

YOUNG WOMEN OF COLOR AND LOW-WAGE WORK

Structural barriers are **systemic challenges** embedded in our culture, economy, and institutions that **cause inequality**. Produced by systems of power, they require **large-scale investment** and **policy solutions** to achieve meaningful change. CLASP conducted focus groups* with young women of color to learn what structural barriers they encounter in daily life. This fact sheet includes insights from **Latina** and **Native** young women about their experiences with low-wage work. Uprooting low-wage work and other structural barriers demands **turning over the ground** to reveal these root causes, **partnering with young women of color** to identify solutions, and **seeding change** in equitable ground.

WAGES

24%

In 2016, approximately 24% of workers in the United States earned poverty-level wages.¹ The Federal Poverty Level for a family of four was \$24,300.²



Women comprise two-thirds of all low-wage workers earning \$10.10 or less an hour. They tend to work in the care sector, which has the fewest labor protections.³

“Even like the jobs that are available to us we don’t get like office jobs that are like someone like me I clean houses. Like because my mom she cleaned houses and then she gave us that job so we me and my sister we do that with my mom and now she’s like older so she stays home and we do the work.”

- Central Valley

DANGER/DIFFICULTY



Home care work is one of the fastest growing sectors but has the fewest labor protections. Jobs include personal care aid, home health aide, and nursing assistant.

“Like, at my job they start us off at 10...And then, like, at three months, you get a \$.25 raise, and then at 6 months, you get a \$.25 raise, and then at a year, you get a \$.25 raise. And then every year after that, but it’s just, I mean, I know for caregiving, I feel like, like the things we do like I feel like we should get paid more than we should. But like, cause we do like we like clean them and we shower them, we feed them and we clean their rooms and we do all of that and I just feel like some jobs, they start you off at a little amount just because they can, you know?”

- Denver

\$10.49

These workers have low wages and no employer-provided benefits. Their median hourly wage is \$10.49, and their median annual income is \$13,800.⁴

“Especially with us, cause I work a 24 hour security I should say, I know there’s times where I know I’m not supposed to be doing, I’m not supposed to be looking for suspects, who have just shot up the area and I’m just sitting there and they call us and say hey you know look for this dude. Um, that’s not really my job, but you know I am not security, but I don’t deal with armed suspects man, that’s, I have no weapons to defend myself. All I have is a strobe light. What am I supposed to do with that? [laughter] I’m not looking to get killed at work. Thanks though.”

- Denver



LEAVE

4%

In 2017, only 4% of private-sector workers at the lowest wage level had access to paid family leave.⁵

"I'm a single parent raising two kids and it's like with him, it's more of like he doesn't respect, what I go through too in order to raise the kids and what I sacrifice and it's like oh no like you did it....it's just like with me just having him [baby], I went back after I had him two weeks and I messed up my body. ... And I can't heal within the six weeks. I have to heal within 5 months."

- Denver

DISCRIMINATION

60%

"Gender harassment" is hostile behavior that is devoid of sexual interest. It includes sexually crude terminology or displays and sexist comments. These behaviors aim to insult and reject women, rather than compelling a sexual relationship.⁶ When sex-based harassment at work is measured by asking about this form of gender harassment, almost 60% of women report having experienced harassment.

"I remember one time I was talking to one of my co-workers and she said she overheard the male managers and said that, they said that um, all the security women are good for is talking and sex and cooking. That's all they're good for. They don't belong in the workplace. I said wow. I'm like, good to know that we're respected."

- Denver

"So I picked it up and these three managers were like just astonished and my husband was like I told you she's strong. And even that like the guy was so I think he was just so caught up in his like I'm not going to let this woman make me feel like a fool. He still didn't give me the job but it was like it's cool like it's cool. I made yourself look like a dumb ass it's cool. I mean that was like I was so mad I was like I'm perfectly healthy to pick up a box. I just showed you like why are you not giving me the job?"

- Central Valley

SEXUAL HARASSMENT



Anywhere from 25% to 85% of women report having experienced sexual harassment in the workplace.⁷

Industries with a high proportion of low-wage jobs, such as food service, hospitality, and agriculture, have high incidences of sexual harassment.

Women, particularly women of color and immigrant women, are overrepresented in low-wage jobs.⁸

"He'll walk up to you and make a smart comment, like, oh yeah daddy does it better, doesn't he. I'm like, yeah, keep wishin', like no. He'll be like call me daddy I'm like no you're funny like you're stupid."

- Denver

⁵ In 2017, CLASP conducted five focus groups with African-American, Hmong American, Native, and Latina girls and young women as well as gender non-conforming youth as part of a research project with Frontline Solutions focused on structural barriers and identity. Different groups of young women highlighted different structural barriers and each group that we spoke to is not represented on every fact sheet.

⁶ Economic Policy Institute, State of Working America Data Library, "Poverty Level Wages," Updated February 13, 2017. [https://www.epi.org/data/#?subject=povwage;CPS_ORG|Census_Bureau_\(poverty_threshold\)](https://www.epi.org/data/#?subject=povwage;CPS_ORG|Census_Bureau_(poverty_threshold)).

⁷ US Department of Health and Human Services, Prior HHS Poverty Guidelines and Federal Registry References, 2018. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/prior-hhs-poverty-guidelines-and-federal-registry-references>

⁸ Lawrence Katz, Ai-Jen Poo, and Elaine Waxman, Imagining a Future of Work that Fosters Mobility for all, 2018. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/katz/files/future_of_work_paper.pdf

⁹ PHI, U.S. Home Care Workers: Key Facts, 2017. <https://phinational.org/resource/u-s-home-care-workers-key-facts/>

¹⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employee Benefits Survey, Leave Benefits Access, 2017. <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2017/ownership/private/table32a.html>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² US EEOC, Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace, 2016. https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/task_force/harassment/upload/report.pdf

¹³ National Women's Law Center, #metoo What Next?: Strengthening Workplace Sexual Harassment Protections and Accountability, 2017.

¹⁴ <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/MeToo-Strengthening-Workplace-Sexual-Harassment-Protections.pdf>