CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

PATHWAYS >> TO > PROGRESS
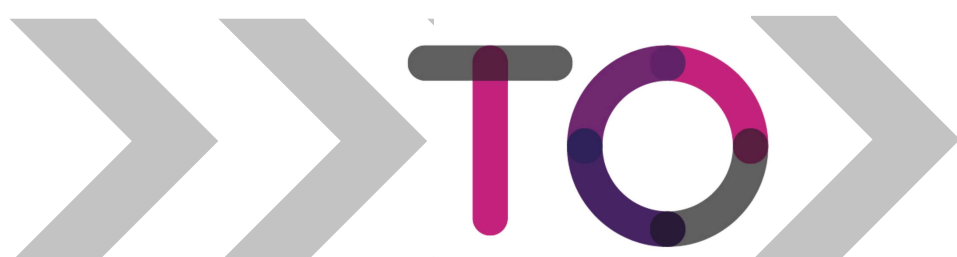
Accelerating the Possibilities

Poverty

WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

Contents

Introduction

For twenty-five years the WNY Women's Foundation (WNYWF) has been transforming systems, culture and policy to create opportunities for each woman to thrive. To commemorate this silver milestone, the WNYWF is releasing the third installment of our *Pathways to Progress: Accelerating the Possibilities* series. This data-driven analysis focuses on: **child care, poverty, leadership, education, occupational segregation, and pay equity**. Our latest edition builds off of the WNYWF's 2010 and 2017 *Pathways to Progress: The Status of Women in WNY* reports and compares the state of affairs for women 25 years ago, to the current climate, with a forecasted trajectory over the next 20-25 years.

Among the key focal points of this analysis is the issue of poverty. Within this context, we explore not only the stark realities faced by women but also the systemic factors that perpetuate and exacerbate these disparities. By shedding light on the multifaceted nature of poverty, we endeavor to catalyze meaningful dialogue and action towards sustainable solutions.

As we embark on this journey of reflection, analysis, and projection, we invite stakeholders from all sectors to join us in our mission to create a more equitable and inclusive society where every woman has the opportunity to realize her full potential. Together, let us accelerate the possibilities and pave the way for a brighter, more prosperous future for all.

Overview

The cumulative impacts of the gender wage gap, occupational segregation (where women are overrepresented in low-paid jobs and underrepresented in high-paying ones), disparities in caregiving and home responsibilities, and the lack of policies that support working families - such as affordable, accessible child care and paid family leave - have created significant economic challenges for women, particularly for women of color. These issues are compounded by systemic factors like gender inequality, racial discrimination, limited access to education, and inadequate social safety nets. Poverty does not affect all women equally. Factors such as race, ethnicity, age, class, and sexual orientation intersect to shape the unique experiences of women living in poverty.

Education

In Erie County, NY, **earning a Bachelor's degree reduces women's likelihood of living in poverty** from 16% to 6%, compared to women with a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022c).

Retirement

Women aged 65 and older in Erie County have higher poverty rates than men of the same age (11% vs. 8%), due in part to smaller retirement savings and lower Social Security benefits (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022d).

Low-Paid Workforce

Of the 1 million U.S. workers with hourly pay at or below the federal minimum wage in 2022, **68% were women** (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023b).

Economic Disparity in Buffalo

In Buffalo, **26% of Black women, 37% of Asian women, and 41% of Latina women 18 years and older live in poverty** - far higher than the national rates of 20%, 11%, and 17%, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022d).
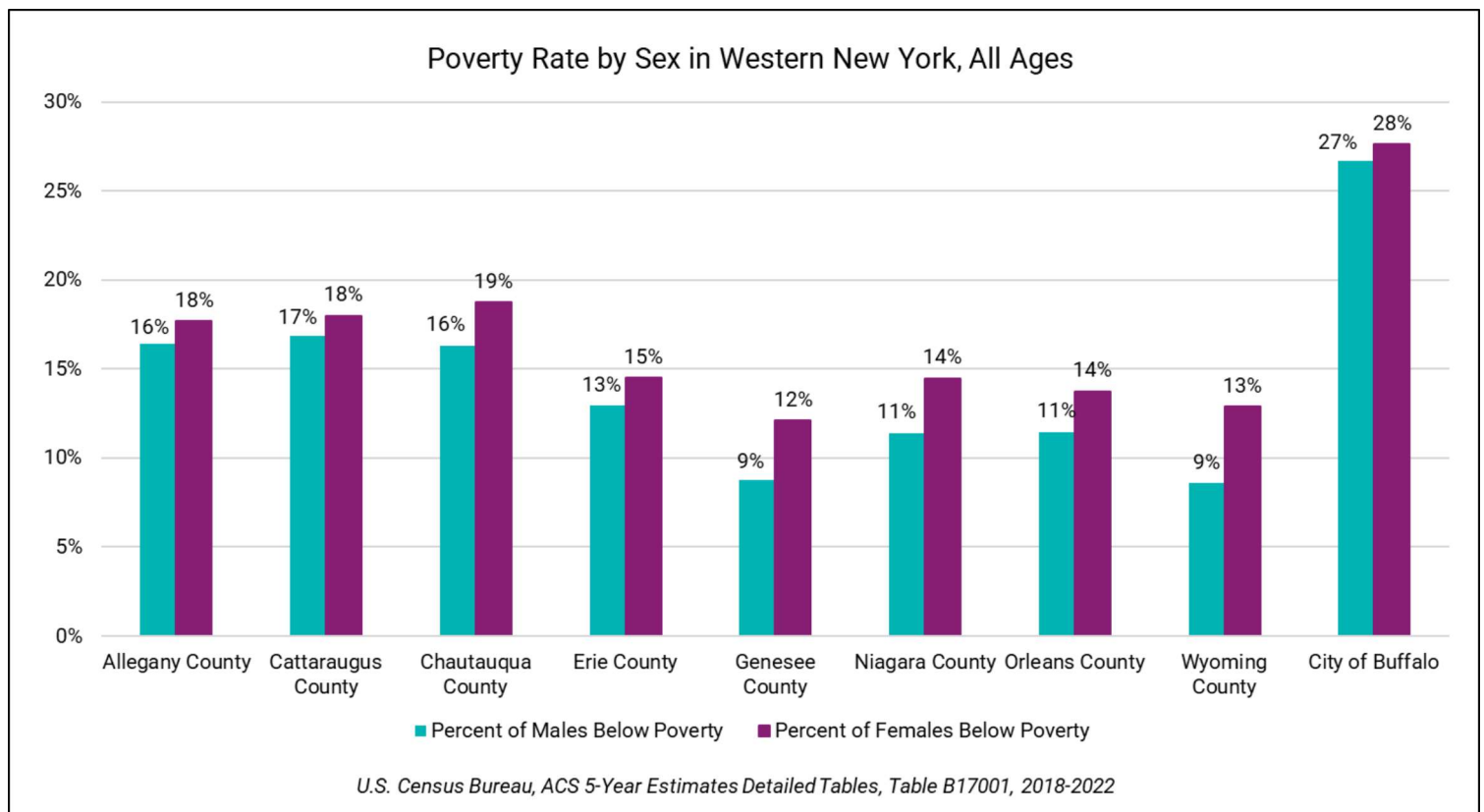
Local Poverty Statistics

Across Western New York (WNY), women experience poverty at higher rates than men. **Among people 18 years and older in Erie County, 14% of women live in poverty compared to 11% of men.** Poverty rates are even higher in Buffalo, with 25% of women and 22% of men 18 years and older living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022d). These are strikingly higher than the national poverty rates of 13% for women and 10% for men. This data highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions and policy measures aimed at addressing the root causes of gender-based poverty and promoting economic equity across all stages of women's lives. Such initiatives could include policies to address wage gaps, improve access to affordable child care and health care, and strengthen social safety nets for vulnerable populations.

Poverty Rate by Sex in Western New York, All Ages

County	Percent of Males Below Poverty	Percent of Females Below Poverty
Allegany County	16%	18%
Cattaraugus County	17%	18%
Chautauqua County	16%	19%
Erie County	13%	15%
Genesee County	9%	12%
Niagara County	11%	14%
Orleans County	11%	14%
Wyoming County	9%	13%
City of Buffalo	27%	28%

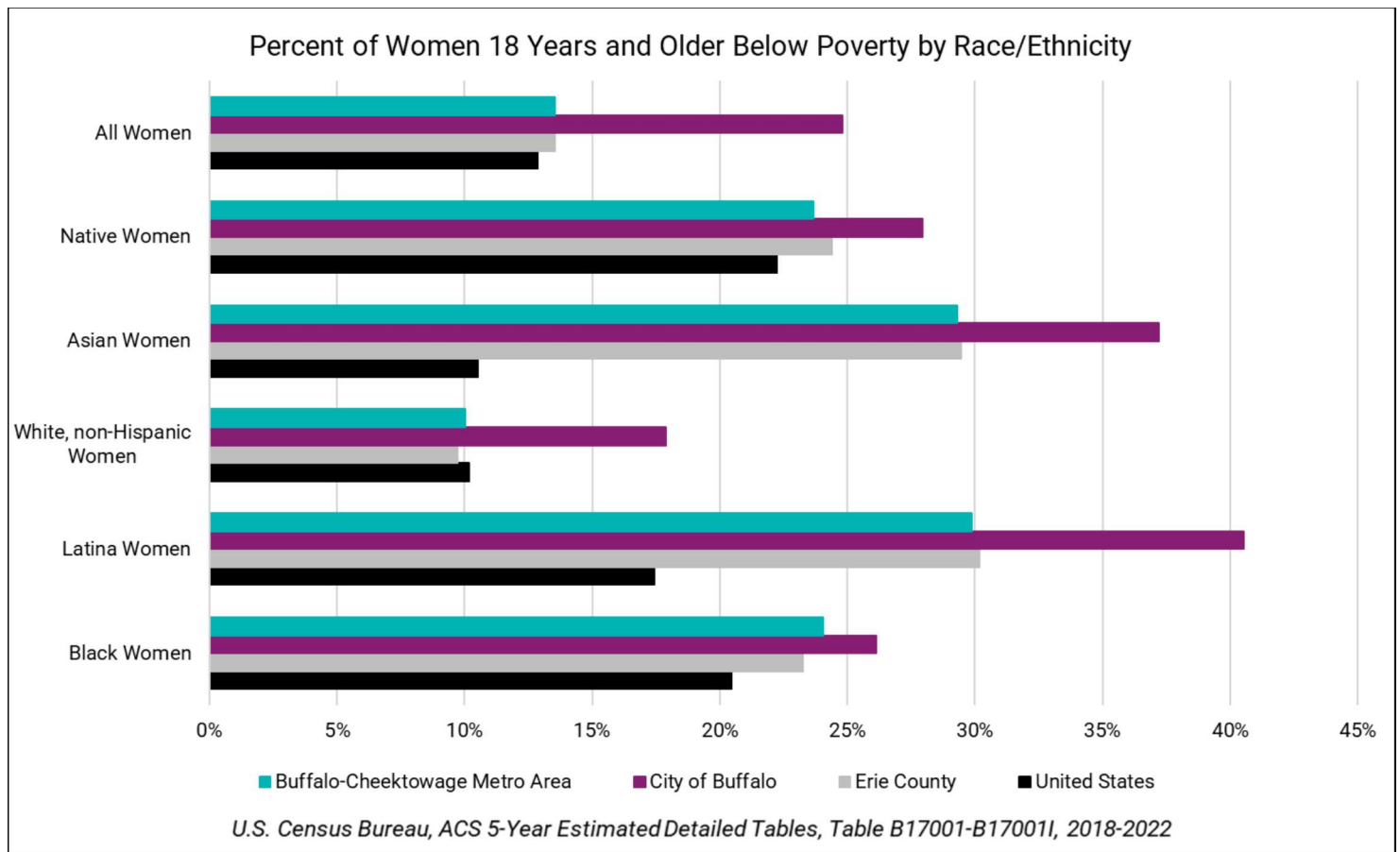*U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B17001, 2018-2022*

Women are disproportionately represented among people in poverty. This holds true in the United States, New York State (NYS), all 8 counties of WNY, and the City of Buffalo. **Of the 127,623 people living in poverty in Erie County, 54% are female even though women make up only 51% of the population.** In the Buffalo-Cheektowaga Metro Area, women represent 51% of the population, but constitute 55% of people in poverty. The disparity is especially glaring in Wyoming County, where women represent almost 50% of the population but almost 60% of people in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022d).

Race & Ethnicity

Poverty rates among women of color are even higher. In Erie County, Black women 18 years and older are more than twice as likely as White, non-Hispanic women to live in poverty (23% compared to 10%) and Latina women are three times as likely (30% compared to 10%). **In the City of Buffalo, Black women 18 years and older are almost 1.5 times more likely to live in poverty than White, non-Hispanic women** (26% compared to 18%). The poverty rates for Latina and Asian women of the same age group are even higher, 41% and 37%, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022d).

Percent of Women 18 Years and Older Below Poverty by Race/Ethnicity

■ Buffalo-Cheektowage Metro Area   ■ City of Buffalo   ■ Erie County   ■ United States

U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimated Detailed Tables, Table B17001-B17001I, 2018-2022
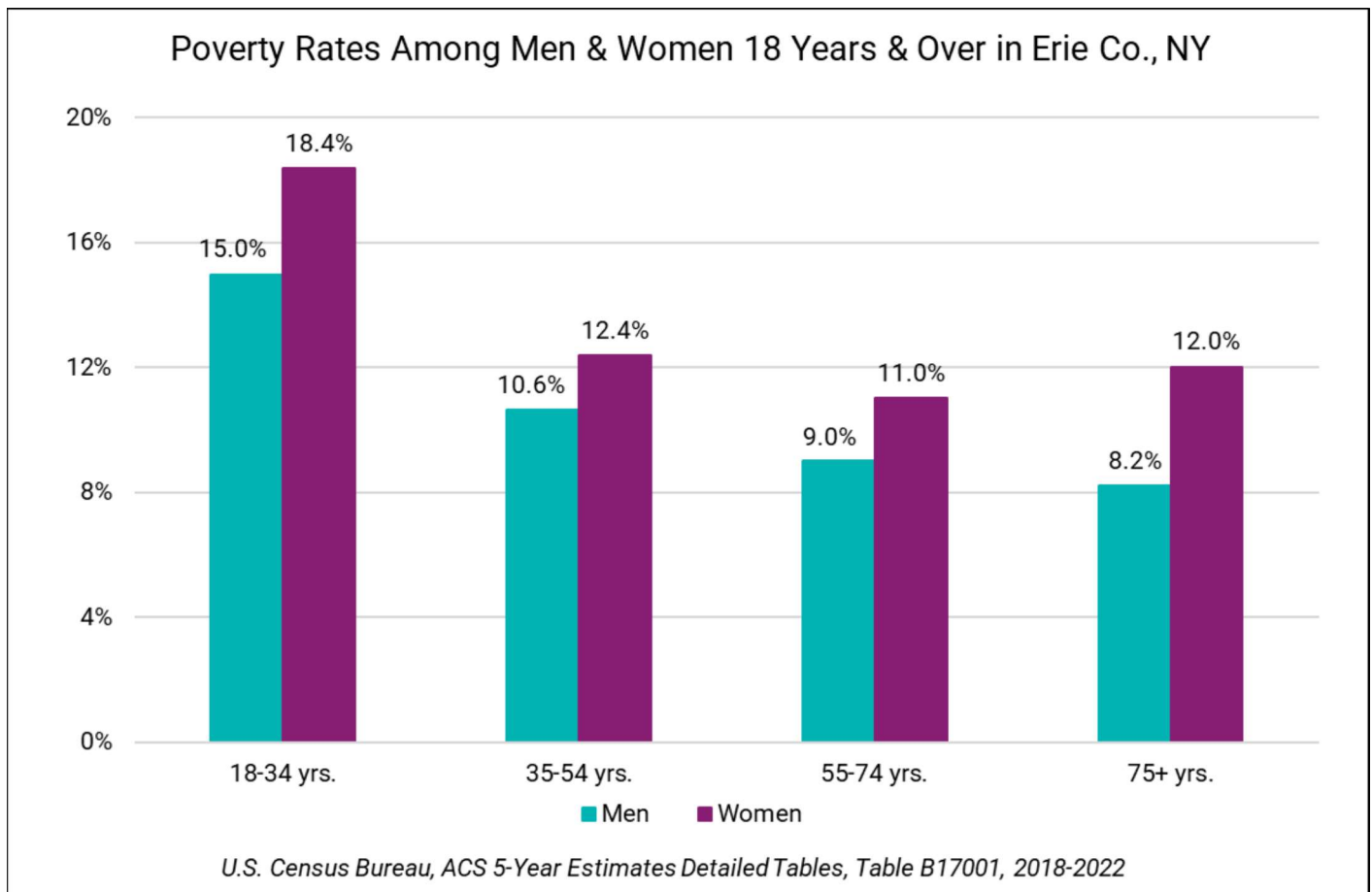
Black and Latina women's higher poverty rates can be partially attributed to their overrepresentation in low-paying jobs, such as service occupations, but also to the wage gap. Nationally, 1 in 5 Black women full-time workers and 1 in 4 Latina women full-time workers work in service occupations, but earn approximately 70% of what white men in those occupations earn (Hegewisch & Gartner, 2024). The wage gap does not only exist in service occupations, however. Across industries, occupations and education levels, women of color are paid less. When **comparing all full-time, year-round workers, Black women earn 69 cents and Latina women earn 57 cents for every dollar paid to a White, non-Hispanic man.** This translates to annual losses of $22,120 for Black women and $30,450 for Latina women (Javaid, 2024).

Age

Women are more likely than men to live in poverty throughout the course of their lifetimes. In general, women have lower incomes, which limits their ability to contribute to retirement plans while in the workforce. Women also take more time out of the workforce than men, often due to unpaid caregiving responsibilities. As a result, women have lower retirement savings and Social Security benefits. **On average, women earn 21% less in their lifetimes, have 9 years less of earned income, and have 30% less in retirement contributions than men** (Goldman Sachs, 2023). For people under 18, the poverty rate for women and men is similar - approximately 19% - but the gap increases for people age 18-34, when many women have children. While the gap narrows after age 34, it never closes and actually widens for women 75 years and older.
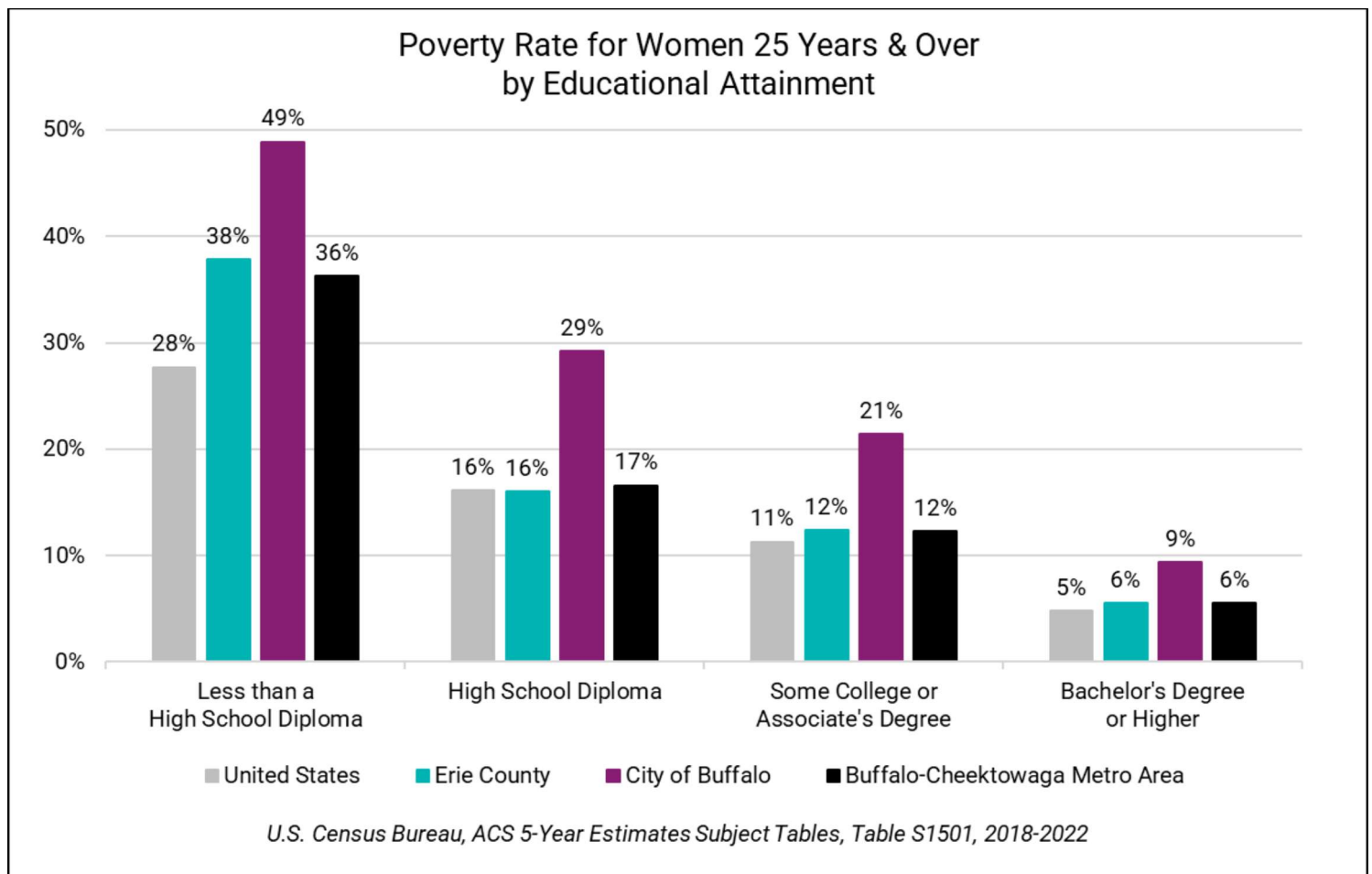

Poverty Rates Among Men & Women 18 Years & Over in Erie Co., NY

U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B17001, 2018-2022

In 2022, the average annual Social Security benefit for retired women 65 and older was approximately $4,600 less than retired men of the same age (Anderson et al., 2024). A longer life expectancy for women puts them at an even greater financial disadvantage since they have less money with which to live longer. Implementing measures such as adjusting benefit formulas to account for caregiving responsibilities, increasing access to retirement savings programs for low-income workers, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources can help alleviate the financial burden disproportionately borne by older women in their retirement years.

Education

Higher education is an effective way to reduce poverty rates among women. As women attain higher levels of education, their likelihood of living in poverty decreases. In fact, each additional level of education earned by a woman is associated with lower poverty rates. In Buffalo, women with a high school diploma are 1.4 times more likely to live in poverty than women with an associate's degree and 3 times more likely to live in poverty than women with at least a bachelor's degree. **Among women in Buffalo without a high school diploma, almost half live in poverty** (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022c).

Poverty Rate for Women 25 Years & Over by Educational Attainment

	United States	Erie County	City of Buffalo	Buffalo-Cheektowaga Metro Area
Less than a High School Diploma	28%	38%	49%	36%
High School Diploma	16%	16%	29%	17%
Some College or Associate's Degree	11%	12%	21%	12%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	5%	6%	9%	6%

U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1501, 2018-2022

Higher education is also associated with reduced unemployment and higher incomes. **Women in Buffalo with a bachelor's degree earn approximately $21,000 more a year than women with a high school diploma.** Earning an associate's degree results in an increase in women's earnings by $7,700 a year (compared to a high school diploma), which would pay for more than a year of community college tuition at State University of New York (SUNY) Erie ($5,935). However, a quarter of women 25 years and older in Buffalo have not taken any coursework beyond high school (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022c), leaving them at a financial disadvantage throughout their lifetimes.

Families

Female-headed families with children are more likely to live in poverty than other types of families. Single mothers are disproportionately affected by poverty, since they are often the sole breadwinner for their families and face significant barriers to balancing work, care giving, and other responsibilities. **Of the 14,331 female-headed families with children living in Buffalo, 47.4% (6,789) live below the poverty level** compared to 21.8% of all families, 34.2% of families with children, and 20.4% of married-couple families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022b). The City of Buffalo not only has much higher rates of poverty among families than the U.S. and NYS, there are almost twice as many female-headed families with children than in the U.S. and NYS (47% compared to 25% and 27%, respectively) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a).

Percent of Households Below Poverty				
	Buffalo	**Erie County**	**NYS**	**U.S.**
All Families	21.8%	9.3%	9.7%	8.8%
Families with Children	34.2%	16.0%	14.9%	13.6%
Female-headed Families with Children	47.4%	34.8%	32.6%	33.1%
U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimated Detailed Tables, Table B17012, 2018-2022				

Many times individuals face a dilemma where they are offered promotions or raises but risk losing critical social support programs, leaving them worse off financially. This unfair predicament forces individuals into a difficult choice: advance their career or prioritize their family's immediate financial needs. **The Benefits Cliff impacts not only individuals and their families but also businesses, which miss out on talent, and the community, which loses significant taxpayer dollars over time.** To address this challenge, Employ Buffalo Niagara and the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta have collaborated to develop the Benefits Cliff Calculator—a free, user-friendly tool designed to calculate an individual's Benefits Cliff and provide valuable insights to navigate this complex issue (Buffalo Niagara Partnership, 2023). This innovative tool aims to empower individuals with the knowledge and resources needed to make informed decisions about their careers and financial well-being. However, it does not solve this systemic problem.

Low-Paid Workforce

Occupational segregation is one reason why so many working women live in poverty. Women are over-represented in lower-paying jobs and industries such as service and care giving, and under-represented in higher-paying ones such as engineering and finance. Nationally, **women hold two-thirds of full-time jobs that pay less than $30,000 per year and less than one-third of jobs that pay an average of at least $100,000** (Chun-Hoon, 2023). The working-poor are defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as people who spend at least 27 weeks in the labor force but whose income still falls below the official poverty level. Nationally in 2021, the working poor rate for women was 4.5% compared to 3.7% for men, and even higher for women of color - 7.7% for Black women and 7.6% for Latina women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023a).

In NYS in 2021, women constituted **63% of the low-paid workforce**, and 15% of them lived in poverty (Tucker & Vogtman, 2023).
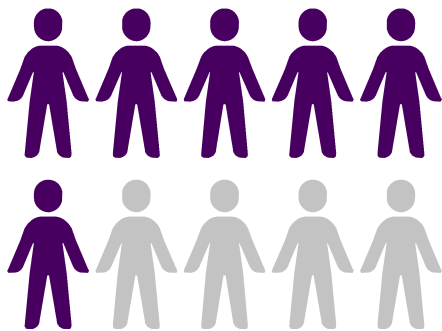
In the U.S., women are 43% of full-time, year-round workers, but **52% of workers with earnings under $25,000** (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Annual earnings of $25,000 is approximately $12/hour.
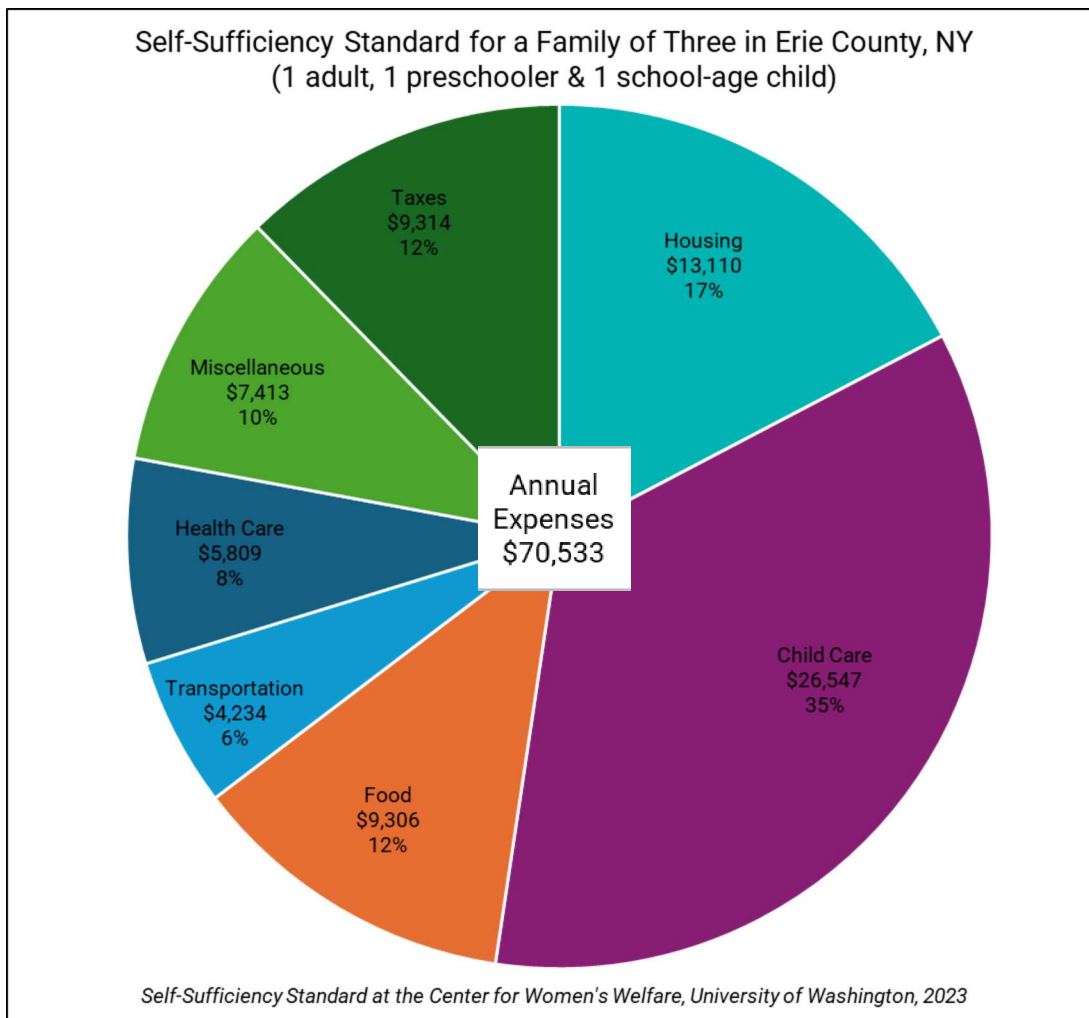
52%

43%
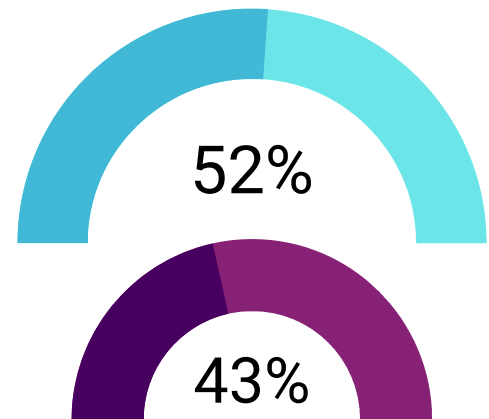
Workers in service occupations, where women are disproportionately represented, are more likely to be among the working poor than in other occupations. Even within the same occupation, women face a higher likelihood of being part of the working poor than men. **The working poor rate for women in service occupations was 10% compared to 6.4% for men in the same occupations** (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023a). Service occupations also have the highest percentage of hourly paid workers earning at or below the federal minimum wage (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023b). These jobs are also less likely to offer employer-provided benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, and retirement plans. These figures underscore persistent gender disparities in wages and highlight the ongoing need for policies and actions aimed at achieving gender equality in the workforce and addressing systemic barriers that disproportionately affect women's economic opportunities.

Self-Sufficiency

The Self-Sufficiency Standard calculates the income working families need to meet their basic needs without public or private assistance, considering factors such as family composition and geographic location. Basic needs include housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, miscellaneous expenses such as phone and internet, clothing, household supplies, and taxes (accounting for federal and state tax credits). The Self-Sufficiency Standard does not include savings for emergencies, college, or retirement. (University of Washington, 2023).

Self-Sufficiency Standard for a Family of Three in Erie County, NY
(1 adult, 1 preschooler & 1 school-age child)

Taxes $9,314 12%
Housing $13,110 17%
Miscellaneous $7,413 10%
Annual Expenses $70,533
Child Care $26,547 35%
Health Care $5,809 8%
Transportation $4,234 6%
Food $9,306 12%

Self-Sufficiency Standard at the Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington, 2023

For millions of women in low-paid jobs, working full-time, year-round is not enough to prevent themselves and their families from living in or near poverty. Poverty is not stagnant - people move in and out of poverty as financial difficulties arise, like medical emergencies or work absences. Most families have to earn much more than the federal poverty line to afford to pay for the basics. In 2023, the federal poverty threshold was $24,549 for a family of 3 with 1 adult and 2 children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). In Erie County, that same family needs almost 3 times that amount to afford basic necessities (University of Washington, 2023).

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

We empower women of all backgrounds and identities to achieve economic mobility by eliminating barriers and providing targeted support in education and workforce development.

mPOWER
FROM EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT
an initiative of the WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

EMPOWERMENT
Providing space and grace through a restorative approach to trauma

SYSTEMS CHANGE
Elevating women's experiences and voices to create change

EDUCATION
Training women in high-demand, high-wage programs

ADVOCACY
Fighting for policies and programs that support women

EMPLOYMENT
Working with employers to secure family-sustaining jobs for women after graduation

SUPPORT
Coaching and access to essential resources

INTERPERSONAL GROWTH
Building skills to help women grow and connect with others

WHAT IT IS

mPower **supports women pursuing education** at the community college or workforce training level, leading to employment with a family-sustaining wage.

WHAT IT DOES

mPower **eliminates barriers and provides targeted support.** Developed based on national best-practice research and focus groups, mPower is a trusted model. As the founder and driver of mPower, the WNY Women's Foundation provides ongoing organizational strength to the program.

WHY IT'S UNIQUE

mPower **incorporates trauma-informed coaching, mentoring, peer-to-peer community building, scholarships, and internship and job success support.**
Expanding on MOMs: From Education to Employment®, mPower learners work with an achievement coach to plan a course of action that addresses their individual barriers and seizes opportunity by centering their voice.

WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

Take Action!

WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

1. Support women's economic mobility programs like WNYWF's mPower Initiative! Learn more about mPower:

2. Learn more about financial foundations, retirement plans, and investments. Join us for our Pathways to Progress Speaker Series - Poverty on May 22, 2024 from 12 pm - 1 pm. For more information on the series:

3. Know the facts and educate your community!

Utilize this white paper as your guide to data and research on poverty to educate your community.

4. Support women-owned businesses!

Scan the QR code to use our women-owned business directory to support women in our community. It is a tangible way to support women entrepreneurs and contribute to economic empowerment within our community.

Conclusion

The multifaceted challenges faced by women, especially women of color, in today's economic landscape demand urgent attention and action. Systemic barriers not only perpetuate economic inequality but also hinder women's ability to fully participate in and contribute to the workforce. To build a more equitable future, it is imperative to dismantle these barriers comprehensively and implement robust policies that foster inclusivity, opportunity, and prosperity for all women, regardless of their race or background. Only through concerted efforts and collective action can we realize the promise of true gender equality and economic empowerment for women everywhere.

Addressing poverty requires collaborative actions and systemic changes to uplift marginalized communities and ensure equitable opportunities for all. One crucial step is supporting initiatives like the WNYWF's mPower initiative, which focuses on empowering women economically, as gender disparities often exacerbate poverty rates. Spreading awareness and education about poverty through resources like this white paper is essential for fostering community understanding and mobilizing collective action. By actively supporting women-owned businesses and prioritizing equitable economic policies, we can create a more just and inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Making these changes is not only morally imperative but also crucial for building resilient communities and fostering long-term prosperity for all individuals and families.

References

Anderson, C., Domina, K., Grossman, T., Matsui, A., Menefee, K., & Sun, S. (2024, April). By the numbers: Data on key programs for the well-being of women, LGBTQIA+ people, and their families. National Women's Law Center. https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2024_NWLC_ByTheNumbers_Brief.pdf

Buffalo Niagara Partnership. (2023, November 27). Benefits Cliff Calculator - Buffalo Niagara Partnership. https://www.thepartnership.org/employ-buffalo-niagara/benefits-cliff-calculator/

Chun-Hoon, W. (2023, March 14). 5 Fast Facts: The gender wage gap. U.S. Department of Labor Blog. https://blog.dol.gov/2023/03/14/5-fast-facts-the-gender-wage-gap

Goldman Sachs. (2023, April 11). Women and retirement security - challenges remain. https://www.marcus.com/us/en/resources/heard-at-gs/women-and-retirement-security---challenges-remain

Hegewisch, A., & Gartner, H. (2024, March). Women earn less than men whether they work in the same or different occupations. Institute for Women's Policy Research. Fact Sheet #C521. https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Occupational-Wage-Gap-2024-Fact-Sheet-1.pdf

Javaid, S. (2024). A window into the wage gap: what's behind it and how to close it. In FACT SHEET. https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2023-Wage-Gap-Factsheet.pdf

Tucker, J., & Vogtman, J. (2023) Hard work is not enough: Women in low-paid jobs. National Women's Law Center. https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/%C6%92.NWLC_Reports_HardWorkNotEnough_LowPaid_2023.pdf

University of Washington. (2024, February 13). New York - Self sufficiency standard. Self Sufficiency Standard. https://selfsufficiencystandard.org/new-york/

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023a). (2023, November). A profile of the working poor, 2021. Report 1106. https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/working-poor/2021/home.htm

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023b). (2023, August). Characteristics of minimum wage workers, 2022. Report 1104. https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/minimum-wage/2022/home.htm

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022a). Poverty status in the past 12 months of families by household type by number of related children under 18. ACS 5-year estimates detailed tables. Table B17012, 2018-2022. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2022.B17012

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022b). ACS 5-Year Estimated Detailed Tables, Table S1702, 2018-2022. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S1702?q=S1702

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022c). Educational attainment. ACS 5-year estimates detailed tables. Table S1501, 2018-2022. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S1501

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022d). Poverty status in the past 12 months by sex by age. ACS 5-year estimates detailed tables. Tables B17001, B17001B, B17001H & B17001I, 2018-2022. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2022.B17001

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2001, 2018-2022. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2001

US Census Bureau. (2024, January 23). Poverty thresholds. Census.gov. https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html

Contact

WNY Women's Foundation
741 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14203
(716) 217- 9056
www.wnywomensfoundation.org
wnyfdn@wnywfdn.org

(f) @WNY Women's Foundation
(ig) @wnywomensfoundation

WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

May 2024

WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

www.wnywomensfoundation.org

Impressia Bank
A DIVISION OF CNB BANK

Pathways to Progress: Accelerating the Possibilities accompanying virtual speaker series
is sponsored by Impressia Bank.