

THE MEASURE OF AMERICA

AMERICAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2008–2009

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AMERICAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT DIFFERENCES ACROSS GENDER AND RACE/ETHNICITY

Gender

American men and women have virtually the same human development level. However, examining each of the three dimensions of the HD Index individually, outcomes for men and women are anything but equal.

Women have a higher education index (mostly due to higher rates of enrollment in school from ages three to twenty-four) and live, on average, about five years longer. However, these advantages in health and education are wiped out by lower earnings.

American men earn about 50 percent more than American women. In every racial/ethnic group, men earn more than their female counterparts; yet in every group except for Asians, women have more education. (The income measure used in this report is personal earnings for all workers, full- and part-time, ages 16 and up. Using *personal* earnings rather than *household* earnings captures gender differences in earnings as well as in control over economic resources; however, this measure can underestimate women's standard of living in cases where household earnings are pooled.)

Race/Ethnicity

Turning to the American HD Index by ethnicity, the picture is highly uneven.

Asians have the highest HD Index, outperforming the other ethnic groups in all three human development dimensions. They earn slightly more than whites, the second ranked group, but have very large advantages in both health and education. Asians live, on average, four years longer than Latinos, eight years longer than whites and American Indians, and more than thirteen years longer than African Americans. Nearly half of Asians have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 30 percent of whites, 17 percent of African Americans, 14 percent of American Indians, and 12 percent of Latinos.

Latinos have the lowest ranking for education – roughly 40 percent of Latinos age 25 and up don't have a high school diploma, about the same rate as America as a whole in the mid-1970's. They also have the lowest ranking for income. However, Latinos score very well on health, resulting in a number-three human development ranking overall. A disturbing pattern, known as the Latino paradox, is that the longer Latino immigrants reside in the U.S., the less healthy they tend to become.

It is important to keep in mind that neither Latinos nor Asians are a monolithic group; the human development challenges and opportunities of Latinos of Mexican descent differ from those of Cuban descent, the issues facing Asians of Vietnamese descent are different from those facing Asians of Pakistani descent, and so on.

African Americans have the lowest HD Index of all groups. African Americans rank third in income and education, but lag far behind in life expectancy. On average, African Americans live five fewer years than American Indians, the second lowest-ranking group on health, and more than thirteen fewer years than Asians. African Americans today have a lifespan shorter than the average American in the late 1970's, some forty years ago.

Asians and whites earn the most by far – \$31,518 for Asians and \$30,485 for whites. African Americans, by comparison, have median earnings of \$23,025, American Indians of \$21,037, and Latinos of \$20,255. Looked at historically, African Americans are earning less than the typical American earned in 1990, American Indians less than the typical American in 1980, and Latinos less than the typical American in 1970.

It is important to keep in mind that the large gaps in *earnings* reflected in the Index are dwarfed by the far greater gaps in *wealth*; in 2004, for instance, the median net worth of whites was almost six times greater than that of nonwhites.

Large Disparities in Human Development Occur Across Gender and Race/Ethnicity Combinations
Asian males rank highest in human development, followed by Asian females, white males, white females, African American females, American Indian females, Latino females, American Indian males, Latino males, and African American males.

Asian and white men have the highest earnings, around \$37,000 – more than \$10,000 more than the next group, Asian women. For Asian and white men, their income advantage over Asian and white women more than compensates for their relative disadvantages in health (Asians and whites) and education (whites only). Among African Americans, American Indians, and Latinos, the opposite is true. Men in these groups have lower HD Index rankings than their female counterparts. While men’s earnings are higher in these three groups, women’s advantages in education or longevity, or a combination of the two, outweigh men’s superior earnings.

Asian and white males have similar high school graduation rates. But while over half of Asian males (53 percent) have at least a college degree, fewer than one-third (32 percent) of white males do.

Latino males score last on education, with fewer than 60 percent of Latino men age 25 and older holding a high school diploma (or its equivalent), and only 12 percent holding a bachelor’s degree.

Asian females have the highest health index and African American males have the lowest health index. African American men are facing significant challenges in health; with a life expectancy of 69.4 years, they are living, on average, nearly 20 fewer years than Asian women, 14 fewer years than Asian men, and about 10 fewer years than Latino men. African American men are living, on average, shorter lives than the typical American in 1960, nearly a half century ago.

America as a whole can expect to reach the HD Index of Asian males by the year 2035, while African American males are living at a level of well-being that prevailed in America circa 1986. In terms of well-being, then, Asian men are 27 years ahead of the country as a whole, African American men 22 years behind. The human development gap between Asian and African American males is nearly 50 years.

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