



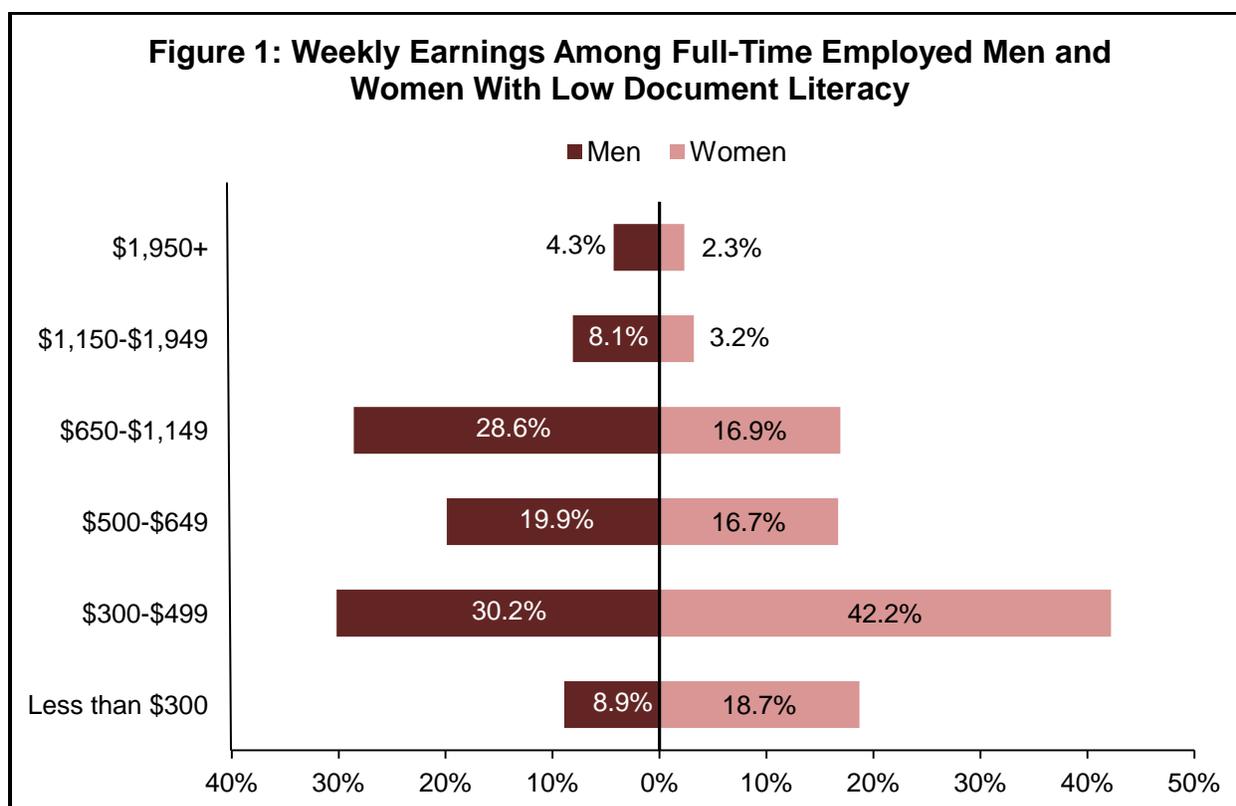
# Fact Sheet

IWPR #C392

February 2012

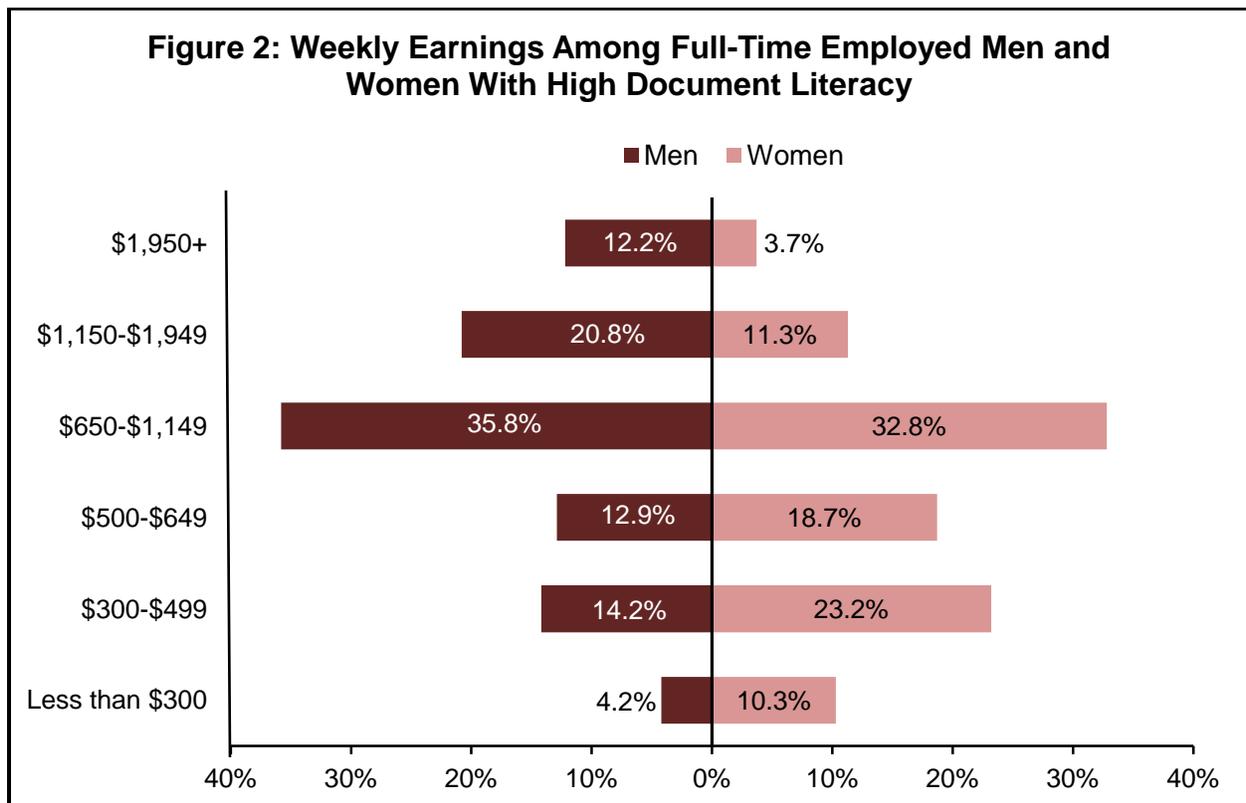
## Low Literacy Means Lower Earnings, Especially for Women

Appropriate literacy levels are crucial for both men and women seeking education and employment opportunities, but low literacy skills disproportionately hurt women's chances of earning a sustaining wage. IWPR analysis of National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)<sup>i</sup> data reveals that men earn more than women regardless of literacy level. Women with low literacy skills report very low earnings overall and substantially lower earnings than those among comparable men (Figure 1). Although women with higher literacy skills are much more likely than women with low literacy to earn sustaining wages, their earnings are still lower on average than those of men (Figure 2). In other words, women need higher levels of literacy than men to earn wages that are comparable with men's.



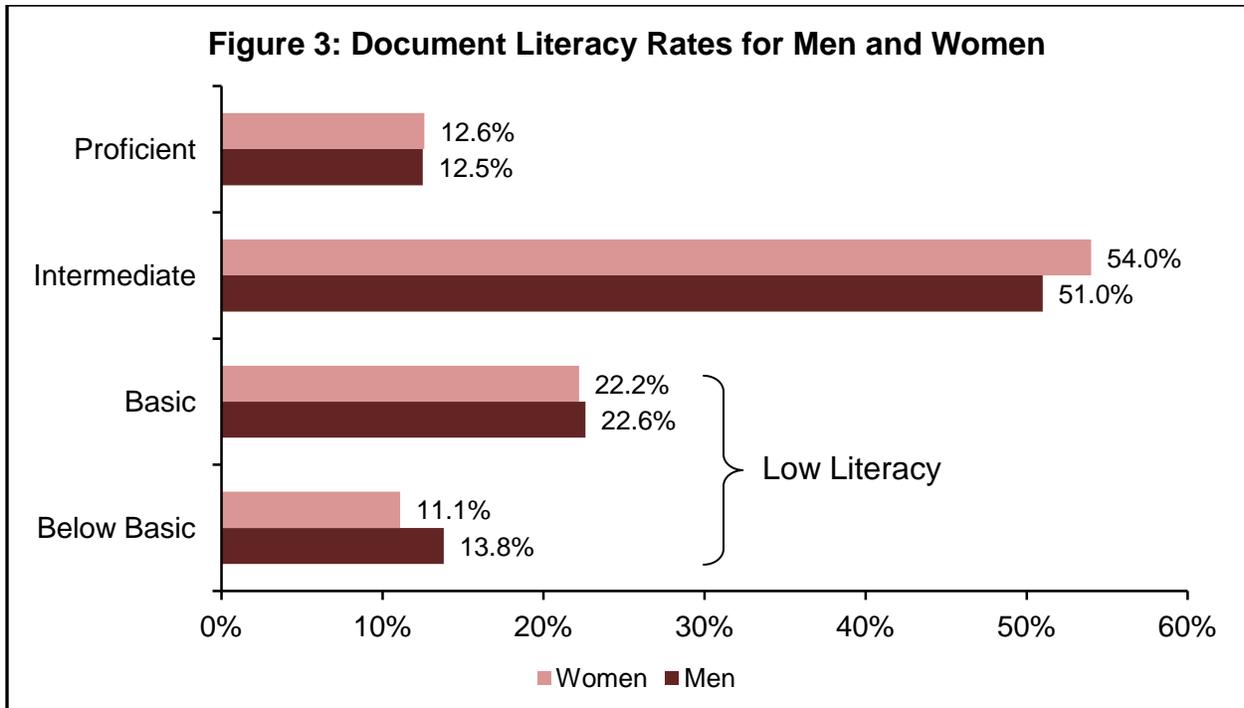
Source: IWPR analysis of National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) data, in 2003 dollars (most recent data available).

Men with low literacy are nearly twice as likely as women at the same literacy level to have weekly earnings above \$650. Women with low literacy are twice as likely as men at that skill level to appear among those in the lowest earnings category of \$300 per week or less. Although both women and men benefit from having strong literacy skills, women appear to see much greater relative gains from high literacy than the gains seen by men (Figure 2). Women with high document literacy are 94 percent more likely than women with low document literacy to make between \$650 and \$1,149 per week and 353 percent more likely to make between \$1,150 and \$1,949 per week (compared to 25 percent and 257 percent more likely, respectively, for men). Although a strong male advantage persists among the very highest earners (\$1,950 or more per week), IWPR analysis of NAAL data suggests that high literacy may help women reach earnings levels that allow them to support themselves and their families.



Source: IWPR analysis of National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) data, in 2003 dollars (most recent data available).

Limited literacy remains a significant issue for both men and women in the United States: 36.4 percent of men and 33.3 percent of women are in the low literacy category (Figure 3). These data indicate that programs that work to improve literacy remain critical. Adult basic education, remedial and bridge programs, and other methods that help people move beyond low literacy are important for national workforce readiness, as well as for individuals' ability to get and keep jobs that pay sustaining wages. Correspondingly, threats of cuts to programs that support literacy and adult education are likely to have a disproportionate impact on low-income women and their families. Since women with low literacy levels are at a particular economic disadvantage (Figures 1 and 2), ensuring that educational programs are designed and funded to help women, particularly those caring for children, should be a part of U.S. workforce development efforts.



Source: IWPR analysis of National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) data, in 2003 dollars (most recent data available).

<sup>i</sup> The NAAL measures adult literacy through survey questions and groups respondents into four literacy categories, *Below Basic*, *Basic*, *Intermediate*, and *Proficient*; the analysis for this fact sheet combines *Below Basic* and *Basic* as *low literacy* and includes only document reading rather than writing or numeric literacy. In 2003, the most recent NAAL was administered to a nationally representative sample of 19,714 adults, ages 16 and older, living in households or prisons (National Center for Education Statistics Department of Education, *A First Look at the Literacy of America's Adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* NCES 2006-470, Jessup, MD: ED Publications, 2005).

*This fact sheet was written by Jennifer Herard, Kevin Miller, Ph.D., Jane Henrici, Ph.D., and Barbara Gault, Ph.D., with support provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Ford Foundation. The authors thank Heidi Silver-Pacuilla, past president of the National Coalition for Literacy, and Heidi Hartmann, IWPR President, for their helpful comments and insights.*

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