THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CALIFORNIA: HIGHLIGHTS

The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) has prepared a report on the Status of Women in California to inform California residents about the progress of women in California relative to women in other states, to men, and to national trends. In addition to this report, IWPR staff have produced reports on 12 other states and the District of Columbia as well as a national report that summarizes key findings for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

In each report, various indicators describe women’s status in four important areas: political participation, employment and earnings, economic autonomy, and reproductive rights. Basic health and demographic data are also provided. On each of the four aspects of women’s well-being for which IWPR calculated composite indicators, California ranks in the top third of the nation. Despite its relatively high rankings nationwide, California does not rank first in the Pacific West region (consisting of Alaska, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington in addition to California) on any composite indicator. Therefore California has room for improvement in the status of its women.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Ranks

The composite political participation rank is based on women’s voter registration and turnout, women elected officials at the state and federal levels, and women’s institutional resources in the state (such as a state commission for women). The national rank is of a possible 50, because the District of Columbia is not included in this ranking. The regional rank is of a maximum of five and refers to the states in the Pacific West region.

- California ranks eighth in the nation and second in the Pacific West region on the political participation composite indicator.

- California ranks 48th in the nation and fourth in its region on women’s voter registration. There are 3.3 million unregistered women who are eligible to vote in the state of California.

Facts and Figures

- Twenty-three of the 120 seats in California’s state legislature were filled by women in 1996, placing California 30th among all states in terms of the percentage of women in its state legislature.

- Since 1964, female voters in the United States have outnumbered male voters, but voter turnout is relatively low for both sexes by international standards. Fifty-four percent of eligible women and 52 percent of eligible men in California reported that they voted in the November 1992 election.
# Chart I. How California Ranks on Key Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPOSITE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION INDEX</th>
<th>National Rank</th>
<th>Regional Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Voter Registration, 1992-1994</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Voter Turnout, 1992-1994</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Elected Office Composite, 1996</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Institutional Resources, 1996</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPOSITE EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS INDEX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Median Annual Earnings, 1990</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio of Women’s to Men’s Earnings, 1990</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Labor Force Participation, 1994</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Managerial and Professional Occupations, 1994</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPOSITE ECONOMIC AUTONOMY INDEX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with Health Insurance Among Nonelderly Women, 1991-1992</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Attainment: Percent of Women with Four or More Years of College, 1990</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Business Ownership, 1992</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Women Above the Poverty Level, 1990</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPOSITE REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS INDEX</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See Appendix I of The Status of Women in the States, available from IWPR, for a detailed description of the methodology and sources used for the indices presented here.

* The national rankings are of a possible 51, referring to the 50 states and the District of Columbia, except for the political participation indicators, which do not include the District of Columbia. The regional rankings are of a maximum of five and refer to the states in the Pacific West region (Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington).

**EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS**

**Ranks**

The composite employment and earnings rank is based on women’s median annual earnings, the female/male earnings ratio, women’s labor force participation, and the proportion of working women in professional and managerial positions. The national rank is of a possible 51, referring to the 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

- California ranks eighth in the nation and second in its region on the employment and earnings composite indicator.
- California’s worst employment and earnings indicator is women’s labor force participation, on which it ranks 41st in the nation and last in its region.
Facts and Figures

- Compared with the nation as a whole, California women enjoy slightly greater earnings equality with men. In 1990, the ratio of the median annual earnings of women to those of men for full-time, year-round workers aged 18 to 65 was 68.5 percent in the United States and 73.3 percent in California.

- In 1994, the unemployment rate for women in California was 8.4 percent compared with the nation's 6.0 percent female unemployment rate. The female unemployment rate in California is the highest in the Pacific West region and among the highest in the nation.

ECONOMIC AUTONOMY

Ranks

The composite economic autonomy rank is based on women's access to health insurance, women's educational attainment, women's business ownership, and the proportion of women living above poverty.

- California ranks 14th in the nation and fourth in its region on the economic autonomy composite indicator.

- California ranks 37th in the nation and fourth in its region in terms of the percentage of nonelderly women with access to health insurance.

Facts and Figures

- In general, women in California tend to be more highly educated than the national average. Over 51 percent of women in California have more than a high school education compared with 42.6 percent of women in the United States.

- The business receipts of women-owned businesses in California rose by 122 percent in constant dollars between 1987 and 1992. This compares favorably with an increase of 87 percent in business receipts for women-owned firms nationally and 35 percent for all firms in the United States during this time period, also adjusted for inflation.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Ranks

The composite reproductive rights rank is based on information on legislation relating to access to legal abortions, the availability of public funding for abortions and infertility treatments, the position of the governor and state legislature on reproductive choice, maternity stay laws, and legislation regarding adoption by lesbian and gay couples.

- California ranks 13th in the nation and fourth in its region on the reproductive rights composite indicator.
Facts and Figures

- Sixty-seven percent of counties in California have abortion providers, a high proportion when compared with the national average (16 percent).

- California is one of 35 states with laws on the books that require a minor to notify or gain the consent of one or both parents before obtaining an abortion.

HEALTH AND VITAL STATISTICS

- California has a lower infant mortality rate (deaths of infants under age one per 1,000 live births) and a higher fertility rate (live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44) than the nation as a whole. California also has a lower percent of low birth weight babies than the nation as a whole, which may indicate that women in California have greater access to pre- and postnatal care than women nationally.

- The percentage of the population enrolled in HMOs in California is nearly twice as high as in the United States as a whole (38.3 percent compared with 19.5 percent). While Medicare recipients in California are more likely than those nationwide to be enrolled in an HMO (34.6 percent versus 9.2 percent in the U.S.), Medicaid recipients in California are less likely than those nationwide to be HMO members (16.3 percent versus 21.4 percent nationally).

BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS

- Compared with the nation as a whole, California has a smaller elderly female population, a larger proportion of women living in metropolitan areas, and a much larger proportion of foreign-born women.

- The female population in California is more ethnically diverse than in the nation as a whole, with minority women making up about 42 percent of women in California and 24 percent of women in the United States as a whole.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is an independent, non-profit, scientific research organization founded in 1987 to meet the need for women-centered, policy-oriented research. This fact sheet is based on the report The Status of Women in California, part of a larger research project funded by the Ford Foundation. The data used come from a variety of sources, primarily government agencies. Individuals and organizations in California also assisted in reviewing the report.

This Research-in-Brief was written by Stacey Friedman and prepared by Megan DeBell in March 1997. The full report, The Status of Women in California, is available for $10.00 from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research. Members and affiliates of the Institute’s Information Network receive regular reports and information and a discount on all publications. For copies of reports or more information on membership, contact IWPR at 1400 20th Street N.W., Suite 104, Washington, D.C. 20036, phone 202/785-5100, fax 202/833-4362, or visit our web site at http://www.iwpr.org.

In California, for copies of the report, contact the California Elected Women’s Association for Education and Research, 6000 J. Street, Sacramento, CA 95819, phone 916/278-3870, fax 916/278-3872.