FAST FACTS

Workplace Barriers and Black Mothers

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What percentage of Black mothers are in the workforce?

- **Fact 1:** "Among mothers living with children under 18 years old, 79.5 percent of Black or African American mothers participated in the labor force . . ." (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024).

What percentage of Black mothers are economic providers for their family?

- **Fact 1**: "40.5% of all mothers with children under 18 are equal, primary or sole income earners for their family. This share is especially large for Black moms: While 36.4% of White, non-Hispanic mothers and 39.3% of Hispanic mothers are equal, primary or sole breadwinners, the percentage of Black mothers is a staggering 65.9%" (George & Livingston, 2024:1).

How does the motherhood penalty map onto race?

- **Fact 1:** "Parenthood carries a penalty for women's labor market outcomes, reducing women's wages, occupational status, and employment opportunities" (Florian, 2018:80).

- **Fact 2:** "Black mothers working full time, year-round are paid only 52 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers" (Coillberg, 2025:1).

- **Fact 3:** "Many mothers of color working full time, year-round lose tens of thousands of dollars each year to the wage gap, with . . . Black mothers typically losing $35,000 annually compared to white, non-Hispanic fathers" (Coillberg, 2025:2).

- **Fact 4:** "We found that Black women [mothers] on average receive 3.6 fewer FPE (full pay equivalent) weeks of paid leave than White women [mothers]. To quantify that, consider a woman working full time at a minimum wage of $15: in that case, 3.6 fewer weeks of pay amounts to $2160 less over the course of her leave—a large sum for these women" (Goodman et al., 2021:746).

- Fact 5: “However, due to a long history of discriminatory hiring practices and exclusionary workplace protections and public assistance policies, Black women [including mothers] are concentrated in low-paying, inflexible service occupations that are excluded from various worker protections and lack retirement benefits, health insurance coverage, and paid sick and maternity leave” (Banks, 2019:1).

How do employment and workplace characteristics impact Black mothers’ breastfeeding practices?

- Fact 1: “Working African American mothers have, on average, higher risk for breastfeeding cessation and experience unsupportive work environments as a barrier to breastfeeding” (Johnson et al., 2015:425).

- Fact 2: “When we considered differences by race, the presumptive advantage of not working on breastfeeding only held for White women. Not working was not associated with an apparent advantage in breastfeeding duration among Black women or women of other races; in fact, among Black women, working in professional/managerial jobs was associated with the longest breastfeeding duration on average across our three occupation categories” (Whitely et al., 2021:10).

- Fact 3: “Racism on the job [for Black mothers] was inversely associated with breastfeeding initiation and duration. In particular, women who reported racism on the job had significantly lower odds of breastfeeding for 3–5 months” (Griswold et al., 2018:1185).

What are Black mothers’ experiences with and responses to race and gender workplace discrimination?

- Fact 1: “Many women [Black mothers] talked of “knowing” that discrimination existed, especially those who worked in predominately White settings. There were overt and covert discriminatory practices . . . Those who worked in majority Black environments also identified discrimination but at the systems level rather than individual level” (Parnell, 2024:399).

- Fact 2: “Women of color [including Black mothers] experience the impact of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexism as well as race-related discrimination, suggesting that the accumulation of stress over the life course is intersectional” (Riggan et al., 2021:71).

- Fact 3: “Overall, participants in this study [Black mothers] were either experiencing, or planning around, pregnancy discrimination and bias and lack of family-friendly workplace policies throughout their reproductive years in a way that caused immense financial burden and stress” (Mehra et al., 2023:5).

- Fact 4: “Professional women were often “the first Black” in a position or “the only Black’’ in a department. The distinction added the weight of consciously creating a positive image for the whole race. They felt viewed as “being just like them (the Black race)” or as an anomaly, “nothing like them”; both erroneous perceptions in need of refutation” (Parnell, 2024:399).

- Fact 5: “ . . . we found that when African American women [mothers] perceived more racial slurs and unfair treatment against members of their ethnic group in their workplace (i.e., interpersonal prejudice), their children reported more frequent messages about the importance of ethnic pride and cultural knowledge in the home [from their mothers]” (Hagelakamp & Hughes 2014:557).

How can employers promote more equitable work environments through family-friendly policies that support Black working mothers?

- Fact 1: “Having a job that allowed for flexibility regarding prenatal considerations and postpartum recovery was viewed positively by the study participants [Black mothers]” (Mehra et al., 2023:8).

- Fact 2: “The enactment of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA) marked a pivotal advance in safeguarding the health and economic security of Black mothers and their families . . . The PWFA [requires] employers to provide essential accommodations, such as allowing a pregnant worker to carry a bottle of water, providing a private space to pump breastmilk or guaranteeing job-protected time off for prenatal and postnatal appointments” (Aina, 2025:1).

- Fact 3: “On December 29, 2022, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 became law. This legislation introduced the PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act (“PUMP Act”), expanding these rights to more nursing employees, including agricultural workers, nurses, teachers, truck and taxi drivers, home care workers and managers” (U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, n.d.).

- Fact 4: “Furthermore, we need policies that allow parents and caregivers more flexible time outside of the workplace to care for their families, including time to work from home or resources to help support them in caring for their families by providing culturally affirming childcare options when parents must be away from home” (Coleman-King et al., 2022:1030).

- Fact 5: “Assistance can include, for example, providing paid parental leave, job security surrounding childbirth, part-time and flexible work schedules, affordable universal childcare and health care, vacation and sick day provisions, and cash allowances to parents” (Collins, 2020:850).

- Fact 6: “The Black motherleaders who participated in the study indicated that they need more support from their organizations, and they specifically noted that providing mentorship opportunities is one way their organizations can invest in their success.” (Ali & Hayes-Burrell, 2024:604).

- **Fact 7:** “For- and non-profit organizations must work to eradicate systemic oppression, including anti-Blackness, racial-gendered bias, dominant stereotypes, gendered expectations, and other obstacles to inclusion. This study demonstrated that by listening to Black women [mothers], valuing their lived experiences and leadership styles, and supporting their leadership practices, organizations can make their workplaces great places for all employees, especially those with oppressed identities” (Ali & Hayes-Burrell, 2024:604).

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