

Research-in-Brief

IWPR# R248

The Status of Women in Alabama *Highlights*

This Research-in-Brief is based on selected findings from *The Status of Women in Alabama* report, a definitive state-wide analysis on women's socio-economic and political circumstances.

Alabama reflects many of the difficult obstacles still facing women in the United States. Women in Alabama are seeing important changes in their lives and their access to political, economic, and social rights. Still, they by no means enjoy equality with men, and they lack many of the legal guarantees that would allow them to achieve it. Women in Alabama, and the nation, would benefit from stronger enforcement of equal opportunity laws, better political representation, adequate and affordable child care, stronger poverty reduction programs, and other policies to improve their status.

Among all 50 states and the District of Columbia, Alabama ranks just below the midpoint of all states in two areas: it is 30th for women's employment and earnings and 33rd for women's health and well-being. In contrast, it falls to the bottom third for three other areas: it is 37th for women's political participation, 46th for women's social and economic autonomy, and 46th for women's reproductive rights (see Chart 1).

Alabama women have made important strides in improving their status, but the state's lower rankings show that Alabama does not ensure equal rights for women. In an evaluation of Alabama women's actual status compared with goals set for their status, Alabama earns the grades of C in employment and earnings, C- in health and well-being, D in political participation, D- in social and economic autonomy, and F in reproductive rights.

Alabama joins Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi as part of the East South Central region. Of the four states of the East South Central area, Alabama ranks first for women's employment and earnings, political participation, and health and well-being. It is second for women's social and economic autonomy and third for their reproductive rights. This suggests that women's status is low in the region overall.

Alabama is a mid-sized state, home to more than 2.3 million women. Alabama has fewer immigrants, Hispanics, Asian

Women in Alabama: What's Promising

- ♦ Women in the state are much more likely to be registered to vote than women in most other states.
- ♦ Alabama women workers earn almost 77 cents to men's dollar for full-time, full-year work, compared with just 73 cents nationally.
- ♦ Alabama women are less likely than women in most states to die of heart disease, lung cancer, or breast cancer.

Women in Alabama: What's Disappointing

- ♦ As of fall 2002, there were no women in Alabama's congressional delegation, and less than 8 percent of state legislators were women.
- ♦ Women in Alabama are less likely to be in the labor force than women in all but six other states.
- ♦ Women in Alabama are among the least likely to have a college education and the most likely to live in poverty.
- ♦ Alabama does not require insurance companies to cover either contraception or infertility treatments, important resources in women's reproductive lives.
- ♦ Compared to the nation as a whole, Alabama has among the highest rates of chlamydia and diabetes, and Alabama women experience among the most days of activities limitations due to health.

Americans, and Native Americans than the country as a whole, but a higher proportion of the state's population is made up of African American women than is the case nationally. A much higher proportion of women in Alabama live in rural areas.

Alabama women continue to face serious obstacles to achieving equality with men and attaining a standing that is equal to the average for women in the United States. Their problems are evident in low rankings on many indicators of women's status presented in this report. While Alabama women are witnessing real improvements in many areas of their economic, social, political, and health status, many important problems remain.

Political Participation

Women in Alabama register and vote at higher rates than in most of the country, but they have much lower political representation among elected officials, at just 44th among the states. Overall, Alabama ranks 37th and receives a grade of D on the political participation composite index. Greater representation in elected office could benefit women overall by encouraging the adoption of more women-friendly policies, which in turn could enhance women's status in other areas.

Employment and Earnings

Women in Alabama participate in the workforce much less often and work as managers or professionals less frequently than women in the nation as a whole. Their earnings fall at the midpoint of all the states and their earnings equality with men is better than in most of the country. These factors combine to place Alabama 30th in the nation on the employment and earnings composite index. The state receives its highest grade in this area, a C.

Social and Economic Autonomy

At 46th for indicators of social and economic autonomy, Alabama women face serious obstacles in this category. Fewer businesses are owned by women in Alabama than nationally, and women in the state are much less likely to have a college education than women in the nation as a whole. More than 16 percent of Alabama women lack health insurance, and about 15 percent live below the poverty line. These women lack many of the basic necessities of life. Alabama's problems guaranteeing women's social and economic autonomy are reflected in the state's grade of D-.

Reproductive Rights

Alabama women lack many important reproductive rights and resources, and as a result the state ranks 46th of 51 on the reproductive rights composite index. Poor women in Alabama can receive public funding for abortion only under federally mandated, limited circumstances, and the state lacks mandates for comprehensive coverage of contraception or infertility treatments. In addition, 58 percent of women in Alabama live in counties without abortion providers. As a result, for

most women, especially those in rural areas, abortion is relatively inaccessible. The state receives a grade of F on this composite index.

Health and Well-Being

Alabama ranks just below the midpoint of all states, at 33rd, and receives a grade of C- for indicators of women's health and well-being. Alabama women have lower lung cancer, breast cancer, and heart disease mortality rates than women in the rest of the country. In contrast, they are more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes, to have poor mental health, and to have limitations on their physical activity because of health issues. Incidence rates of AIDS and chlamydia are also much higher in Alabama than in most of the country. Women's relatively poor health status is probably related to their lower rates of insurance coverage and the lack of adequate insurance mandates in the state.

Women's Resources and Rights Checklist

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995, heightened awareness of women's status around the world and pointed to the importance of government action and public policy for the well-being of women. At the conference, representatives of 189 countries, including the United States, unanimously adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which pledged their governments to action on behalf of women. The Platform for Action outlines critical issues of concern to women and remaining obstacles to women's advancement.

Many of the laws, policies, and programs that already exist in the United States meet the goals of the Platform for Action and support the rights of women identified in the Platform. In some ways, women in the United States enjoy access to relatively high levels of gender equality compared with women around the world. In other areas, the United States and many individual states have an opportunity to better support women's rights.

The Women's Resources and Rights Checklist, Chart 2, provides an overview of the policies supporting women's rights and the resources available to women in Alabama. This list was derived from ideas presented in the Platform for Action, including the need for policies that help prevent violence against women, promote women's economic equality, alleviate poverty among women, improve their physical, mental, and reproductive health and well-being, and enhance their political power. The rights and resources outlined in the Women's Resources and Rights Checklist fall under several categories: protection from violence, access to income support (e.g., through welfare and child support collection), women-friendly employment protections, family leave benefits, legislation protecting sexual minorities, reproductive rights, and institutional representation of women's concerns.

Chart 1
How Alabama Ranks on Key Indicators

Indicators	National Rank*	Regional Rank*	Grade
Composite Political Participation Index	37	1	D
Women's Voter Registration, 1998 and 2000	5	1	
Women's Voter Turnout, 1998 and 2000	12	1	
Women in Elected Office Composite Index, 2002	44	1	
Women's Institutional Resources, 2002	20	1	
Composite Employment and Earnings Index	30	1	C
Women's Median Annual Earnings, 1999	25	1	
Ratio of Women's to Men's Earnings, 1999	11	1	
Women's Labor Force Participation, 2000	45	4	
Women in Managerial and Professional Occupations, 1999	30	1	
Composite Social and Economic Autonomy Index	46	2	D-
Percent with Health Insurance Among Nonelderly Women, 2000	30	2	
Educational Attainment: Percent of Women with Four or More Years of College, 1990	45	2	
Women's Business Ownership, 1997	33	1	
Percent of Women Above the Poverty Level, 1999	43	3	
Composite Reproductive Rights Index	46	3	F
Composite Health and Well-Being Index	33	1	C-

See Appendix II in *The Status of Women in Alabama* 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 four and refer to the states in the East South Central region (AL, KY, MS, and TN).

Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Many of the indicators in Chart 2 can be affected by state policy decisions. As a result, the Women's Resources and Rights Checklist provides a measure of Alabama's commitment to policies designed to help women achieve economic, political, and social well-being. In Alabama, while women have access to some of the policies and resources on this checklist, they lack many others. The state has adopted nine out of 31 possible policies presented in the Women's Resources and Rights Checklist.

The Status of Women in Alabama is part of an ongoing research project conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) to measure and track the status of women in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Primarily funded by the Ford

Foundation, with additional funding from state and local foundations and organizations, this project intends to improve the ability of advocates and policymakers at the state level to address women's issues. Funding from the Rockefeller Family Fund, the Open Society Institute, and the Marjorie Cook Family Foundation also supports the project. The first three sets of reports were released in 1996, 1998, and 2000, consisting of 33 state reports and three national reports. The 2002 series includes nine states as well as an update of the national report. The 2002 National Report provides an overview of women's status across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. See IWPR's website (www.iwpr.org) for more information.

Chart 2 Women's Resources and Rights Checklist				
	Yes	No	Other Information	Total Number of States with Policy (of 51) or U.S. Average
Violence Against Women				
Has Alabama adopted a domestic battery statute complementing assault laws?	✓			34
Does Alabama law require domestic violence training of new police recruits and health care professionals?		✓		10
Does Alabama law prohibit domestic violence discrimination in insurance?	✓			22
Is a first stalking offense a felony in Alabama?	✓			12
Does Alabama law require sexual assault training for police, prosecutors, and health care professionals? ¹		✓		4
Child Support				
Percent of single-mother households receiving child support or alimony:			32%	34%
Percent of child support cases with orders for collection in which support was collected:			35%	39%
Welfare and Poverty Policies				
Does Alabama extend TANF benefits to children born or conceived while a mother is receiving welfare?	✓			28
Does Alabama allow receipt of TANF benefits up to or beyond the 60-month federal time limit?	✓		60-month limit	44
Does Alabama allow welfare recipients at least 24 months before requiring participation in work activities?		✓	Immediate	13
Does Alabama provide transitional child care under TANF for more than 12 months?	✓		No time limit	14
Has Alabama's TANF plan been certified or submitted for certification under the Family Violence Option or made other provisions for victims of domestic violence?	✓			37
In determining welfare eligibility, does Alabama disregard the equivalent of at least 50 percent of earnings from a full-time, minimum wage job?		✓		11
Does Alabama have a state Earned Income Tax Credit?		✓		16
Maximum TANF benefit for a family of three (two children) in Alabama, 2001:			\$164.00	\$379.00
Employment/Unemployment Benefits				
Is Alabama's minimum wage higher than the federal level as of January 2002? ²		✓		12
Does Alabama have mandatory temporary disability insurance?		✓		5
Does Alabama provide Unemployment Insurance benefits to:				
Low-wage earners?		✓		14
Workers seeking part-time jobs?		✓		9
Workers who leave their jobs for certain circumstances ("good cause quits")?		✓		30

(continued on next page)

<i>(Chart 2 continued)</i>	Yes	No	Other Information	Total Number of States with Policy (of 51) or U.S. Average
Has Alabama implemented adjustments to achieve pay equity in its state civil service?		✓		20
Family Leave Benefits				
Has Alabama proposed legislation extending Unemployment Insurance benefits to workers on temporary leave to care for infants and newly adopted children?		✓		0 Enacted; 20 Proposed
Has Alabama proposed legislation allowing use of temporary disability insurance to cover periods of work absence due to family care needs?		✓		1 Enacted; 3 Proposed
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity				
Does Alabama have civil rights legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity?		✓		14
Has Alabama adopted legislation creating enhanced penalties or a separate offense for crimes based on sexual orientation?		✓		28
Has Alabama avoided adopting a ban on same-sex marriage?		✓		16
Reproductive Rights				
Does Alabama allow access to abortion services: Without mandatory parental consent or notification?		✓		8
Without a waiting period?		✓		29
Does Alabama provide public funding for abortions under any or most circumstances if a woman is eligible?		✓		16
Does Alabama require health insurers to provide comprehensive coverage for contraceptives?		✓		19
Does Alabama require health insurers to provide coverage of infertility treatments?		✓		11
Does Alabama allow the non-legal parent in a gay/lesbian couple to adopt his/her partner's child? ³	✓		Lower Court	25
Does Alabama require schools to provide sex education?		✓		23
Institutional Resources				
Does Alabama have a commission for women?	✓			40
Total Policies	9	22		31 possible
See Appendix III in <i>The Status of Women in Alabama</i> for a detailed description and sources for the items on this checklist.				
¹ Alabama lacks a legislative mandate that requires police training. However, the Police Officers Standards and Training Commission requires police academies to provide four hours of domestic violence training as part of the training curriculum.				
² Alabama has no state minimum wage as of January 2002. In most cases, the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 prevails.				
³ Most states that allow such adoptions do so as a result of court decisions. In Alabama, a lower-level court has ruled in favor of second-parent adoptions.				
Compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.				

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is a scientific research organization dedicated to informing and stimulating debate on public policy issues of critical importance to women and their families. IWPR focuses on issues of poverty and welfare, employment and earnings, work and family issues, the economic and social aspects of health care and safety, and women's civic and political participation.

The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR, an independent, nonprofit organization, also works in affiliation with the graduate programs in public policy and women's studies at The George Washington University.

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