

CHILD CARE

ISSUE BRIEF

Nearly One in Five Working Mothers of Very Young Children Work in Low-Wage Jobs

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The first years of life are critical to children's development and their future success.¹ Infants and toddlers need stable, responsive, nurturing relationships for their healthy development.² However, parents working in low-wage jobs face particular challenges as breadwinners and caregivers. With limited incomes, parents struggle to meet their children's basic needs: a home in a safe community, nutritious food, and books and toys to encourage their children's learning. Parents also strain to afford the safe and stable child care they need to be able to work—much less the high-quality child care that children need to be successful in school. In addition, the working conditions in many low-wage jobs make parenting more difficult. Low-wage jobs often entail unstable, unpredictable schedules over which workers have little control, and lack any paid sick or family leave; this can keep parents from spending time with their children on a regular basis and from being consistently available when their children need them, and can make it difficult to arrange child care.³ In addition, some mothers in low-wage jobs face discrimination on the job because of their pregnancy or caregiving responsibilities.

Many mothers of very young children work in low-wage jobs—including jobs as cashiers, personal care aides, maids, and restaurant servers—and are facing precisely these challenges. Working mothers with very young children are more likely than workers overall to be in low-wage jobs.

More than half of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage jobs are raising children on their own; half are working full time; and over one-third are poor. They are disproportionately African-American or Hispanic. They are also less likely to have a college education than workers overall.

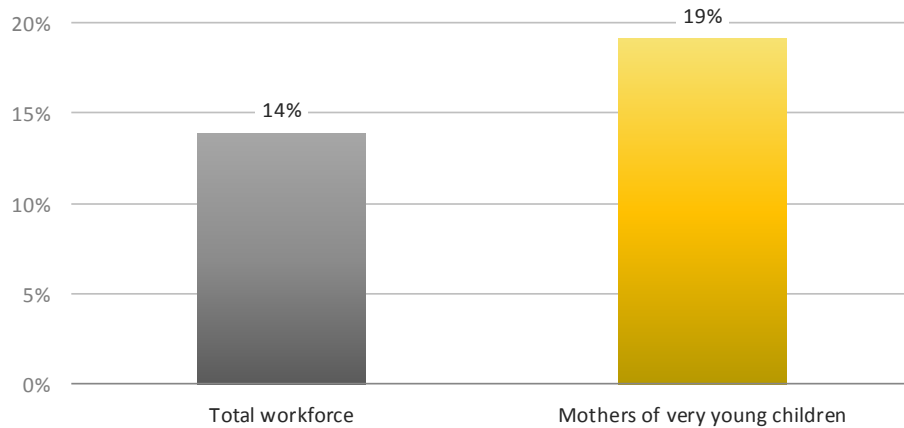
KEY FACTS

- **Over 1.2 million mothers with very young children work in low-wage jobs.**
- **Nearly one in five working mothers with very young children work in low-wage jobs.**
- **Over one-third of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage jobs are poor.**
- **About half of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage jobs are employed full time.**

A new National Women's Law Center analysis of state and national data shows that:⁴

- Over 1.2 million mothers with very young children (children ages three and under) are in low-wage occupations (those that typically pay \$10.10 or less per hour).⁵
- Nearly one in five (19.2 percent) working mothers of very young children are employed in low-wage occupations; in comparison, fewer than one in seven (13.9 percent) of all workers are employed in low-wage occupations.
- In every state, working mothers of very young children are disproportionately represented in low-wage occupations.

Share of workers in low-wage occupations



Source: NWLC calculations based on Current Population Survey 2013 using Miriam King et al., IPUMS-CPS. Mothers of very young children are those who have at least one child age 3 or younger at home. Figures are for all employed workers.



- Over one-third (34.8 percent) of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage occupations are poor, compared to just 6.7 percent of all workers and 13.5 percent of all working mothers with very young children.
- Over half (53.0 percent) of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage occupations are single, compared to 29.0 percent of all working mothers with very young children.
- 22.5 percent of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage occupations are African-American and 27.8 percent are Hispanic; in comparison, 11.2 percent of all workers are African-American and 15.4 percent are Hispanic.
- Only 7.0 percent of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage occupations have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 34.9 percent of all workers and 42.0 percent of all working mothers with very young children.
- About half (50.7 percent) of mothers who have very young children and work in low-wage occupations are employed full time, compared to 79.5 percent of all workers and 70.6 percent of all working mothers with very young children.
- 6.1 percent of workers in low-wage occupations are mothers with very young children; in comparison, 4.5 percent of all workers are mothers with very young children.

Parents in low-wage jobs work hard, making sacrifices because they want better lives for their children. Yet the very nature of those jobs and the financial insecurity that goes with them can create tremendous stress for parents, which can affect their relationship with their children and the home environment and put their children at risk of falling behind even before they enter school.⁶

Agenda for Action

With low-wage jobs projected to account for much of the job growth in our economy over the next ten years,⁷ it is crucial that lawmakers adopt policies that can help parents in low-wage jobs gain more financial security, reduce their stress, and support their children's successful development. These policies include:

- Raising the minimum wage and tipped minimum wage.
- Giving workers more control over their work schedules, and making work schedules more predictable and stable.
- Increasing families' access to child care assistance and high-quality early care and education programs.
- Designing child care and early education policies in a way that responds to families' diverse circumstances.
- Providing paid family leave and paid sick days.

- Enforcing and strengthening laws prohibiting pregnancy and caregiver discrimination.
- Strengthening supports such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) that help parents working in low-wage jobs lift their families out of poverty.

These measures would greatly bolster the ability of hard-working parents with low-wage jobs to ensure the well-being of their young children—and this

investment in children’s successful growth and development will ultimately help strengthen our nation’s economy.⁸

The following tables show national and state data on mothers who have very young children and who are employed in low-wage occupations. This analysis focuses on infants and toddlers (ages three and under) because high-quality child care is particularly important during the early ages of children’s growth and development, yet often unaffordable—care for infants and toddlers costs more than care for older children—and very difficult to find in many communities.⁹

WORKING MOTHERS OF VERY YOUNG CHILDREN (0-3)

	Working mothers of very young children					
	All workers		All occupations		Low-wage occupations	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	142,593,000	100.0%	6,384,000	100.0%	1,223,000	100.0%
Race/Ethnicity						
White, non-Hispanic	94,686,000	66.4%	3,869,000	60.6%	542,000	44.4%
African-American	15,981,000	11.2%	928,000	14.5%	275,000	22.5%
Hispanic	22,005,000	15.4%	1,132,000	17.7%	340,000	27.8%
Asian/Pacific Islander	8,707,000	6.1%	442,000	6.9%	75,000	6.1%
Full-/Part-time Status						
Full-time	113,432,000	79.5%	4,504,000	70.6%	620,000	50.7%
Part-time for any reason	29,162,000	20.5%	1,880,000	29.4%	603,000	49.3%
PT for economic reasons	7,935,000	5.6%	387,000	6.1%	166,000	13.6%
PT for non-economic reasons	21,226,000	14.9%	1,492,000	23.4%	437,000	35.7%
Marital Status						
Married	77,361,000	54.3%	4,534,000	71.0%	575,000	47.0%
Single*	65,232,000	45.7%	1,850,000	29.0%	648,000	53.0%
Poverty Status						
Below poverty	9,587,000	6.7%	861,000	13.5%	426,000	34.8%
Above poverty	133,006,000	93.3%	5,523,000	86.5%	797,000	65.2%
Educational Attainment						
Less than high school	12,710,000	8.9%	371,000	5.8%	205,000	16.7%
High school diploma or equivalent	37,730,000	26.5%	1,396,000	21.9%	513,000	42.0%
Some college/associate’s degree	42,407,000	29.7%	1,932,000	30.3%	420,000	34.4%
Bachelor’s degree or higher	49,746,000	34.9%	2,684,000	42.0%	85,000	7.0%

*Includes those who are married but whose spouse is absent.

Notes: Mothers of very young children are those who have at least one child age 3 or younger at home. Figures are for all employed workers. “Low-wage” occupations are those with median hourly wages of \$10.10 or less per hour. “Low-wage” occupations could be defined in different ways; this analysis uses an hourly earnings cut-off of \$10.10 per hour in light of the Fair Minimum Wage Act (S. 460/H.R. 1010) pending in Congress, which would gradually raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10 per hour.

Source: NWLC calculations based on the Current Population Survey (CPS) 2013 using Miriam King et al. IPUMS-CPS: Version 3.0. [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010. Median hourly wages of occupations: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), May 2013 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm.

MOTHERS OF VERY YOUNG CHILDREN (0-3) IN LOW-WAGE OCCUPATIONS, BY STATE

State	Share of workforce that is comprised of mothers of very young children		Share of workers who are in low-wage occupations	
	Overall	Low-wage	Total workforce	Mothers of very young children
United States	4.5%	6.1%	13.9%	19.2%
Alabama	4.6%	7.4%	13.0%	20.6%
Alaska	4.6%	7.2%	11.6%	18.4%
Arizona	4.4%	6.6%	13.9%	20.7%
Arkansas	5.0%	8.1%	14.1%	23.0%
California	4.3%	5.7%	15.3%	20.1%
Colorado	4.5%	6.6%	12.5%	18.3%
Connecticut	4.2%	6.3%	12.9%	19.2%
Delaware	4.4%	6.4%	13.1%	18.9%
District of Columbia	3.5%	4.7%	10.6%	14.4%
Florida	4.0%	5.6%	15.0%	21.1%
Georgia	4.8%	7.8%	12.6%	20.3%
Hawaii	4.3%	5.4%	16.2%	20.2%
Idaho	5.5%	7.0%	14.8%	19.1%
Illinois	4.7%	6.4%	13.3%	18.2%
Indiana	4.9%	8.1%	13.6%	22.4%
Iowa	5.3%	6.8%	14.3%	18.5%
Kansas	5.0%	8.4%	13.3%	22.1%
Kentucky	4.7%	7.0%	13.7%	20.4%
Louisiana	5.0%	8.3%	14.4%	23.9%
Maine	4.0%	6.6%	14.0%	23.0%
Maryland	4.5%	6.3%	11.6%	16.2%
Massachusetts	4.3%	5.4%	12.7%	16.2%
Michigan	4.6%	6.9%	14.8%	22.0%
Minnesota	5.3%	7.2%	13.5%	18.5%
Mississippi	5.0%	8.5%	14.1%	23.7%
Missouri	4.9%	7.4%	13.8%	20.7%
Montana	4.4%	6.4%	15.2%	21.9%
Nebraska	5.3%	7.8%	14.2%	20.9%
Nevada	4.4%	5.6%	21.5%	27.1%
New Hampshire	4.0%	5.5%	11.7%	16.3%
New Jersey	4.3%	5.1%	12.1%	14.4%
New Mexico	4.6%	7.5%	15.4%	25.3%
New York	4.1%	5.2%	14.7%	18.3%
North Carolina	4.7%	7.3%	13.5%	21.0%
North Dakota	5.2%	7.8%	15.4%	22.9%
Ohio	4.6%	7.0%	13.8%	21.0%
Oklahoma	5.0%	8.3%	13.7%	22.8%
Oregon	4.4%	7.4%	15.5%	26.2%

State	Share of workforce that is comprised of mothers of very young children		Share of workers who are in low-wage occupations	
	Overall	Low-wage	Total workforce	Mothers of very young children
Pennsylvania	4.2%	5.8%	13.5%	18.6%
Rhode Island	4.3%	5.9%	14.9%	20.5%
South Carolina	4.7%	7.6%	13.9%	22.6%
South Dakota	5.6%	5.9%	14.8%	15.4%
Tennessee	4.7%	7.4%	13.0%	20.5%
Texas	4.9%	7.5%	13.6%	20.8%
Utah	5.8%	8.5%	11.8%	17.1%
Vermont	3.8%	5.4%	13.8%	19.4%
Virginia	4.5%	6.6%	11.8%	17.5%
Washington	4.3%	7.0%	13.9%	22.8%
West Virginia	4.1%	6.4%	14.9%	23.0%
Wisconsin	4.8%	6.2%	13.9%	17.9%
Wyoming	4.6%	10.4%	13.1%	29.5%

Notes: Mothers of very young children are those who have at least one child age 3 or younger at home. Figures are for all employed workers. "Low-wage" occupations are those with median hourly wages of \$10.10 or less per hour. "Low-wage" occupations could be defined in different ways; this analysis uses an hourly earnings cut-off of \$10.10 per hour in light of the Fair Minimum Wage Act (S. 460/H.R. 1010) pending in Congress, which would gradually raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10 per hour.

Source: National data are from the Current Population Survey (CPS) 2013 calculated by NWLC using Miriam King et al. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS)-CPS: Version 3.0. [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010. State data are from the American Community Survey 2008-12 five-year averages calculated by NWLC using Steven Ruggles et al., IPUMS: Version 5.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010. Median hourly wage of occupations: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), May 2013 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm.

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4 National data are from the Current Population Survey (CPS) 2013 calculated by NWLC using Miriam King et al. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS)-CPS: Version 3.0. [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010. State data are from the American Community Survey 2008-12 five-year averages calculated by NWLC using Steven Ruggles et al., IPUMS: Version 5.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010. Median hourly wage of occupations: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), May 2013 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, available at http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm.

5 "Low-wage" occupations are those with median hourly wages of \$10.10 or less per hour. "Low-wage" occupations could be defined in different ways; this analysis uses an hourly earnings cut-off of \$10.10 per hour in light of the Fair Minimum Wage Act (S. 460/H.R. 1010) pending in Congress, which would gradually raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10 per hour.

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