

US state of New Jersey ranks near the bottom on pay equity for mothers

May 10 2024, by Steven Flamisch



Credit: Ketut Subiyanto from Pexels

Forget the flowers. This Mother's Day, give Mom a raise. A [new report](#) by the Rutgers Center for Women and Work finds that New Jersey ranks near the bottom of all states on pay equity for mothers.

On average, moms earn less than women without children and significantly less than men, especially in the state's wealthiest counties. Known as the "motherhood penalty," this is a key driver of the gender pay gap in New Jersey and the U.S.

"Many women experience a large, immediate, and persistent drop in [earnings](#) after the birth of their first child," said economist Yana Rodgers, Faculty Director of the Rutgers Center for Women and Work. "In most families, moms still do the bulk of the childcare and housework, which limits their job options. Paying for childcare is expensive, and quality programs can be hard to find in some areas. All of this has a substantial impact on moms' earnings."

Many new mothers exit the workforce, reduce their hours, or take a lower-paying job that gives them the flexibility to care for their children. These moves alter their career trajectory and reduce their earnings for years to come, even after their kids have moved out.

Some employers expect that moms will frequently miss work to care for their children, so they offer them lower wages and fewer opportunities. Simultaneously, some employers offer dads higher pay—the "fatherhood premium"—due to their perceived competence and dedication.

Rutgers researchers Rodgers, Becky Logue-Conroy, and Debra Lancaster analyzed data from the most recent five-year wave of the American Community Survey, 2018-22, to calculate the motherhood penalty in New Jersey. They found:

- New Jersey ranks near the bottom on pay equity for mothers; #43 on the list. That puts the state in the company of mostly Southern and Western states, lagging far behind the most equitable state, Vermont (#1), and New Jersey's next-door neighbor, New York (#13).

- The motherhood penalty and the fatherhood premium are real. On average, New Jersey moms earned \$53,376 annually from 2018-22. Women without children earned \$55,314. Men without children earned \$78,692. Dads topped the list at \$100,829.
- That's a lot of money. Each year, mothers in New Jersey took home an average of \$25,316 less than men without children and \$47,453 less than fathers. The earnings differentials were even greater when comparing married women to married men.
- The motherhood penalty is worse in wealthy counties. Monmouth County tops the list, with moms taking home an average of \$39,911 less than men without children and \$72,323 less than dads. Hunterdon, Sussex, Somerset, and Morris counties round out the top five.
- The gap is smaller in areas where incomes are lower. The motherhood penalty is smallest in Essex, Passaic, and Union counties, as well as most of South Jersey (Atlantic, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland).

New Jersey has enacted several policies that could help to reduce the [motherhood penalty](#) over time, including New Jersey Family Leave Insurance (NJFLI), the Equal Pay Act, and the \$15 minimum wage. But the report finds that policymakers and employers can do more for mothers:

- Provide job protection for all workers who want to use paid family leave. Currently, nearly all workers are guaranteed wage replacement through NJFLI, but workers in [small firms](#) (30 employees or fewer) and those who recently changed jobs or worked less than 1,000 hours in the last year do not qualify for job protection under the New Jersey Family Leave Act. Closing this loophole would help.
- Establish a tax credit incentivizing employers to provide childcare directly to their workers, or to contract with existing

childcare providers to do so. More broadly, federal and state investments in affordable, high-quality childcare are needed, especially in rural areas where childcare can be hard to find.

- Encourage fathers to use NJFLI for paternity leave. In the U.S., workplace culture often discourages dads from taking time off to bond with a child. Managers should normalize paternity leave by using the program themselves and encouraging their staff to do so.

More information: Rutgers Center for Women and Work, [The Motherhood Penalty in New Jersey](#) (2024)

Provided by Rutgers University

Citation: US state of New Jersey ranks near the bottom on pay equity for mothers (2024, May 10) retrieved 30 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-05-state-jersey-bottom-pay-equity.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.