid, and nearly 97 percent are women—including nearly 17 percent Black women and just over 16 percent Latina women. A reconstruction of child care systems in the US must center the needs of women of color and their children as well as provide high-quality and well-paying jobs to the providers who do incredibly valuable early childhood education—something that is invaluable to the country.

Safe, accessible, affordable adult and elder care
Creating easy, affordable access to health services for the elderly, sick, and disabled would reduce the time women spend managing appointments and other critical aspects of care. Flora and Vivian, two profile participants, demonstrate two different ways in which the current systems for long-term home and community-based care challenge caregivers. Flora intended to take a short-term break from work to care for her mom after an early Alzheimer’s diagnosis but after realizing hiring paid care workers was inaccessible to her family, she became a full-time caregiver. In contrast, Vivien had multiple interactions with paid care workers, both in home and facility settings, but explained she was rare and lucky in being able to afford the amount of care her loved ones needed. Increased access to affordable and quality long-term and home- and community-based care, such as home health aides and similar care services, would also be essential to reducing women’s time spent caring for loved ones. This cannot be done without also providing quality pay and jobs to the care providers themselves who are also disproportionately women and women of color.

Paid safe days
Safe days or safe leave refers to paid time off that allows workers to take paid time off when they themselves or their loved ones are victims of domestic violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault. Some paid leave laws include these provisions, and any national program for paid sick time should include safe leave so that people, once again disproportionately women and women of color, can have the time they need to attend related medical appointments, obtain a protective order, or relocate. The Healthy Families Act includes safe days as an eligible reason to use the time.
**Paid family and medical leave**

A national paid family and medical leave program would allow for workers to earn a percentage of their pay while they take time off to address a serious health condition (including pregnancy), care for a family member/loved one with a serious health condition, and care for a newborn, newly adopted child, or newly placed foster child. Currently, the United States offers no national standard of paid leave, but the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 offers unpaid leave to approximately 56 percent of the workforce. There is key legislation that would close gaps in FMLA coverage such as the **Job Protection Act**, but critically the **Family and Medical Leave Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act** would establish a federal program to allow workers to take up to 12 weeks off for eligible needs.

Paid family and medical leave programs must be specifically tailored to encourage and promote men accessing them—a lesson learned from other countries who have passed programs. Three ways to help make paid leave work for men include progressive wage replacement, job protection and antiretaliation measures, and flexible timing. Ensuring the lowest-earning men have as close to full pay as possible is critical to ensuring the families who need it the most (as shown by this research) have true access to the program. Job protection and strong antiretaliation measures in a national program are necessary for men (and everyone) to feel comfortable taking paid leave, especially as research shows men fear retaliation for taking leave and face stigma in the workplace when they do access these benefits. Finally, allowing men to take leave at any point during the first year of a child’s life gives families the flexibility to trade off who is the primary caregiver. This helps keep both parents attached to the workforce, while still spending critical time caring for their new child. It’s also necessary to include an expansive and inclusive definition of family in paid leave legislation to encourage and allow all families to care for each other. Ensuring men from all backgrounds value care work and have access to public policies that allow them to take on their share of the work is a key piece of this solution.

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**Raise the federal minimum wage**

The federal minimum wage has stagnated at $7.25 an hour since 2009, and the tipped minimum wage stands at a devastatingly low $2.13 an hour since 1991. Women, especially Black and Hispanic women, are over represented in low-wage and minimum wage jobs, with research estimating that if the minimum wage were raised, 23 percent of all workers who would see a raise are Black or Hispanic women. According to the Economic Policy Institute, in every part of the United States a single adult needs $17 an hour to live modestly but adequately. 

The **Raise the Wage Act of 2023** would raise the minimum wage to $17 and eliminate the tipped, disability, and youth subminimum wages. This would raise wages for millions of workers across the country and help close the disparities felt by women of color.

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Delaney, one of our profile participants, accessed FMLA but, when asked about her experiences, cited many problems with the program, including its eligibility requirements. She explained that “with FMLA you have a year that you have to wait. Well, what if I have a baby within that year and something’s wrong with my baby, how is my job not protected?” It’s true—FMLA currently requires people to have worked at their employer for at least 12 months to access leave. This is one of the many ways this program currently fails families.
Local intervention

The jobs in which women of color are disproportionately represented are often workplaces without access to critical benefits. While the ultimate policy goal would be for these to be national programs separate from employment benefits, until that is a reality, employers and states must lead the way in implementing these programs. Only an estimated 20–25 percent of the US workforce has access to paid leave through their employer. This percentage is much lower for low-wage workers. For example, in 2020, only eight percent of workers in the bottom wage quartile (who on average earn $14 per hour or less) had access to paid leave.

Equitable pathways to education and workforce advancement

Our research findings also outlined that Black and Latina people are underrepresented in the higher-paying sectors of management, business, financial, and professional occupations, which contributes to the wage gap but also hinders an inclusive and equitable workforce. Beyond just access to higher-paying occupations, there should be continued policy measures to eliminate discrimination in hiring and promotion, and promote a workplace that supports the advancement of workers regardless of their race, gender, and other identities. Additionally, there must be intentional work to diversify high-quality jobs by creating equitable pathways to secondary and postsecondary education, workforce development, and apprenticeship programs.

End subminimum wages

The tipped minimum wage allows employers to pay their employees $2.13 an hour as long as their tips reach the minimum wage. While tipped workers’ wages are never supposed to be less than the minimum wage, it is nearly impossible to enforce this rule, and it contributes to the economic oppression of workers of color, and disproportionately women of color. Additionally, the tipped minimum wage is a legacy of slavery, when the restaurant industry looked to hire newly freed Black people and force them to live on tips. The policy lives on today as the tipped minimum wage disproportionately affecting women of color. More than two-thirds of tipped workers are women, and even among tipped workers the disparities grow. Latina women make an estimated 30 percent less than tipped white men and 23 percent less than white women. As previously mentioned, the Raise the Wage Act of 2023 would end the tipped subminimum wage over a seven-year period and is an urgently needed congressional action.

Equal pay for equal work

While the wage gap is an insidious problem partially caused by women being more likely to take part-time work due to their unpaid caregiving responsibilities, as previously noted, old-school pay discrimination still persists despite the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009. The Paycheck Fairness Act includes solutions to the current loopholes. These solutions include but are not limited to the prohibition of retaliation for colleagues discussing salaries and screening job applicants on their salary history; requiring employers to prove that pay disparities exist for legitimate, job-related reasons; and giving the Department of Labor and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission the tools they need to enforce the ideal of “equal pay for equal work.”

While profile participant Emma is now an office manager at a school, when asked about opportunities for advancement, she explained that “I don’t see that very often, I don’t see much advancement. I see us trying to fight for equal pay as other [school] districts.” Emma has worked part-time jobs and now works in a woman-dominated occupation. Her experience matches the data and has a real impact on how she thinks about her financial stability and future.
Workers and people of color are disproportionately represented in occupations with unstable and unpredictable hours, which increases the difficulty of managing child care and other unpaid care responsibilities for these working women. This is seen in the extreme for Latina women. Despite being only 19 percent of the U.S. population, Latinas make up 21 percent of child care workers and nearly 30 percent of service jobs. Simultaneously, 44 percent of U.S.-born Hispanic mothers and 53 percent of foreign-born Hispanic mothers have an irregular/nonstandard work schedule. In general, Latinas are overrepresented in jobs with high incidences of labor violations by employers. Flexible and fair scheduling legislation with strong enforcement would help give women the time they need to plan for child care. The Schedules That Work Act would address many problems seen in hourly workers’ scheduling, including adequate rest between shifts, advance notice of schedules, a right to request a schedule that fits their needs, predictability for last-minute changes or canceled shifts, and more.

Worker protections
Domestic workers and farmworkers are at heightened risk of economic exploitation, as they are excluded from critical labor protections afforded to other workers. This current reality is a consequence of post-chattel slavery measures from Southern legislators pushing for the exclusion of these workers from landmark legislation over decades because they were and continue to be occupations held overwhelmingly by people of color and, in the case of domestic workers, overwhelmingly by women of color. Amending the Fair Labor Standards and National Labor Relations Acts to provide coverage to farmworkers and allowing domestic workers critical protections like overtime pay and other revisions outlined in the proposed Domestic Worker Bill of Rights Act would be monumental steps for these workers and their families.

Unionization
Protecting the right to organize is a critical tool for building an equitable economy. Research shows that unions help households by raising incomes, increasing benefits, and improving the quality and stability of their jobs. Analysis by the Center for American Progress shows that Black households with a union member have a median wealth that is more than three times nonunion Black households. In Hispanic households, median wealth for union households is more than five times nonunion Hispanic counterparts, and for white households it’s almost double. Women represented by unions have hourly wages 9.5 percent higher on average than their nonunionized female counterparts. In the service industry, folks who are union-represented are paid nearly 50 percent more than nonunion counterparts. Union workers also have better access to paid sick days, and unions are critical in the ongoing fight for paid family and medical leave. Unions don’t just help unionized workers; research shows that in places with high union density, workers, whether unionized or not, have higher wages and better benefits because unions set higher standards to attract and retain workers. Ensuring all workers, in every industry, can democratically elect to join a union and repealing the so-called “right-to-work” laws are essential protections to promoting an equitable economy for women of color. The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act protects the right to join a union by empowering workers, holding employers accountable for violating workers’ rights, and protecting safe and fair union elections, among other provisions—all of which support the autonomy of workers.

Improve part-time work
Part-time work can be a helpful tool for women to manage their unpaid caregiving needs, but there must be further exploration of how to ensure part-time work is valued, well paid, and maintains access to critical benefits that are often reserved for full-time employees. During Emma’s interview, she mentioned multiple part-time jobs she took in order to make ends meet. She struggled with the rigidity of the hours and consistently mentioned the lack of access to medical insurance. The current structure of part-time work is not set up to help those who use it the most: women.

Research shows that part-time workers earn nearly 30 percent less per hour than other workers with similar demographic characteristics and education levels. When adjusted for industry, occupation, demographics, and education, the penalty is still nearly 20 percent. This reduction, when “fully adjusted,” suggests that part of the wage penalty can be attributed to lower-paying sectors and jobs with more part-time work—the same jobs in which women of color are overrepresented. Research found that people working part time specifically for “noneconomic reasons” (such as child care problems and other unpaid caregiving needs) experienced a wage penalty of over 18 percent. Part-time workers also face a benefits disadvantage—full time workers’ benefits are, on average, 20 percent of their total compensation. This drops to just over 16 percent for part-time workers. Pay and benefit parity
between part-time and full-time workers would be a huge step in supporting the financial prosperity of many caregivers. The Part-Time Worker Bill of Rights Act would expand workplace protections, implement pay parity, and more to increase the economic stability of these workers.68

Lessons from the pandemic
While the pandemic caused immense disruption and grief, it also made incredibly salient the lack of public policy infrastructure that can support people through a crisis. With nearly 60 percent of people in the US living paycheck to paycheck, a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic is nearly impossible to weather without emergency savings and public policies such as expanded public benefits and direct cash assistance, paid sick days, and paid leave.69 Ensuring all people are set up to financially succeed through consistent livable wages and having the resources for emergency savings and successful retirement programs is urgently needed to close the growing economic disparities across the country and to support caregivers. However, the pandemic also showed us the capability of our government to provide direct cash assistance to families in need. The stimulus payments and monthly installments of the expanded child tax credits were incredibly successful in lifting children out of poverty and helping families make ends meet. Instead of waiting for the next global disaster, it would be prudent to build out the infrastructure of these programs and reimplement aspects of them like the monthly child tax credit payments to promote the continued economic security of families across the country.

Flexibility for caregivers in the workplace (whether a full-time or part-time employee) is essential. This flexibility can include fair and flexible scheduling, as discussed in Section 2. It also includes the continuation of support for remote work. Remote and hybrid work options allow caregivers in many cases to remain employed and have contributed to increased labor-force participation for women with children under the age of 5 in a “post-pandemic” world.70 However, this is not a catch-all solution, as we know women of color are disproportionately in low-wage and essential jobs that cannot be transferred to a remote model.

A note on implementation
We cannot overstate the necessity of inclusive implementation of these policies. Programs like tax credits and paid leave only work if people know they have the right to them and how to use them.

Allowing caregivers to be there for their children and sick, disabled, or aging loved ones while being employed is a win for everyone. When asked about what at her current workplace made her feel supported as a caregiver, Flora responded without hesitation: “Definitely having a really flexible remote workplace has been a game changer. Having access to paid leave, paid time off has been really important.”

Effective implementation is nuanced and different depending on what each community looks like, but all require adequate funding to ensure the government, stakeholders, and community partners can actually reach low-income families and communities of color.

This work, and the vast and robust work in this field, all reveal the difficult truth that our economic and social systems are fundamentally failing women, especially low-income earners and women of color. Unpaid care is an essential, vital, and honorable aspect of the human experience and is inseparable from broader economic prosperity. Promoting equitable access to quality jobs with livable wages and benefits, creating an affordable and quality child care system, and securing the democratic right to organize are urgently needed to promote the advancement and financial longevity of women in general and women of color in particular. Valuing caregiving as a valid form of labor and promoting caregiver participation in the workforce through part- and full-time work parity, remote and hybrid work options, and flexible work schedules are necessary changes. All of these recommended changes to our labor and economic policies are pieces of building an economy rooted in worker empowerment and solidarity—ensuring an economy that allows all workers access to equitable protections, benefits, and quality of life. These critical public investments in building a care infrastructure can recognize the value of both care and care workers, invest in children and families, and, hopefully, by reducing strain between paid work and unpaid care labor, boost the economic opportunities of women and caregivers. A broad reckoning with the ways in which our economic system is imbued with racism and sexism is urgently needed to reconstruct an economy that values the work of women and supports their families’ well-being.
APPENDIX

FIGURE A1. TIME TREND 2021–2023, SHARE OF RESPONDENTS WHO LEFT OR LOST JOB DUE TO CHILD CARE INTERRUPTIONS

FIGURE A2. TIME TREND 2021–2023, TAKING PAID/UNPAID LEAVE DUE TO CHILD CARE INTERRUPTIONS

FIGURE A3. TIME TREND 2021–2023, CUTTING WORK HOURS/SUPERVISED CHILDREN WHILE WORKING DUE TO CHILD CARE INTERRUPTIONS

Source: Author’s calculations based on Household Pulse Survey microdata files
NOTES

1. Here and throughout the report, we focus on analyzing these issues through a lens of equity rather than equality. We recognize that simply providing equal access to opportunities may be inadequate to address the historical and structural causes of gender and racial disparities. Hence, our analysis and policy prescriptions are aimed at achieving gender and racial equity.

2. In this report, “women of color” refers to women from non-Hispanic, nonwhite backgrounds (non-Hispanic Black and Asian women) as well as Hispanic women, irrespective of their racial background. We have excluded Indigenous women from our analysis due to limited sample sizes.

3. Throughout this report, there may be times when care work may be seen as “burdensome” or “difficult,” whether that be explicitly or implicitly. To be clear, we value care work as both essential and positive, but recognize that our current systems make this work challenging. The goal of this report, and especially the policy recommendations, is to build economic systems that allow for everyone to make the best decisions for themselves and their loved ones related to their care and to ensure those choices are not a burden.

4. The data referenced in this report originates from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), which relies on self-reported accounts of how individuals aged 15 and older allocate their time, encompassing various activities, including unpaid care work. It is crucial for readers to recognize the inherent limitations associated with self-reported data. Notably, discrepancies can arise between participants’ perceptions and their actual time expenditure, particularly in the context of care responsibilities. Prior research indicates a tendency among male respondents to overestimate the extent of their involvement in care-related activities compared to female respondents. For instance, studies have demonstrated that men often report spending more time on child care or household chores than what observational data suggests (e.g., see S. M. Bianchi et al., “Is Anyone Doing the Housework? Trends in the Gender Division of Household Labor” [Social Forces, 2000]). This potential bias should be taken into consideration when interpreting findings related to gender differences in unpaid care work, as it may influence the comparative data presented and the consequent analysis derived from the ATUS.

5. These classifications are based on the categorization of activities in the ATUS.


13. We combined all respondents who have a college degree and those with more advanced degrees into a single group to ensure adequate number of observations in each gender/race subgroup.

14. In other words, being “in the labor force” is therefore a more inclusive term, capturing both those who are employed and those who are actively seeking employment. Conversely, those who are not actively looking for a job or are not available for work are considered “not in the labor force.” For example, retirees, students, homemakers who aren’t seeking paid work, and others who might be neither working nor seeking work fall outside the labor force.


20. V. Wilson, E. Miller, and M. Kassa, “Racial Representation in Professional Occupations: By the Numbers” [Economic Policy Institute, June 8, 2021], epi.org.

Our analysis used 2021 Pulse Survey data instead of 2020. This was primarily done since the 2021 surveys asked more detailed questions about how child care interruptions affected paid work. This also felt important since throughout 2021, the pandemic disrupted paid work and care arrangements, as above schools did not reopen for face-to-face instruction until May, and COVID vaccines did not show up for young children until much later.


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"Raise the Wage Act of 2023."


M. Zhavoronkova, K. Khattar, and M. Brady, "Occupational Segregation in America” (CAP20, March 29, 2022), Occupational Segregation in America - Center for American Progress.


A. Banerjee, M. Poydock, C. McNicholas, I. Mangundayao, and A. Sait, "Unions Are Not Only Good for Workers, They’re Good for Communities and for Democracy" (Economic Policy Institute, December 15, 2021), Unions are not only good for workers, they’re good for communities and for democracy.


Notes for all Household Pulse Survey (HPS) time trend graphs: While the summary statistics generated for 2021 and 2022 are based on multiple weeks of survey data, the statistics for 2023 are based on only one week of survey data. This is because the relevant data were available for only Week 61 in 2023.

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