THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN NORTH CAROLINA: HIGHLIGHTS

The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) has prepared a report on the Status of Women in North Carolina to inform North Carolina residents about the progress of women in North Carolina 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 the status of women in four important areas: political participation, employment and earnings, economic autonomy, and reproductive rights. Basic health and demographic data are also provided. On three of the four aspects of women’s well-being for which IWPR calculated composite indicators, North Carolina ranks in the bottom half or lowest third of the nation. In contrast, North Carolina ranks higher, 12th in the nation, on the reproductive rights composite indicator. North Carolina does not rank first in the South Atlantic region (consisting of Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia in addition to North Carolina) on any composite indicator. Thus North Carolina still 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 eight and refers to the states in the South Atlantic region; it also does not include the District of Columbia.

- North Carolina ranks 38th in the nation and third in the South Atlantic region on the political participation composite indicator.
- North Carolina ranks 31st in the nation on women’s voter registration. There are nearly 673,000 unregistered women who are eligible to vote in the state of North Carolina.

Facts and Figures

- Twenty-eight of the 170 seats in North Carolina’s state legislature were filled by women as of April 1996, placing North Carolina 36th among all states in terms of the percentage of women in the state legislature. Two of the state’s 12 U.S. Representative seats were filled by women in 1996.

- Since 1964, female voters in the United States have outnumbered male voters, but voter turnout is relatively low for both sexes by international standards. Sixty-one percent of eligible women and 59 percent of eligible men in North Carolina reported that they voted in the November 1992 election.
Chart I. How the North Carolina Ranks on Key Indicators

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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. The regional rankings are of a maximum of nine and refer to the states in the South Atlantic region (Maryland, Delaware, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and West Virginia), in addition to the District of Columbia. For the purposes of the District report, women’s political participation in the District of Columbia was calculated as if the District were a state, for example, considering the city council as though it were a unicameral state legislature, and so on. In the reports for each of the states in the study, the District was not included in the rankings on political participation.

Calculated by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research.


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. The regional rank is of a maximum of nine and refers to the states in the South Atlantic region, including the District of Columbia.

- North Carolina ranks 33rd in the nation and seventh in its region on the employment and earnings composite indicator.
■ North Carolina’s worst employment and earnings indicator is the percent of working women in managerial and professional occupations, on which it ranks 40th in the nation and eighth in its region. North Carolina’s best rank is the ratio of women's to men’s earnings on which it ranks tenth on the nation and third in its region.

Facts and Figures

■ Compared with the nation as a whole, North Carolina 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 71.7 percent in North Carolina.

■ In 1994, the unemployment rate for women in North Carolina was 4.8 percent compared with the nation’s 6.0 percent female unemployment rate. The female unemployment rate in North Carolina is among the lowest in the South Atlantic region and the 13th lowest 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.

■ North Carolina ranks 36th in the nation and sixth in its region on the economic autonomy composite indicator.

■ North Carolina ranks 30th in the nation and third in its region in terms of the percentage of nonelderly women with access to health insurance.

Facts and Figures

■ In general, women in North Carolina tend to be less highly educated than the national average. Less than 40 percent of women in North Carolina 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 North Carolina rose by almost 71 percent (in constant dollars) between 1987 and 1992. This compares 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 gay or lesbian couples.

■ North Carolina ranks 12th in the nation and third in its region on the reproductive rights composite indicator.

Facts and Figures

■ Thirty-four percent of counties in North Carolina have abortion providers, 18 percentage points above the national average.
North Carolina is among four states that have passed legislation explicitly prohibiting adoption by gay or lesbian couples.

HEALTH AND VITAL STATISTICS

- North Carolina has a higher infant mortality rate (deaths of infants under age one per 1,000 live births), a slightly higher percent of low birth weight babies, and a lower fertility rate (live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44) than the nation as a whole.

- The percentage of the population enrolled in HMOs in North Carolina is less than half as high as that of the United States as a whole (8.3 percent compared to 19.5 percent). Medicare recipients in North Carolina are much less likely than those nationwide to be enrolled in an HMO, while Medicaid recipients in North Carolina are about as likely as those nationwide to be HMO members.

BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS

- Compared with the nation as a whole, North Carolina has a much larger rural population and a much smaller proportion of women living in metropolitan areas (63 percent versus 83 percent) and a much smaller immigrant population (1.8 percent and 7.9 percent).

- The female population in North Carolina has a larger proportion of African-American women than in the nation as a whole (22.6 percent and 12.1 percent, respectively), while Asian-American, Hispanic, and Native American women combined make up less than three percent of women in North Carolina versus 12.0 percent in the nation.

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 Status of Women in North Carolina, part of a larger research project funded by the Ford Foundation. The data used in the report come from a variety of sources, primarily government agencies, and individuals and organizations in North Carolina assisted in reviewing the report. The Advisory Committee for the report in North Carolina is chaired by Brenda Summers, NC Equity, and includes: Melanie Wade, North Carolina Council for Women; Jan Allen, National Organization for Women, North Carolina; Sorien Schmidt, North Carolina Justice and Community Development Center; Sindy Barker, North Carolina Nurses Association; Sarah Rubin, Manpower Development Corporation; Kathy Hodges, North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Dewey Matherly, Family Service of Gaston County; Selden Holt, Family Service of Gaston County; Shannon Carey, Planned Parenthood of the Capital and Coast, Raleigh; Ellen Plummer, Women's Center, Duke University; Beth Norris, American Association of University Women, North Carolina; Harriet Hopkins, Women's Attorney Association; Polly Williams; Older Women's League, Raleigh; and Betsy Barton, North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health.

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 North Carolina, 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, as well as a discount on all publications. For copies of the report or more information on membership, contact: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 1400 20th Street, NW, 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 North Carolina, for a copy of the report, contact: NC Equity, 3900 Barrett Drive, Suite 311, Raleigh, NC 27609, phone 919/783-8088, fax 919/783-5665.