Poverty Among Women:
What Utahns Need to Know

RESEARCH SUMMARY

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

NO. 57 | AUGUST 3, 2026

Utah has a relatively low poverty rate compared with the United States as a whole, but poverty affects more women than men in Utah and the nation. Women may face greater economic challenges because of unequal pay, limited access to stable and well-paying jobs, childcare costs, education, and caregiving responsibilities. These challenges can be especially difficult for single mothers and women from some demographics (including racial groups). Poverty is about more than income—it can affect housing, food security, health, safety, and children's long-term well-being. Addressing poverty among Utah women can strengthen families, expand economic opportunity, and improve communities across the state.

POVERTY IN UTAH

- Is higher for women than for men.
- Is especially high among female-headed households with young children.
- Varies by race, age, family structure, and rural or urban residence.

OVERALL TRENDS

Utah's poverty rate is lower than the national average, and 2019 Census data ranked it as the second-lowest in the nation. Since 2016, Utah's overall poverty rate decreased by 2.4%, showing meaningful progress. However, women continue to experience poverty at higher rates than men, with 9.6% of Utah women living in poverty compared with 8.2% of Utah men. Utah women also have a lower poverty rate than women nationally, but this overall comparison can obscure the higher risks faced by specific groups of women within the state.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

Female-headed households are among the groups most vulnerable to poverty. Overall, 19.2% of Utah women who are heads of household with no spouse present live in poverty. When children under age 18 are present, the rate rises to 27.4%, and when all children in the home are under age 5, the poverty rate reaches 36.4%. These rates are lower than national rates, but they remain far higher than poverty rates for married-couple households in Utah.

DEFINITION

The Official Poverty Measure of the U.S. compares a household's pre-tax income to a threshold "based on a set of goods that people need for survival." The cost of the set of goods is adjusted for inflation and family size. "If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty." The Supplemental Poverty Measure adjusts the calculation to also account for geographic housing costs, taxes, work expenses, and use of government assistance programs.

U.S. Census Bureau

AGE & LOCATION

Poverty also varies by age and location. Across the United States and Utah, women experience higher poverty rates than men in every age group. Young age groups are vulnerable, and older women face particular risks. Among Utahns age 75 and older, 8.5% of women live in poverty compared with 4.8% of men. Rural residence can also increase risk. Average poverty rates are slightly higher in counties with smaller populations, and rural communities also show other markers of economic hardship.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

Educational attainment has improved for Utah women, and women now make up 52.1% of Utah bachelor's degree holders. Even so, men continue to earn more than women across education levels, and women are more likely to pursue degrees and occupations that lead to lower salaries. Marriage and children also affect women's educational progress more strongly than men's, contributing to a motherhood penalty that can increase poverty risk. Childcare further complicates economic stability: the typical annual cost of care for a 4-year-old child in Utah exceeds a year of college tuition, and limited childcare options can push women into part-time work that is less likely to include benefits.

Public benefits can help low-income women and families meet basic needs, but the cliff effect can create barriers to economic mobility. As women increase their earnings, supports such as food assistance, housing support, childcare subsidies, or healthcare assistance may decrease faster than wages can replace them. This can leave families worse off after a raise or promotion and may discourage some women from seeking higher pay.

RACE & GENDER

Poverty rates vary substantially by race and gender. Utah women experience higher poverty rates than Utah men in nearly all racial groups, with especially high rates among Black or African American women at 36.8% and Native American and Native Alaskan women at 19.1%. White women in Utah have a poverty rate of 8.5%, while Asian women and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander women have rates of 9.6% and 10.6%, respectively. These patterns show that poverty among Utah women is not evenly distributed and that racial and gender disparities intersect in important ways.

SHARED SOLUTIONS

Utah has taken steps to address poverty through targeted education goals, integrated services for public assistance and workforce training (addressing immediate needs and long-term career goals at the same time), and the Intergenerational Poverty Mitigation Act. Yet, continued collaboration between public agencies, and nonprofit organizations is needed to reduce poverty among Utah women and girls.

THE PATH FORWARD

Targeted supports can reduce disparities. Policies and programs that address housing, food security, healthcare, childcare, transportation, and safety can help women meet immediate needs while building long-term stability. Because poverty rates are especially high among female-headed households, racial minorities, older women, and women in rural communities, broad economic strategies should be paired with programs and supports designed to target the specific needs of different vulnerable groups of women.

Education and workforce pathways can strengthen economic security. Women's educational progress is encouraging, but wage gaps, occupational segregation, and interrupted education continue to affect earnings. Expanding access to postsecondary education, certificates, career training, mentoring, and family-friendly supports, such as flexible schedules and childcare access, can help more women complete credentials and move into higher-paying fields.

Childcare and benefit reform can support mobility. Affordable childcare and well-designed public benefits are essential for women working toward both immediate and long-term financial stability. Expanding access to affordable childcare, reducing benefit cliffs, and improving coordination among public and nonprofit resources can help women increase earnings without losing critical support too quickly.

PREVENTING POVERTY IN UTAH

You can help prevent poverty in Utah by increasing awareness of the resources available to help lift women out of poverty and advocating for policies making educational programs and workplaces family friendly. See below for calls to action and resources that can help Utahns support women, girls, and families at risk of poverty.

Data Source: UWLP Snapshot No. 33

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Learn More**: Explore resources in the UWLP Poverty & Homelessness Resource Kit.
- **Review:** Find goals, perceptions, and community partners on the Poverty & Homelessness Spoke webpage.
- **Get Involved:** Connect to the grassroots initiative, A Bolder Way Forward.
- **Take Action:** Help move the needle and discover additional Calls to Action for individuals, groups, organizations and communities.

Support policies and programs that address poverty among women who face the highest risks, including single mothers, older women, women of color, and women in rural communities.

Encourage employers, educators, and policymakers to expand family-friendly education and employment pathways that lead to better wages and benefits.

Help connect Utah women to available resources, including childcare subsidies, food assistance, housing supports, workforce services, and 211 Utah.

Learn more at **www.utwomen.org**

Authors: Dr. Yvette Young & Dr. Susan R. Madsen

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project
UtahStateUniversity