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The Status of Women in North Carolina: Continued Progress and Persistent Challenges

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The status of women in North Carolina reveals both women's progress over the last few decades and places where their advancement has slowed or stalled. A report from the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), *The Status of Women in North Carolina*, shows that women are well-represented in the state's elective executive positions and hold a higher proportion of state legislature seats than in 1996; have experienced a narrowing of the gender wage gap; and are much more likely now than 20 years ago to work in managerial or professional positions and to earn a bachelor's degree or higher. In addition, women in North Carolina are the equal or main bread winner in close to four out of ten families with children. The teen pregnancy rate in the state has also declined dramatically in recent years, and North Carolina's women are more likely to receive certain preventive health procedures, such as mammograms, than women in the nation overall.

At the same time, women continue to be underrepresented in North Carolina's state legislature relative to their share of the population, and many women—especially those with low levels of education—are stuck in low-wage jobs. Women also still earn less than men; North Carolina's women earn only 83 percent on the dollar compared to men. In addition, some women and men in North Carolina lack basic work-related supports such as paid family and sick leave and affordable child care, and more than one-fifth of women aged 18–64 lack health insurance coverage. These findings suggest that addressing the persistent obstacles to political, social, and economic advancement that women face is essential to ensuring a more positive future for North Carolina and the nation as a whole.

The Status of Women in North Carolina includes data on four topic areas: political participation; health and well-being; employment, education, and earnings; and economic security and poverty (basic demographic data are also provided). It updates a 1996 IWPR report on the status of women and moves beyond that report by including analysis of women's circumstances in nine selected metropolitan and rural areas within the state. By analyzing the status of women across North Carolina's diverse communities, the report provides information that can be used to assess women's progress in achieving rights and opportunities, to identify obstacles to gender and racial equality, and to propose promising solutions for improving the lives of women. *The Status of Women in North Carolina* also examines how women in the state fare relative to women across the nation by providing state-by-state rankings for some of the major indicators analyzed.

To prepare the report, IWPR analyzed data from multiple data sources, including the Centers for Disease Control, the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Much of the analysis in the report relies on the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), a large annual survey of a representative sample of the entire resident population in the United States. When analyzing state- and national-level microdata from the ACS, IWPR used 2010 estimates, the most recent available data. For the analysis of selected metropolitan and rural areas, IWPR used estimates that combine several years of data (2008–2010) to ensure sufficient sample sizes.

In addition to providing state-level data and national comparisons, the study also covers nine sub-state areas representing diverse regions within North Carolina. They include five metropolitan areas: Asheville (Buncombe and Madison counties), Charlotte (Cabarrus, Gaston, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, and Union counties), Cumberland County, Greensboro (Alamance, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Guilford, Randolph, Stokes, and Yadkin counties), and the Triangle (Chatham, Durham, Franklin, Johnston, Orange, and Wake counties). These areas also include four groups of counties in the western part of the state: Alexander-Burke-Caldwell, Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey, Cleveland-McDowell-Rutherford-Polk, and Henderson-Transylvania. A fifth county grouping, referred to in the report as simply "Western North Carolina," includes Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain counties.[1]

The project is funded by the N.C. Council for Women, Wells Fargo, the Women's Giving Circle of Cumberland County, the Mountain Area Health Education Center Department of OB-GYN, the North Carolina Women's Fund at the North Carolina Community Foundation, Women for Women of the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, and Women to Women of the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro.

Findings from the report show both progress and continued challenges for women in relation to political participation, health, education, and the economy.

Political Participation

By running for office, voting, and serving as leaders in the community, women can make sure that their priorities are reflected in public policy decisions and debates. They can help shape laws, policies, and decision-making in ways that reflect their interests and needs, as well as those of their families and communities.

- In North Carolina, women voted at higher rates than men in both the 2008 and 2010 elections. In the 2008 presidential elections, approximately 2,364,000 women (69 percent of eligible female voters) and 2,006,000 men (66 percent of eligible male voters) went to the polls.

- In the North Carolina state legislature, women hold 5 of 50 seats in the Senate (10 percent) and 35 of 120 seats in the House of Representatives (29 percent), resulting in a combined 23.5 percent of all elected General Assembly seats. This situates North Carolina in 28th place among the 50 states and District of Columbia for its proportion of women in the state legislature and places the state below the national rate for female representation at this level of government (23.7 percent; Center for Women and Politics

[1] For the metropolitan areas, IWPR used the definition given in the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) provided by the Minnesota Population Center at the University of Minnesota (Ruggles et al. 2010).
To define the rural areas, IWPR used Public Use Microdata Area variables (PUMAs), which are the smallest geographic unit available within American Community Survey microdata. While PUMAs do not cross state lines, they do, in some cases, include more than one county. This clustering of counties is to enable sufficient sample sizes and ensure respondents' confidentiality. The U.S. Census Bureau does not release one-year microdata for geographic areas with a population count of less than 100,000 and three-year microdata for areas with a population count of less than 65,000.

2012). Although women continue to be underrepresented in North Carolina's state legislature compared to their share of the state's population, their representation in 2012 marks an improvement over 1996, when only 16.5 percent of the state's legislators were women (IWPR 1996).

Table 1. Voter Turnout for Women and Men in North Carolina and the United States, 2008 and 2010

	North Carolina		United States	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
2010 Voter Turnout[a]				
Women	47%	1,631,000	46%	50,595,000
Men	44%	1,378,000	45%	45,392,000
2008 Voter Turnout[a]				
Women	69%	2,364,000	66%	70,415,000
Men	66%	2,006,000	61%	60,729,000

Note: [a]Percent of all women and men aged 18 and older who are citizens of the United States and reported voting.
Sources: IWPR calculations using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce (2011 and 2012a).

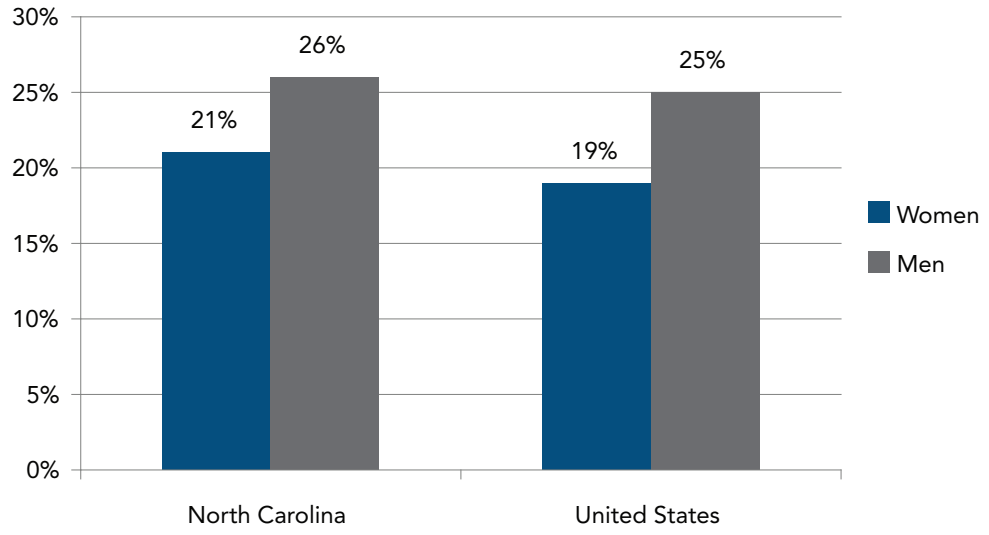
- While women's representation in North Carolina's state legislature is below the national average, women in the state hold a high proportion of elective executive positions in state government compared to other states across the nation. In 2012, women hold five of the ten elective executive positions in North Carolina's government in addition to the governorship (CAWP 2012). In 1996 only one of North Carolina's elective executives was a woman, the Secretary of State, who had been appointed to the position mid-term due to the incumbent's forced resignation (IWPR 1996).

Health and Well-Being

Health is a critical component of women's and girls' overall well-being. Poor health can pose serious obstacles to economic stability, educational attainment, and employment opportunities, just as good health can help women to prosper in all of these areas. While many women in North Carolina experience good health, others face poor health outcomes, suggesting that women's health care needs remain an important part of their status that must be examined and addressed.

- In North Carolina, as in the United States as a whole, more than one-fifth of women aged 18–64 lack health insurance coverage. Seventy-nine percent of women from this age group in the state have coverage through some type of plan, compared to 74 percent of comparable men. This places the state 37th in the nation for its proportion of women with health insurance coverage (Figure 1).

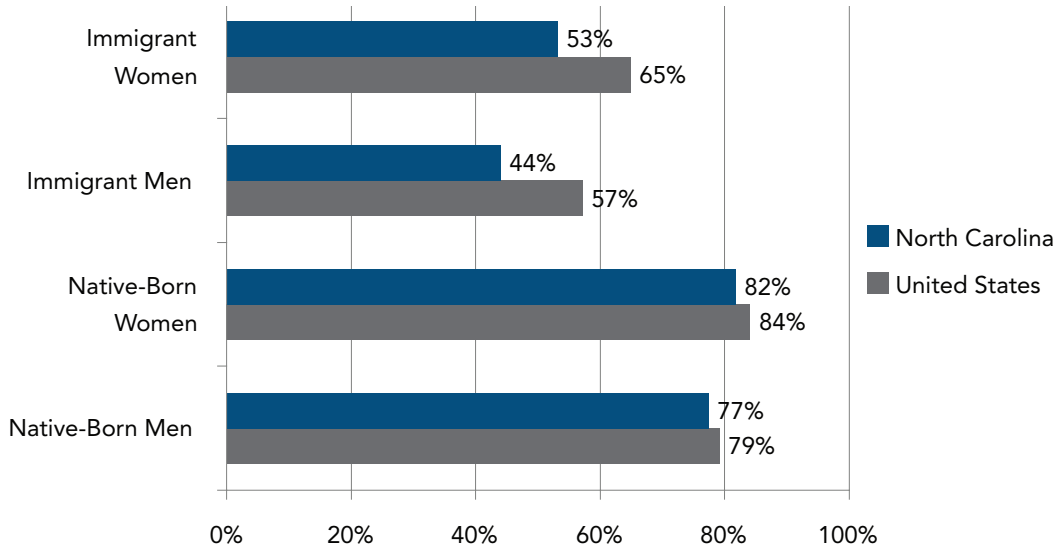
Figure 1. Percent of Women and Men without Health Insurance Coverage, North Carolina and the United States, 2010



Note: For women and men aged 18–64.
Source: IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

- Lack of health care insurance is a particular problem for immigrant women (and men). Only 53 percent of immigrant women aged 18–64 in North Carolina have coverage, compared to 82 percent of native-born women of the same age range. The proportion of immigrant women and men with health insurance coverage in the state is much lower than in the nation as a whole. In the United States, 65 percent of immigrant women and 57 percent of immigrant men have health insurance coverage (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Health Insurance Coverage by Gender and Place of Birth, North Carolina and the United States, 2010



Note: For women and men aged 18–64.
Source: IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

- Between 2005 and 2009, the average annual age-adjusted mortality rate for female breast cancer in North Carolina was 23.5 per 100,000 women, nearly identical to the national average of 23.0 per 100,000 during the same time period. The rates varied, however, among women of different racial/ethnic groups. In the state, black women had the highest age-adjusted mortality rate for breast cancer at 31.3 per 100,000, which was 42 percent higher than the rate for white women (22.1 per 100,000). Hispanic women had the lowest rate at 5.2 per 100,000 (National Cancer Institute 2012).

- Between 2006 and 2010, the infant mortality rate in North Carolina was 7.9 per 1,000 live births, compared to 6.1 per 1,000 live births in the nation in 2010 (Gerald, Petersen, and Knight 2012; Murphy, Xu, and Kochanek 2012). This represents an improvement at both the state and national level in recent years. In 1993, the infant mortality rate in North Carolina was 10.5 per 1,000 births compared to 8.4 per 1,000 births nationally (IWPR 1996).

- The teen pregnancy rate in North Carolina has steadily decreased in recent years, from 76.1 per 1,000 for teens aged 15–19 in 2000 to 49.7 per 1,000 for teens of the same age range in 2010 (N.C. Department of Health and Human Services 2012). The birth rate for teens aged 15–19 in North Carolina in 2009, however, was somewhat higher than in the United States as a whole (44.9 per 1,000 for the state compared to 39.1 per 1,000 for the nation).[2]

- On several indicators of preventive care, women in North Carolina fare reasonably well compared to women in the nation as a whole. Women aged 50 and older in the state are more likely than comparable women nationwide to report having had a mammogram in the past two years (81 percent in the state compared to 78 percent in the nation as a whole).[3] More than eight in ten women aged 18 and older in North Carolina have had a pap test during the previous three years (84 percent), a slightly higher proportion than in the United States as a whole (82 percent)[4]. In the state, black women were more likely to have had the test (89 percent) than white (83 percent) and Hispanic women (84 percent; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).[5]

- Domestic violence and sexual assault undermine the health and well-being of many women in North Carolina. In 2011, 51 out of 93 identified local domestic violence programs in North Carolina participated in a 24-hour census conducted by the National Network to End Domestic Violence. In one day, the 51 programs served 1,526 victims, 682 of whom were provided emergency shelter or transitional housing and 844 of whom received non-residential assistance such as counseling, legal advocacy, and children's support groups. Still, 287 requests for services went unmet, reflecting a shortage of funds and staff (National Network to End Domestic Violence 2012).

- Data collected by the North Carolina Council for Women (N.C. Department of Administration 2012) indicate that in the 2010–2011 State Fiscal Year, the 104 domestic violence programs funded by the Council served a total of 61,283 clients. The 92 sexual assault programs funded by the Council served 13,881 clients.

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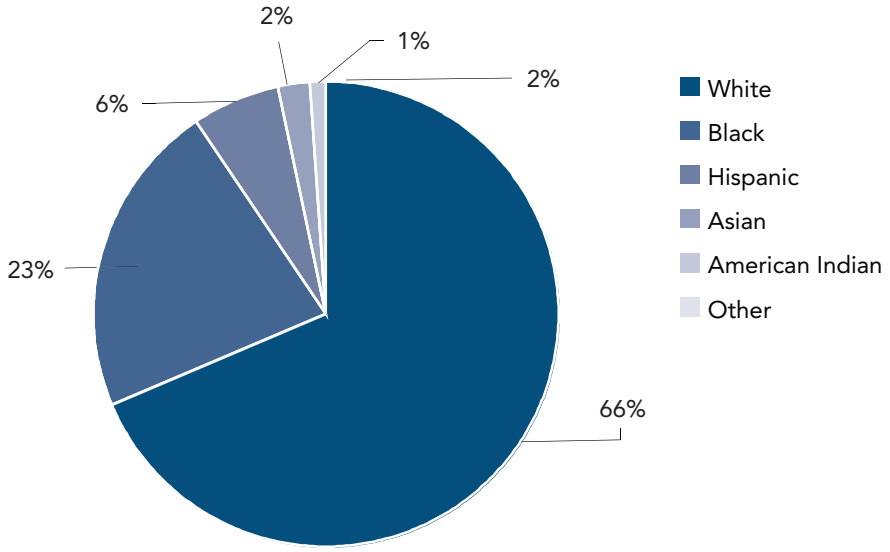
[2] IWPR compilation of data from the Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2012).
[3] IWPR compilation of data from the Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey (CDC 2012).
[4] IWPR compilation of data from the Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey (CDC 2012).
[5] IWPR compilation of data from the Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey (CDC 2012).

Employment, Education, and Earnings

Women have made great strides in the workforce in North Carolina in recent decades. Although women's labor force participation did not increase between 1990 (when it was 60 percent) and 2010 (when it was 59 percent) the workforce has changed in many ways.[6] The population and workforce of North Carolina have become more diverse, more educated, and more likely to work in professional and managerial occupations. While many women have advanced degrees, lack of educational qualifications and low earnings remain a concern for a substantial number of women, particularly in more rural areas.

- In 1990, three-quarters (76 percent) of women in the workforce in North Carolina were white. One-fifth (21 percent) were black, and the remaining three percent was comprised of women from other racial/ethnic groups (IWPR 1996). By 2010, the share of Hispanic women in the state's workforce had grown from one to six percent and the share of Asian American women had increased from one to two percent. As of 2010, white women constituted 66 percent of the women in North Carolina's workforce (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Distribution of the Female Workforce by Major Racial/Ethnic Groups, North Carolina, 2010



Notes: For women aged 16 and older.
Race categories are identified as exclusive: white, not Hispanic; black, not Hispanic, Asian American, not Hispanic; American Indian, not Hispanic; and other, not Hispanic. Persons whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race.
Source: IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

[6] IWPR 1996 and IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

- Employed women aged 16 and older in North Carolina are more likely than comparable men to work in managerial and professional occupations. The share of women aged 16 and older who are working in these occupations, however, varies considerably across the state, ranging from close to half of all employed women (49 percent) in the Triangle metropolitan area to less than one-third of employed women (31 percent) in Alexander-Burke-Caldwell. Since 1990, the overall share of women in the state who work in managerial and professional occupations has increased from 26 percent to 40 percent.[7] In 2010, North Carolina ranked 17th among the 50 states and District of Columbia for its proportion of women in managerial and professional occupations, a much higher ranking than the state held in 1990, when it ranked 40th in the nation.[8]

- Overall, women aged 25 and older in North Carolina have higher levels of education than men of the same age range, although educational attainment varies widely among the different sub-state areas analyzed. Alexander-Burke-Caldwell has the smallest proportion of women and men with a bachelor's degree or higher (14 and 12 percent, respectively), and the Triangle metropolitan area has the highest (42 percent for women and 43 percent for men).[9]

- Immigrant women and men in North Carolina are as likely as their native-born counterparts to hold a bachelor's degree or higher, but they are also more heavily concentrated at the lower end of the educational spectrum. In North Carolina, 32 percent of immigrant women and 36 percent of immigrant men aged 25 and older have less than a high school diploma, compared to 12 percent of native-born women and 15 percent of native-born men of the same age range.[10]

- Since 1990, the share of women in North Carolina with at least a bachelor's degree has increased sharply, from 16 percent in 1990 to 27 percent in 2010. During the same period, the share of women who have not completed high school was cut by more than half, from 30 percent to 13 percent (IWPR 1996; Table 2). At the same time, a substantial number of women aged 25 and older in North Carolina (445,800) in 2010 had not completed high school (Table 2).

- Education is crucial to increasing earnings for women: women with a bachelor's degree or higher in North Carolina earn more than twice as much as those with less than a high school diploma. Women, however, do not benefit financially from education as much as men; men earn more than women at every educational level. In North Carolina, women with some college education or an associate's degree earn less than men with only a high school diploma or the equivalent ($31,000 and $34,700, respectively).[11]

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[7] IWPR 1996 and IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).
[8] IWPR 1996 and IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).
[9] IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 and 2010 American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).
[10] IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).
[11] IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

Table 2. Highest Educational Attainment of Women and Men in North Carolina, 2010

Educational Attainment	Women		Men		Total
Less Than High School Diploma	445,800	13%	516,700	17%	15%
High School Diploma or the Equivalent	893,600	27%	854,800	28%	28%
Some College or Associate's Degree	1,100,900	33%	842,200	28%	31%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	886,400	27%	786,500	26%	26%
Total	3,326,700	100%	3,000,300	99%	100%

Note: For women and men aged 25 and older. Totals may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

- In North Carolina, as in all states across the nation, women aged 16 and older who work full-time, year-round have lower median annual earnings than men. The median annual earnings for women in North Carolina are $33,000 compared to $40,000 for men, a gap of $7,000 per year or $135 per week. Earnings differ substantially among the largest racial/ethnic groups, with white women having the highest median annual earnings at $35,400, followed by Asian American women ($30,000), black and American Indian women ($29,000 each), and Hispanic women ($24,000).[12]

- The gender wage gap has narrowed substantially in North Carolina during the last 20 years–to a greater extent than in the nation as a whole. In 1990, the state had a gender wage gap of 28 percent compared to 31 percent in the nation (reflecting earnings ratios of 72 percent and 69 percent, respectively). By 2010, the gender wage gap had narrowed to 17 percent in North Carolina and 21 percent in the nation as a whole (Figure 4).[13]

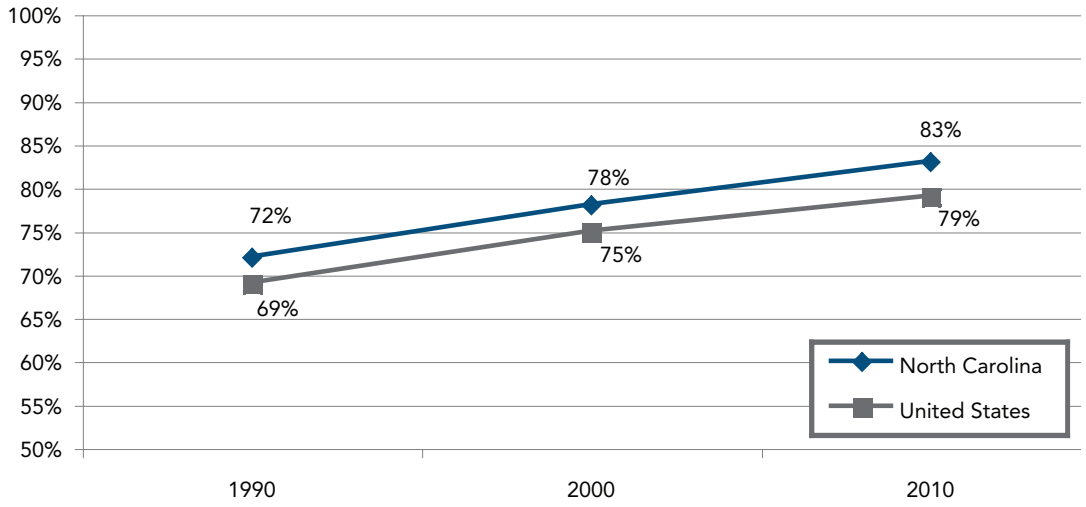
- Many women and men in North Carolina and the United States lack basic work supports, such as the right to paid parental leave or to paid time off to look after one's own or a child's illness. In North Carolina, more than four in ten employed women do not have access to paid sick days for their own illnesses, let alone to take care of sick children.[14]

[12] IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

[13] Because these estimates are based on the American Community Survey, they are not strictly comparable to IWPR's standard calculation of the gender wage gap, which is based on the Current Population Survey. In 2010, the national earnings gap based on the CPS was 23 percent (Hegewisch and Williams 2011).The estimates given here, which are based on the 2010 IPUMS ACS, also differ slightly from the ACS estimates of median annual earnings for full-time, year-round workers that are officially published through American Fact Finder. In 2010, the officially published median annual earnings for women in North Carolina who work full-time, year-round was $33,188, compared to $41,138 for men. These earnings result in a wage ratio of 80.7 for the state. Officially published ACS estimates for the nation show a wage ratio of 78.6 percent for 2010 (based on an estimate of median annual earnings of $36,551 for women and $46,500 for men in the nation as a whole; IWPR compilation of 2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder; U.S. Department of Commerce 2012b).

[14] IWPR analysis of microdata from the 2010 and 2011 National Health Interview Survey (CDC 2010 and 2011) and the 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey (Ruggles et al. 2010).

Figure 4. Gender Earnings Ratio in North Carolina and the United States, 1990, 2000, and 2010



Note: Based on median annual earnings for women and men aged 16 and older employed full-time, year-round, including those who are self-employed.
Source: IWPR 1996 and IWPR analysis of microdata from the 2000 IPUMS U.S. Census and 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey (Ruggles et al. 2010).

Economic Security, Family Income, and Child Care

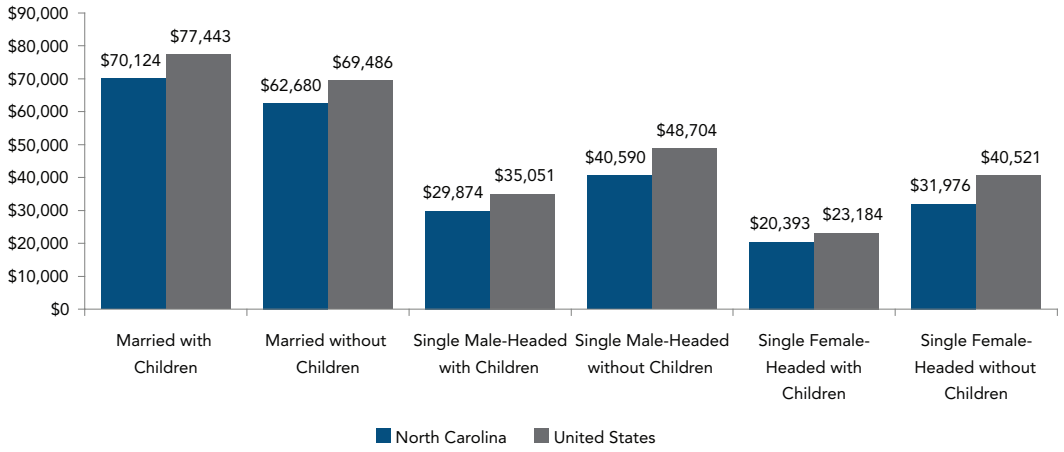
Women's economic security depends on having enough income and financial resources to cover their expenses and save for retirement. While some women live in families with comfortable incomes, others find that multiple factors make it difficult for them to make ends meet and save for the future. The persistent wage gap, the high cost of child care, and limited access to public programs that can help families in difficult economic times mean that many households in North Carolina, particularly those headed by single women with children, face serious economic uncertainty.

- Women's earnings are essential to the economic security of many families in North Carolina. In close to four out of ten (39 percent) households with children, women's earnings contribute at least half of all household earnings, including in one-quarter of married couples with children in the state.[15]

- In North Carolina, families headed by single women with children have the lowest median annual income ($20,393) of all family types. The income of families headed by single women with children under age 18 is 68 percent of the income of comparable families headed by men and just 29 percent of the income of families headed by married couples with children under age 18 (Figure 5).

[15] IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

Figure 5. Median Family Income by Family Type, North Carolina and the United States, 2010



Notes: Includes households with no income. In 2010 inflation-adjusted dollars. Families with children include those with children under age 18; households with adult children (aged 18 and older) are not included.
Source: IWPR compilaton of 2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder (U.S. Department of Commerce 2012c).

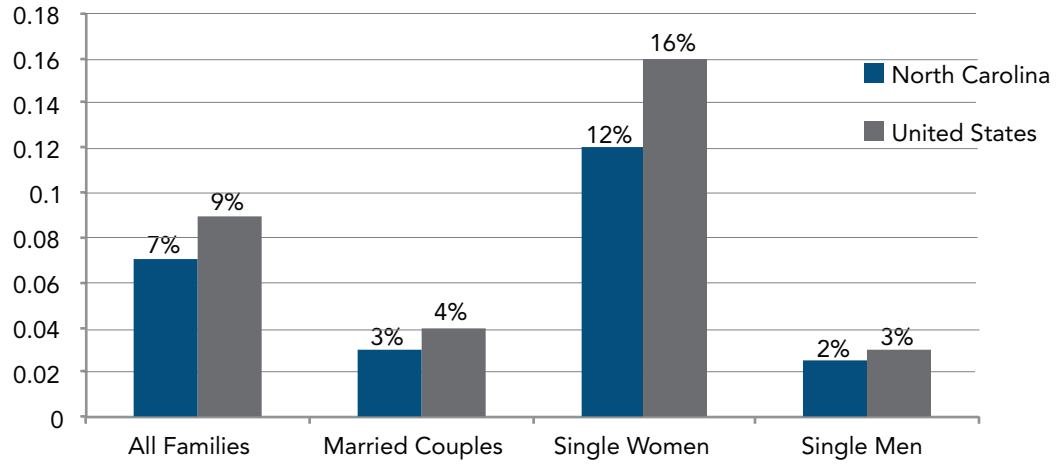
- In 2010, 17 percent of women and 13 percent of men aged 18 and older in North Carolina were poor (living in families with incomes at or below the federal poverty threshold as calculated in the IPUMS American Community Survey). An additional 21 percent of women and 19 percent of men were near poor (living in families with incomes between 100 and 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold). In the United States as a whole, 15 percent of women and 12 percent of men during this same period were poor, and 19 percent of women and 17 percent of men were near poor.[16]

- Public programs such as Work First (North Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called food stamps) play a vital role in assisting families who lack economic security. Many families who live below the federal poverty line, however, do not receive these benefits. In North Carolina, seven percent of families in poverty with young children receive Work First benefits. Slightly more than one in ten (12 percent) of single mothers and two percent of single fathers with young children and incomes below the qualifying poverty threshold receive any cash assistance, a lower proportion than in the United States overall (Figure 6).

- Early care and education programs provide an important workforce support for mothers and fathers. Affordable, quality child care makes it possible for parents to do their jobs while knowing their children are receiving adequate support and a good education. Unfortunately, for some families the cost of child care is prohibitively expense. For families in North Carolina, the average annual fees for full-time care in a center are $9,185 for an infant and $7,774 for a four-year old child. By comparison, average annual tuition and fees for a public four-year college in North Carolina are $5,685 (Child Care Aware of America 2012).

[16] IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

Figure 6. Percent of Households with Incomes Below the Poverty Line with Children Under Five That Receive Public Cash Assistance, by Family Household Type, North Carolina and the United States, 2010



Note: In North Carolina, for households to quality for "Work First" benefits, household income must be less than 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold for household type.
Source: IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

- In North Carolina, 67 percent of households own their homes, a proportion that is similar to the United States as a whole (65 percent).[17] Homeownership rates in North Carolina are higher among white households (76 percent) than among black (50 percent), Asian American (66 percent), and Hispanic (45 percent) households (sample size is insufficient to reliably estimate the homeownership rates of American Indian households).[18]

Recommendations

These findings on the status of women in North Carolina reflect both notable areas of progress and places where additional improvements are needed. Policymakers, service providers, and other community stakeholders in the state can strengthen existing efforts to improve the status of women by taking the following steps:

- Encouraging employers to remedy gender wage inequities by monitoring hiring decisions, selections, and promotions and by conducting internal pay audits to identify potential gender and race disparities;

- Facilitating access to further education, including for those who do not speak English as their first language;

- Supporting programs that provide essential services such as child care, especially for households headed by single women;

[17] IWPR analysis of 2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder (U.S. Department of Commerce 2012d).
[18] IWPR analysis of 2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder (U.S. Department of Commerce 2012d).

- Conducting outreach in local communities and schools to address health concerns, including efforts to increase services and awareness of supports for victims of domestic violence; and

- Making a concerted effort to increase the number of women in positions of political leadership and creating a pipeline for young women to take on leadership roles.

Such changes are essential to improving the economic security and well-being of North Carolina's diverse communities and will help the state as a whole to prosper. New, innovative approaches to addressing the challenges identified in *The Status of Women in North Carolina* will help to make the state a place where women from all walks of life can thrive and create a brighter future for women in North Carolina and the nation as a whole.

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