

# Hispanic Women at Work

By Megan Elliott\*

## Introduction

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Hispanic\*\* population is projected to experience the largest growth compared to its counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups over the next several decades. Demographic projections suggest that Hispanics will be an increasing influence and contributor to the American economy and labor force. The most recent Census estimates show that Latinos number over 41 million in the U.S., and comprise 14.1% of the total population.\*\*\* Nearly 20 million Hispanics in the U.S. are women, making Latinas 13.4% of all women in the U.S and 48.3% of all Latinos.

Currently there are 12.5 million Latinas of working age (16 to 64). Hispanic women constitute almost half (47.3%) of all working-age Latinos, and two in five (39.9%) Hispanic workers. Projections show that Latinas in the labor force will grow by 2.8 million between 2002 and 2012. This is 28.8% of the 9.7 million projected labor force growth for all women.

The work experience of Latinas contributes a significant amount to the economic well-being of their families and households. According to Census data, in 2003, median incomes of married-couple Hispanic families were 85.2% higher

when the wife was in the paid labor force. In female-headed Hispanic households with no husband present, median income decreased by 55.3% when the woman did not work.

Considering Latinas' contributions to the economic well-being of the Hispanic community, and their current and growing contributions to the U.S. economy, it is critical to understand the key factors and barriers that shape Latinas' employment status. This statistical brief highlights several leading and lagging indicators of labor market performance for Hispanic women. Please note that most of the percentages

# Statistical Brief

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\*\* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably throughout this brief and refer collectively to Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central and South Americans, Dominicans, and others of Spanish and Latin American descent. Latinos may be of any race; therefore, unless denoted as "non-Hispanic," persons of Hispanic origin may be included in both the "Black" and "White" racial categories.

\*\*\* Data do not include residents of Puerto Rico.

contained in this brief were calculated by the National Council of La Raza.

## Education

- Latinas have dramatically lower education levels than their peers.** In 2004, 41.8% of all Latinas age 15-64 did not have high school diplomas, compared to 17.1% of White women, 22.7% of Black women, and 15.6% of Asian women. Of those Latinas who did have diplomas, half (54.0%) of them pursued education beyond high school, compared to 65.6% of White women, 58.2% of Black women, and 76.4% of Asian women.
- Latinas have lower annual incomes than their peers, even with similar education backgrounds.** In 2003, Latinas 18 years and older working full-time and year-round earned less, regardless of education levels, when compared to other women. For example, Latinas holding a bachelor's degree had a median yearly income of \$38,178, compared to \$41,852 for non-Hispanic White women, \$38,842 for Black women, and \$45,615 for Asian women.

## Labor Force/ Employment

### Labor Force Indicators<sup>1</sup>

- Latinas have the lowest labor force participation rate of all major U.S. racial and ethnic groups.** In 2004, 56.1% of Latinas were working or looking for work, compared to 58.9% of White women. Meanwhile, Black women maintained the highest labor force participation rate of 61.5% – and Asian women's labor force participation rate stood at 57.6%.
- As a share of women workers, Hispanic women are almost two times more likely than White women to be unemployed.** In 2004, 7.6% of Latinas in the workforce were unemployed. At the same time, the unemployment rate of White women was 4.7%,

Asian women's was 4.3%, and Black women's was 9.8%.

- Among Latino subgroups, Puerto Rican women have the highest labor force participation rate, Mexican women have the highest unemployment rate, and Cuban women have the lowest of both rates.** In 2004, Latinas of Puerto Rican origin had the highest labor force participation rate (57.8%), compared to 54.1% for Mexican-origin Latinas and 51.9% for Cuban-origin Latinas. Latinas of Mexican origin had unemployment rates of 8.5%, the highest among any Hispanic subgroup. Conversely, the unemployment rate for Latinas of Cuban origin was only 3.8% in 2004. The unemployment rate of Puerto Rican women (7.9%) was higher than that of total Latinas (7.6%).

**TABLE 1**

**Employment Status of Women in 2004 by Race and Ethnicity (%)**

	Total	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
Labor Force Participation Rate	59.2	58.9	61.5	57.6	56.1
Employment Rate	56.0	56.1	55.5	55.1	51.8
Unemployment Rate	5.4	4.7	9.8	4.3	7.6

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey Household Data Annual Averages 2004: Table 5. Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by sex, age, and race; and Table 6. Employment Status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex, age, and detailed ethnic group. Employment rate calculated by the National Council of La Raza.

## Not in the Labor Force

- **There are almost as many Hispanic women of working age out of the workforce as in the workforce.** In 2004, there were 6.0 million Hispanic women not in the labor force, or 43.9% of Latinas of working age. This is compared to 41.1% (38.5 million) of White women, 38.5% (5.5 million) of Black women, and 42.4% (2.1 million) of Asian women.
- **While Latinas not in the labor force were more likely than their White and Asian peers to want a job, they were the least likely out of all women to search for one.** According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), of those Hispanic women not in the labor force, 463,000 (7.7%) wanted a job, compared to 5.0% of White women, 6.1% of Asian women, and 9.3% of Black women in 2004. Slightly over one-third (36.3%) of those Latinas who wanted a job searched for one in the 12 months prior to the survey, compared to 39.0% of White women, 38.0% of Asian women, and 47.0% of Black women.

## Hours

- **The majority of Hispanic women work full-time, but a significant number are**

**employed part-time.** In 2004, approximately 1.7 million Latinas, or 23.8% of the total number of employed Hispanic women, worked part-time. White women had a higher rate of part-time workers – 27.2% – while Black and Asian women workers had lower rates of part-time workers, 17.5% and 20.8%, respectively.

- **Hispanic women working part-time are more likely than their White and Asian counterparts to want full-time jobs.** In 2004, nearly one in five (19.0%) of the 1.7 million Latinas working part-time did so for economic reasons,<sup>2</sup> compared to only 9.0% of White women and 12.1% of Asian women. Similarly, 21.9% of Black women worked part-time for economic reasons.

## Industry, Occupation, and Earnings

- **Median weekly earnings for Latinas working full-time are lower than for any other group of women workers.** In 2004, Latinas earned only \$419 in median weekly earnings, 71.7% of the median weekly earnings of White women (\$584), 83.0% of Black women (\$505), and 68.4% of Asian women's median weekly earnings (\$613).
- **Among women workers, Hispanics have the smallest share in management, professional, and related typically high-paying occupations.** Slightly more than one in five (22.4%) Latina workers was in management, professional, and related occupations in 2004,

## Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship

In 2004, 317,000 Latinas were considered self-employed. The majority (98.4%) of them were in nonagricultural industries. Nearly one in three self-employed Latinas (31.5%) were in education and health services, while 18.0% were employed in professional and business services. The other top industries in which Latinas were self-employed were wholesale and retail trade (17.4% of total self-employed), other services (9.1%), leisure and hospitality (7.6%), and financial activities (6.9%).

According to the Census Bureau's preliminary estimates of business ownership from the 2002 Survey of Business Owners, Latinas owned 540,909 businesses in the United States, accounting for 2.4% of the total U.S. firms in 2002 and contributing \$36.3 billion to the U.S. economy. This is a 60.2% increase in the number of Latina-owned businesses and a 32.7% increase in sales and receipts from 1997.

compared to 38.6% of White women, 30.6% of Black women, and 43.8% of Asian women. There were 14.0% Hispanic men in management, professional, and related occupations in 2004.

- **In 2004, Latinas working full-time earned less than other women in many occupational categories.**<sup>3</sup> In the top six occupations in which Latinas are employed, they earned considerably less than most other women, as noted in Figure 1.
- **Latinas earning hourly wages have the lowest median hourly earnings out of all women.**<sup>4</sup> In 2004, the median

hourly wage for the nearly 4.9 million Latinas earning hourly wages was \$9.04 per hour. This is compared to median hourly wages of \$10.21 for White women, \$9.93 for Black women, and \$10.57 for Asian women.

## Health Insurance and Pension Coverage

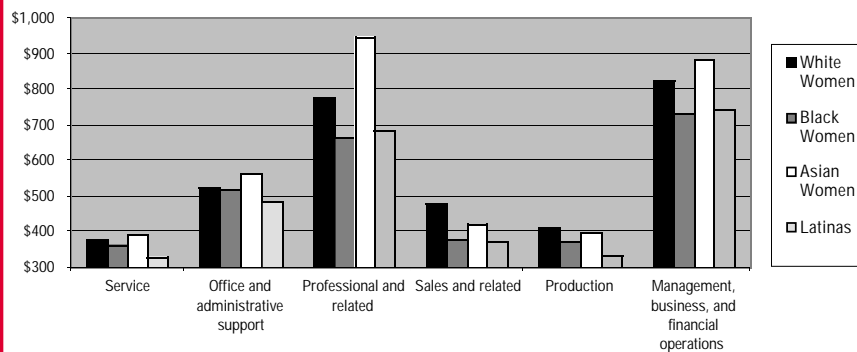
- **Latina workers are the least likely of all women workers to have employer-provided group health insurance, even when accounting for important factors such as size of employer.**<sup>5</sup> In 2001, 38.8% of Latina workers had

employer-provided group health insurance in their own names. Comparably, 50.0% of White non-Hispanic women workers and 53.8% of Black women workers had employer-provided group health insurance in their own names.

- **Latinas are the least likely of all women to have an employer-offered pension plan at work, and the least likely to be included in the plan.** In 2001, two in five (40.1%) Latinas had an employer-offered pension plan at work, and only 27.9% were included in the plan. Figure 2 on page 5 further illustrates the disparities among women workers.

FIGURE 1

Usual Weekly Earnings of Employed Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Sex, Race, and Ethnicity, the Top Six Occupations in which Latinas were Employed: 2004



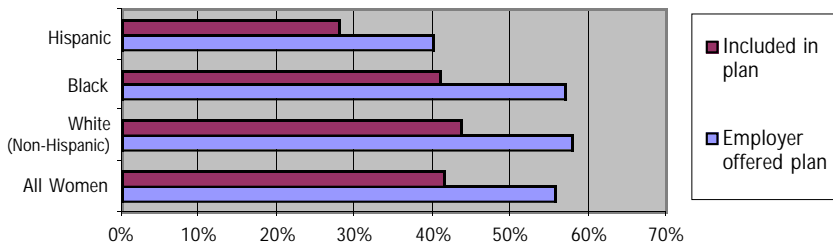
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics: Table A-2. Usual weekly earnings of employed full-time wage and salary workers by intermediate occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity and non-Hispanic ethnicity, Annual averages 2004, Current Population Survey Unpublished Data.

## Union Affiliation

- **Latinas were the least likely among their peers to be represented by unions.** In 2004, only 758,000 out of 6.7 million (11.4%) full-time employed Latinas were represented by unions. This compares to 12.1% of White women, 15.2% of Black women, and 12.1% of Asian women.
- **Wages increase for Latina workers when they are classified as either represented by a union or a member of a union.**<sup>6</sup> In 2004, full-time working

**FIGURE 2**

**Percentage of Women with Employer-Offered Pension Plans and Percent Included in Plan by Race and Ethnicity, 2001**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 2002, Table NC8. Pension Plan Coverage of Workers, by Selected Characteristics, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, and Poverty Status: 2001, Washington, DC, [http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032002/noncash/nc8\\_000.htm](http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032002/noncash/nc8_000.htm).

non-unionized Latinas' median weekly earnings were \$401 a week, compared to \$623 for Latinas who were members of unions. This was a 55.4% increase in the median weekly earnings between unionized Latinas and non-unionized Latinas.

■ **Unlike their White, Black, and Asian peers, married Latinas are less likely to participate in the labor force than Latinas who are divorced, widowed, separated, or never married.** In 2003, married Latinas had a

labor force participation rate of 54.5%, compared to 57.4% for Latinas who had other marital statuses, a difference of 2.9%. The opposite was true for White, Black, and Asian women, as illustrated by Table 2.

- **Latinas in the labor force are significantly more likely than other groups to have children under 18.** In 2003, half (50.1%) of all Latinas in the labor force had children under the age of 18. In comparison, 36.8% of White women, 45.0% of Black women, and 39.8% of Asian women in the labor force had children under 18.
- **Latinas are dramatically more likely than their peers not to work because of home or family reasons.** Nearly two

## Family Status

■ **Overall, Latinas are more likely to be married than their Black counterparts, and less likely to be married than their White and Asian counterparts.** In 2003, half (50.4%) of Latinas over the age of 16 were married with a spouse present,<sup>7</sup> compared to 29.3% of Black women, 54.8% of White women, and 58.4% of Asian women.

**TABLE 2**

**Labor Force Participation Rate of Women by Marital Status, Race, and Ethnicity, 2003**

Race and Ethnicity	All Marital Statuses	Married, Spouse Present	Other Marital Status	Difference between Married and Other Marital Status
Total	59.5%	61.0%	57.9%	-3.1%
White	59.2%	60.5%	57.6%	-2.9%
Black	61.9%	67.4%	59.7%	-7.7%
Asian	58.3%	60.7%	54.8%	-5.9%
Hispanic	55.9%	54.5%	57.4%	2.9%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Table 8. Employment Status of Persons by Presence and Age of Own Children, Sex, Race, Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, and Marital Status, Annual Average 2003.

Other marital status and difference between married and other marital status calculated by the National Council of La Raza.

in three (64.3%) Latinas between the ages of 18 and 64 who did not work in 2003 cited home or family factors as the

reason. In comparison, 47.8% of White non-Hispanic women, 29.8% of Black women, and 57.3% of Asian women

identified home or family factors as their reason for not working.

## Discrimination

As both women and minorities, Latinas face considerable discrimination in the workplace. The major types of discrimination have to do with sex, race, and national origin. According to an analysis by the National Partnership for Women and Families, between the years of 1992 and 2003 the number of complaints filed by Latinas with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) increased in all of these categories.

*Sex discrimination* charges encompass several issues – discrimination in hiring, glass ceiling problems, pregnancy discrimination, and sexual harassment. In 1992, Latinas filed 1,052 *sex discrimination* charges with the EEOC. In 2003, they filed 1,763 charges, a 68% increase over 1992. Furthermore, Latinas had a 120% increase in 2003 over 1992 in *sexual harassment* charges filed with the EEOC.

*Race and national origin discrimination* occur when women (or men) are faced with discriminatory employment practices because of their race or national origin, as well as *racial or ethnic harassment*. In 2003, Latinas filed 252 charges, an increase of 183% compared to the 89 charges filed in 1992. While the numbers varied from year to year for *national origin discrimination* charges filed by Latinas, overall there was a 16% increase in 2003 over 1992; 1,791 charges in 2003 and 1,542 charges in 1992.

While numbers alone cannot fully capture the discrimination experiences of Latinas in the workplace, they can demonstrate that the number of complaints filed by Latinas was larger in 2003 than in 1992, suggesting that discrimination persists for Latinas in the workforce.

## Conclusion

While the United States has begun to recover from the recent economic recession, Hispanic women continue to face barriers to both entering the workforce and advancing once they are there. Moreover, the data show that even when education and occupation are factored in, there are still

disparities among women workers. Considering the growth of the Hispanic community and its contributions to the American economy, it is crucial that policy-makers address the issues that Latinas face, including insufficient education, low earnings, and inadequate health

insurance coverage. Employment discrimination is also a serious issue (see box above). Policies must be designed that protect the rights of Latina workers, as well as provide opportunities to increase their wages and advance in the workforce.

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*Women at Work: Looking Behind the Numbers, 40 Years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, National Partnership for Women and Families, Washington, DC, July 2004.

## Endnotes

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1. The labor force participation rate is the civilian labor force (employed and unemployed) as a percentage of the civilian noninstitutional population. The employment rate is the number employed as a percentage of the civilian noninstitutional population. The unemployment rate is the number unemployed as a percentage of the civilian labor force.
2. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that the number of workers who are “part-time for economic reasons” is an important indicator of the health of the U.S. economy. BLS defines “part-time for economic reasons” as a worker who wants and is available to work full-time but is working part-time because of poor economic conditions or an inability to find full-time work.
3. Architecture and engineering occupations were the only occupations in which Latinas did not earn less than non-Hispanic women. However, only 21,000 Latinas (.3% of total employed Latinas) were in these occupations, with Latinas still earning less than White and Asian men. Latinas averaged \$953 in median weekly earnings in architecture and engineering occupations, compared to total men’s median weekly earnings in architecture and engineering of \$1,139.
4. Fewer than three in 100 employed Latinas (151,000) are paid at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage. Only 2.1% of employed White women, 1.7% of employed Black women, and .8% of employed Asian women are paid at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage.
5. Latinas are the least likely to have employer-provided group health insurance, even when accounting for work experience, size of employer, age, type of residence, region, occupation, and earnings. For example 46.7% of employed full-time Latinas had employer-provided group health insurance, compared to 63.3% of White non-Hispanic women and 62.3% of Black women. While there were several earnings and occupational categories in which Latinas were more likely to have employer-provided group health insurance, the number of Latinas in those categories was minimal.
6. Workers are classified as being a “member of a union” when they belong to a union. Workers are classified as being “represented by a union” when they are either union members or report no union affiliation but have jobs that are covered by a union or an employee association contract. Latinas who were represented by unions had median weekly earnings of \$616 in 2004.
7. While 57.3% of Latinas are married, 6.9% of them are married with no spouse present. This is compared to 7.4.% of Black women, 3.0% of White women, and 4.3% of Asian women who are married with no spouse present.