

# Briefing Paper

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## The Status of Women in Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, and Yancey Counties, North Carolina

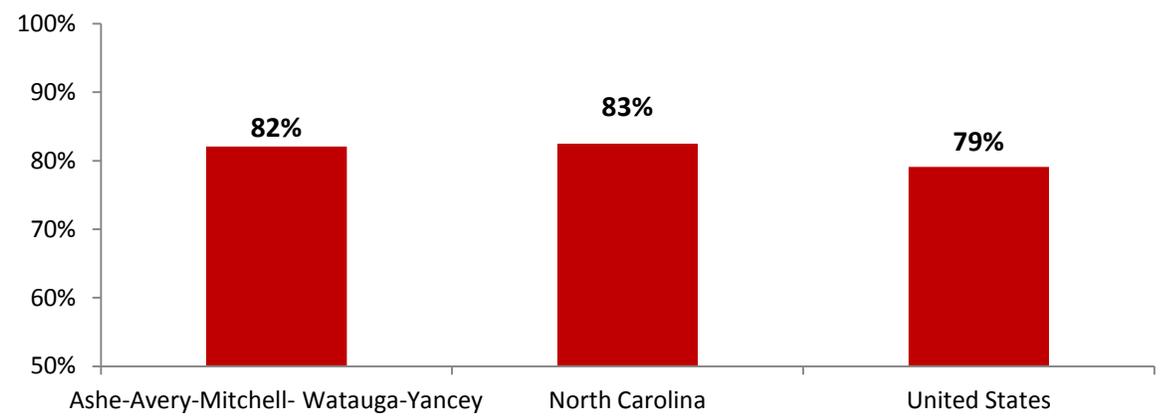
Women in the western counties of North Carolina, and the state as a whole, have made much progress during the last few decades. The majority of women in these counties work—many in professional and managerial jobs—and women are a mainstay of the economic health of their communities. Yet, there are ways in which women’s status still lags behind men’s, and not all women are prospering equally. This briefing paper provides basic information about the status of women in five western North Carolina counties—Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, and Yancey—focusing on women’s earnings and workforce participation, level of education, poverty, access to child care, and health status. It also provides basic demographic information about women in the region.<sup>1</sup>

### Work and Earnings in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey

Women are an important part of the labor force in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey, but they continue to face specific challenges in the workforce, including a persistent gender wage gap (Figure 1). Fifty-six percent of women aged 16 and older in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey are in the workforce, compared with 64 percent of men (Table 1). Women’s labor force participation rate in these counties combined is lower than in both the state and the nation as a whole (59 percent each; Table 1).

In Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey, as well as in North Carolina overall, the labor force participation rate is much higher for women with children under age 18 than for all women. Seventy-four percent of women with children under 18 are employed or actively looking for work in both these counties combined and the state as a whole; Table 1). Mothers with dependent children, however, are much less likely than fathers with dependent

**Figure 1. Ratio of Women’s to Men’s Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Workers in Western North Carolina, North Carolina, and the United States, 2008–2010**



Notes: For employed women and men aged 16 and older. Data for Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Yancey are for 2008–2010. Data for North Carolina and the United States are for 2010 only.

Source: IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 and 2010 Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

children to be employed or looking for work; 91 percent of fathers in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey and 94 percent in the state overall are in the workforce (Table 1), suggesting that women are more likely than men to cut back on employment when they are parents. The higher workforce participation of fathers is also presumably to make up for the fact that many women reduce their labor force participation when their children are young.

<b>Table 1. Overview of Women's and Men's Economic Status</b>			
	<b>Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey</b>	<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>United States</b>
<b>Labor Force Participation Rate, Aged 16 and Older</b>			
Women	56%	59%	59%
Men	64%	70%	70%
Mothers with Children Under 18	74%	74%	73%
Fathers with Children Under 18	91%	94%	94%
<b>Percent of Employed Women and Men Who Work Full-Time, Aged 16 and Older</b>			
Women	64%	72%	71%
Men	78%	84%	84%
<b>Percent of Women and Men Employed in Professional or Managerial Occupations, Aged 16 and Older</b>			
Women	36%	40%	39%
Men	26%	30%	33%
<b>Median Annual Earnings, Full-Time, Year-Round Workers, Aged 16 and Older</b>			
Women	\$28,358	\$33,000	\$36,000
Men	\$34,558	\$40,000	\$45,500
<b>Gender Earnings Ratio, Aged 16 and Older</b>			
<b>Gender Earnings Ratio by Educational Attainment, Aged 25 and Older</b>			
Less Than High School Diploma	N/A	76%	74%
High School Diploma or Equivalent	74%	75%	74%
Some College or Associate's Degree	86%	76%	76%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	73%	70%	71%
<b>Proportion of Women and Men with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, Aged 25 and Older</b>			
Women	26%	27%	28%
Men	25%	26%	29%
<b>Proportion of Women and Men with a High School Diploma or Less, Aged 25 and Older</b>			
Women	43%	40%	42%
Men	48%	46%	44%
<b>Percent of Women and Men Living At or Below Poverty, Aged 18 and Older</b>			
Women	21%	17%	15%
Men	20%	13%	1
<b>Percent of All Households Receiving Food Stamps</b>			
<b>Percent of Women and Men Aged 18–64 Without Health Insurance Coverage</b>			
Women	21%	21%	19%
Men	25%	26%	25%

Notes: N/A indicates data are not available.

Data for Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey are for 2008–2010. Median annual earnings are reported in 2010 dollars. Data for North Carolina and the United States are for 2010 only.

Source: IWPR analysis of 2010 and 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

While the majority of employed women in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey work full-time (64 percent), women in this area are much more likely than men to work part-time (36 percent of employed women compared with 22 percent of employed men).<sup>2</sup> In the state overall (data not available for Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey), women are more likely than men to say that they work part-time because they cannot find child care or for other family care related reasons. In a recent survey, twenty percent of women, compared with only 3 percent of men, gave these reasons for working part-time.<sup>3</sup> In addition, women are more likely to work in the sectors and occupations where jobs are only available on a part-time basis (and more women than men say that they work part-time because they could not find a full-time job).<sup>4</sup> Part-time workers are much less likely than full-time workers to have access to paid leave, health care, and employer-supported pensions (Society for Human Resource Management 2011).

More than two-thirds (36 percent) of employed women in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey work in professional and managerial jobs, which is a considerably higher proportion than men in these counties combined (26 percent). The proportions of both women and men in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey working in professional and managerial jobs are lower than in the state as a whole (Table 1), which suggests that these counties may offer fewer opportunities for higher-paying jobs than are available in some other parts of the state.

While a higher proportion of employed women than employed men in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey work in professional and managerial positions, employed men in this area are more likely than their female counterparts to hold management jobs (8 percent of employed men compared with 6 percent of employed women). Employed women, however, are more likely than employed men to work in education, training, and library occupations (13 percent compared with 6 percent). They are also more likely to work in office and administrative support occupations (18 percent of employed women compared with 7 percent of employed men), and sales and related occupations (14 percent of employed women compared with 10 percent of employed men).<sup>5</sup> Men in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey are considerably more likely than women to work in construction occupations and installation, maintenance, and repair occupations.<sup>6</sup>

In Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey, occupational segregation and, to a lesser extent, women's underrepresentation in management jobs, reduce women's earnings compared with men's. In 2008–2010, the median annual earnings for women aged 16 and older who are employed full-time, year-round were \$28,358, compared with \$34,558 for men (Table 1). This means that women earned 82 cents for every dollar earned by men, resulting in a gender wage gap of 18 percent. This gap is slightly larger than the wage gap in North Carolina (17 percent) and smaller than the gap in the United States as a whole (21 percent; Figure 1 and Table 1).<sup>7</sup>

## **Educational Attainment**

One-fourth of all women and men aged 25 and older in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey have a bachelor's degree or higher (26 percent of women and 25 percent of men; Table 1). Women in these counties combined are slightly less likely than women in the state or the nation as a whole to have at least a bachelor's degree (27 percent for the state and 28 percent for the nation; Table 1).

More than four in ten women aged 25 and older (43 percent; Table 1) in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey—an estimated 18,325—have only a high school diploma or less.<sup>8</sup> Proportionately more men than women have such low educational attainment (48 percent of men aged 25 and older, or an estimated 20,093, have only a high school diploma),<sup>9</sup> but women with this level of education are less likely than men to find jobs with wages sufficient to sustain a family. In Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey, median annual earnings for women who work full-time, year-round and have only a high school diploma or the equivalent are \$22,361, compared with \$30,384 for similarly-educated men. Women in this group of counties who have some college education or an associate's degree earn slightly less (\$30,000) than men with a high school diploma or the equivalent (median annual earnings for men with some college education or an associate's degree are \$35,000).<sup>10</sup>

Although education increases women's earnings, it does not reduce the gender wage gap. In Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey, women with a bachelor's degree or higher have median earnings of \$42,500 compared with \$58,000 for similarly-educated men.<sup>11</sup> This means the earnings gap is larger when only women and men with a bachelor's degree or higher are compared: college-educated women make only 73 cents for every dollar earned by a college-educated man (Table 1). This pattern holds true for the state and nation as well (Table 1).

## Poverty

Many women in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey live in families with incomes that are either below or close to the federal poverty line. Approximately 10,715 women aged 18 and older (21 percent; Table 1) live at or below the poverty line, and another 12,239 (24 percent) are *near* poverty (living with incomes between 100 and 200 percent of the federal poverty line).<sup>12</sup> In Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey, the poverty rates for both women and men are considerably higher than in the state and the nation as a whole (Table 1).

In Watauga and in the state overall, families headed by single women with children face a greater risk of living in poverty than other families. In Watauga (data are not available for Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey), one in five families with children are headed by single women (20 percent). These families, however, make up half (49 percent) of all families with children living in poverty. In the state as a whole, the same pattern holds true: families with children that are headed by single women constitute 29 percent of all families with children and 61 percent of families with children that are living in poverty (Table 2). In North Carolina as a whole, slightly more than one in ten single women with young children under five (12 percent) and incomes below the qualifying poverty threshold receive welfare cash assistance.<sup>13</sup>

## Child Care

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 many families, limited access to affordable childcare is a significant burden. In the absence of quality, affordable childcare, many women interrupt their tenure in the labor market, reducing their ability to provide for the families and to save for retirement or emergencies. Other women are forced to put their children in low-quality, unreliable care. In North Carolina, the average fees for

**Table 2. The Status of Children: Family Income, Poverty, and Child Care**

	Ashe	Avery	Mitchell	Watauga	Yancey	North Carolina
<b>Family Income</b>						
Annual Income for a Family of One Adult and Two Children Need to Afford Essential Living Expenses, 2010 <sup>1</sup>	\$37,894	\$40,301	\$40,739	\$43,394	\$37,637	\$41,920
Median Annual Income of Married-Couple Families with Children Under 18 Years, 2008–2010 <sup>2</sup>	\$47,363	N/A	N/A	\$69,500	N/A	\$70,124
Median Annual Income of Single Men with Children Under 18 Years, 2008–2010 <sup>2</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$29,874
Median Annual Income of Single Women with Children Under 18 Years, 2008–2010 <sup>2</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$20,393
<b>Poverty</b>						
Number of All Families in Poverty with Children Under 18, 2008–2010 <sup>2</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	793	N/A	N/A
Share of Families in Poverty with Children Under 18 That Are Headed by Single Women, 2008–2010 <sup>2</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	49%	N/A	61%
Share of Families with Children Under 18 That Are Headed by Single Women, 2008–2010 <sup>2</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	20%	N/A	29%
<b>Child Care</b>						
Children Eligible for Child Care Subsidy, SFY 2010–2011 <sup>3</sup>	1,178	631	641	1,193	751	391,549
Budget Available to Serve Eligible Children, SFY 2010–2011 <sup>3</sup>	\$1,332,905	\$439,777	\$559,151	\$965,602	\$426,910	N/A
Percent of Eligible Children Receiving Subsidized Child Care Services, SFY 2010–2011 <sup>3</sup>	15%	17%	20%	17%	9%	N/A
Budget per Child Eligible for Child Care Subsidy, SFY 2010–2011	\$1,131.50	\$696.95	\$872.31	\$809.39	\$568.46	N/A
Total Number of Children Age 0 to 5 Enrolled in Child Care, 2011 <sup>4</sup>	493	377	332	884	209	207,953

Note: N/A indicates data are not available.

<sup>1</sup>Source: Sirota and McLenaghan 2010.

<sup>2</sup>IWPR calculations using 2008–2010 and 2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder; data for North Carolina are for 2010 only (U.S. Department of Commerce 2012).

<sup>3</sup>North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education 2012.

<sup>4</sup>Annie E. Casey Foundation 2012.

year-round, full-time child care range from \$6,227 (for a four-year old in a family child care home) to \$9,185 (for an infant in a child care center; Child Care Aware of America 2012). By comparison, the average annual tuition and fees for a public four-year college in North Carolina are \$5,685 (Child Care Aware of America 2012). In Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey, a total of 3,201 children are eligible for child care subsidies because their parents earn too little to afford the fees. Yet, no more than one in five eligible children receives child care subsidies in any of the region's counties, with the highest proportion receiving subsidies in Mitchell (20 percent) and the lowest in Yancey (9 percent; Table 2).

## Health

Health is an important component of women's and girls' overall well-being that contributes to their economic stability, educational attainment, and employment opportunities. Although many women in the Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey area experience good health, health outcomes vary by county in this region, suggesting that women's health care needs remain an important part of their status that must be examined and addressed.

Having health insurance coverage is critical to women's access to health care. Twenty-one percent of women aged 18–64 in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey, however, do not have health insurance coverage (Table 1). Lack of health insurance leaves women without coverage not only for basic wellness and check up visits, but also for severe or chronic medical problems.

In Ashe and Watauga counties, the breast cancer mortality rate for women between 2005 and 2009 was lower (17.5 and 18.6 per 100,000, respectively) than for women in the state as a whole (23.5 per 100,000). In both Avery and Yancey counties, however, the female breast cancer mortality rate was higher (28.2 and 26.8 per 100,000, respectively) than the state rate (Table 3). Data on breast cancer mortality for women in Mitchell County were not available.

When using an age-adjusted mortality rate, which accounts for distributional age differences among population groups, women in Mitchell County have a considerably higher mortality rate due to heart disease and cerebrovascular disease (stroke) than their counterparts in the state as a whole (Table 3). Watauga and Yancey counties, on the other hand, have lower mortality rates due to heart disease and cerebrovascular disease than women in North Carolina overall (Table 3).<sup>14</sup> In Ashe and Avery counties, the results are more mixed. Women in both counties have a higher mortality rate for heart disease than their counterparts in the state as a whole, but a lower mortality rate for stroke and other cerebrovascular diseases (Table 3).

Although teen pregnancy rates in the state and nation have fallen in recent years, teenage pregnancy remains a problem in many jurisdictions. Mitchell and Yancey counties have pregnancy rates for teens aged 15–19 that are somewhat higher than the pregnancy rates for teens of the same age range in the state as a whole (56.2 per 1,000 and 56.5 per 1,000 compared with 49.7 per 1,000). Ashe (47.4 per 100,000) has a slightly lower teen pregnancy rate than in the state. The teen pregnancy rate for Avery is not available, and the rate for Watauga county is just 9.9 per 1,000 (Table 3).

**Table 3. Overview of Women's Health Status**

	Ashe	Avery	Mitchell	Watauga	Yancey	North Carolina	United States
Total Number of Teen Pregnancies (15–19 Years), 2010 <sup>1</sup>	31	19	23	32	29	15,957	N/A
Pregnancies among Teens Aged 15–19, (Rate per 1,000), 2010 <sup>1</sup>	47.4	N/A	56.2	9.9	56.5	49.7	N/A
<b>Average Annual Mortality Rates among Women (per 100,000)<sup>2</sup></b>							
Breast Cancer, 2005–2009	17.5	28.2	N/A	18.6	26.8	23.5	23
Cervical Cancer, 2005–2009	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.3	2.4
Uterine Cancer, 2005–2009	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.0	4.2
Ovarian Cancer, 2005–2009	N/A	N/A	N/A	12.7	N/A	7.9	8.2
<b>Heart Disease Mortality Rate, All Ages, 2005–2009<sup>3</sup></b>	154.6	183.8	194.4	139.5	141.7	153.6	161.0
<b>Mortality Rate from Stroke and Other Cerebrovascular Diseases, All Ages, 2005–2009<sup>3</sup></b>	45.8	39.8	60.1	38.8	39.0	50.4	42.7
<b>Diabetes Mortality Rate, All Ages, 2005–2009<sup>3</sup></b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	20.8	19.8

Notes: N/A indicates data are not available.

All mortality rates are per 100,000 and age-adjusted to the total U.S. population in 2000.

Sources: <sup>1</sup>North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services 2012.

<sup>2</sup>National Cancer Institute 2012.

<sup>3</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2012.

## Basic Facts About Women in Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, and Yancey Counties

The female population in Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, and Yancey counties combined is much less diverse than in the state as a whole. More than nine in ten (93 percent) women and girls in these four counties are white, compared with about two-thirds (65 percent) in the state overall. In Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey, Hispanic women and girls constitute the next largest racial or ethnic group within the female population at four percent, which is half their share of the state's total female population (Table 4).

The median age of women and girls in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey is 41 years, which is slightly older than the median age for women and girls in the state and United States as a whole (38 years each). Eighteen percent of women in Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey are aged 65 and older, compared with 15 percent in North Carolina and the nation overall (Table 4).

**Table 4. Basic Demographic Statistics for Women and Girls**

	<b>Ashe-Avery- Mitchell- Watauga-Yancey</b>	<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>United States</b>
<b>Total Population</b>	129,348	9,561,558	309,349,689
Number of Women and Girls, All Ages	64,987	4,905,216	157,294,247
Median Age of All Women and Girls	41	38	38
Proportion of Women Aged 65 and Older	18%	15%	15%
<b>Distribution of Women and Girls by Race and Ethnicity, All Ages</b>			
White, Not Hispanic	93%	65%	64%
Black, Not Hispanic	N/A	22%	13%
Hispanic	4%	8%	16%
Asian American, Not Hispanic	N/A	2%	5%
American Indian, Not Hispanic	N/A	1%	1%
Other, Not Hispanic	2%	2%	2%
<b>Proportion of Women and Girls Who Are Foreign-Born, All Ages</b>	3%	7%	13%
<b>Proportion of Women Who Are Married, Aged 18 and Older</b>	53%	50%	49%

Notes: Those whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. “Other” includes those reporting multiple race identities and those whom the Census Bureau did not classify.

Data for Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey are for 2008–2010. Data for North Carolina and the United States are for 2010 only.

N/A indicates insufficient sample size.

Source: IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 and 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

## Conclusion

Many women in Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, and Yancey counties are thriving; yet the data in this briefing paper show that there are still many areas for improvement, including the wage gap, limited access to affordable child care, and the lack of basic health insurance. Policy recommendations to address these challenges include

- promoting quality flexible working practices to make it easier for parents to combine paid work with care giving;
- providing training to employers on best practices for recruiting and retaining female workers, particularly in sectors where they are now underrepresented;
- encouraging pay transparency and increasing awareness of resources to help women find out about going wage rates and strategies for negotiating their wages;
- monitoring workforce development to ensure that women and men have equal access to training in high-growth, well-paid careers;
- providing career counseling and financial supports to women with lower levels of education; and
- ensuring that those who need it receive assistance from “Work First,” North Carolina’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program.

## Methodological Notes

This briefing paper presents data for Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, and Yancey counties in North Carolina, as well as for North Carolina and the United States as a whole. Basic demographic statistics and figures on women's economic status for Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey are based on IWPR analysis of the 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata; figures for North Carolina and the United States as a whole are based on IWPR analysis of the 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010). When analyzing women's status in the selected counties, IWPR used estimates that combine three years of data to ensure sufficient sample sizes that allow for reliable reporting. Data on child care comes from various published sources, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation Data Center Kids Count, Child Care Aware of America, and the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education. Data on women's health status are from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, and the National Cancer Institute. To define the Ashe-Avery-Mitchell-Watauga-Yancey area, IWPR aggregated Public Use Micro Data Area variables (PUMAS), which are the smallest geographical unit within the American Community Survey data. PUMAS do not cross state lines, but they do sometimes include more than one county.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the analysis of demographic and economic data in this fact sheet, 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.

<sup>2</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>3</sup> IWPR calculation based on U.S. Department of Labor. 2011. "Table 23: States: Persons at Work 1 to 34 Hours by Sex, Age, Race, Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, and Hours of Work, 2010 Annual Averages."

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<sup>4</sup> IWPR calculation based on U.S. Department of Labor. 2011. “Table 23: States: Persons at Work 1 to 34 Hours by Sex, Age, Race, Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, and Hours of Work, 2010 Annual Averages.”

<sup>5</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>6</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010). Twenty-one percent of men work in these occupations; the sample sizes for women are too small to report estimates.

<sup>7</sup> 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 for the United States, which is based on the Current Population Survey (CPS). In 2010, the national earnings gap based on the CPS was 23 percent (Hegewisch and Williams 2011).

<sup>8</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>9</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>10</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>11</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>12</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>13</sup> IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Heart disease includes acute and chronic rheumatic fever and heart disease, hypertensive heart and renal disease, ischaemic heart disease, pulmonary heart disease and diseases of pulmonary circulation, and other forms of heart disease. Cerebrovascular disease includes cerebral haemorrhages, cerebral infarction, stroke, and other cerebrovascular diseases. Diabetes includes diabetes mellitus.