

# Research-in-Brief



## The Status of Women in Arkansas: Highlights

Arkansas women continue to face serious obstacles in achieving equality with men and with attaining a standing equal to the average for women in the United States. Their problems are evident in rankings in the bottom half of all states on all of the indicators calculated by IWPR. Of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, Arkansas ranks just below the midpoint of all states at 32nd for reproductive rights. It is in the bottom third of all states at 39th for political participation and 43rd for health and well-being. It drops to 50th in two measures of women's economic strength: economic autonomy and employment and earnings (see Chart I).

Arkansas does not ensure equal rights for women, and the problems facing Arkansas women demand significant attention from policymakers, women's advocates and researchers concerned with women's status. As a result, in an evaluation of Arkansas women's status compared with goals set for women's ideal status, Arkansas earns grades of D+ in health and well-being, D in

Chart I: How Arkansas Ranks on Key Indicators

Indicators	National Rank*	Regional Rank*	Grade
<b>Composite Political Participation Index</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>D</b>
Women's Voter Registration, 1992-96	39	3	
Women's Voter Turnout, 1992-96	43	3	
Women in Elected Office Composite Index, 2000	20	2	
Women's Institutional Resources, 2000	40	4	
<b>Composite Employment and Earnings Index</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>F</b>
Women's Median Annual Earnings, 1997	51	4	
Ratio of Women's to Men's Earnings, 1997	23	3	
Women's Labor Force Participation, 1998	42	3	
Women in Managerial and Professional Occupations, 1998	48	4	
<b>Composite Economic Autonomy Index</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>F</b>
Percent with Health Insurance Among Nonelderly Women, 1997	48	3	
Educational Attainment: Percent of Women with Four or More Years of College, 1990	50	4	
Women's Business Ownership, 1992	45	4	
Percent of Women above the Poverty Level, 1997	46	3	
<b>Composite Reproductive Rights Index</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>D</b>
<b>Composite Health and Well-Being Index</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>D+</b>

See Appendix II in *The Status of Women in Arkansas* 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 West South Central Region (AR, LA, OK, TX).

Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

political participation and in reproductive rights, and F in economic autonomy and employment and earnings (see Chart I).

Arkansas joins Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas as part of the West South Central census region. The status of women in Arkansas is generally below average for women in this region. Within the four states of the West South Central area, Arkansas ranks second in reproductive rights, third in health and well-being, but fourth in every other broad issue area (political participation, employment and earnings, and economic autonomy).

Arkansas' consistently low rankings on most of the indicators calculated by IWPR illustrate the potential interaction among some of the indicators presented in this report. Lower levels of educational attainment, for example, can contribute to lower earnings and more female poverty. Low levels of access to health insurance can contribute to relatively poor physical and mental health and well-being. While the same problems do not always affect the same women, in many cases they reinforce one another.

## Political Participation

Women in Arkansas register and vote at rates lower than women in the rest of the country, and they lack both adequate political representation in elected office and institutional resources such as a commission for women. At the same time, the state has a relatively high ranking for women in elected office, at 20th. Overall, the state ranks 39th and receives a grade of D on the political participation composite index.

## Employment and Earnings

Women in Arkansas participate in the workforce less often, earn wages much lower, and work as managers or professionals much less often than women in the nation as a whole. Their earnings in relation to Arkansas men's are around average for the country—primarily, however, because men's earnings are also relatively low in the state. These factors combine to place Arkansas 50th in the nation on the employment and earnings composite index. The state also receives a grade of F.

## Economic Autonomy

Ranking 50th in economic autonomy, Arkansas' women face serious obstacles in this category as well. Far fewer businesses than average are owned by women in Arkansas, and women in the state are much less likely to have a college education than women in the nation as a whole. In addition, more than 24 percent of Arkansas women lack health insurance, and nearly 17 percent live below the poverty line. Women in these circumstances lack many of the basic necessities of life. Arkansas' problems in guaranteeing women's economic autonomy are reflected in the state's grade of F.

## Reproductive Rights

Arkansas women lack many of the reproductive rights and resources identified as important, and as a result the state ranks 32nd of 51 and receives a grade of D on this composite index. State policies restrict access to abortion by mandating parental notification, and poor women can receive public funding for abortion only under federally mandated, limited circumstances. Moreover for many women, especially those in rural areas, abortion is virtually inaccessible: only 22 percent of Arkansas women live in counties that have abortion providers, and less than 3 percent of counties have abortion providers. Finally, women in Arkansas are not legally guaranteed that their health insurers will provide coverage for contraception, and lesbians do not have a judicially clarified right to adopt their partners' children.

## Health and Well-Being

Women in Arkansas experience many obstacles to good health and well-being compared with women in other states. Arkansas ranks 43rd of all the states on this indicator and receives a grade of D+. Although Arkansas women have lower breast cancer mortality rates and lower chlamydia and AIDS incidence than women in most of the country, they are more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes, to die from heart disease and lung cancer, to have poor mental health, and to have limitations on their physical activity because of health issues.

## 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.

Chart II, the Women's Resources and Rights Checklist, provides an overview of the policies supporting women's rights and the resources available to women in Arkansas. This list derives 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.

Many of the indicators in Chart II can be affected by state policy decisions. As a result, the Women's Resources and Rights Checklist provides a measure of Arkansas' commitment to policies designed to help women achieve economic, political, and social well-being. In Arkansas, women lack many

Chart II: Women's Resources and Rights Checklist

	Yes	No	Other Information	Total Number of States with Policy (of 51) or U.S. Average
<b>Violence Against Women</b>				
Is domestic violence a separate criminal offense in Arkansas?	✓			30
Does Arkansas law require domestic violence training of new police recruits?		✓		32
Domestic violence and sexual assault spending per person:			\$0.28	\$1.34
Is a first stalking offense a felony in Arkansas?	✓			10
Does Arkansas law require sexual assault training for police and prosecutors?		✓		10
<b>Child Support</b>				
Percent of single-mother households receiving child support or alimony:			35%	34%
Percent of child support cases with orders for collection in which support was collected:			42.5%	39.2%
<b>Welfare Policies</b>				
Does Arkansas extend TANF benefits to children born or conceived while a mother is on welfare?		✓		27
Does Arkansas allow receipt of TANF benefits up to or beyond the 60-month federal time limit?		✓	24-month limit	30
Does Arkansas allow welfare recipients at least 24 months before requiring participation in work activities? <sup>1</sup>		✓		23
Does Arkansas provide transitional child care under TANF for more than 12 months?	✓		36 months	33
Has Arkansas' TANF plan been certified or submitted for certification under the Family Violence Option or made other provisions for victims of domestic violence?	✓		Certified	40
In determining welfare eligibility, does Arkansas disregard the equivalent of at least 50 percent of earnings from a full-time, minimum wage job?	✓			25
Average TANF benefit in Arkansas, 1997-98:			\$166.68	\$358.08
<b>Employment/Unemployment Benefits</b>				
Is Arkansas' minimum wage higher than the federal level as of March 2000?	✓			11
Does Arkansas have mandatory temporary disability insurance?		✓		5
Does Arkansas provide Unemployment Insurance benefits to:				
Low-wage workers?			Sometimes	12
Workers seeking part-time jobs?		✓		9
Workers who leave their jobs for certain circumstances ("good cause quits")?	✓			23
As of July 2000, has Arkansas proposed policies allowing workers to use Unemployment Insurance for paid family leave?		✓		0 Enacted; 13 Proposed
Has Arkansas implemented adjustments to achieve pay equity in its state civil service?		✓		20
<b>Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity</b>				
Does Arkansas have civil rights legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity?		✓		19
Does Arkansas have a Hate Crimes law covering sexual orientation?		✓		24
Has Arkansas avoided adopting a ban on same-sex marriage?		✓		20
<b>Reproductive Rights</b>				
Does Arkansas allow access to abortion services:				
Without mandatory parental consent or notification?		✓		9
Without a waiting period?	✓			33

**Chart II: Women's Resources and Rights Checklist, continued**

	Yes	No	Other Information	Total Number of States with Policy (of 51) or U.S. Average
<b>Reproductive Rights, continued</b>				
Does Arkansas provide public funding for abortions under any or most circumstances if a woman is eligible?		✓		15
Does Arkansas require health insurers to provide comprehensive coverage for contraceptives?		✓		11
Does Arkansas require health insurers to provide coverage of infertility treatments?	✓			10
Does Arkansas allow the non-legal parent in a gay/lesbian couple to adopt his/her partner's child? <sup>2</sup>			No case has been tried	21
Does Arkansas require schools to provide sex education?		✓		18
<b>Institutional Resources</b>				
Does Arkansas have a Commission for Women?		✓		39
<b>Total Policies<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>		<b>28 possible</b>

See Appendix III for a detailed description and sources for the items on this checklist.

<sup>1</sup> Arkansas imposes immediate work requirements.

<sup>2</sup> Most states that allow such adoptions do so as the result of court decisions. In Arkansas, no case has yet been tried.

<sup>3</sup> Policies in the "yes" and "no" columns do not add up to 28 because some of Arkansas' policies have mixed evaluations and thus fall in the "other" column.

Compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

rights and resources identified with women's well-being. The state receives a total score of eight out of 28 possible measures presented in the Women's Resources and Rights Checklist.

**Conclusion**

Arkansas illustrates many of the difficult obstacles still facing women in the United States. While women in Arkansas and the United States as a whole are seeing important changes in their lives and in their access to political, economic and social rights, they by no means enjoy equality with men, and they still lack many of the legal guarantees that would allow them to achieve that equality.

In order for women in Arkansas to achieve more equality and greater well-being, the state should adopt the policies it lacks from the Women's Resources and Rights Checklist. In addition, women in Arkansas and in the nation as a whole would benefit from stronger enforcement of equal opportunity laws,

better political representation, adequate and affordable child care, and other policies that would help improve their status.

*The Status of Women in Arkansas is part of an ongoing research project conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) to establish baseline measures of the status of women in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The effort is part of a larger IWPR Economic Policy Education Program, funded primarily by the Ford Foundation, with additional funding by the Motorola Corporation, by Kristie Graham and the Stocker Foundation, by the Minnesota Women's Foundation, and by the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation. The project is intended to improve the ability of advocates and policymakers at the state level to address women's economic issues. The first two series of reports were released in 1996 and 1998 and included a summary national report and 24 state reports. This third series includes nine states as well as an update of the national report.*

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The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is a public policy research organization dedicated to informing and stimulating the debate on public policy issues of critical importance to women and their families. IWPR focuses on poverty and welfare, employment and earnings, work and family issues, the economic and social aspects of health care and domestic violence, and women's civic and political participation. IWPR's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations. IWPR is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. ❖