

Briefing Paper

IWPR # R372

January 2013

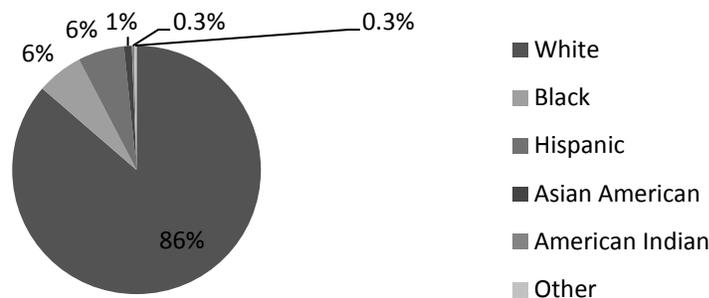
The Status of Women in Buncombe County, North Carolina

Women in Buncombe County, as in North Carolina as a whole, have made much progress during the last few decades, yet more remains to be done to elevate women's status. The majority of women work—many in professional and managerial jobs—and women are a mainstay of the economic health of their communities. Yet, there are some ways in which women's status still lags behind men's, and not all women are prospering equally. This briefing paper provides basic information about the status of women in Buncombe County, focusing on women's earnings and workforce participation, level of education, poverty, access to child care, and health status. It also provides background demographic information about women in the county.

Basic Facts About Women in Buncombe County

The female population in Buncombe County has much less racial and ethnic diversity than the state as a whole. Eighty-six percent of women and girls in the county are white, compared with about two-thirds of the state's female population as a whole (Figure 1 and Table 1). In Buncombe County, black women and girls constitute the next largest racial and ethnic group within the female population at six percent, which is considerably less than their share of the state's total female population (22 percent; Table 1).

Figure 1. Distribution of Women and Girls by Race and Ethnicity in Buncombe County, All Ages, 2008–2010



Note: Racial and ethnic categories are defined as exclusive: white, not Hispanic; black, not Hispanic; Asian American, not Hispanic; American Indian, not Hispanic; and Other, not Hispanic. Those whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. "Other" includes those who chose more than one racial category as well as those not classified by the Census Bureau.

Source: IWPR calculations using 2008–2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder (U.S. Department of Commerce 2012).

The median age for all women and girls in Buncombe County is 42 years, which is four years older than the median age for women and girls in the state and nation as a whole. Eighteen percent of women in Buncombe County are aged 65 and older, compared with 15 percent in North Carolina and the United States as a whole (Table 1).

Table 1. Basic Demographic Statistics for Women and Girls			
	Buncombe County	North Carolina	United States
Total Population	236,318	9,561,558	309,349,689
Number of Women and Girls, All Ages	122,909	4,905,216	157,294,247
Median Age of All Women and Girls	42	38	38
Proportion of Women Aged 65 and Older	18%	15%	15%
Distribution of Women and Girls by Race and Ethnicity, All Ages			
White, Non-Hispanic	86%	65%	64%
Black, Non-Hispanic	6%	22%	13%
Hispanic	6%	8%	16%
Asian American, Non-Hispanic	1%	2%	5%
American Indian, Non-Hispanic	0.3%	1%	1%
Other, Non-Hispanic	0.3%	2%	2%
Proportion of Women Who Are Foreign-Born, All Ages	5%	7%	13%
Proportion of Women Who Are Married, Aged 15 and Older	48%	48%	48%

Note: Data for Buncombe County are for 2008–2010. Data for North Carolina and the United States are for 2010. Those whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic may be of any race. “Other” includes those who chose more than one racial category as well as those not classified by the Census Bureau.

Totals may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Sources: North Carolina and United States figures are based on IWPR analysis of 2010 American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010), except for marital status figures, which are based on IWPR calculations of 2008–2010 and 2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder. All data for Buncombe County are from IWPR calculations using 2008–2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder (U.S. Department of Commerce 2012).

Work and Earnings

The majority of women in Buncombe County are in the workforce. Sixty percent are either employed or actively looking for work, which is quite similar to the proportion of women in the workforce in the state as a whole (59 percent; Table 2). The proportion of women in the labor force in Buncombe County is lower than the proportion of men (69 percent), as is the case in the state and nation overall (Table 2).

Table 2. Overview of Women's and Men's Economic Status

	Buncombe County	North Carolina	United States
Labor Force Participation Rate, Aged 16 and Older			
Women	60%	59%	59%
Men	69%	70%	70%
Mothers with Children Under 18	N/A	74%	73%
Fathers with Children Under 18	N/A	94%	94%
Percent of Employed Women and Men Who Work Full-Time, Year Round, Aged 16–64 Years			
Women	55%	56%	56%
Men	62%	66%	67%
Percent of Women and Men Employed Full-Time, Year-Round in Professional or Managerial Occupations, Aged 16 and Older			
Women	45%	40%	39%
Men	38%	30%	33%
Median Annual Earnings, Full-Time, Year-Round Workers, Aged 16 and Older			
Women	\$31,632	\$33,000	\$36,000
Men	\$37,180	\$40,000	\$45,500
Gender Earnings Ratio, Aged 16 and Older			
	85%	83%	79%
Gender Earnings Ratio, Full-Time, Year-Round Workers, by Educational Attainment, Aged 25 and Older			
Less Than High School Diploma	N/A	76%	74%
High School Diploma or Equivalent	N/A	75%	74%
Some College or Associate's Degree	N/A	76%	76%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	N/A	70%	71%
Proportion of Women and Men with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, Aged 25 and Older			
Women	33%	27%	28%
Men	30%	26%	29%
Proportion of Women and Men with a High School Diploma or Less, Aged 25 and Older			
Women	37%	40%	42%
Men	39%	46%	44%
Percent of Women and Men Aged 18–64 Without Health Insurance Coverage			
Women	19%	21%	19%
Men	26%	26%	25%
Percent of Women and Men Living At or Below Poverty			
Women	14%	17%	15%
Men	13%	13%	12%
Percent of All Households Receiving Food Stamps			
	10%	13%	12%

Notes: Data for Buncombe County are for 2008–2010. Median annual earnings in 2010 inflation-adjusted dollars.

Data for North Carolina and the United States are for 2010 only. N/A indicates data are not available.

Sources: IWPR calculations using 2008-2010 and 2010 American Community Survey (ACS) data accessed through American Fact Finder (U.S. Department of Commerce 2012) and IWPR analysis 2010 Integrated Public-Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

While the majority of employed women in the Buncombe County work full-time (55 percent; Table 2), women in this county are much more likely to work part-time than men (45 percent of employed women work part-time compared with 38 percent of employed men).ⁱ In general, women are more likely than men to say that they work part-time because they cannot find child care or for other family-care related reasons. In the state overall (data are not available for Buncombe County), 20 percent of women, compared with only 3 percent of men, give these reasons for working part-time.ⁱⁱ In addition, although the Great Recession has led both men and women to see an increase in part-time work for economic reasons during the last few years, women are more likely than men to work in the sectors and occupations where jobs are only available on a part-time basis (Shaefer 2009). Part-time workers are much less likely than full-time workers to have access to paid leave, health care, and employer-supported pensions (Society for Human Resource Management 2011).

In addition to these differences in hours worked, women and men in Buncombe County, as in the nation as a whole, tend to work in different occupations. Forty-five percent of employed women in Buncombe County work in professional and managerial jobs, which is a considerably higher proportion than men (38 percent; Table 2). Both women and men in Buncombe County are more likely than their counterparts in the state as a whole to work in these jobs, suggesting that there are strong employment opportunities available to many women in the area.

While employed women in Buncombe County are more likely than employed men to hold professional or managerial jobs, proportionately more employed men in the county hold management positions (13 percent compared with 9 percent). In general, women and men in the area, as in other jurisdictions, tend to work in different occupations. Men in Buncombe County are more likely to work in production occupations (10 percent compared with 5 percent), while women are more likely than men to work in office and administrative support occupations (21 compared with 6 percent) and in education, training, and library occupations (10 compared with 4 percent). Women are also more likely than men to work in health care practitioner, technical, and support occupations (15 compared with 5 percent).ⁱⁱⁱ

Although women in Buncombe County hold a higher proportion of professional occupations than men, they have lower median earnings, a trend that is partially explained by women's lower representation in management jobs and the unequal distribution of women and men across occupations. In 2008–2010, the median annual earnings of women aged 16 and older employed full-time, year-round in Buncombe County were \$31,632 compared with \$37,180 for men. This means that women earned 85 cents for every dollar earned by men, resulting in a gender wage gap of 15 percent. This gap is smaller than the wage gap in both North Carolina (17 percent) and the United States as a whole (21 percent; Table 2).

Educational Attainment

On the whole, women in Buncombe County are well-educated. Thirty-three percent of all women in the area aged 25 and older have a bachelor's degree or higher, which is a greater proportion than among women in the state (27 percent) or the nation as a whole (28 percent). Women in Buncombe County are also more likely than their men to have at least a bachelor's degree (30 percent; Table 2).

Yet, nearly four in ten women (37 percent) in Buncombe County have only a high school diploma or less. Proportionately more men than women have such a low educational attainment (39 percent of men in Buncombe County have a high school diploma or less; Table 2), but in general women with this level of formal education are less likely than comparable men to have jobs with wages sufficient to sustain a family. In the state overall, median annual earnings for women with less than a high school diploma are only \$19,000, which is considerably lower than the earnings of men with this level of education

(\$25,000). Median annual earnings in North Carolina for women with a high school diploma or the equivalent are \$26,000 compared with \$34,700 for similarly-educated men.^{iv}

For both women and men, earnings increase with higher levels of education, although women earn less than men at every educational level. Women with some college education or an associate's degree have median annual earnings of \$31,000, which is less than the earnings of men with only a high school diploma (median earnings for men with some college education or an associate's degree are \$41,000). Women with a bachelor's degree or higher in North Carolina have median earnings of \$47,600, which is substantially less than the earnings of similarly-educated men (\$68,000). At every level of educational attainment, women and men in North Carolina have lower median earnings for full-time, year-round work than their counterparts across the nation.^v

Poverty

A substantial number of women in Buncombe County have incomes that leave them below the federal poverty line. Approximately 13,760 women aged 18 and older (14 percent) in this area live in poverty. Women in Buncombe County are slightly more likely than men to live below the poverty line (13 percent), but less likely than women in the state and nation as a whole to be poor (17 percent and 15 percent, respectively; Table 2).

Families headed by single women with dependent children face a higher risk of living in poverty than other families. In Buncombe County, one in four families with children under 18 (25 percent) are headed by single women, but these families make up half (50 percent) of all families with children that are living in poverty (Table 3). In North Carolina as a whole, only 12 percent of single women with young children (under five) who have incomes below the qualifying poverty threshold receive welfare cash assistance.^{vi}

Child Care

Early care and education programs provide an important workforce support for mothers and fathers. Affordable, quality child care makes it possible for parents to do their jobs while knowing their children are receiving adequate support and a good education. Unfortunately, for many families, limited access to affordable child care is a significant burden. In the absence of quality, affordable child care, many women interrupt their tenure in the labor market, reducing their ability to provide for their families and to save for retirement or emergencies. Other women are forced to put their children in low quality, unreliable care.

In North Carolina, the average fees for year-round, full-time child care range from \$6,227 (for a four-year old in a family child care home) to \$9,185 (for an infant in a child care center). By comparison, the average annual tuition and fees for a public four-year college in North Carolina are \$5,685 (Child Care Aware of America 2012). In Buncombe County, a total of 8,871 children are eligible for child care subsidies because their parents earn too little to afford the fees. Yet, only one in five eligible children receives any subsidized child care (Table 3).

Table 3. The Status of Children: Family Income, Poverty, and Child Care		
	Buncombe County	North Carolina
Annual Living Income Standard¹		
Annual Income a Family of One Adult and Two Children Needs to Afford Essential Living Expenses, 2010	\$39,428	\$41,920
Family Income		
Median Annual Income of Married-Couple Families with Children under 18 Years ²	\$65,408	\$70,124
Median Annual Income of Single Men with Children under 18 Years ²	\$27,976	\$29,874
Median Annual Income of Single Women with Children under 18 Years ²	\$23,925	\$20,393
Poverty		
Number of All Families with Children in Poverty, 2008–2010 ²	4,948	254,650
Share of Families in Poverty with Children Under 18 that Are Headed by Women, 2008–2010 ²	50%	61%
Share of Families with Children Under 18 that Are Headed by Women, 2008–2010 ²	25%	29%
Child Care		
Children Eligible for Child Care Subsidy, SFY 2010–2011 ³	8,871	391,549
Budget Currently Available to Serve Eligible Children, SFY 2010–2011 ³	\$9,400,256	N/A
Percent of Eligible Children Receiving Subsidized Child Care Services, SFY 2010–2011 ³	20%	N/A
Budget per Child Eligible for Child Care Subsidy, SFY 2010–2011	\$1,060	N/A
Total Number of Children Aged 0 to 5 Enrolled in Child Care, 2011 ⁴	4,848	207,953

Note: N/A indicates data not available.

Sources: ¹Sirota and McLenaghan 2010.

²IWPR calculations using 2008–2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder.

³North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education 2012.

⁴The Annie E. Casey Foundation Data Center Kids Count 2012.

Health

Health is an important component of women’s and girls’ overall well-being that contributes to their economic stability, educational attainment, and employment opportunities. While many women in Buncombe County experience good health, others face poor health outcomes, suggesting that women’s health care needs remain an important part of their status that must be examined and addressed.

Having health insurance coverage is critical to women’s access to health care. Approximately 15,000^{vii} women aged 18–64 in Buncombe County, however, do not have basic health insurance (19 percent; Table 2). Lack of basic health insurance leaves women without coverage not only for basic wellness and check up visits, but also for severe or chronic medical problems.

When using an age-adjusted mortality rate, which accounts for distributional age differences among populations, women in Buncombe County have a slightly higher mortality rate from breast cancer than women in the state overall (25.9 per 100,000 compared with 23.5 per 100,000; Table 4). The age-adjusted mortality rates from heart disease, stroke and other cerebrovascular diseases, and diabetes, however, are lower for women in Buncombe County than their counterparts in the state as a whole (Table 4).^{viii}

Although teen pregnancy rates have fallen in the state and nationally in recent years, teenage pregnancy remains a significant concern in many areas. For Buncombe County, the pregnancy rate for teens aged 15–19 is 40.0 per 1,000, which is lower than the pregnancy rate for teens of the same age in the state as a whole (49.7 per 1,000; Table 4).

Table 4. Overview of Women's Health Status			
	Buncombe County	North Carolina	United States
Total Number of Teen Pregnancies (15–19 Years), 2010¹	275	15,957	N/A
Pregnancies Among Teens Aged 15–19, 2010 (Rate per 1,000)¹	40.0	49.7	N/A
Average Annual Mortality Rates Among Women (per 100,000)²			
Breast Cancer, 2005–2009	25.9	23.5	23.0
Cervical Cancer, 2005–2009	N/A	2.3	2.4
Uterine Cancer, 2005–2009	3.9	4.0	4.2
Ovarian Cancer, 2005–2009	7.9	7.9	8.2
Heart Disease Mortality Rate, All Ages, 2005–2009³	139.0	153.6	161.0
Cerebrovascular Disease Mortality Rate, All Ages, 2005–2009³	46.5	50.4	42.7
Diabetes Mortality Rate, All Ages, 2005–2009³	11.8	20.8	19.8

Notes: N/A indicates data are not available.

All mortality rates are per 100,000 and age-adjusted to the total U.S. population in 2000.

Sources: ¹ North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services 2012.

² IWPR compilation of data from the National Cancer Institute State Cancer Profiles 2012.

³ IWPR compilation of data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2012.

Conclusion

Many women in Buncombe County are thriving, yet there are still many areas for improvement, including the wage gap, the dearth of affordable child care, and the lack of basic health insurance. Policy recommendations to address these challenges include

- promoting quality flexible working practices to make it easier for parents to combine paid work with care giving;
- ensuring that employers provide training to employers on best practices for recruiting and retaining women workers, particularly in sectors where they are now under-represented;
- increasing career counseling and financial supports for women with low levels of education;

- facilitating further access to education;
- monitoring workforce development to ensure that women and men have equal access to training in high-growth, well-paid careers;
- supporting more targeted teen pregnancy prevention programs and increased support for teens who are already pregnant and parenting; and
- ensuring that all families who need it receive assistance from “Work First,” North Carolina’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

Methodological Notes

This briefing paper presents data for Buncombe County, North Carolina, and the United States. Demographic and economic data are based on IWPR analysis of the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series version of the American Community Survey (Ruggles et al. 2010) and on 2008–2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder. IWPR used estimates that combine several years of data (2008–2010) for Buncombe County; these estimates ensure sufficient sample sizes that allow for reliable reporting. Data for the state and nation as a whole are based on one-year (2010) data. Data on child care come from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Child Care Aware of America, and the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education. Data on women’s health status are from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Cancer Institute, and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

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Notes

ⁱ IWPR calculations using 2008–2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder (U.S. Department of Commerce 2012).

ⁱⁱ IWPR calculation based on U.S. Department of Labor. 2011. “Table 23: States: Persons at Work 1 to 34 Hours by Sex, Age, Race, Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, and Hours of Work, 2010 Annual Averages.”

ⁱⁱⁱ IWPR calculations using 2008–2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder (U.S. Department of Commerce 2007)

^{iv} IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

^v IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

^{vi} IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

^{vii} IWPR calculations using 2008–2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder (U.S. Department of Commerce 2012).

^{viii} Heart disease includes acute and chronic rheumatic fever and heart disease, hypertensive heart and renal disease, ischaemic heart disease, pulmonary heart disease and diseases of pulmonary circulation, and other forms of heart disease. Cerebrovascular disease includes cerebral haemorrhages, cerebral infarction, stroke, and other cerebrovascular diseases. Diabetes includes diabetes mellitus.

This briefing paper was prepared by Cynthia Hess, Ph.D., and Youngmin Yi with support provided by the N.C. Council for Women, Wells Fargo, Women for Women of the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, the Mountain Area Health Education Center Department of OB-GYN, and the North Carolina Women’s Fund at the North Carolina Community Foundation.

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