

# Study: inequality between men and women dramatic in Houston-area

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Gender and sexuality are major factors in shaping the experience of Harris County residents, often inequitably, a new report finds. Credit: University of Houston

A [new study](#) by the University of Houston Institute for Research on Women, Gender & Sexuality (IRWGS) reports that women lag far behind men on multiple fronts in Harris County. Women are almost 50% more likely to live in poverty than men and the wage gap for men and women by race and ethnicity is considerably greater here than nationally. The report presents both new and summary analyses of select data on gender and sexuality, derived from the 2017 American Community Survey and other sources.

"These and other data in the report demonstrate that [gender](#) and sexuality are major factors in shaping the experience of Harris County residents, often inequitably. We've made some progress in moving toward equitable inclusion of all talented workers in the workforce including women, but there's far to go," said IRWGS director Elizabeth Gregory. "An important element seems to be that we haven't found a way to equitably provide child-care support for working families. As a result, mothers get stuck slowing their careers where it might not be to their, their family's or the community's advantage to do that."

Key findings of the report include:

- In Harris County during 2017, women's poverty rate (15.3%) was nearly 50% higher than the male poverty rate (10.4%). The gender gap is higher than observed nationally, statewide (Texas) and in comparable counties in the United States.
- Wage gap data for men and women by race/ethnicity in Harris County is considerably greater than the national wage gap, with the median non-Hispanic (NH) white woman here making 69.4 cents on the dollar made by the median NH white man; the median NH Asian woman making 63.6 cents; the median NH black woman making 47.1 cents; and the median Hispanic woman making 33.5 cents.
- Thirty percent of Harris County women with minor children in

the home were unpartnered, with a median household income of \$31,600 and 36.0% living at or below the poverty line.

Contrastingly, 8.2% of men with minor children in the home were unpartnered, with a median household income of \$54,000 and 17.2% at or below poverty. Harris County children with partnered parents had a median family income of \$78,000, with 11.2% living under the [poverty rate](#).

- Between the time of their birth and high school graduation, most U.S. children do not have access to public school/care during [work hours](#) 63% of the time. The new availability of pre-K for some four-year-olds in Harris County lowers the non-availability of public school/care to 60% of the time.
- Texas and Harris County follow the national trend with rapidly declining teen fertility rates: The Texas teen fertility rate declined 59.1% between 2007 (the start of the recent recession) and 2018 and the Harris County rate fell 60.9% in that interval. Nonetheless, these rates remain high compared to national rates.
- Though demographic data on sexuality is imprecise, recent U.S. Census data indicates that among same-sex cohabiting partners in Harris County, 59% were men, and 41% were women.

Gregory notes that the LGBT community is incompletely documented due to persistent social risk.

"Data on the LGBT community is limited, like much gender and sexuality data that operates in a context of risk—in this case due to lack of employment protection and other social stigma," said Gregory. The center works to responsibly document such data in ways that minimize risk.

Founded in 2019, the University of Houston Institute for Research on Women, Gender & Sexuality is the region's first gender and sexuality focused think tank. The institute's goal is to provide evidence-based data

and analyses to amplify discussion around the social and economic forces linked to gender and sexuality that have long gone unexamined and to engender positive change.

"Instead of taking gender and [sexuality](#) disparities for granted as inevitable, people should start talking about them over dinner with friends and asking, 'How can we alter this?' 'What are the real economic dynamics of gender, and how can they be improved upon?' While gender has long served as a work-assignment system and has given men and [women](#) different jobs in the home and workforce and different pay scales, the old patterns don't make sense anymore, for employers or for families," said Gregory.

Provided by University of Houston

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