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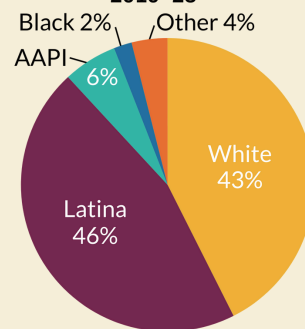
The gender wage gap—the difference between what men and women earn—remains a serious issue in the United States. For Latinas the wage gap is especially wide, not only nationally but also in Santa Barbara County.

In this research brief we use data from the 2023 US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates to investigate Latinas’ participation in the civilian labor force and their hourly earnings. Our findings highlight the economic inequalities experienced by Latina workers.

## Latina Workers in Santa Barbara County

In 2023, Latinas represented 46 percent of the female civilian labor force in Santa Barbara County, surpassing non-Hispanic white women, who comprised 43 percent (fig. 1). The percentages for Black, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), and other women, which includes American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN), were far smaller.

**Figure 1. Racial/Ethnic Background of the Santa Barbara County Female Labor Force, 2019–23**



Source: Estimates calculated from 2019–2023 ACS 5-year PUMS.  
Note: Percentage add up to more than 100% due to rounding error.

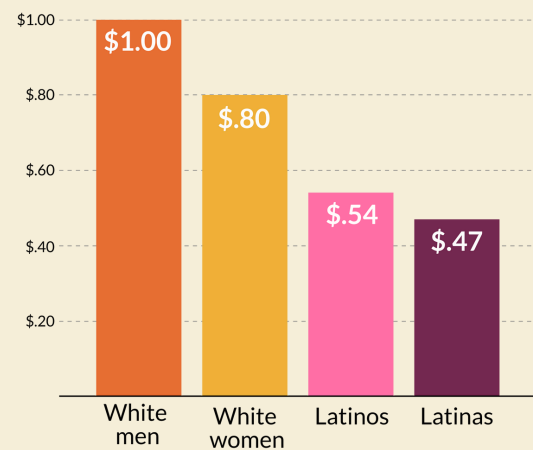
Latina workers in Santa Barbara County tend to be younger than their white female counterparts. The median age for Latinas was 35, compared to 42 for white women. This younger population is essential to the future of the regional economy. Younger workers bring energy, adaptability, innovation, and are more likely to embrace new technologies and start new businesses.

## The Hourly Earnings Gap Faced by Latinas

Latinas experience significant inequality in hourly compensation when compared to white and Latino men. Latinas in Santa Barbara County earned only 47 cents in the time it took a non-Hispanic white man to earn a dollar (fig. 2). Latino men made a little more, 54 cents, and white women were paid 80 cents. These findings evidence a racial and gender gap that especially burdens Latinas.

Differences in educational attainment and occupational status explain part of the wage gap. When compared to white residents, Latinos and Latinas tend to have poorer access to high-quality K-12 education and universities and colleges that grant bachelor's degrees.<sup>1</sup> Some women also experience immigration-related barriers to obtaining good jobs. Additionally, gender discrimination and stereotyping play a part in defining career paths, and contribute to lower pay for Latinas relative to men even within the same occupational categories.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 2. Gap in Hourly Earnings for White and Latina/o Residents of Santa Barbara County, by Gender, 2019–23**



Source: Estimates calculated from 2019–2023 ACS 5-year PUMS.

## Conclusion

This research highlights the pay gap that Latinas face in Santa Barbara County. Many Latinas are the primary earners in their households and contribute significantly as taxpayers and community members. When they are underpaid, the impact extends beyond individual workers, affecting families' ability to access housing, education, healthcare and to plan for retirement. Because Latinas make up nearly half of the female workforce in Santa Barbara County, the consequences of their financial challenges ripple across the entire region.

Wage inequality has serious implications for the region's economic well-being and must be countered by advancing economic opportunity for all. This requires comprehensive policy solutions that include reducing occupational segregation, expanding support for family care, creating pathways to citizenship, and strengthening protections against workplace discrimination. Santa Barbara's civic and business leadership can play a role in advancing fair and equitable wages for Latinas and all other workers.

<sup>1</sup> Enrique S. Pumar, "The Differential Latinx Attainment Rate: A Comparative Analysis of Recent Trends in Educational Achievements." *Journal of Leadership, Equity, and Research* 7, no. 3 (2021). <https://journals.sfu.ca/cvj/index.php/cvj/article/view/167/303>.

<sup>2</sup> Olga Alonso-Villar and Coral del Río, "Disentangling Occupational Sorting from Within-Occupation Disparities: Earnings Differences Among 12 Gender–Race/Ethnicity Groups in the U.S." *Population Research and Policy Review* 42, no. 3 (2023): 45. doi: 10.1007/s11113-023-09791-1.

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