USU’s Utah Women & Leadership Project Releases New Research Snapshot on Poverty Among Utah Women

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10/21/2026

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The Utah State University Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) released a new research report, *Poverty Among Utah Women: A 2026 Update*, which provides an overview of poverty trends among Utah women and how they vary by race and ethnicity, age, family structure, educational attainment, and geography. Drawing on the most recent American Community Survey data and other national and state sources, the snapshot highlights areas for improvement as well as persistent disparities that continue to shape women’s economic stability in Utah.

According to Susan R. Madsen, founding director of the UWLP and coauthor of the snapshot, the report traces a decade of change since UWLP’s first poverty snapshot in 2016. It notes that poverty among Utah’s female#headed households with children under age 5 has fallen sharply – from 49.6% to 32.9% – a 17#percentage#point decrease over 10 years.

“Despite these improvements, many women still face structural barriers that heighten their risk of poverty,” she said. “These include wage gaps, occupational segregation, caregiving responsibilities, and rising housing costs.”

Utah Women Continue to Experience Poverty at Lower Rates Than National Averages

The snapshot reports that 8.8% of Utah women live in poverty, compared to 13.3% of women nationally. Utah also continues to rank among the lowest#poverty states overall, with a statewide poverty rate of 8.3%.

Key findings include:

- Women of color—including Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian women—experience higher poverty rates than White women, though some groups have seen notable improvements since the 2022 report.
- Single mothers remain among the most vulnerable groups: 16.3% of female#headed households in Utah live in poverty, compared with 3.3% of married#couple households.
- Women aged 75 and older face rising poverty rates, with 11.6% living in poverty—nearly double the rate among Utah men in the same age group.
- Rural Utah women experience higher poverty rates (10%) than women in urban counties (8.8%).

Madsen said persistent factors contributing to poverty among Utah women include the gender wage gap and the lifetime pay gap, noting that Utah women earn 74 cents for every dollar men earn and that they face the nation's largest lifetime pay gap.

Educational Attainment, Workforce Patterns, and Occupational Segregation Shape Economic Outcomes

Educational attainment remains a critical driver of women’s economic mobility. Although Utah women now hold more bachelor’s degrees than men (26.2% vs. 24.8%), men still hold more graduate or professional degrees. Women’s workforce participation has risen slightly over the past decade, yet women remain concentrated in lower#paying, female#dominated industries.

The report highlights several structural contributors to poverty:

- Women are more likely to work part#time (36.4% vs. 28.7%), often due to caregiving responsibilities.
- Childcare costs remain prohibitive: only 18.7% of Utah families can afford infant care, and a minimum#wage worker must work 47 weeks to pay for the care for one infant.
- Occupational segregation places women disproportionately in lower#wage industries such as healthcare support and personal care services.
- Utah women earn 74 cents for every dollar a man earns (comparing full-time workers), and 62% of what men earn annually when part-time workers are included.

“These factors compound over time, contributing to long#term financial insecurity for many Utah women,” Madsen said.

Efforts to Address Poverty in Utah

The report outlines recent legislative and community#based efforts to reduce poverty and strengthen women’s economic stability. In 2025, Utah lawmakers appropriated $6 million for new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs to help families transition from public benefits to work#based independence. A 2026 state resolution also aims to reform federal constraints that limit Utah’s ability to innovate in poverty#reduction programs.

Community organizations continue to play a critical role:

- Utah Community Action supports 50,000 children and families each year through housing, utility assistance, preschool, and nutrition programs.
- The Community Action Partnership of Utah strengthens agencies that offer housing, financial counseling, and basic#needs services.
- United Way provides county#specific access to food banks, rental assistance, and mental health support via 211.
- Women of the World supports refugee women as they navigate systemic barriers to achieve self#reliance.
- The Utah Department of Workforce Services offers food, childcare, employment, medical, and financial assistance statewide.

Together, these and other critical organizations form a statewide network that addresses the complex dimensions of poverty.

“As Utah continues to navigate rapid demographic change, mental health challenges, and persistent disparities, these findings highlight both progress and urgency,” said Madsen. “Utah must continue to aggressively focus efforts on prevention, early intervention, and access to high#quality mental health care for individuals and families statewide.”

Additional report authors are Robyn C. Blackburn, UWLP research fellow, and Yvette Young, former UWLP research manager.

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The Utah Women & Leadership Project strengthens the impact of Utah girls and women through research, resources, and statewide engagement. Its premier initiative – A Bolder Way Forward – creates opportunities for Utahns to learn, collaborate, and drive meaningful change across 18 areas of focus. For more information, visit the UWLP website at utwomen.org. The UWLP is affiliated with USU Extension.

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