Status of Women in the States 2000: Women’s Progress and Policy Needs on the Road to Equality

by Amy Coiazzo

How well are women doing in the United States? In part, that depends on where they live. Findings from IWPR’s most recent series of reports on the status of women in the states reveal that while social and economic inequality are present everywhere, their extent varies tremendously from state to state and region to region.

At an event at the National Press Club on November 15, IWPR released The Status of Women in the States reports, a national overview of the current status of women in the United States and nine reports on individual states. On the same day, nine state Advisory Committees released their individual state reports and held local and state press events (see pp 4-5).

Each of the reports includes data on five different areas: women’s political participation, employment and earnings, economic autonomy, reproductive rights, and health and well-being. The reports allow states to compare their women’s status to that of women in other states and to the national average. Each also includes a Women’s Resources and Rights Checklist with information on state policies that support women’s rights and resources available in the states.

In general, women in much of the Southeast and some of the Midwest participate less often politically, fare poorly in employment and earnings, have less economic autonomy, enjoy fewer reproductive rights, and experience poorer health than women in the West or Northeast. Connecticut and Vermont are the highest-ranking states overall for women’s status, while Mississippi is the lowest.

However, in no state have women achieved full equality with men, and all states have substantial room for improvement. As of the most recent election, women make up only 13 percent of the U.S. Congress. Nowhere in the United States do women receive the same wages as men, and women’s median earnings are on average only 73.5 percent of men’s.

To combat this inequality, states can adopt public policies to replace outdated practices that limit women’s access to social and economic resources. Women’s wages can be raised by stronger enforcement of equal employment opportunity laws, improved educational opportunities, higher minimum wages, increased unionization. (cont’d on p. 7)
National policymaking will always be important for women and other groups, such as the poor, who tend to be overlooked when public policy decisions are made, especially at the local level. National policy will remain the central vehicle for redistributing income, for example, but state-based policy action is increasingly important for women and families as more and more policy making is devolved from the federal to the state level.

Since its inception in 1987, the Institute for Women’s Policy Research has had a strong focus on policy change at the state level. In the early 1990s, we began to develop our project on The Status of Women in the States to monitor women’s progress, which varies tremendously from state to state. These reports, the first round of which appeared in 1996, present data on the gender gap in politics as well as economics and also cover reproductive rights and women’s health conditions. In each succeeding cycle we have worked more closely with our State Advisory Committees, which are composed of leaders who have the policy knowledge and local history to develop and use the reports in ways that will make a difference for women and families in their states.

Building on the success of this state-national partnership model, IWPR has developed other projects to produce state-based research that can make a difference in advocacy for policy change. With the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, IWPR is collecting information in seven states about how welfare recipients and other low-income women (and men) participate in job training programs. We hope the findings will be useful in the national debate surrounding reauthorization of the TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) program as well as to advocates and policy makers at the state level who are struggling to improve training and education for welfare clients making the transition to paid employment.

Partnering with the National Employment Law Project, which provides legal technical assistance to state-based groups, IWPR produces research on the extent of unemployment among different types of workers (male/female, minority/majority, part-time/full-time, low wage/middle wage) and the degree to which each type receives unemployment insurance benefits. IWPR also re-grants funds to state-based advocacy groups (such as the Institute for Wisconsin’s Future in Milwaukee and the Center for Public Policy Priorities in Austin, Texas) to facilitate their use of the research in public education activities.

Currently, IWPR is partnering with the Labor Resource Center at the University of Massachusetts at Boston on a study of the cost of providing paid family leave in Massachusetts. The cost estimates will be used by Massachusetts advocates in their campaigns for paid family leave and IWPR will take the estimation model to other states. IWPR staff are also working with unemployment insurance and paid family leave advocates in Georgia, Illinois, and New York. In addition, IWPR is partnering with the Early Education for All Campaign in Boston to provide estimates of the costs of providing pre-kindergarten services to all three and four-year olds in Massachusetts.

IWPR is proud to have been in on the ground floor of the development of national-state research and advocacy partnerships and fortunate to be able to continue our work with many state-based groups, thanks to the generous support of our many funders and members.

Catherine Hill, Study Director, is the head of IWPR’s Social Security team.

IWPR Calculates the Cost of Privatizing Social Security

Efforts to protect Social Security from privatization are still needed. Surveys continue to find that many Americans like the idea of keeping a portion of their payroll taxes in their “own” individual account, especially before they learn about the large cuts in traditional Social Security benefits that would be required to make individual accounts possible. Despite the best efforts of progressive researchers and advocates, many people are not aware of the potential negative effects of privatization.

Advocates for protecting Social Security from privatization face an uphill battle. Privatizers can offer large cuts in the payroll tax with the cost of lost retirement income coming decades later. Diverting two percent of the 12.4 percent of payroll taxes into individual accounts is a major tax cut. Cutting two percent of payroll taxes — about $600 for a worker making $30,000 annually — doesn’t sound too bad until you remember that this would mean an annual loss of one-sixth of Social Security’s revenue (approximately $87 billion in 2000). As the losses in retirement income are years away, it is easy to forget that tax cuts now mean benefit cuts in the future.

IWPR has a new interactive calculator on its website to help you show your friends and colleagues how much money they are likely to lose under privatization. Visit our website at www.iwpr.org and get the figures!
**Appearances**

IWPR researchers have presented at multiple conferences, panels and meetings around the country on a variety of issues, including Social Security reform, the gender wage gap, family and medical leave, unemployment insurance, job training, welfare reform and child care.

**November**


**October**


**September**


**New Releases**

*The Status of Women in the States* is a national report on the status of women in the United States. IWPR staff prepared this report (and nine individual state reports including Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Indiana, Hawai‘i, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Tennessee) to inform others about the progress of women in their state relative to women in other states, to men, and to the nation as a whole. Edited by Amy Caiazzo, 96 pages. To order the full report, or any of the nine individual state reports, please see the enclosed flyer.


**Briefing Paper, Unemployment Insurance and Welfare Reform: Fair Access to Economic Supports for Low-Income Working Women,* by Annisah Um’tani and Vicky Lovell, is an 11-page report that discusses how unequal access to unemployment insurance (UI) specifically affects welfare recipients. The report emphasizes the vital role UI plays in preventing excessive hardship among welfare recipients due to unstable jobs. Enclosed.

**Fact Sheet, Paid Family and Medical Leave: Essential Support for Working Women and Men,* by Vicky Lovell and Hedich Rahmanou, is a brief overview of public policy alternatives that provide paid leave when workers or members of their families have serious health conditions or when children are born or adopted. Enclosed.

**TV and Radio**

The *Status of Women in the States* reports received national coverage and were cited in over 300 print, TV and radio outlets across the country. IWPR President Heidi Hartmann, Study Director Amy Caiazzo, and Director of Research Barbara Gault were interviewed by numerous radio and television organizations about the reports including: 12/6 – Maryland Public Television; 11/16 – CNN-FN; 11/15– CNN Radio; KUAC (public radio in Fairbanks Alaska); KMIX (St. Louis radio station); KCBS Radio (San Francisco); KPWK Pacifica Radio; KOB Radio (New Mexico); KNX 1070 (CBS) LA; WBZ Boston; Wall Street Journal Radio; WFCR (West MA); WGAL (Lancaster, PA); CBS (Knoxville, TN); 11/14 – BBC.

**Print Media**

ARKANSAS

"The report illustrates that we have a long way to go to be on par with our sisters in other states." — Janine Parry, Chair, State Advisory Committee

L to R — Dr. Janine Parry, University of Arkansas, Angela Duran, Good Faith Fund, Sharon Priest, Secretary of State (at microphone), State Capitol Building.

COLORADO

"Colorado right now is a good place for many women... We have much to celebrate. However, not all Colorado women are reaping the benefits of a strong economy... Too many women are forced to choose whether to have a roof over their family's heads, food on the table, or adequate childcare."

Marla J. Williams, President and CEO of the Women's Foundation of Colorado, Sheraton Steamboat, Steamboat Springs, CO.

TENNESSEE

"The results of the report give policy makers reliable, relevant data and identify opportunities for improvement which can make a difference for women in our state."
— Dr. Wilsie Bishop, Dean, East Tennessee State University.

L to R — Ronnie Steinberg, Tennessee Advisory Committee Chair and Senator Thelma Harper (D) at the Legislative Plaza, Nashville TN.

DELAWARE

"Sometimes if you don’t know about these things, it’s hard to get something done ... hopefully this will be a wake-up call."

Marian Palley, Director of Women's Studies, University of Delaware.
**MINNESOTA**

"Much more needs to be done ... that is especially true when it comes to minority women."
— Jan Malcolm, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Health.

**ARIZONA**

"This is not a report that is just going to sit on the shelf, it will develop a more defined agenda for women and girls ... and help inform the women of our state."
— Laura Alexander, Development Officer, Women’s Foundation of Southern Arizona, *Arizona Daily Wildcat.*

**NEW HAMPSHIRE**

"We’re hoping that as many people as possible use it [the report] to make positive changes ... there are many areas where women and others have to start two blocks behind before they get to the starting line."
— Theresa de Langis, Executive Director, New Hampshire Commission on the Status of Women

**HAWAI'I**

"Could it be that issues especially vital to women, such as child care, caregiver responsibilities and family support, are often so low a priority in the Legislature that women have become disenchanted with the political system?" Editoria, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin.*

First Lady Vicky Cayetano, Governor’s Conference Room, State Capitol.

**INDIANA**

"The report gives us sound information on which to base proposals and initiatives, for which we are very grateful ... we know there are many women in the state who do not even have the status enjoyed by some."
— Charlotte Zietlow, Chair, Indiana Advisory Committee.

L to R — Kim Thacker, Director of Women’s Programs for the Indiana AFL-CIO; Charlotte Zietlow, Chair, Indiana Advisory Committee; Sheila Suess Kennedy, former Director of Indiana Civil Liberties Union; Barbara Levy-Tobey, Director of Indiana Office of Women’s Health, Indiana Statehouse.
February

1-2 The New World of Welfare: An Agenda for Reauthorization and Beyond, sponsored by the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan, Marriott Hotel, Washington, DC. The conference will provide an opportunity for rigorous debate among a diverse set of welfare experts, both liberal and conservative, academic and non-academic. For more information, call (734) 764-4276, or visit www.cms.housing.umich.edu.

7-10 Women and Social Security Summit: Keeping Social Security A Guaranteed Part of Retirement, co-sponsored by National Council of Women’s Organization’s Women and Social Security Project; Business and Professional Women USA; OWL – The Voice of Midlife and Older Women; the National Council of Negro Women; and the American Association of University Women. Additional co-sponsors include Feminist Majority, NOW and the Women’s Institute for a Secure Retirement. The event will be held at the Wyndham Hotel, Washington, DC. For more information, see the enclosed brochure or call (202) 393-8953.

7-9 Igniting a Spark...Creating a Passion for Change, sponsored by the Alliance of Work/Life Professionals. AWLP’s Annual Conference is being held at Disney’s Coronado Springs Resort, Orlando, Florida. The conference will address increasingly complex work/life issues for professionals and strategies to deal with them. As part of the conference, the Federal Government will offer seminars that address child care; new subsidy programs; elder and kinship care; telework and many other aspects of work/life issues. For more information, please call (800) 874-9383, or visit www.awlp.org/conference.

23-25 Eastern Economic Association Meetings, Crowne Plaza, New York City, NY. The EEA annual meeting will address a number of economic topics, including the status of women. For more information, call (914) 633-2088.

March

1-3 The 6th Annual Conference of the College and University Work/Family Association (CUWFA), Balancing Professional and Personal Lives in Higher Education: A Focus on Women Faculty, sponsored by CUWFA and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, Tucson, Arizona. This conference will address program initiatives, policies, practices and research related to work-life issues in academia. For more information, call (410) 516-6605.

8 International Women’s Day, Global Women’s Strike. The event is an international strike to end all forms of discrimination and violence against women. For more information, contact International Wages for Housework Campaign, Crossroads Women’s Center, PO Box 11795, Philadelphia, PA, or call (215) 848-1120.

April

19-21 Women Political Leaders: Changing Public Roles in the United States and Around the World, sponsored by Eisenhower Fellowships and the George Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A & M University. The conference is meant to recognize and encourage emerging female political leaders and enhance their potential, and highlight the need for such women to have an increasingly global perspective. For more information, call (979) 862-2251.

26-29 Building Union Power in a Challenging Economy, AFL-CIO/UALE Education Conference, Park Plaza Hotel, Boston, MA. Join labor researchers, activists, and educators from many countries to focus on the challenges unions face in a changed economic environment and the strategies being developed to confront them. Topics will include the anti-union character of the “new” economy, organizing approaches, and how unions are changing internally to meet the challenges of immigration. For more information, contact Nancy Pounds at (319) 335-4177 or visit www.uale.org.

June

Institute for Women’s Policy Research announces
IWPR’s Sixth Women’s Policy Research Conference
The Status of Women: Facing the Facts, Forging the Future
Washington, DC June 8-9, 2001, at the Capitol Hilton. For more information, visit www.iwpr.org or call (202) 785-5100.
New Releases

*Working Time: International Trends, Theory, and Policy Perspectives,* a new book published by Routledge Press. This book presents the first comprehensive analysis of both paid and unpaid work time. Other areas covered include the shorter work week, flexible work practices, underwork and overwork. Edited by Deborah Figart and Lonnie Golden. See enclosed order form.

National Council of Women’s Organization’s (NCWO) new publication, *Women Speak on Affirmative Action.* Women from a variety of fields and backgrounds speak out about affirmative action. This publication also provides information and statistics on the states and the impact of affirmative action and its repeal. The full version can be downloaded at www.womensorganizations.org. For additional copies, please call NCWO at (202) 393-7122.

*The Shadow Negotiation,* a new release by Deborah M. Kolb and Judith Williams. This book “is packed with insights for any women who wants to increase her effectiveness at the bargaining table … and reveals the ways women are likely to stumble in negotiation and then lays out a clear, practical game plan for success in making their voices and their demands count.” See enclosed order form.

Announcements

AAUW Educational Foundation invites applications for the 2001 Foundation Scholar-in-Residence program. Eligible research projects include women and economic security, including workplace and work-life issues and gender, technology, and the computer culture. Stipend up to $45,000. Deadline for proposals 2/10/01. For more information, call (202) 728-7616 or visit www.aauw/7000/aboutcf.html.

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