

# The Status of Women in Washington:

*Forging Pathways  
to Leadership and  
Economic Opportunity*



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## Executive Summary

Women in Washington have made significant advances in the past several decades but face persistent inequities that often prevent them from reaching their full potential. Women in the state are more likely than they were two decades ago to hold a bachelor's degree or higher, have experienced a narrowing of the gender wage gap, and have a higher representation in the state legislature than in most other states in the nation. At the same time, Washington women continue to earn less than men, and many face economic insecurity. Women also are far from achieving parity in the state legislature and face stark disparities in opportunities and access to resources across racial and ethnic groups. Addressing such challenges and disparities is essential to the continued advancement of women and the well-being of Washington as a whole.

This report provides critical data and analyzes areas of progress for women in Washington, as well as places where progress has slowed or stalled. It examines key indicators of women's status in several topical areas: employment and earnings, economic security and poverty, and political participation. The data presented on these topics can serve as a resource for advocates, community leaders, policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders who are working to create public policies and programs that enable women in Washington to achieve their full potential. Key findings in the report include the following:

- In Washington, 58.7 percent of women are in the labor force, either employed or actively looking for work. This reflects a national trend in which women's workforce participation has risen sharply over the last six decades. Child care problems and family or other personal obligations, however, still limit the extent to which many Washington women can participate in the workforce.
- Women's median annual earnings in Washington for full-time, year-round workers (\$41,300) are higher than earnings for women nationwide (\$38,000), but considerably lower than earnings for men in Washington (\$53,000). Among women from the largest racial and ethnic groups, Asian/Pacific Islander women have the highest earnings (\$45,000), and Hispanic women have the lowest (\$27,000).
- In 2013, women in Washington earned 77.9 cents on the dollar compared with their male counterparts, a slightly larger gap than the gap between women's and men's earnings nationwide. When comparing the earnings of Washington women from each racial and ethnic group with the earnings of white men—the largest group in the labor force—Hispanic women face the largest gap, with median annual earnings that are less than half those of white men.
- In Washington, median annual earnings of women with a graduate or professional degree (\$69,000) are more than two and a half times those of women with less than a high school diploma (\$24,400). Yet, women earn less than men at every educational level, and at most levels of education they earn less than men with lower qualifications.

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- In Washington, as in the nation as a whole, gender segregation is found across broad occupational groups. Women are much more likely than men to work in service occupations, sales and office occupations, and education, legal, community service, arts, and media occupations. Men are considerably more likely than women to work in production, transportation, and material moving occupations; natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations; and computer, engineering and science occupations. This occupational segregation contributes to the gender wage gap, since the occupations in which women are concentrated typically pay less than those in which men are concentrated.
  - At the current rate of progress since 1959, the gender wage gap in Washington is projected to close in the year 2071.
  - If women received equal pay, the earnings increase added up across all women in the state would amount to \$11.2 billion, representing 2.7 percent of Washington's gross domestic product in 2013.
  - Women's poverty rate in Washington is lower than the rate for women nationwide. Among the largest racial and ethnic groups, Native American women have the highest poverty rate at 27.1 percent, followed by Hispanic (26.4 percent) and black women (23.7 percent). An additional 11.3 percent of Native American women, 14.9 percent of Hispanic women, and 12.1 percent of black women are "near poor," or living with family incomes between 100 and 150 percent of the federal poverty line. Families headed by single women are also disproportionately likely to be poor: 39.4 percent of families headed by single mothers have incomes below the poverty line.
  - Women in Washington are more likely than in the nation as a whole to have a bachelor's degree or higher (32.4 percent compared with 29.7 percent). Among women from the largest racial/ethnic groups in the state, Asian/Pacific Islanders are the most likely to have at least a bachelor's degree (41.0 percent), and Hispanics are the least likely (15.5 percent).
  - In Washington, women's voter registration and turnout rates are higher than in the nation as a whole. In 2012, 69.9 percent of women aged 18 and older in Washington registered to vote, compared with 67.0 percent in the nation. More than six in ten women in the state (62.7 percent) went to the polls, compared with 58.5 percent of women in the United States overall.
  - Washington ranks fifth in the nation for the number of seats in its state legislature that are held by women (48 of 147 seats, or 32.7 percent). As in other states, though, the representation of women in Washington in the state legislature is low relative to women's share of the total population. If progress continues at the current rate, women in Washington will achieve parity in their representation in the state legislature in the year 2038.

Changes to public policies and program initiatives provide opportunities to create a better future for women in Washington. Recommended changes include implementing policies to remedy gender wage inequities, increasing opportunities for women to pursue careers in higher-paying fields, expanding employer practices that promote work-life balance, increasing supports for working families, making a concerted effort to increase the number of women in positions of political leadership, and creating a pipeline for young women to take on leadership roles. Such changes would benefit the state's women and families and help Washington as a whole to prosper.

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## I. Introduction

This report provides an overview of how women in Washington fare in several key dimensions of their lives: earnings and education; economic security and poverty; and political participation. It analyzes a range of indicators in each of these topical areas and tracks women's progress in the state over the last few decades. The report also examines several indicators that shed light on the future of women in Washington and identifies policy recommendations that would benefit women and the state as a whole.

The analysis in this report shows that women in Washington have advanced considerably in many areas but also experience stalled progress. On the one hand, women in the state are active in the workforce, make important economic contributions to their families and communities, and have experienced a narrowing of the gender wage gap over the last several decades. On the other hand, Washington women continue to earn less than men and face a larger gender wage gap than women in the nation as a whole. Women in Washington also face racial and ethnic disparities and are more likely than their male counterparts to be poor. In addition, while they are more highly represented in state legislature than women in most other states, Washington women are underrepresented at this level of political leadership compared with their share of the overall population. These challenges must be addressed for the state as a whole to thrive.

## II. Washington Women in the Workforce

Women's increased labor force participation represents a significant change in the U.S. economy since 1950. Nearly six in ten women (58.6 percent) now work outside the home (IWPR 2014a), compared with 33.9 percent in 1950 and 43.3 percent in 1970 (Fullerton 1999). Women's labor force participation in Washington reflects this trend: 58.7 percent of women in the state are employed or actively looking for work (IWPR 2014a). As in other states, women in Washington are less likely to be in the labor force than men: 69.8 percent of men in the state are in the workforce (IWPR 2014a).

Although the majority of both women and men in Washington's labor force work full-time, women are more than twice as likely as men to work part-time. Approximately 32.2 percent of women in Washington's labor force work part-time, compared with 15.2 percent of men (IWPR 2014a).<sup>1</sup>

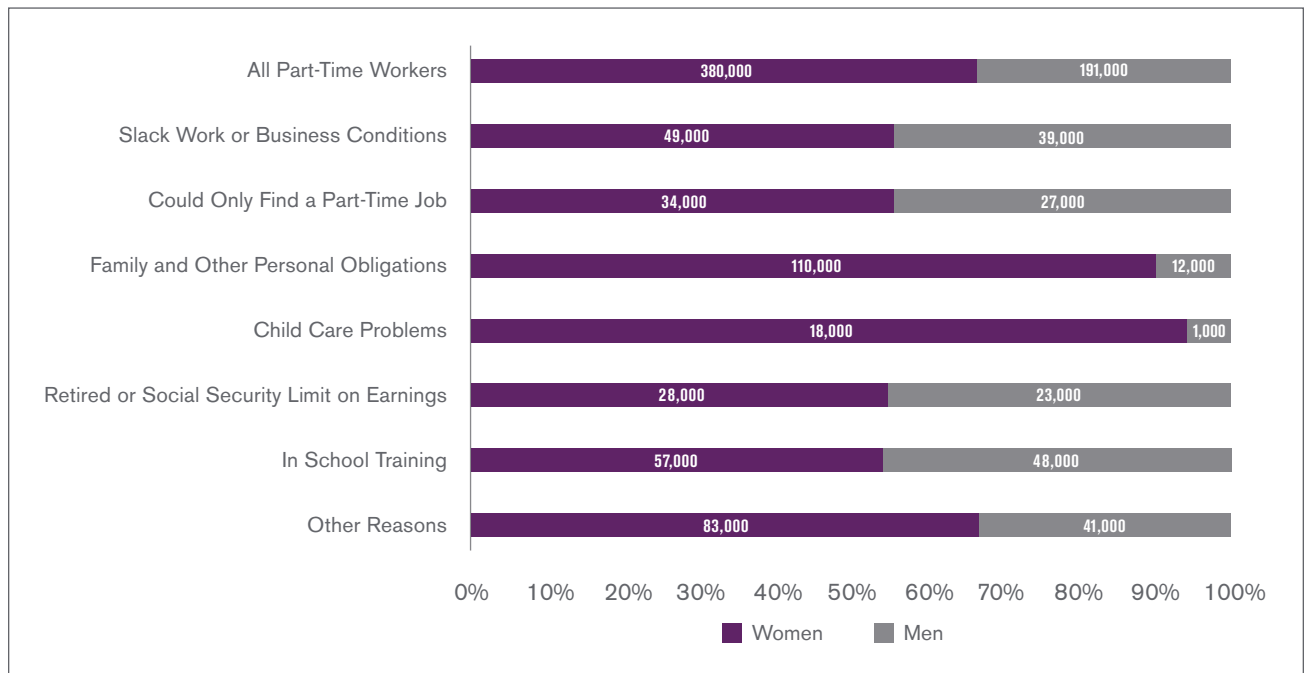
Women work part-time for various reasons. The majority who work part-time do so voluntarily, but a substantial number do not. As Figure 1 shows, among the women in Washington who reported in 2013 that they usually work part-time, 49,000 worked fewer hours than they normally would have because of "slack work," or reduced hours at their jobs.<sup>2</sup> An additional 34,000 women worked part-time because they could not find full-time work.

Among voluntary part-time workers, women are much more likely than men to say that they usually work part-time because of child care problems (18,000 women compared with 1,000 men) or because of other personal or family obligations (110,000 women compared with 12,000 men; Figure 1). Part-time work for these reasons accounts for about one-third of women who usually work part-time, compared with fewer than one in ten men who usually work part-time.

<sup>1</sup> Full-time is defined as 35 or more hours per week.

<sup>2</sup> Another 15,000 women in Washington reported working part-time during the week of the survey but said they normally worked full-time (U.S. Department of Labor 2013).

**Figure 1. Number of Part-Time Workers (Among Those Who Usually Work Part-Time) by Gender and Reason for Working Part-Time, Washington, 2013**



Note: Women and men aged 16 and older. Part-time is defined as usually working fewer than 35 hours per week. "Other reasons" include seasonal work, health and medical limitations, full-time work week of fewer than 35 hours, and all other reasons. Source: IWPR compilation of Current Population Survey data from the U.S. Department of Labor 2014.

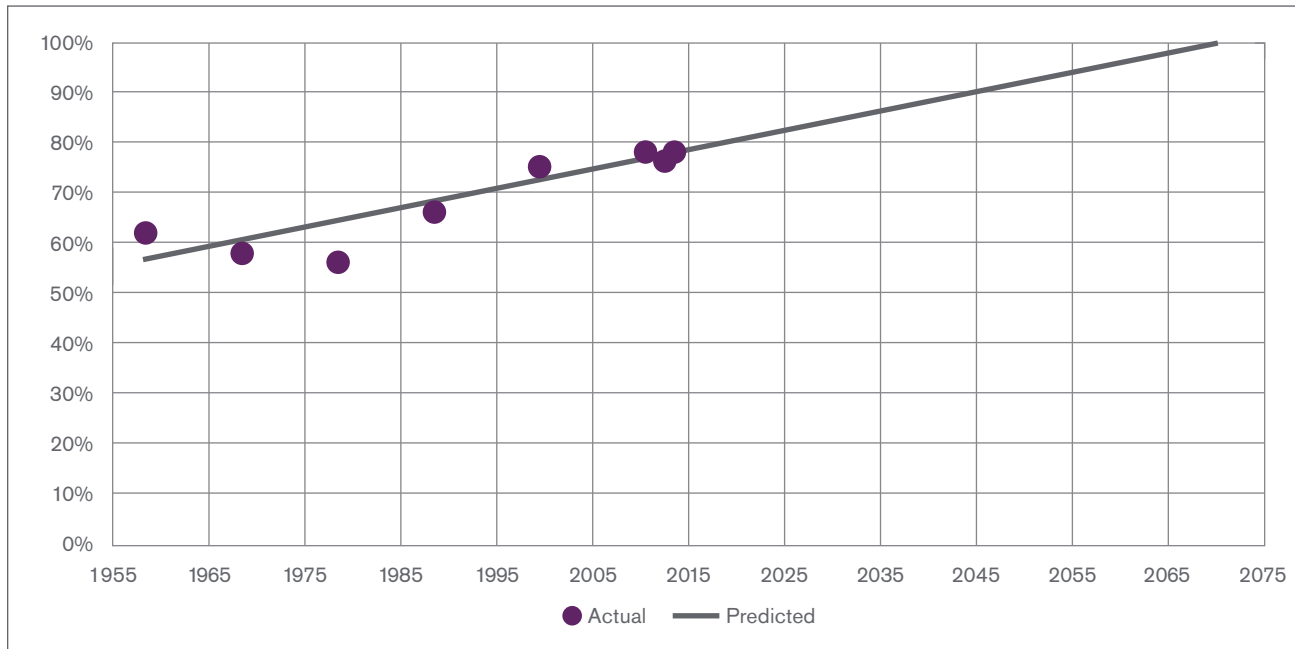
The unequal distribution of unpaid work in the family (Krantz-Kent 2009) contributes to women's greater representation among those who work part-time (Kalleberg 2000). In addition, the high cost of child care likely factors into the decision of many women to work part-time or withdraw from the labor force altogether. In Washington, the average annual fee for full-time child care for an infant in a child care center is nearly \$12,332, which is higher than the average annual tuition and fees for public four-year in-state colleges (\$10,811) and is 15 percent of median income for married couples and 48 percent for single mothers (Child Care Aware of America 2014). Since women overall earn less than men, it is more often mothers than fathers who reduce their time in the labor force in order to care for children. While the decision to reduce hours of paid work or withdraw from the labor force may make short-term economic sense within the family, it can threaten women's longer-term economic security. Stepping out of the labor force for a period of time or cutting back on hours of paid work damages women's earnings potential (Rose and Hartmann 1994) and very likely reduces their Social Security and pension benefits in retirement (Hartmann and English 2009).

### III. Median Earnings and the Gender Wage Gap

In 2013, Washington ranked tenth among all states and the District of Columbia for women’s median annual earnings and was tied with Wyoming for seventh place for men’s earnings. Both women’s and men’s earnings in the state were considerably higher than the earnings for their counterparts nationwide (IWPR 2014a).

Yet, Washington women earn less than men in the state, as in all other states in the nation. In Washington, women who work full-time and year-round have median annual earnings of \$41,300, compared with \$53,000 for men (IWPR 2014a). This means that women overall earn 77.9 percent of men’s earnings, compared with 79.2 in the United States as a whole, resulting in a wage gap of 22.1 percent in the state and 20.8 percent in the nation.<sup>3</sup> The earnings ratio in Washington has narrowed since 1980, after widening between 1950 and 1980. Despite this progress, pay equity remains elusive: at the current rate of progress since 1959, the gender wage gap in Washington is not expected to close until 2071 (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Ratio of Women’s to Men’s Earnings, Full-Time, Year-Round Workers, Washington**



Note: Aged 16 and older.

Source: IWPR calculations based on the 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000 Decennial Censuses and 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 American Community Surveys (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 5.0).

<sup>3</sup> Because these estimates are based on the American Community Survey (ACS), they differ slightly from the calculation of the gender wage gap for the United States based on the Current Population Survey (CPS), the official data source for national earnings. In 2013, the national gender wage gap for full-time, year-round workers based on the CPS was 21.7 percent (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor 2014). This report relies on the ACS because the ACS’s larger sample size makes it possible to provide disaggregated data on women’s earnings at the state level. Differences in estimates based on the ACS and CPS may be due to different time periods for reporting annual earnings.

The estimates in this report, which are based on the 2013 Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, also differ slightly from the ACS estimates of median annual earnings for full-time workers that are officially published through the Census Bureau’s American Fact Finder. Like IWPR’s analysis using ACS microdata, the estimates published through American Fact Finder show a wage ratio for the nation of 79.2 percent for 2013 (based on an estimate of median annual earnings of \$38,097 for women and \$48,099 for men). For Washington, these estimates show a wage ratio of 79.8 percent, based on an estimate of median annual earnings of \$41,897 for women and \$52,482 for men (IWPR 2014b).



Women's earnings in Washington vary across the largest racial and ethnic groups, as they do in the nation overall. In Washington, Asian/Pacific Islander women have the highest median annual earnings at \$45,000, followed by white women (\$43,300; Table 1). Hispanic women have the lowest earnings at \$27,000. This pattern holds true in the nation as a whole, where Asian/Pacific Islander and white women have the highest earnings at \$46,000 and \$40,000, respectively. As in Washington, Hispanic women in the United States have the lowest earnings among the largest racial and ethnic groups (Table 1).

**Table 1. Median Annual Earnings and Earnings Ratio for Full-Time/Year-Round Workers by Gender and Race/Ethnicity in Washington and the United States, 2013**

	Washington			United States		
	Women	Men	Ratio	Women	Men	Ratio
Asian/Pacific Islander	\$45,000	\$60,000	75.0%	\$46,000	\$59,000	78.0%
Black	\$35,000	\$44,900	78.0%	\$34,000	\$37,500	90.7%
Hispanic	\$27,000	\$32,000	84.4%	\$28,000	\$30,900	90.6%
Native American	\$35,000	\$40,000	87.5%	\$31,000	\$37,000	83.8%
Other Race or Two or More Races	\$42,600	\$50,000	85.2%	\$38,000	\$45,000	84.4%
White	\$43,300	\$58,000	74.7%	\$40,000	\$52,000	76.9%
Total						
American Community Survey	\$41,300	\$53,000	77.9%	\$38,000	\$48,000	79.2%
Current Population Survey				\$39,157	\$50,033	78.3%

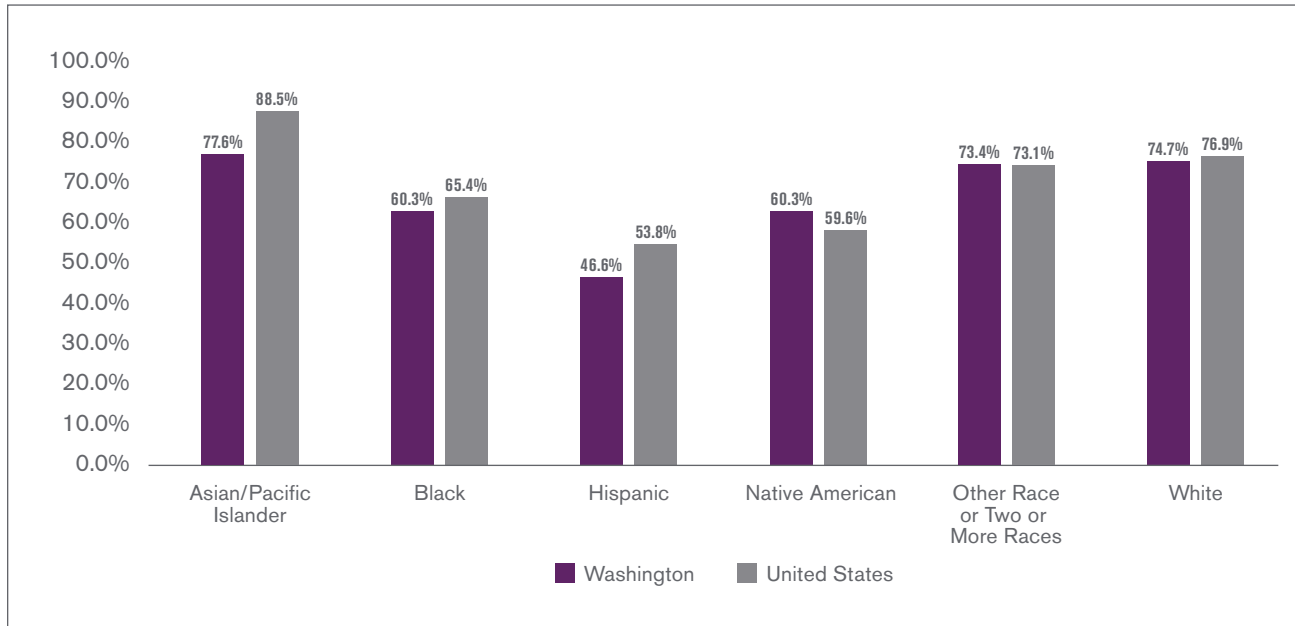
Notes: Aged 16 and older. Hispanics may be of any race or two or more races. Racial categories do not include Hispanics. Sources: IWPR analysis of American Community Survey data (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 5.0); Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor 2014).

When comparing the earnings of Washington women and men from the same racial or ethnic group, the differences in earnings are smallest for Native Americans. This smaller difference is due partly to the comparatively low earnings of Native American men (\$40,000), which is considerably lower than the median annual earnings for men of all racial and ethnic groups combined (\$53,000; Table 1). While the median annual earnings for Native American women in the state are also lower than median annual earnings for women overall, the difference is not as large as for men (Table 1).

Another way of looking at the gender wage gap compares the earnings of different groups of women with the earnings of white men, the largest group in the labor market. In 2013, black and Native American women who worked full-time, year-round earned 60.3 percent of white men's earnings, and Hispanic women earned less than half the amount white men earned (46.6 percent; Figure 3). When comparing the earnings of white and Asian/Pacific Islander women with those of white men, the gap is considerably smaller, although still substantial: white women earned 74.7 percent and Asian/Pacific Islander women earned 77.6 percent of white men's earnings (Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Ratio of Women’s Earnings to White Men’s (for Full-Time, Year-Round Workers), Washington and the United States, 2013**



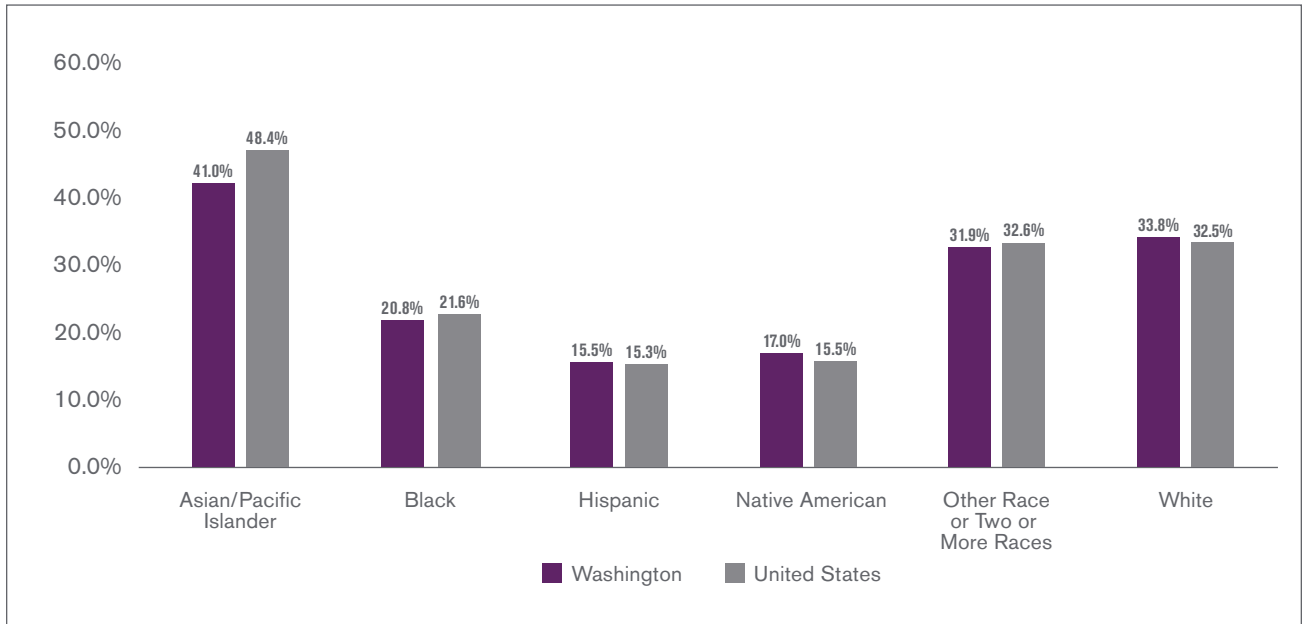
Notes: Aged 16 and older. Hispanics may be of any race or two or more races. Racial categories do not include Hispanics. Source: IWPR analysis of American Community Survey data (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 5.0).

## IV. Education and Earnings

Adults with higher levels of education consistently earn more than those with lower levels and are less likely to live in poverty (Gornick and Jäntti 2010). In the United States, only 4.9 percent of women with a bachelor’s degree or higher live in poverty, compared with 12.6 percent of women with some college education or an associate’s degree, 16.2 percent with a high school diploma, and 31.9 percent with less than a high school diploma (IWPR 2014c).

Between 1989 and 2013, the share of Washington women with at least a bachelor’s degree increased from 19.7 to 32.4 percent, mirroring a nationwide trend in women’s increased educational attainment (IWPR 1996; IWPR 2014a). In 2013, Washington ranked 15th in the nation for its share of women with a bachelor’s degree or higher (IWPR 2014a), although the percentage of women with this level of education varies across the largest racial and ethnic groups. Asian/Pacific Islander women are the most likely to have a bachelor’s degree or higher, and Hispanic women are the least likely (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Percent of Women with a Bachelor’s Degree or Higher by Race/Ethnicity, Washington and the United States, 2013**



Notes: Aged 25 and older. Hispanics may be of any race or two or more races. Racial categories do not include Hispanics. Source: IWPR analysis of American Community Survey data (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 5.0).

Education increases women’s earnings but does not eliminate the gender wage gap. In Washington, women with a bachelor’s degree earn more than twice the amount that women with less than a high school diploma earn (Table 2). Yet, women who work full-time, year-round earn less than men at every educational level, and at most levels of education they earn less than men with lower qualifications. As Table 2 shows, median annual earnings for women in the state with some college education are \$4,000 less than those of men with only a high school diploma. Women with an associate’s degree have median annual earnings that are \$6,600 less than men with some college education; women with a bachelor’s degree earn, on average, \$1,000 less than men with only an associate’s degree; and women with a graduate or professional degree have median annual earnings that are \$6,000 less than men with a bachelor’s degree. These data indicate that women need more educational qualifications than men do to secure jobs that pay well and that the gender wage gap is largest at the highest educational level.

**Table 2. Median Annual Earnings and Earnings Ratio for Full-Time, Year-Round Workers by Educational Attainment, Washington and the United States, 2013**

	Washington			United States		
	Women	Men	Ratio	Women	Men	Ratio
Less Than High School Diploma	\$24,400	\$32,000	76.3%	\$21,100	\$28,600	73.8%
High School Diploma or Equivalent	\$32,400	\$42,000	77.1%	\$30,000	\$40,000	75.0%
Some College Education	\$38,000	\$50,000	76.0%	\$34,800	\$46,000	75.7%
Associate's Degree	\$43,400	\$55,000	78.9%	\$40,000	\$50,000	80.0%
Bachelor's Degree	\$54,000	\$75,000	72.0%	\$50,000	\$70,000	71.4%
Graduate or Professional Degree	\$69,000	\$100,000	69.0%	\$65,000	\$94,000	69.1%

Note: Aged 25 and older.

Source: IWPR analysis of American Community Survey data (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 5.0).

## V. The Gender Wage Gap and Occupational Segregation

Occupational segregation—the concentration of women in one set of jobs and men in another—is one factor that contributes to the gender wage gap. At every skill level—low, medium, and high—median earnings are highest in male-dominated occupations and lowest in female-dominated occupations (Hegewisch et al. 2010).<sup>4</sup> One national study found that differences in employment by occupation and industry account for approximately half of the overall gender wage gap (Blau and Kahn 2007).

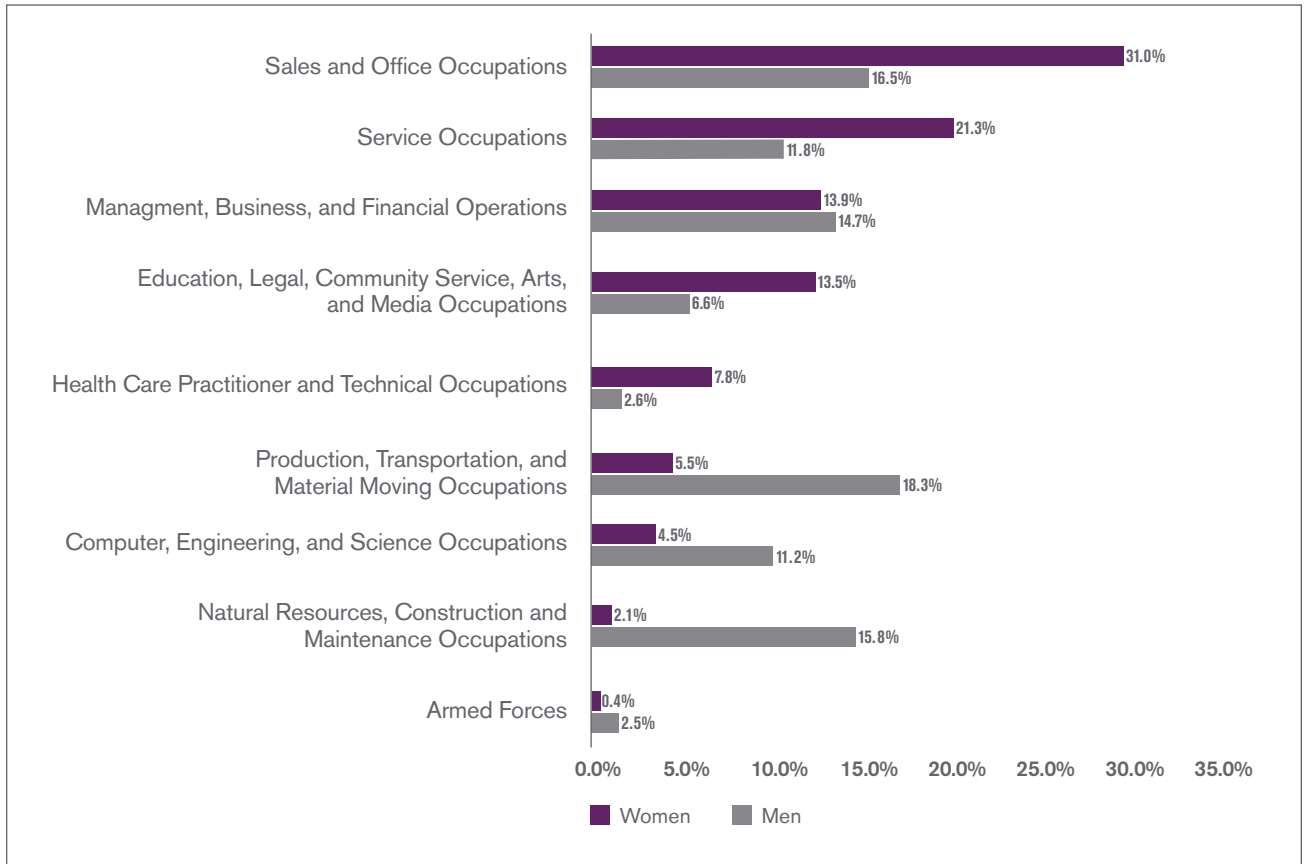
In Washington, as in the nation as a whole, more than half of employed women work in two occupational groups (Figure 5; IWPR 2014a). Thirty-one percent of Washington women work in sales and office occupations (such as retail salespersons and office support workers), and approximately 21 percent work in service occupations (such as in restaurants, health services, and child or elder care).<sup>5</sup> Men in the state are more than three times as likely as women to work in production, transportation, and material moving occupations, a group of occupations that includes engineers and other machine assemblers; flight attendants, pilots, and air traffic controllers; and ambulance, bus, and truck drivers, among others. Men are also more than seven times as likely as women to work in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations (Figure 5).

In addition, men in Washington are more than twice as likely as women to work in computer, science, and engineering occupations. Washington men are also more likely than men in the nation as a whole to be employed in these fields: 11.2 percent of employed men in the state work in computer, science, and engineering occupations, compared with 8.0 percent nationally (Figure 5; IWPR 2014a). Women in Washington are also more likely than their counterparts in the nation as a whole to work in computer, science, and engineering occupations, but the difference is not as large as with men. Approximately 4.5 percent of women in the state and 3.4 percent in the nation work in these fields (Figure 5; IWPR 2014a).

<sup>4</sup> Female-dominated occupations refer to those in which at least three of four workers are women, and male-dominated occupations are those in which at least three of four workers are men.

<sup>5</sup> In the nation overall, 32.2 percent of women work in sales and office occupations and 21.3 percent work in service occupations (IWPR 2014a).

**Figure 5. Distribution of Employed Women and Men Across Broad Occupational Groups in Washington, 2013**



Note: Aged 16 and older.

Source: IWPR analysis of American Community Survey data (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 5.0).

In Washington, as in the nation as a whole, women tend to be concentrated in relatively low-paid occupational groups. The two groups that employ the largest shares of women—sales and office and service occupations—are among the lowest paid occupations for women, with median annual earnings for women of \$36,000 and \$27,000, respectively (Table 3). Two of the occupational groups in which men are most heavily concentrated—production and natural resources—are also among the lower-paid broad occupational groups for men, but these groups have median earnings for men that are considerably higher than those of women in sales and service occupations (Table 3).

In addition to being concentrated in low-paid occupational groups, women in Washington earn less than men in each of the groups shown in Table 3. The largest earnings gaps are in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations; management, business, and financial operations; and computer, science, and engineering occupations. Women in these occupations earn 66.7, 70.6, and 71.4 percent of men’s earnings, respectively. In the United States as a whole, employed women in natural resources and management also face the largest wage gaps. Nationwide, however, those who work in computer, science, and engineering occupations face one of the smallest gender earnings differences (Table 3).

The gap in earnings within broad occupational categories likely stems in part from women’s employment in lower paid detailed occupations within these broad groups. For example, the broad occupational group of education, legal, community service, arts, and media occupations combines relatively well-paid jobs, such as administrators in education, with very low-paid jobs, such as teaching assistants. Within each broad group, women typically work in the lower wage detailed occupations and men in the higher wage ones.

**Table 3. Women’s and Men’s Median Annual Earnings Across Broad Occupational Groups in Washington and the United States, 2013**

	Washington			United States		
	Women	Men	Ratio	Women	Men	Ratio
Sales and Office Occupations	\$36,000	\$47,000	76.6%	\$33,000	\$45,000	73.3%
Service Occupations	\$27,000	\$36,000	75.0%	\$23,600	\$31,000	76.1%
Management, Business, and Financial Operations	\$60,000	\$85,000	70.6%	\$56,000	\$78,000	71.8%
Education, Legal, Community Service, Arts, and Media Occupations	\$49,000	\$60,000	81.7%	\$45,000	\$57,000	78.9%
Health Care Practitioner and Technical Occupations	\$65,000	\$84,000	77.4%	\$59,000	\$81,000	72.8%
Production, Transportation, and Material Moving Occupations	\$29,000	\$40,000	72.5%	\$26,000	\$36,000	72.2%
Computer, Engineering, and Science Occupations	\$65,000	\$91,000	71.4%	\$60,000	\$76,000	78.9%
Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance Occupations	\$30,000	\$45,000	66.7%	\$28,000	\$40,000	70.0%
Armed Forces	N/A	\$41,900	N/A	\$37,000	\$40,000	92.5%

Notes: Women and men aged 16 and older who are employed full-time, year-round. N/A=insufficient sample size.  
Source: IWPR analysis of American Community Survey data (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 5.0).

## VI. Economic Security for Washington Women and Families

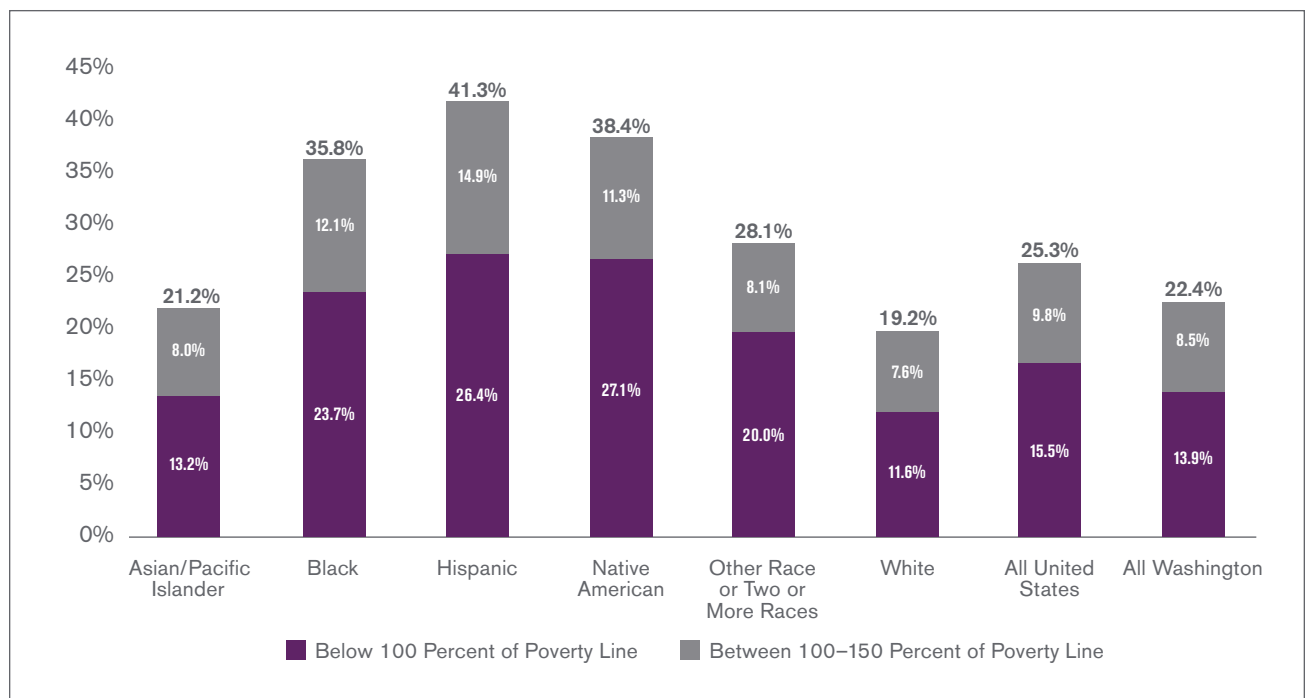
Women’s economic security is directly linked to their family income, which includes not only earnings from jobs but also income from other sources, such as investments, retirement funds, Social Security, and government benefits. In Washington, as in the nation as a whole, many women enjoy comfortable family incomes, but others struggle to make ends meet. In 2013, 13.9 percent of all women in Washington—an estimated 371,070—and 11.0 percent of all men aged 18 and older had family incomes below the federal poverty line (IWPR 2014a).

The federal poverty threshold on which poverty rates are based does not come close to capturing the cost of living for most families in the United States. Established by the federal government in the 1960s, the federal poverty threshold has been adjusted for inflation but not for increases in widely accepted living standards, and, therefore, does not accurately measure the resources needed to avoid economic hardship (Fremstad 2010)<sup>6</sup>. A family is considered poor if its pre-tax cash income falls below the poverty threshold; in 2013, the poverty line for a family of three with two children was \$18,769 (U.S.

Department of Commerce 2014)—an amount that is not sufficient to make ends meet, let alone to build assets to ensure long-term economic security. Given the inadequacy of the official poverty measure, the proportion of women and men in Washington who face economic hardship is likely much higher than the proportion living in poverty as calculated based on the federal poverty threshold.

Hispanic, black and Native American women in Washington are the most likely to face economic hardship; approximately four in ten are poor or “near poor,” which means they are living in families with incomes either below poverty or between 100 and 150 percent of the federal poverty line (Figure 6). In each of the largest racial and ethnic groups, women are more likely than men to have incomes below 150 percent of the poverty line, with the largest difference between Native American women and men (Appendix Table B-1).

**Figure 6. Poverty Status Among Women by Race/Ethnicity, Washington, 2013**

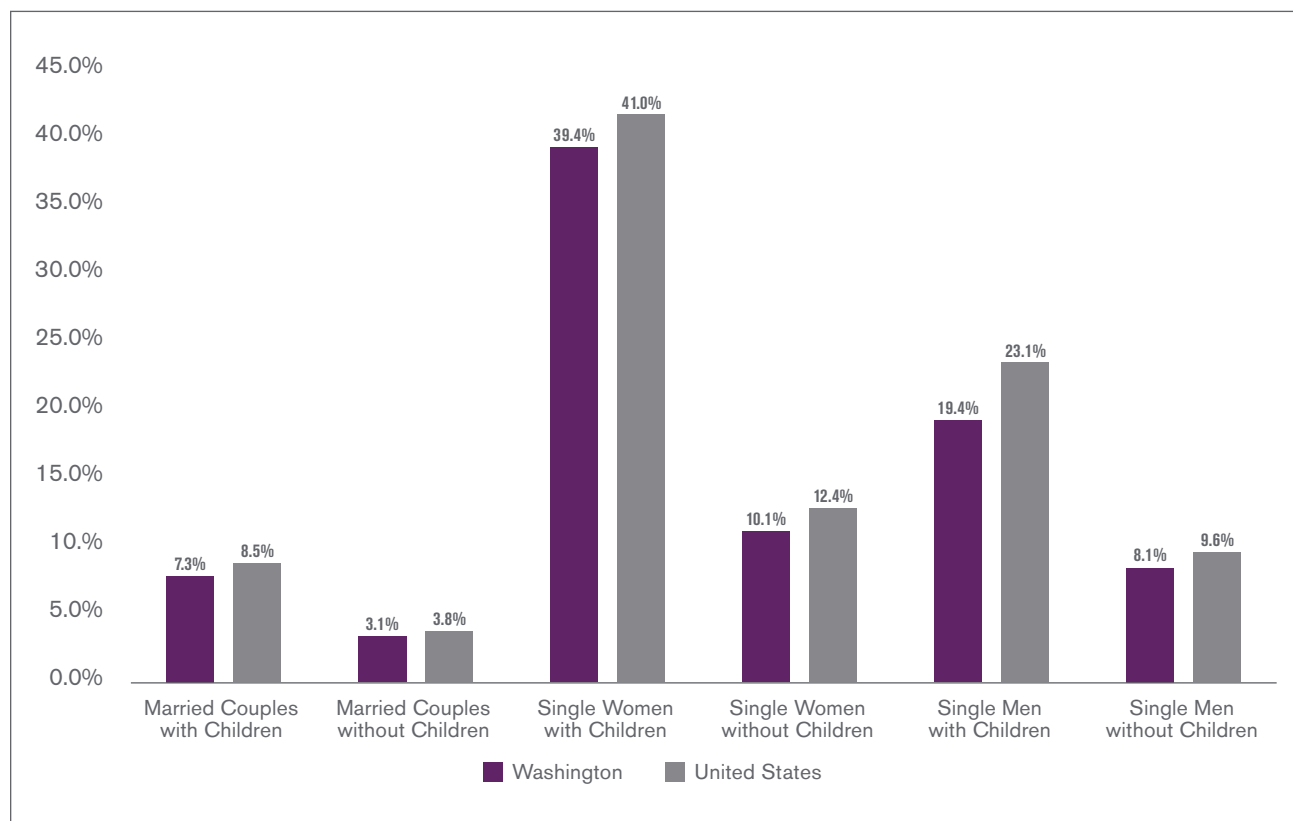


Notes: Aged 18 and older. Hispanics may be of any race or two or more races. Racial categories do not include Hispanics. Includes those with family incomes below 100 percent or between 100 and 150 percent of the federal poverty line. Source: IWPR analysis of American Community Survey data (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 5.0).

Families headed by single mothers are also disproportionately likely to be poor. Nearly four in ten families (39.4 percent) in Washington headed by single women with children have incomes below the poverty line, compared with one in five families (19.4 percent) headed by single men with children and fewer than one in ten families (7.3 percent) headed by married couples with children. In both the state and the nation, families headed by married couples without children have the lowest poverty rates (Figure 7).

6 Some cash benefits or cash-like assistance (e.g., the Earned Income Tax Credit and food stamps) are not counted as income when the Census Bureau calculates the official poverty rate. In response to concerns about the limitations of the official poverty measure, the Census Bureau recently developed a new Supplemental Poverty Measure to more accurately assess poverty. This measure accounts for the effects of important government benefits, as well as for taxes, work expenses, and medical expenses on households' standards of living (Short 2011). Under the Supplemental Poverty Measure, poverty rates for women and men in the nation are slightly higher overall than under the official measure (about one percentage point). The difference between men's and women's poverty, however, is smaller with the new measure (Short 2014).

**Figure 7. Percent of Families with Income Below Poverty by Family Type, Washington and the United States, 2013**



Notes: “Single women” and “single men” refer to women or men who are married with an absent spouse, divorced, widowed, or have never married. Families with children are those with children under age 18.  
 Source: IWPR analysis of American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder (IWPR 2014d).

Multiple factors contribute to women’s higher poverty rates than men’s, particularly among single mothers. In addition to the high costs of child care and women’s lower earnings due, in part, to occupational segregation and the gender wage gap, the lack of work-family supports—such as subsidized child care, paid maternity or parental leave, and paid time off to take care of one’s own health or a sick child—makes it difficult for many women to sustain employment and achieve economic security. Under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), employees who work for employers with at least 50 workers are entitled to 12 weeks of job-protected leave for maternity or paternity or for other major health related events. The leave, however, is unpaid, and limitations in the coverage of the law result in an estimated 40 percent of employees in the United States lacking access to job-protected leave for these reasons (Klerman, Daley, and Pozniak 2013). Low-wage workers are especially likely to lack coverage (Ben Ishai 2014).<sup>7</sup> In the absence of job protected leave, some women step out of the labor force for a period of time when they become parents (Berger and Waldfogel 2004). When they return to the workforce, they may start a new job and lose the seniority they would have had if their time at work had been uninterrupted. Other challenges associated with low wage work—such as unstable and unpredictable schedules—make it difficult for many women to earn an adequate income (Lambert, Haley-Lock, and Henley 2012).

<sup>7</sup> While Washington’s family leave law covers same-sex married couples and allows workers to use leave to care for a registered domestic partner, other restrictions in the law leave many workers uncovered (National Partnership for Women and Families 2014).



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## VII. The Gender Wage Gap, Poverty, and Washington's Economy

Closing the gender wage gap would help many Washington women achieve economic security. If all working women in the state aged 18 and older were paid the same as comparable men—men who are of the same age, have the same level of education, work the same number of hours, and have the same urban/rural status—their average earnings would increase from \$36,834 to \$43,524 (\$6,690 or 18.2 percent) annually (IWPR 2014e). Added up across all working women in the state, this earnings increase amounts to an increase of \$11.2 billion, or 2.7 percent of the state's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2013. This estimate of growth in GDP is likely an underestimate, since women's work hours, educational achievement, and occupational attainment were not increased in the statistical model producing this estimate; higher wages would likely increase women's work hours and educational and occupational attainment. Women's higher wages and the resulting increase in family income would also have multiplier effects, also omitted from the estimation model, including an increase in demand for goods and services and a subsequent increase in production.

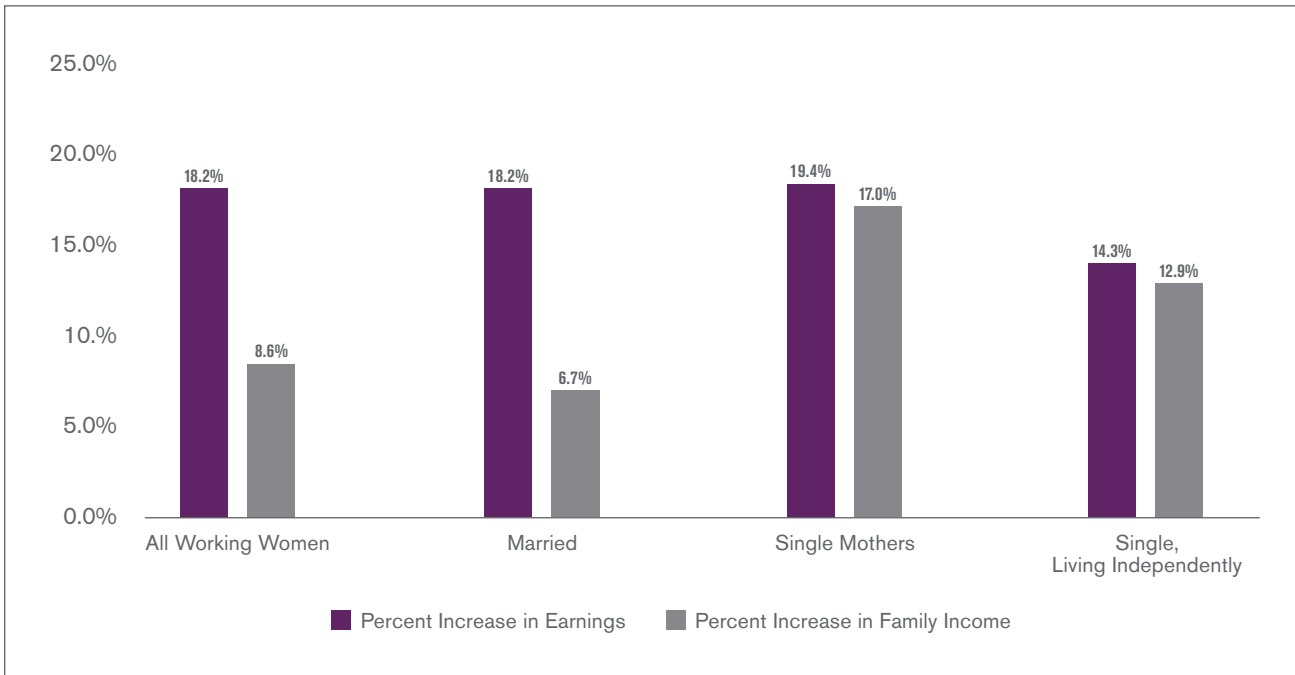
Eliminating the gender wage gap would increase women's earnings and the family incomes of working women living in various household formations.<sup>8</sup>

- If married working women in Washington aged 18 and older were paid the same as comparable men, their average annual earnings would increase from \$40,250 to \$47,582, or 18.2 percent. This translates into an average of \$7,332 per year for each family, which would raise the average annual family income for married couples from \$114,468 to \$122,098. This increase would result in \$6.2 billion in total income gains across the state (Figure 8; IWPR 2014e).
- For single mothers aged 18 and older, receiving equal pay would amount to an average annual increase in earnings of \$6,890 (or 19.4 percent), from \$35,492 to \$42,382. Average annual incomes for families headed by single mothers would increase from \$43,397 to \$50,758, resulting in a total income gain across the state of \$0.9 billion (Figure 8; IWPR 2014e).
- If Washington women aged 18 and older who are single and live independently were paid the same as comparable men, they would earn 14.3 percent more, or an average of \$5,875 per year. Their earnings would increase from \$41,031 to \$46,907 and their average annual incomes would rise from \$45,556 to \$51,432, resulting in a statewide total income gain of \$2.5 billion (Figure 8; IWPR 2014e).

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<sup>8</sup> Single women—which here includes those who are never married, divorced, separated, or widowed—are limited to those who live alone, since these women are clearly dependent on their own earnings and their household income can be easily calculated. Many other single women live in a variety of household formations, but it is more difficult to determine the relevant household income for complex households, whose members may or may not help to support each other financially.

**Figure 8. Percentage Increase in Mean Annual Earnings and Mean Family Income for Selected Family Types if Working Women Earned the Same as Comparable Men, 2011–2013 Average, Washington**

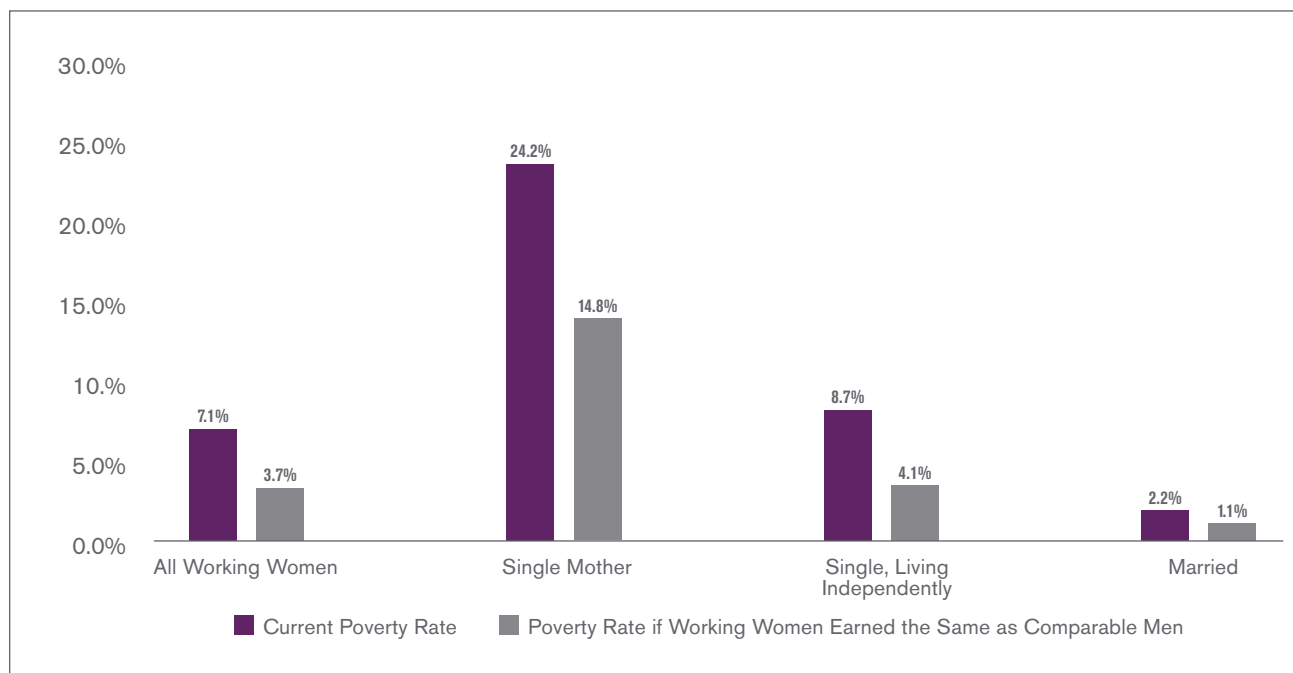


Notes: For women aged 18 and older. Not all possible family types are shown.

Source: Institute for Women’s Policy Research calculations based on the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic supplements, 2011–2013, for calendar years 2010–2012 (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 3.0).

Paying women the same as comparable men would also reduce the poverty rate for Washington women and their families. As Figure 9 shows, the poverty rate for all working women would be cut nearly in half, from 7.1 to 3.7 percent. For families headed by single mothers, the poverty rate would fall by nearly 40 percent, from 24.2 to 14.8 percent. Single women living independently of other family members would have their poverty rate reduced by more than 50 percent, from 8.7 to 4.1 percent. The poverty rate for married couples would be cut in half (from 2.2 to 1.1 percent).

**Figure 9. Current Poverty Rate and Estimated Rate if Women Earned the Same as Comparable Men, Washington**



Source: For women aged 18 and older. IWPR calculations based on the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic supplements, 2011–2013, for calendar years 2010–2012.

## VIII. Women’s Political Participation

Political participation allows women to help shape laws, policies, and decision-making in a way that reflects their interests and needs, as well as those of their families and communities. By running for office, voting, and serving as leaders in their communities, women can make sure their priorities are reflected in public policy decisions and debates.

In Washington, women’s voter registration and turnout rates are higher than in the nation as a whole. Nearly seven in ten women in the state (68.0 percent) registered to vote in 2010 and 54.1 percent voted, compared with 61.5 percent of women who registered to vote and 42.7 percent who voted in the nation overall (Table 4). In 2012, a presidential election year, voter registration and turnout rates increased in both Washington and the nation. In the state, 69.9 percent of women registered to vote and 62.7 percent voted. In the nation, 67.0 percent of women registered to vote and 58.5 percent went to the polls (Table 4). In both the state and the nation, women are more likely to register and vote than men.

**Table 4. Voter Registration and Turnout for Women and Men in Washington and the United States, 2010 and 2012**

	Washington		United States	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
<b>2012 Voter Registration</b>				
Percent	69.9%	65.1%	67.0%	63.1%
Number	1,875,000	1,658,000	81,743,000	71,414,000
<b>2010 Voter Registration</b>				
Percent	68.0%	64.1%	61.5%	57.9%
Number	1,763,000	1,604,000	72,926,000	64,337,000
<b>2012 Voter Turnout</b>				
Percent	62.7%	58.5%	58.5%	54.4%
Number	1,682,000	1,491,000	71,397,000	61,551,000
<b>2010 Voter Turnout</b>				
Percent	54.1%	51.6%	42.7%	40.9%
Number	1,403,000	1,289,000	50,595,000	45,392,000

Note: Percent of all women and men aged 18 and older who reported registering and voting based on the November 2010 and 2012 Supplements of the Current Population Survey.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce 2011 and 2013. Compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

In Washington, women held both of the state's seats in the U.S. Senate and three of the state's ten seats in the U.S. House of Representatives as of January 2015. Nationally, women held 100 of the 535 seats in the US. Congress (18.7 percent; Table 5).

The representation of women in the state legislature is low relative to women's share of the total population. As of January 2015, women held 18 of 49 seats in Washington's Senate and 30 of 98 seats in its House of Representatives, or 32.7 percent of all elected seats. This representation of women in state government, however, is high compared with other states: Washington ranks fifth among the 50 states for its proportion of women in the state legislature (CAWP 2015d), which is well above the national rate for female representation at this level of government (24.2 percent; Table 5).

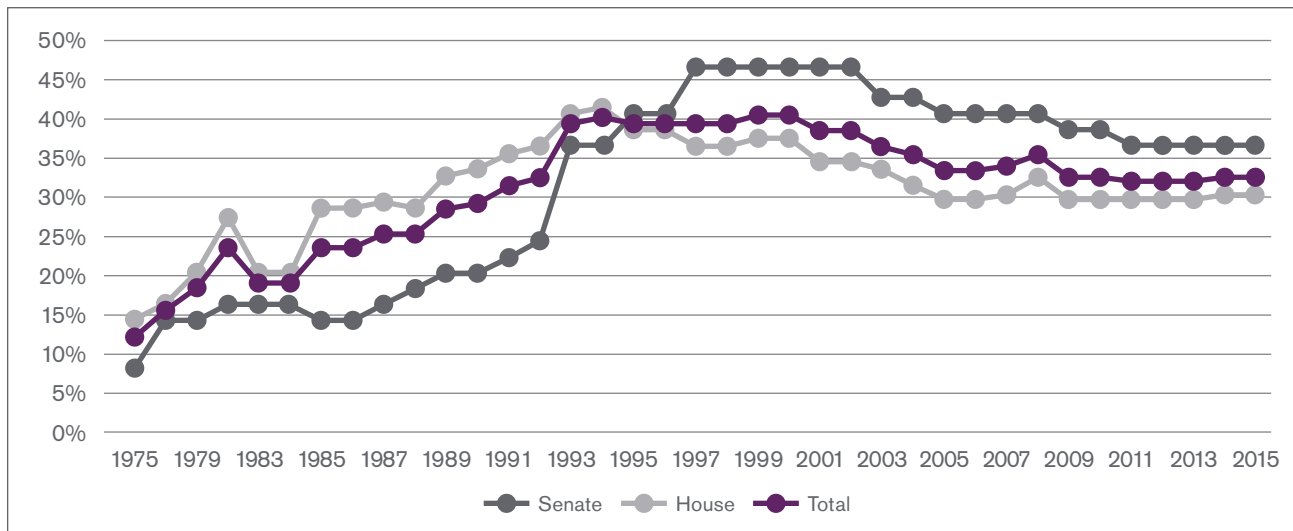
**Table 5. Women in Elected Office in Washington and the United States, 2015**

	Washington		United States	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Number and Percent of Women in Statewide Executive Elected Office<sup>a</sup></b>	1 of 9	11.1%	77 of 318	24.2%
Women of Color	0	0.0%	9	2.8%
<b>Number and Percent of Women in the U.S. Congress<sup>b</sup></b>	5 of 12	41.7%	104 of 535	19.4%
U.S. Senate	2 of 2	100.0%	20 of 100	20.0%
Women of Color	0	0.0%	1	1.0%
U.S. House	3 of 10	30.0%	84 of 435	19.3%
Women of Color	1	10.0%	32	7.4%
<b>Number and Percent of State Senate and House Seats Held by Women<sup>c</sup></b>	48 of 147	32.7%	1,786 of 7,383	24.2%
Senate	18 of 49	36.7%	435 of 1,972	22.1%
Women of Color	1	2.0%	102	5.2%
House	30 of 98	30.6%	1,351 of 5,411	25.0%
Women of Color	4	4.1%	288	5.3%

Sources: <sup>a</sup>CAWP 2015a, 2015d, and 2015e. <sup>b</sup>CAWP 2015c, 2015d, and 2015e. <sup>c</sup>CAWP2015b, 2015d, 2015e, 2015f.

The number of seats held by women in Washington’s state legislature has declined since the 1990s (Figure 10; CAWP 2015d). In 2015, women held 32.7 percent of the seats in the state legislature; Washington had its highest share of women’s representation in 1999 and 2000 at 40.8 percent. Despite this decline, the state continues to fare well relative to other states in the nation. Since 1975, Washington has ranked in the top ten states for women’s representation in state legislature for all years except 1983, when it was eleventh. Washington ranked first in the nation from 1993 to 2004 (CAWP 2015d).

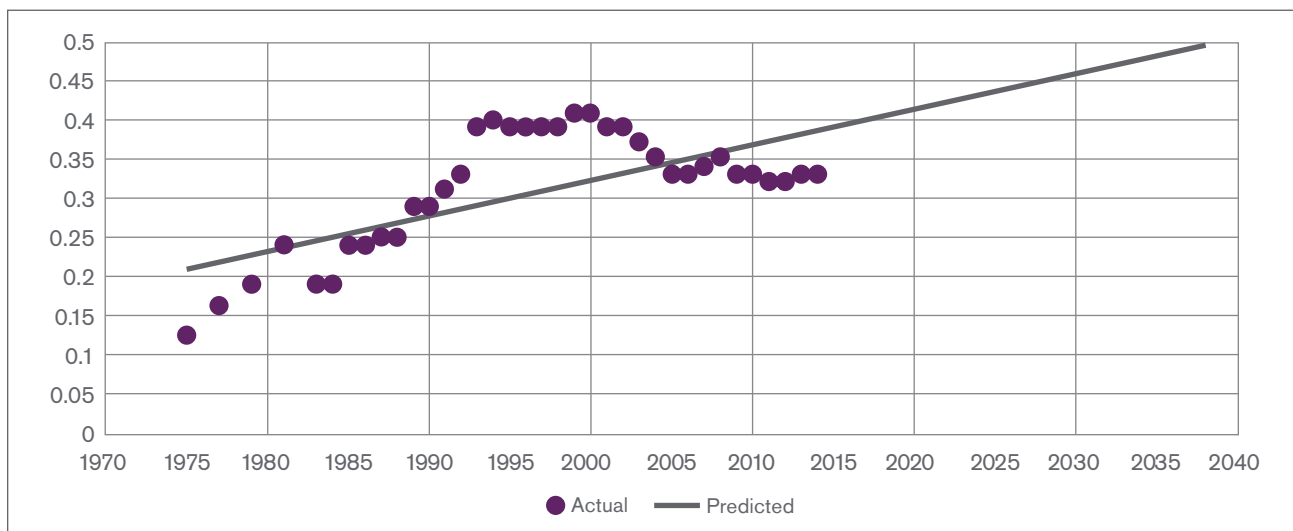
**Figure 10. Percentage of Seats in Washington State Legislature Held by Women**



Source: IWPR compilation of data from the Center for American Women in Politics 2015d.

Despite Washington's high rankings on this indicator, women have not yet achieved equal representation at this level of government. If progress continues at the current rate (since 1975), women will, for the first time, hold half of state legislature seats in Washington in the year 2038 (Figure 11). This linear projection may be overly optimistic considering that women held a larger share of seats in the 1990s than in the years 2010–2015.

**Figure 11. Women's Representation in Washington State Legislature**



Note: Projection based on a linear projection from the regression of women's share of the seats in both houses of the state legislature. Source: IWPR analysis of data from the Center for American Women and Politics (2015d).

As of January 2015, only one woman—Kim Wyman, Secretary of State—held one of the nine elective executive positions in Washington. Nine other women have held these positions in the past, including Christine Gregoire, who served as Governor from 2005–2013 (CAWP 2015d). In the United States, women held 77 of 318 elective executive positions in January 2015 (24.2 percent; CAWP 2015a).

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## IX. Conclusions and Recommendations

Women in Washington face substantial challenges that demand attention from policymakers, advocates, employers, and funders alike. While on many indicators of women's status Washington fares relatively well compared with states across the nation, women in Washington continue to experience inequities. The state's gender wage gap remains larger than in the nation as a whole, translating into lower pay, less family income, and more poverty in families with a working woman—all of which harm not only women and their families but Washington as a whole. If women received equal pay, the earnings increase added up across all women in the state would amount to \$11.2 billion, representing 2.7 percent of gross domestic product in 2013.

Furthermore, disparities by race and ethnicity prevent many women of color from having equal and sufficient access to higher education and better paying jobs. In addition, although Washington women are well represented in the state legislature compared with other states across the nation, they are far from achieving gender parity in their representation, and their share of seats in the state legislature have fallen.

Washington must invest more in its women to improve the well-being of women and their families and the economic prosperity of the state as a whole. Recommended actions for key stakeholders include:

### Employers

- Monitor hiring and promotions. Review pay and grading decisions to identify potential gender and racial disparities.
- Establish, enforce, and monitor policies to remedy gender wage inequities.
- Increase wage transparency and standardize methods for setting salaries and bonuses.
- Implement workplace flexibility practices—such as paid family leave and/or schedule control and flexibility—that benefit all employees.
- Increase women's leadership in executive positions, governance, and search and compensation committees.

### Policymakers

- Enforce existing legislation related to workplace and educational equity and discrimination.
- Develop new statutes that address barriers to equality, such as lack of work/family supports and the unequal treatment of part-time workers.
- Ensure gender equity in publicly-funded education, workforce development, and training programs.
- Ensure that adequate funding is directed toward programs that increase the financial well-being of women and their families and communities.



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## Program Providers

- Increase opportunities for women to pursue careers in higher-paying technical fields. Monitor vocational and education and training programs to ensure that there is active outreach and support for women pursuing nontraditional careers.
- Ensure that career advice for women and girls addresses the earnings potential of different fields of study and occupations, including fields not requiring a four-year college degree.
- Expand training and support programs that increase the number of women in positions of political leadership and create a pipeline for young women to take on leadership roles.
- Provide supports for women students with children to ensure that motherhood is not a barrier to education, learning and leadership development opportunities

## Philanthropic Organizations

- Make investments with a gender lens. Support programs that provide essential services for women, such as child care, job training, and transportation.
- Invest in organizations and initiatives that have a systems change focus that complements the work of direct service programs.
- Work with organizations in the state to develop networking and training opportunities that prepare and position women for public leadership roles.
- Encourage partnerships and collaborations among policymakers, thought leaders, advocates, and other stakeholders to discern the best and most creative solutions to the persistent challenges faced by women in Washington. Invest in the infrastructure needed to sustain these partnerships.

## Advocates

- Raise awareness among policymakers, funders, employers, and other stakeholders about the education, training, and employment needs of women and girls.
- Educate policymakers, funders, employers, and other stakeholders about the important role that work supports play in ensuring that women can participate successfully in their local economy.
- Advocate for improved work supports, educational opportunities, and other resources that will help them to prepare for lifelong educational and economic success and secure jobs that pay family-sustaining wages and provide good benefits.
- Advocate for gender equity in political leadership, including for elected, appointed, and staff positions. Train women to run for elected office and develop networks to increase the number of women in appointed office.

By taking such steps, Washington can become a state where all women can work, lead, and thrive, and the Washington economic growth rate will increase accordingly.

## Appendix A. Basic Demographic Statistics

Table A1. Basic Demographic Statistics for Washington and the United States, 2013

	Washington	United States
<b>Total Population<sup>a</sup></b>	6,971,406	316,128,839
Number of Women, All Ages	3,487,837	160,536,555
Ratio of Women to Men	1.00:1	1.03:1
Median Age	38	38
<b>Distribution of Women by Age<sup>a</sup></b>		
Under 18	22.3%	22.3%
18 to 44	36.1%	35.5%
45 to 64	26.6%	26.5%
65 and older	14.9%	15.6%
<b>Distribution of Women by Race and Ethnicity, All Ages<sup>a</sup></b>		
Asian/Pacific Islander	8.7%	5.3%
Black	3.2%	12.7%
Hispanic	11.5%	16.6%
Native American	1.2%	0.7%
Other Race or Two or More Races	4.4%	2.4%
White	71.1%	62.4%
<b>Distribution of Women by Marital Status, Aged 15 and Older<sup>a</sup></b>		
Married	49.3%	46.2%
Separated, Widowed, or Divorced	23.6%	23.8%
Single, Never Married	27.2%	29.9%
<b>Distribution of Households by Type<sup>b</sup></b>		
Total Family Households and Households Headed by Women and Men Living Alone or with Nonrelatives	2,644,557	116,291,033
Married Couple Families (with and without their own children)	49.5%	48.0%
Female-Headed Families (with and without their own children)	10.3%	13.1%
Male-Headed Families (with and without their own children)	4.7%	4.8%
Living Alone or with Nonrelatives	35.5%	34.1%
<b>Percent of All Households Headed by Single Women with Children<sup>b</sup></b>	6.1%	7.2%
<b>Percent of Same-Sex Couple Households Among All Households<sup>c</sup></b>	0.8%	0.6%
<b>Proportion of Women Who Are Foreign-Born, All Ages<sup>d</sup></b>	14.0%	13.2%

Notes: Hispanics may be of any race or two or more races. Racial categories do not include Hispanics.

Source: <sup>a</sup>IWPR analysis of American Community Survey data (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 5.0); <sup>b</sup>IWPR 2014f; <sup>c</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce n.d.; <sup>d</sup>IWPR 2014g.

## Appendix B. Poverty Status Among Women and Men in Washington and the United States

Table B-1. Poverty Status for Women and Men in Washington and the United States, 2013

		Washington		United States	
		Women	Men	Women	Men
Asian/Pacific Islander	<b>Below or Near Poverty</b>	<b>21.2%</b>	<b>18.1%</b>	<b>20.6%</b>	<b>19.7%</b>
	Below	13.2%	10.9%	13.0%	12.2%
	Near	8.0%	7.2%	7.6%	7.5%
Black	<b>Below or Near Poverty</b>	<b>35.8%</b>	<b>27.5%</b>	<b>38.9%</b>	<b>31.9%</b>
	Below	23.7%	18.2%	25.7%	20.4%
	Near	12.1%	9.3%	13.2%	11.5%
Hispanic	<b>Below or Near Poverty</b>	<b>41.3%</b>	<b>34.8%</b>	<b>39.2%</b>	<b>32.5%</b>
	Below	26.4%	18.1%	24.0%	17.3%
	Near	14.9%	16.7%	15.2%	15.2%
Native American	<b>Below or Near Poverty</b>	<b>38.4%</b>	<b>28.6%</b>	<b>41.4%</b>	<b>37.2%</b>
	Below	27.1%	18.7%	28.1%	24.4%
	Near	11.3%	9.9%	13.3%	12.8%
Other Race or Two or More Races	<b>Below or Near Poverty</b>	<b>28.1%</b>	<b>23.6%</b>	<b>29.9%</b>	<b>24.3%</b>
	Below	20.0%	16.2%	19.7%	15.3%
	Near	8.1%	7.4%	10.2%	9.0%
White	<b>Below or Near Poverty</b>	<b>19.2%</b>	<b>15.7%</b>	<b>19.8%</b>	<b>15.6%</b>
	Below	11.6%	9.3%	11.7%	9.1%
	Near	7.6%	6.4%	8.1%	6.5%
Total	<b>Below or Near Poverty</b>	<b>22.4%</b>	<b>18.6%</b>	<b>25.3%</b>	<b>20.4%</b>
	Below	13.9%	11.0%	15.5%	11.9%
	Near	8.5%	7.6%	9.8%	8.5%

Note: For women and men aged 18 and older. "Near poor" includes those with family incomes below 150 percent of the federal poverty line. Hispanics may be of any race or two or more races. Racial categories do not include Hispanics. Source: IWPR analysis of American Community Survey data (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 5.0).

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## Appendix C. Methodology

To analyze the status of women in Washington, IWPR selected indicators that prior research and experience have shown illuminate issues that are integral to women's lives and that allow for comparisons between the state and the United States as a whole. The data come from several sources, which are noted in the text. Many of the figures rely on analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) from the Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series. The ACS is a large annual survey of a representative sample of the entire resident population in the United States, including both households and group quarter (GQ) facilities. GQ facilities include places such as college residence halls, residential treatment centers, skilled nursing facilities, group homes, military barracks, correctional facilities, workers' dormitories, and facilities for people experiencing homelessness. GQ types that are excluded from ACS sampling and data collection include domestic violence shelters, soup kitchens, regularly scheduled mobile vans, targeted nonsheltered outdoor locations, commercial maritime vessels, natural disaster shelters, and dangerous encampments.

Most of the tables and figures in this report present data for individuals, often disaggregated by race and ethnicity. In general, race and ethnicity are self-identified; the person providing the information on the survey form determines the group to which he or she (and other household members) belongs. People who identify as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race; to prevent double counting, racial categories—including white, black (which includes those who identified as black or African American), Asian/Pacific Islander (which includes those who identified as Chinese, Japanese, and Other Asian or Pacific Islander), or Native American (which includes those who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native) exclude Hispanics or Latinos.

When analyzing state- and national-level ACS microdata, IWPR used 2013 data, the most recent available, for most indicators. Data on median earnings are not presented if the unweighted sample size is less than 100 for any cell; data on other indicators are not presented if the unweighted sample size is less than 100 for the category total. IWPR used personal weights to obtain nationally representative statistics for person-level analyses, and household-level weights for household analyses. Weights included with the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) ACS for person-level data adjust for the mixed geographic sampling rates, nonresponse adjustments, and individual sampling probabilities. Estimates from IPUMS ACS samples may not be consistent with summary table ACS estimates due to the additional sampling error and the fact that over time, the Census Bureau changes the definitions and classifications for some variables. The IPUMS project provides harmonized data to maximize comparability over time; updates and corrections to the microdata released by the Census Bureau and IPUMS may result in minor variation in future analyses.

IWPR calculations based on microdata from the American Community Survey may differ slightly from published estimates that are available through the U.S. Census Bureau's American Fact Finder. In some instances, IWPR classifies respondents in a different way from the Census Bureau (e.g., race and ethnicity). In other cases, the Census Bureau employs different estimation procedures.

Some of the differences reflected in the data between women and men, different groups of women, or Washington and the nation as a whole are statistically significant (they are unlikely to have occurred by chance and probably represent a true difference between the groups being compared). Other differences are too small to be statistically significant and may have occurred by chance. IWPR did not calculate or report measures of statistical significance; generally, the larger a difference between two values (for any given sample size), the more likely it is that the difference will be statistically significant. Sample sizes differ among the indicators analyzed.

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To analyze the impact that paying women equally to men would have on Washington's economy and the poverty rates for working women, IWPR used data from the 2011–2013 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic supplement (CPS-ASEC) to measure women's and men's earnings. The analysis of women's and family earnings gains is based on a model that predicts women's earnings as if they were not subject to wage inequality. Using an ordinary least squares regression model, the natural log of men's annual earnings are regressed on controls for many of the differences between men and women in age, education, annual hours of work, and metropolitan residence based on a sample of men aged 18 or older with positive earnings and positive hours of work during the previous year. Women's earnings are predicted using the coefficients from the men's earnings equation (this method assumes that women retain their own human capital but are rewarded at the same rates as men would be) and calculated only for the actual hours that women worked during the year. The average earnings estimates include only those predicted to have positive earnings adjustments. Those with reduced predicted earnings are assigned their actual earnings during the year. Additional detail on the estimation of equal wages for working women can be found in the Institute for Women's Policy Research briefing paper, *How Equal Pay for Working Women Would Reduce Poverty and Grow the American Economy* (Hartmann, Hayes, and Clark 2014).

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## About the Institute for Women's Policy Research

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities, and societies. IWPR works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and their families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. The Institute's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women's studies and public policy and public administration programs at The George Washington University.

## About Women's Funding Alliance

Women's Funding Alliance has been a leader in improving the lives of women and girls in Washington State for over 30 years. Working together with thousands of committed individuals and hundreds of community partners, Women's Funding Alliance increases opportunities and breaks down barriers. The organization shines a spotlight on the most pressing issues facing women and girls and brings actionable solutions to philanthropy, community-based organizations, business, and government.

Women's Funding Alliance is the only organization focused solely on advancing leadership and economic opportunity for women and girls across Washington State. Its mission is achieved by making the case, driving solutions, and mobilizing people to make change. The organization's work is guided by the knowledge that when women hold more power and are doing better, families, communities, and economies are strengthened.

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*An examination of Washington State's unique leadership status and economic landscape to support community needs and expand opportunity for all women and girls.*



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