

Fact Sheet

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Women and Paid Sick Days: Crucial for Family Well-Being

Balancing work with personal and family health-care concerns is a major stressor for many working women. Women continue to be overrepresented in part-time and low-wage positions, those least likely to offer employer benefits such as paid sick days. Nevertheless, working women remain our families' primary caregivers. For too many women, being sick or having an ill family member presents an untenable choice: stay at work when you shouldn't, or lose pay (and perhaps a job) by staying home.

More than 22 million working women lack basic sick days benefits

- ◇ More than 22 million working women (22,416,000) do not have paid sick days (Table 1).¹
- ◇ 47 percent of women working in the private sector have no paid sick days.²
- ◇ In the industries that employ the most women—retail trade and accommodations/food service—55 percent and 78 percent of workers are without paid sick days, respectively (Table 2). In those two industries alone, almost 9 million women (8,780,000) lack paid sick days.³
- ◇ 27 percent of low-income women (with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty level) put off getting health-care because they cannot take time off from work. 18 percent of women at all income levels face this situation.⁴

Table 1. Percent and number of women workers with and without paid sick days, 2006

| | Women workers with paid sick days | | Women workers without paid sick days | | Total number of women workers |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | |
| Private sector | 53 | 23,392,000 | 47 | 20,979,000 | 44,371,000 |
| Federal, state, and local government | 88 | 10,801,000 | 12 | 1,437,000 | 12,239,000 |
| Total, private and public sectors | 60 | 34,194,000 | 40 | 22,416,000 | 56,609,000 |

Note: Rows and columns may not sum to totals due to rounding. Self-employed, private household, agricultural, and military workers are excluded.

Source: Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey, the November 2005 through October 2006 Current Employment Statistics, and the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

Table 2. Number of women workers in the seven largest private-sector industries for women, by percent of workers without paid sick days, 2006

| Seven largest industries for women | Number of women employed (thousands) | Percent of workers without paid sick days | Number of women without paid sick days (thousands) |
|---|---|--|---|
| Accommodation and food service | 5,947 | 78 | 4,639 |
| Administration and waste services | 3,326 | 69 | 2,295 |
| Retail trade | 7,529 | 55 | 4,141 |
| Manufacturing | 4,096 | 48 | 1,966 |
| Professional and technical services | 3,413 | 31 | 1,058 |
| Health care and social assistance | 3,413 | 29 | 990 |
| Finance and insurance | 3,937 | 18 | 709 |
| Total | 31,660 | 50 | 15,797 |

Note: Columns may not sum to totals due to rounding. Self-employed, private household, agricultural, and military workers are excluded.
 Source: Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey, the November 2005 through October 2006 Current Employment Statistics, and the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

Women are still the primary family caregivers

- ◇ 80 percent of mothers assume primary responsibility in the family for selecting their children’s doctor, taking children to doctor’s appointments, and arranging for their children’s follow-up care.⁵
- ◇ 40 percent of working mothers lack both sick and vacation leave, and 53 percent of working mothers cannot take days off for sick children. (Working fathers have more flexibility: 30 percent lack both sick and vacation leave, and 48 percent cannot stay home when their children are sick.)⁶
- ◇ Half (49 percent) of working mothers must miss work when their child is sick with a minor illness, such as a cold or ear infection (compared with 30 percent of working fathers).⁷
- ◇ Half (49 percent) of all working mothers who do stay home with sick children do not get paid for the time off. 75 percent of women living in poverty do not get paid when they must miss work to care for a sick child.⁸

Most women in low-wage jobs have no paid sick days

- ◇ 57 percent of women workers in the ten largest low-wage occupations for women are without paid sick days (Table 3 and Figure 1).

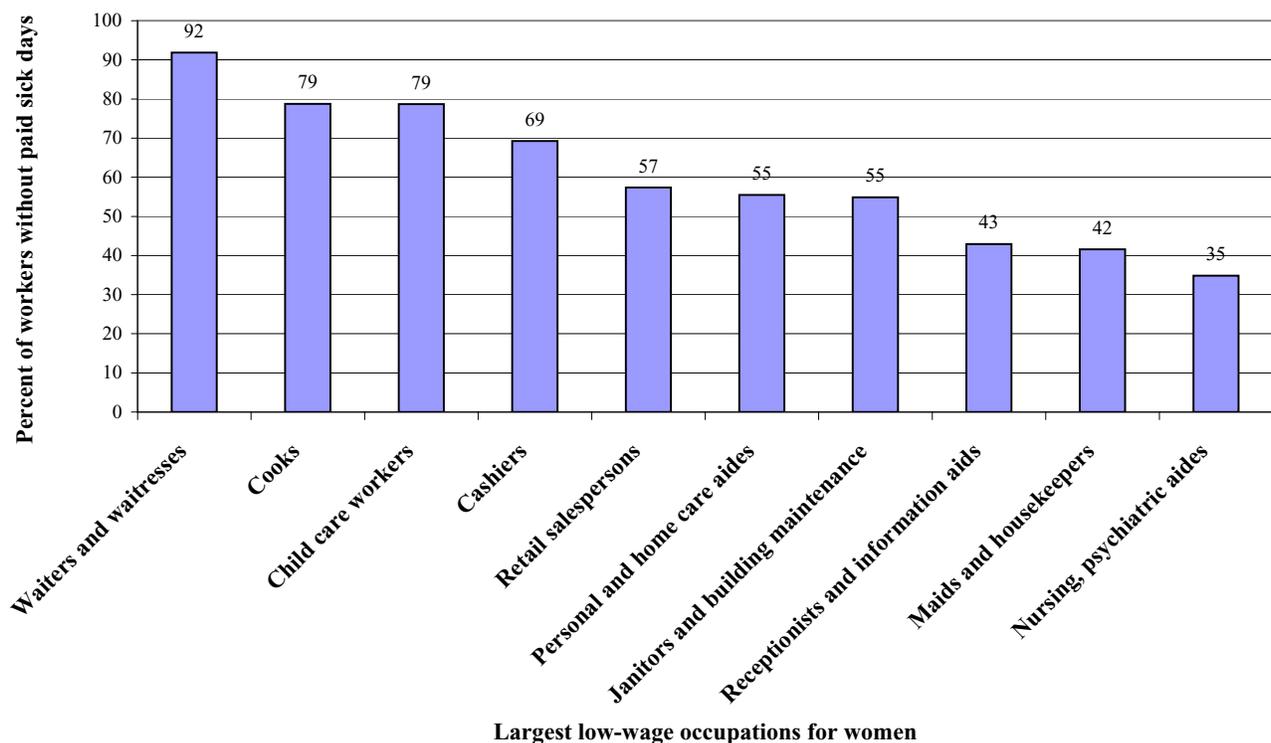
Table 3. Number of women workers without paid sick days in the ten largest low-wage occupations for women, by percent of workers without paid sick days, 2006 (full-time wage and salary workers) ⁹

| Ten largest low-wage occupations for women | Number of women employed (in thousands) | Percent of workers without paid sick days | Number of women without paid sick days (in thousands) |
|--|---|---|---|
| Waitresses | 556 | 92 | 512 |
| Cooks | 433 | 79 | 342 |
| Child care workers | 414 | 79 | 327 |
| Cashiers | 1,064 | 69 | 734 |
| Retail salespersons | 810 | 57 | 462 |
| Personal and home care aides | 328 | 55 | 180 |
| Janitors and building cleaners | 421 | 55 | 232 |
| Receptionists and information clerks | 846 | 43 | 364 |
| Maids and housekeepers | 724 | 42 | 304 |
| Nursing, psychiatric, home health aides | 1,181 | 35 | 413 |
| Total | 6,777 | 57 | 3,870 |

Note: Columns may not sum to totals due to rounding.

Source: Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey, the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, and Highlights of Women’s Earnings in 2005 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Report 995).

Figure 1. Percent of workers without paid sick days in the ten largest low-wage occupations for women



Source: Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey and the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

Methodology

Paid sick days coverage rates are from the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey (NCS), a nationally representative U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) payroll survey of more than 10,000 private-sector establishments. (Private household, agricultural, and military employers and the self-employed are not included.) The March 2006 NCS did not survey local and state governments, so participation rates for workers in those sectors are from IWPR's analysis of the 1996-1998 Employee Benefits Survey, the precursor to the NCS.¹⁰ The NCS data are on whether *jobs* are covered by a paid sick days policy; incumbents in those jobs may not yet have met employer-imposed eligibility thresholds related to job tenure. To adjust for eligibility, data from the BLS' Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey on the percent of workers who are new hires, by industry, were multiplied by the average number of days between date of hire and eligibility for paid sick days (78 days); NCS "access" rates were reduced by the results.

¹ Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey, the November 2005 through October 2006 Current Employment Statistics, and the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Salganicoff, Alina, Usha R. Ranji, and Roberta Wyn. 2005. *Women and Health Care: A National Profile*. Melona, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation.

⁵ Salganicoff, Ranji, and Wyn 2005.

⁶ Heymann, Jody S. 2000. *The Widening Gap: Why America's Working Families Are in Jeopardy and What Can Be Done About It*. New York: Basic Books.

⁷ Wyn, Roberta, and Ojeda, Victoria. 2003. *Women, Work, and Family Health: A Balancing Act*. Melona, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ An occupation is designated as low-wage if at least one-third of its incumbents earn poverty wages (less than \$9.62 per hour), according to Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of the 2005 monthly Current Population Surveys. Data not shown for Preschool and kindergarten teachers, which employs 495,000 women, due to inadequate sample size for determining paid sick days coverage. Employment data by occupation are from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2005*. Paid sick days participation data are from the Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey and the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

¹⁰ Lovell, Vicky. 2004. *No Time to be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers When Workers Don't Have Paid Sick Leave*. IWPR Publication No. B242. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research.

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