



WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION FACT SHEET



MOTHERHOOD

Compiled in June 2019

Single mothers

- There are 11 million single-parent families in the United States and nearly 80% of them, including 17.2 million children³ they represent, are headed by single mothers. More than a third of New York households with children are single-parent families and more than 500,000 (78%) of single-parent families are headed by single women²

Single mothers in poverty

- More than 40% of single women with children live in poverty¹
- Nearly two in five Black women (37 percent) and over one-quarter of American Indian/Alaska Native women (27 percent) are raising a child without the support of a spouse or partner while in college, compared with 19 percent of Hispanic women, 17 percent of women of two or more races, 14 percent of White women, and 7 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander women¹³
- The poverty rate for single-mother families is more than 26%, meaning single mothers are significantly more likely than two-parent or single-father families, at 13%, to be living in poverty²

Single mothers and education

- Single mothers who complete a bachelor's degree earn \$610,300 more over their lifetimes and are 69 percent less likely to live in poverty than single mothers with only high school diplomas.³
- Public or institutional investments in services, such as child care and case management, boost graduation rates and lead to increased lifetime earnings and lower poverty for single mothers who graduate, more than paying for themselves through higher tax contributions and savings on public benefits if single mothers complete their degrees.³
- Single mothers' own investments in college pay off when they graduate, yielding \$8.50-\$16.50 in lifetime earnings for every dollar they invest in their own educations.³
- 8 percent of single mothers in college graduate with a degree³
- From 2004 to 2012, the number of student parents in the United States climbed by 1.1 million, or 30 percent, to 4.8 million students.⁴
- Nationally just 17 percent of single parents who enrolled in four-year colleges in the 2003-4 academic year earned bachelor's degrees within six years.⁴
- Roughly half of four-year public colleges and 44 percent of community colleges also offer on-campus child care, though the number of centers is shrinking.⁴
- Some 275 colleges offer single-family housing, mostly in apartments.⁴
- Only 8% of single mothers who enroll in college will graduate with an associate or bachelor's degree within six years, compared to 54% of married mothers and 40% of women overall.⁵
- Today's college communities include 1.7 million single mothers striving to earn degrees that could secure better futures for their families, but only 8 percent of them complete school within six years, due in large part to the difficulties of balancing parenting with schoolwork and jobs.⁶

¹ Organizing with a gender frame

² Pay Equity and Advancement Wage Gap

³ College Degrees Bring Significant Benefits to Single Mothers and Society

⁴ College, with Kids

⁵ On a Mission to Create Paths Out of Poverty for Single Mothers

⁶ Support Single Mothers in College to Make Education More Equitable for All



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- Nearly four in ten Black female college students are single mothers, and Latina and Native American women students are also more likely to be juggling parenthood and school without the support of a partner.⁶
- Single mothers who complete associate degrees earn \$329,498 more over their lifetimes and are 38 percent less likely to live in poverty than single mothers with only high school diplomas.⁶
- The number of single mothers in college more than doubled in the 12 school years between 1999 and 2012.¹³
- Nearly 2.1 million students—or 11 percent of all undergraduates—are raising children without a partner.¹³
- Women of color in college are especially likely to be single parents.¹³
- 30 percent of single student mothers attend for-profit institutions—triple the rate of women students without children.¹³
- In 2015, just 31 percent of single mothers ages 25 and older held a college degree, compared with 54 percent of comparable married mothers and 40 percent of women overall.¹³
- 44 percent of all single student mothers attend public two-year institutions. Another 30 percent of single student mothers attend for-profit institutions—making them over three times as likely to attend for-profit colleges as women students without children—and 19 percent attend public or private four-year colleges¹³
- The vast majority of single mothers in college (89 percent) have low incomes; 63 percent live at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level¹³
- A large majority of single mothers are unable to contribute to college costs: 81 percent report an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of \$0—twice the share of married mothers—meaning they have no income of their own or from their families to cover college-related expenses¹³
- Single mothers who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander have an average of nearly \$600 more unmet need than their White counterparts¹³
- The 1.7 million single student mothers enrolled as of 2015-16 represent more than two in five student parents (43 percent) and the majority of mothers in college are single parents (62 percent)¹⁴
- Mothers, and especially single mothers, borrow more than other student parents and students without children. Student mothers enrolled in 2015-16 held a median \$8,300 in debt, and single mothers carried \$9,500 in debt. Median debt among single mothers in college was 2.7 times higher than median debt among women students without children (\$3,500).¹⁴

Mothers and Work

- Almost every developed country guarantees mothers paid time off when they have a child. On average, the 35 countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD) offer 18 weeks of paid leave. The U.S. guarantees none.⁷
- A 2014 study found about a quarter of American mothers of preschoolers don't work. Women in managerial or professional jobs were the most likely to remain in the workforce: Only 15 percent of them stopped working while their children were young—but they did cut back on how much they worked, by about 2.5 hours per week, on average.⁷

⁷ Modern motherhood has economists worried



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- American workers in households making more than \$75,000 a year are twice as likely to get paid leave as those whose households earn less than \$30,000.⁷
- Women without access to paid leave are significantly more likely to quit their jobs after giving birth than those with paid leave but only 12 percent of U.S. workers in the private sector have paid family leave through their employer⁸
- When faced with the prospect of unpaid leave or no leave at all (unpaid leave is protected under the Family and Medical Leave Act for about 60 percent of U.S. workers), many women who have children choose to leave the workforce⁸
- After becoming fathers, men see an average of a 6 percent increase in earnings even after controlling for factors such as hours worked and marital status, while new mothers see a 4 percent decrease per child⁸
- Seventy percent of mothers with children under 18 work.¹¹
- The so-called “motherhood penalty” - in other words, the reduction in pay that women who have children face - is as high as 10% among highly-paid, highly-skilled workers.⁹

Mothers and Health

- Maternal mortality is a leading cause of death of women reproductive age.¹⁰
- Caregiving activities of mothers with depression are compromised, affecting feeding practices, sleep routines, well-child visits, vaccinations, safety practices, and mother/infant bonding.
- Eighty percent of women breast-feed, up from about half.¹¹
- 20% of pregnant women in the US are survivors of childhood maltreatment, and are at increased risk for PTSD and depression that extends into their pregnancies; these women have increased risk for having a low birth weight or premature baby.¹²

Mothers and Education

- Today, more than two million moms are pursuing postsecondary education.¹³
- 4 in 10 women at two-year colleges say that they are likely or very likely to drop out of school due to their dependent care obligations.¹³
- 43 percent of women at two-year colleges who live with dependents say that they are likely or very likely to drop out of school due to their dependent care obligations¹³
- More than two in five student parents are single mothers, many of whom are balancing school, care, and work.¹⁴
- While a range of time and financial obstacles can impede their ability to graduate on time, student parents achieve higher grade point averages (GPA) than other students. One in three student parents maintain a 3.5 GPA or higher.¹⁴

⁸ Barriers and Bias

⁹ Gender Equality in the Workplace December 2016

¹⁰ The bad, the ugly, and the good

¹¹ The Costs of Motherhood Are Rising, and Catching Women Off Guard

¹² Co-creating Well-being

¹³ Single Mothers in College: Growing Enrollment, Financial Challenges, and the Benefits of Attainment

¹⁴ Despite Big Enrollment Declines, Parents Make up 22 Percent of College Students



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