

## Nurses' Wages: An Exception to the Law of Supply and Demand?

Vicky Lovell

On March 8, 2006, IWPR released a new report, *Solving the Nursing Shortage through Higher Wages*, that analyzes the factors that influence the supply and wages of hospital nurses. As a traditionally female-dominated job (even now, 93 percent of hospital nurses are women), nursing is still colored by old norms about the value of women's work and women's opportunities for professional recognition. More than 1.3 million women work as hospital nurses and more are needed each year, so the quality of these jobs is extremely important for women.

Many hospital administrators complain that there are not enough nurses to fill funded positions—that there is a nurse shortage. Hospital associations predict a crisis in our ability to provide adequate health care, and nurses are concerned that understaffing is affecting the quality of patient care. State and federal

policy makers are being asked to expand subsidies for nurse education and finance media campaigns to make nursing more attractive. There may be good rationales for these programs, but, if the real reason hospitals cannot hire enough nurses is that their wage offers are too low, increasing the number of qualified

workers will not solve the problem—the new nurse graduates will look for more attractive jobs with other employers, such as private physicians' offices. Our report finds that analyses of the nurse workforce largely ignore the relationship between wages and nurse labor supply:

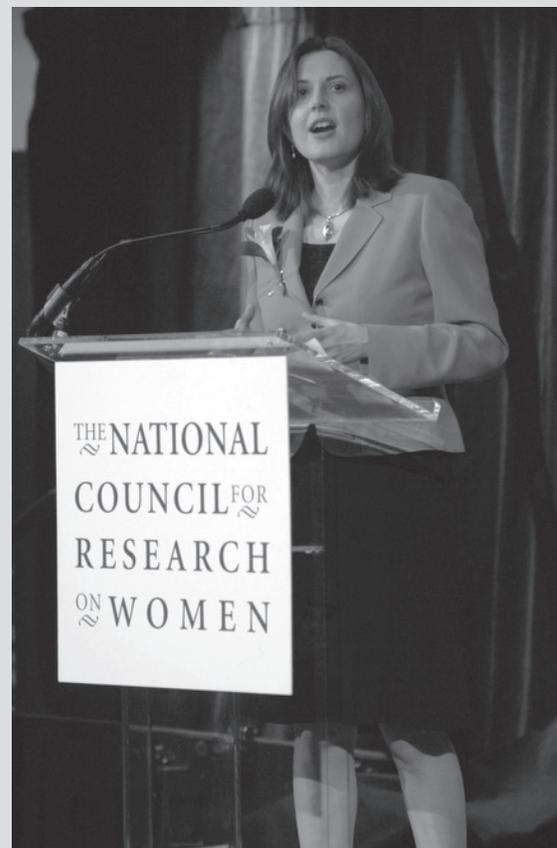
*(cont'd on p. 4)*

## IWPR Receives Award for Policy Research Work

Alexandra Borosova

The Institute for Women's Policy Research is honored to be the recipient of the "Women Who Make a Difference" Member Center Award from the National Council for Research on Women (NCRW) for outstanding work in policy research. This award recognizes outstanding women leaders and organizations working in a variety of disciplines for their unique ability to project their visions for a better world onto local, national, and global landscapes.

Dr. Barbara Gault accepted the award on behalf of IWPR at the annual awards dinner held on March 7, 2006, in New York City. In her acceptance speech, Dr. Gault discussed the importance of continuing to advocate for more comprehensive and accessible government information on women, and extended special thanks to NCRW Board member, Mariam K. Chamberlain, for her inspiration and leadership. Dr. Chamberlain also sits on IWPR's Board, and the Institute has named and endowed a fellowship in her honor.



*Barbara Gault, Ph.D., is the Vice President and Director of Research of IWPR*

NCRW is an umbrella organization of 106 university and non-university based research centers working to promote debate, policies, and practices to build a more inclusive and equitable world for women and girls.

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IWPR, an independent, non-profit, research organization, works in affiliation with the graduate programs in public policy & women's studies at The George Washington University.

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

A recent review of the changes in women's employment, family behavior, and attitudes by three sociologists, David A. Cotter, Joan M. Hermsen, and Reeve Vanneman, argues that women's progress toward equality has stalled in the United States and women may even have slipped backward. Published by the Population Reference Bureau with the Russell Sage Foundation, the short report cites the recent fall in women's labor force participation as well as changes in attitudes to make their case. While they note that their claim is controversial, they say the only remaining questions in their mind are whether the slowdown is an actual backward movement and whether it is only a temporary setback or the start of a long lasting trend.

Partly because labor force participation of men also falls in recession, such as we experienced in 2001, I am less sure the employment data indicate even a stall. Other indicators have recently turned positive. For example, after a long period beginning in the early 1990s of little or no progress in narrowing the gender wage gap, it now appears to be closing further. (Yes, it is too early to tell if this positive trend of the past several years is a blip or longer lasting, too.) In my view, the strong commitment women have made to education at the college level and beyond makes it unlikely that women will step back to more domestic pursuits in large numbers. As a popular World War I song had it: "*How 'Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm? (After They've Seen Paree)?*"

*The Institute for Women's Policy Research conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities, and societies.*

Leslie Bennetts, a long-time *Vanity Fair* reporter (formerly at *The New York Times*) is working on a book designed to highlight the benefits (rather than the challenges) of combining work and family and the economic and other dangers to women of focusing on children and family building to the exclusion of work. She hopes her book will counter the copious mainstream media coverage that seems to be designed to encourage well-educated and well-heeled young women to stay home with their children.

Meantime, the welfare bill that I wrote about in the last issue finally did pass on February 8, 2006, as part of The Budget Reconciliation Bill, and, like its predecessor in 1996, represents clear backward movement for low-income women. Virtually no positive changes were made in the law and states will be under increased pressure to move harder to employ parents, who often face multiple problems, into the workforce. Marriage promotion and responsible fatherhood initiatives gained \$150 million.

On a more positive note, late last year the women worker data series in the Bureau of Labor Statistics payroll survey of business establishments was reinstated (see story on page 4). I especially want to thank key staff on the Hill: Holly Fechner, policy director and chief labor and pension counsel for the U. S. Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee on Sen. Edward Kennedy's staff; Bill Parsons, former senior policy advisor on Rep. Chris Van Hollen's staff; Letty Mederos, Chief of Staff for Rep. Rosa DeLauro; and Adrienne Hallett, legislative assistant on the appropriations committee on Sen. Tom Harkin's staff, for making this victory possible.

Two steps back for women, one step forward?

*Heidi Hartmann*

# After the Hurricanes: Inequalities in Wages and Education

Erica Williams

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita brought great devastation to the Gulf Coast region, destroying homes and lives and uncovering deep inequalities along gender, race, and class lines. IWPR responded to the events in the Gulf Coast last year by analyzing poverty levels among women and people of color prior to the hurricanes. We hoped that our look at the region would bring a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by women and people of color upon the arrival of the storms and the challenges that lay ahead. Soon, IWPR will release *The Women of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast: Multiple Disadvantages and Key Assets for Recovery, Part II. Employment and Earnings, Gender, Race, and Class*. This Briefing Paper will look at the role women played in the region's labor market prior to the hurricanes and give policy recommendations for reincorporating women into the labor market during and after the rebuilding period.

Using 2004 data from the American Community Survey and 2000 Census data from the Public Use Microdata Sample, IWPR examines women's employment and earnings in regions affected by the hurricanes. Our analysis shows that women in these regions, and particularly women of color, earned far less than white men and faced pervasive labor market segregation by sex and race.

In 2004, in the city of New Orleans, for example, the ratio between all women and white men's median annual earnings was 53.9 percent, far lower than the national ratio (68.8 percent). For women of color, the picture was worse. The wage ratio between Black women and white men's median annual earnings was 43.9 percent in the city of New Orleans, 44.7 percent in the New Orleans metro area, and 47.2 percent in the Beaumont-Port

Alexandra Borosova

IWPR's research has received significant attention in the media over the last few months on a number of issues affecting women and their families.

IWPR's research on sick leave continues to receive widespread attention, including mention in *The Boston Globe*, CNN's *Situation Room* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

IWPR's new report, *Solving the Nursing Shortage through Higher Wages*, was mentioned and cited in *The Washington Post*, *The Business Press*, *Orlando Business Journal*, *EndoNurse.com*, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, *AlertNet*, *Nursezone.com*, *Dow Jones International News*, and an *Associated Press* article running in papers around the country.

Dr. Amy Caiazza was quoted in an article running in *Times Union* (NY), *The Record Bergen* (NJ), and the *Postwritersgroup.com*, explaining that the higher rate of success of women in politics abroad than in the United States is partly due to historical reasons and election systems. Dr. Avis Jones-DeWeever was similarly quoted and pictured in a *Voices of America News* article, and a *Knight Ridder* article running in *The Mercury News* (CA). Barbara Gault's interview on the topic aired on an NPR radio show on women's political participation.

IWPR's *Status of Women in the States* reports continue to spur discussion in the nation's media outlets. The reports were cited in *The Providence Journal*, *Biz-*

*women.com*, *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, *City Life* (NV), *Albuquerque Journal*, *The Star Ledger* (NJ), *Omaha-World Herald* (NE), *Lincoln Journal Star* (NE), *Detroit Free Press*, *Courier-Journal* (KY), *Knight Ridder Tribune News*, the *Business and Economic Review*, *The Byrn-College Station Eagle* (TX), *US Fed News*, *AlertNet* and *Birmingham News*, *Associated Press*, *The Plain Dealer* (OH), and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

IWPR's recent briefing paper, *The Women of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast: Multiple Disadvantages and Key Assets for Recovery, Part I*, was cited in the *Brain Child Magazine*, the *Kansas City infoZine* (MO), *Sun Herald*, *Women's E-News*, and an *Associated Press* article running in *The Canadian Press*, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, *JournalNow.com* (NC), and the *Leesville Daily Leader* (LA).

IWPR's wage gap research persists in forming national debates. Dr. Hartmann was quoted on *CNN.com* and interviewed on *Marketplace* about the reasons for the national wage gap between men and women. IWPR was also cited in the *Columbia Daily Tribune*, *The Missourian*, *The Daily Northwestern*, *The Record* (NJ), *The Houston Chronicle*, and the *Times Union* (Albany, NY), the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* (NY), *US Fed News*, *The Jakarta Post*, *Omaha World-Herald*, *bizwomen.com*, *Connecticut Post*, *Yearbook of Experts*, and *Women's E-News*.

Arthur metro area of Texas, compared with 62.7 percent nationally.

These wage disparities in part reflect a disparity in access to higher education. While Black women in the city of New Orleans in 2004 were more likely to have a college degree than they were in the nation as a whole (18.9 percent versus 17.5 percent), they were far less likely to

have this level of education than white women and men in the city (50.6 percent and 61.8 percent, respectively).

These findings highlights the economic and social challenges that women will face upon returning to the region and the need to consider their experiences the rebuilding process unfolds.

## Nurses' Wages

(cont'd from p. 1)

Only 11 of 49 recent analyses we reviewed recommended raising wages in order to draw more nurses to hospital employment. This suggests that hospital administrators and government policy makers may not have a complete picture of how nurse labor supply can be increased.

To get the whole story, we used data from the Current Population Survey to explore recent changes in nurse wages and employment. Hospital nurses' wages actually declined from 1996 to 2001, even though hospitals began experiencing trouble filling nurse positions by 1998. We would have expected employers facing a labor shortage to raise wages—the law of supply and demand predicts that will attract workers. Comparing trends in hospital nurses' wages to the number of nurses working in hospitals over the same period, the data suggest that nurses may be quite responsive to wages: When wages fail to increase, fewer nurses want to work for hospitals; but when wages begin to rise, so does employment. For instance, nurses' median weekly earnings fell 1.5 percent (in inflation-adjusted dollars) from 1996 to 2000, and the number of nurses working in hospitals dropped by about 14,000 over that period. Wages finally rose in 2001, and hospitals were able to employ 9.2 percent, or 112,000, more nurses the following year.

The research literature shows that hospitals' decisions about how many nurses to employ have direct impacts on patients' health. Low staffing levels are associated with worse patient outcomes and longer hospital stays. So, if hospitals hire too few nurses, patient care suffers. This makes it very important from the consumer's perspective that hospitals employ the right number of nurses. Hospitals' hiring practices are not just a matter of hospital finances; they are a concern for everyone who uses hospital services.

Rather than raising wages to attract more nurses, hospitals often use mandatory overtime, temporary workers, one-time hiring bonuses, and understaffing to work around their failure to attract enough nurses. These approaches all have negative consequences for quality of patient care, while failing to ensure a stable, adequate nurse supply. Increasing the union presence in hospitals could help reach this goal; unions boost the wages of hospital nurses by 13 percent. In fact, all nurses, union and non-union alike, earn more in cities with greater union density than nurses elsewhere. And nurse/patient ratios are higher in cities with a stronger union presence in nursing.

When nurses' wages do not increase in response to hospitals' staffing concerns, there is reason to suspect that the practice of collusion—employers agreeing with one another to hold down wages—has yet to be eliminated in hospital settings. More transparent and fairer wage-setting, and stronger enforcement of government standards, are needed so that wages can rise as appropriate to draw nurses to bedside care.

This study was funded by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which is using the report in its new Nurse Alliance organizing campaign. IWPR staff are traveling to meetings and hearings across the country to discuss the relationships between nurse pay, nurse labor supply, and patient care with nurses, policy makers, and other audiences.

## IWPR Leads the Fight to Save Data on Women Workers!

Lara Hinz

IWPR is proud to announce that the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Women Workers Data Series has been saved! The BLS had discontinued this data series last July, with the approval of the Office of Management and Budget. Nearly a year earlier, IWPR, working with other women's groups, had launched a campaign to encourage key organizations to submit letters in favor of keeping the data. Despite receiving 5,000 comments during an open comment period that ran at least 9 to 1 in favor of keeping the data, the BLS proceeded with its plan to remove the women worker question from its nationwide payroll survey. Sen. Kennedy, however, working with Senators Harkin, Lautenberg, and Clinton was able to put forth an amendment to the Labor-HHS appropriations bill that required the BLS to reinstate the collection of the data series. Rep. Rosa DeLauro and Rep. Chris Van Hollen championed the cause on the House side. The interest and persistence of several congressional staff members were also key to the success of the campaign.

The amendment was passed by a voice vote on the floor of the Senate on October 26, 2005, was incorporated in the House-Senate conference bill, and remained in the bill when it was signed into law by the President in late December.

Thanks to the many individuals, organizations, and political allies who joined this fight, this data series of 40 years' standing will be reinstated, and economists and other social scientists will be able to continue to use it to study women's employment by industry across the business cycle, leading to a better understanding of the ups, downs, and long term growth of the U.S. economy. Business owners, labor leaders, women's advocates, and policy makers will be able to see women's employment growth, or the lack of it, by detailed industries. And all of us will be better informed about women's employment opportunities.



Solving the Nursing Shortage through Higher Wages

Institute for Women's Policy Research

Purchase this new report at [www.iwpr.org](http://www.iwpr.org). See page 7 for a list of other new releases from IWPR!

# event updates

## Politics, Religion, and Women's Public Vision

Amy Caiazza and Inku Subedi

This winter and spring, IWPR continued its work on religion, politics, and women's public vision with a series of events designed to engage women in conversations about values, women's movements, and public life.

On January 24<sup>th</sup>, IWPR and the Pluralism Project of Harvard University held a standing-room only screening of a new film sponsored by the Pluralism Project, *Acting on Faith: Women's New Religious Activism in America*. *Acting on Faith* offers an intimate look at the lives and work of three American women—one Buddhist, one Hindu, and one Muslim—for whom faith, activism, and identity are intertwined. After the screening, audience members engaged in a discussion about religion, feminism, and the changing face of American activism.

IWPR also sponsored a lively luncheon discussion on March 9<sup>th</sup> in Washington, DC, on the role of religion in women's movement organizing. The meeting, which brought together women's movement leaders from the DC-area, was led by Dr. Constance Buchanan, Senior Program Officer in Religion at the Ford Foundation, and Dr. Heidi Hartmann, President of the Institute for Women's Policy Research. Participants engaged

in thought-provoking debates on many topics, including the roles of religion and secularism in American democracy and whether the women's movement needs a more explicit grounding in moral values. Participants agreed that there is a need to address the growing visibility of progressive religious leaders and values by promoting a feminist moral voice that can advocate visibly for women's priorities.



Dr. Amy Caiazza welcomes the audience at the film screening

IWPR's Working Group on Women's Public Vision continued its work by writing a draft statement of women's moral values and vision, using an online collaborative writing software developed by Faith Voices for the Common Good. Participants worked to articulate women's vision for public life and identify ways to promote that vision in policy and practice. In the coming months, this writing process will be opened up



(Clockwise from top) Frances Kissling, Susan Scanlan, Jamillah Karim, Cheryl Cooper, & Susie Johnson at the March 9<sup>th</sup> luncheon discussion



Audience members watch the film at IWPR



IWPR released a new report on cultivating women's political activism and leadership, *Called To Speak*, on April 11, 2006, through an audio news conference with the report's author (Amy Caiazza, Ph.D.) and activists. The report is based on interviews with some of the most creative and exciting women in interfaith community organizing today. A main finding is that groups can successfully encourage political activism by providing women ways to feel comfortable expressing anger and outrage in public life, something they are often afraid to do.

Listen to the audio news conference online at

[www.iwpr.org](http://www.iwpr.org)

to women from all over the world who would like to participate. The Working Group is also planning a series of grassroots forums for later this year on religion, feminism, and social justice in the Baltimore and Washington areas, in partnership with local community organizations.

IWPR will continue our outreach work on religion, values, and public life throughout the year. Please visit our website for future events, commentary, and publications.



**Ruth Sidel, Ph.D.**

*Holly Trout*

IWPR member, Dr. Ruth Sidel, has been a champion of issues regarding women and their families throughout her career. Dr. Sidel is currently a professor of sociology at Hunter College in New York, and the author of *Unsung Heroines: Single Mothers and the American Dream*, which was released in April.

Dr. Sidel has been interested in issues facing single mothers for some time. Raised by her father, Dr. Sidel observed first hand how single fathers are perceived and treated differently by society than single mothers. Her father was seen as a hero for raising a small child alone while single mothers are all-too-often criticized, stereotyped, and blamed for virtually all of the problems affecting the American family. *Unsung Heroines* presents readers with an opportunity to hear from women about their lives and their struggles to care for themselves and their children.

Dr. Sidel has followed the work of IWPR for many years and has found it to be a valuable source for her current work, as well as previous work on women and poverty. Dr. Sidel believes that “without this kind of data, improving the lives of women, children and indeed all families would be virtually impossible.” Dr. Sidel is also the author of *Keeping Women and Children Last: America’s War on the Poor* and *On Her Own: Growing Up in the Shadow of the American Dream*.

## IWPR General and Project Support

*Amy Lin*

The Institute is able to fulfill its mission of providing information about economic indicators, social trends, and the effects of public policies on women and their families with the generous support of: the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to work with several partners to promote an economic development approach to early care and education; Bell South to study the wages of communication workers in partnership with the Communications Workers of America and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; the Sunrise Foundation for increasing IWPR’s media outreach; AARP for a comprehensive book on women’s retirement; the Otto Bremer Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for an evaluation of *The Status of Women in the States* project; the Ford Foundation, the Metro America Foundation, and the Retirement Research Foundation for Social Security research and education; Pre-K Now and the National Institute for Ear-

ly Education Research for cost estimates related to preschool expansion; the Service Employees International Union for a study on nurses’ wages; the National Education Association for work on the quality of child care jobs; the Ford Foundation for a project to raise awareness of women’s involvement in faith-based organizing; the Annie E. Casey Foundation for work on job quality, paid leave, welfare programs, and work supports; the Ford Foundation for work on paid family leave and job quality; the Sister Fund for work on developing forums for issues on faith and feminism; Soroptimist International of the Americas and the Ms. Foundation for continued work on the status of women in the Gulf Coast affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; the New Prospect Foundation; the New Directions Foundation; the Stewart R. Mott Charitable Trust, and many others for general support funding.

### *Gifts of Remembrance and Tribute*

In 2005, some of our members paid tribute to important people in their lives with these special gift designations:

#### *In memory*

- Shannon Brown (Jami Brown)
- Dorothy Cornwall Cheney (Frances Hutner)
- Dorothy and William Hays (Rosemary Hays-Thomas)
- Mary Brewster Wells (David Wells and Jack Wells)

#### *In honor*

- Barbara Bergmann (Marianne Ferber)
- Ellen Bravo (Linda Garcia Barnard)
- Mariam Chamberlain (Carol Kehr Tittle)
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- Heidi Hartmann (Carol Baney Martin)
- Marie Withers Osmond (Patricia Yancey Martin)
- Sally Bould Stan (Sally Bould)

If you would like to designate your next IWPR donation *In honor* or *In memory* of someone special, please contact **Amy Lin** via email at [lin@iwpr.org](mailto:lin@iwpr.org) or (202) 785-5100 x38.

## MAJOR NEW GRANT from the Kellogg Foundation will Fund Partnership to Link Economic Development and Child Care

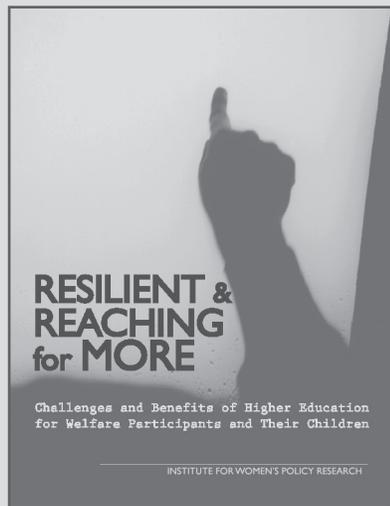
Alexandra Borosova

IWPR, along with several other organizational partners, recently received a major grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for an exciting project to craft and advance new policy approaches that link child care with economic development. The purpose of the project is threefold: 1) to promote pioneering public policy that applies economic development strategies to strengthen the early care and education sector; 2) to test ideas at the local and state level by investing in Venture Grants; and 3) to bring promising local efforts to scale by building a network of innovative leaders from a variety of fields beyond early care and education, including finance, planning, and community and economic development, who can make early care and education a core part of economic development policy.

The project will be carried out by an interdisciplinary team of four collaborating organizations: the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance, Cornell University, Smart Start's National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC), and the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

IWPR anticipates that the project will lead to greater visibility of the economic importance of early care and education, broader utilization of economic development approaches in developing, improving, and expanding early care and education, and greater involvement of a diverse group of professionals in policy discussions on economic development and early care and education.

The project is funded by a \$1,240,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan, and will run from 2006 through 2008.



### REPORT

#### ***Resilient & Reaching for More: Challenges and Benefits of Higher Education for Welfare Participants and Their Children***

By Avis Jones-DeWeever & Barbara Gault  
This report examines both the challenges and pay-offs associated with acquiring higher education under the tight constraints of welfare reform. IWPR hopes this work will inform policies that help to build sustainable pathways out of poverty for low-income women who receive welfare.

April 2006

IWPR No. D466, 64 pages, \$15

### REPORT

#### ***Called to Speak: Six Strategies That Encourage Women's Political Activism***

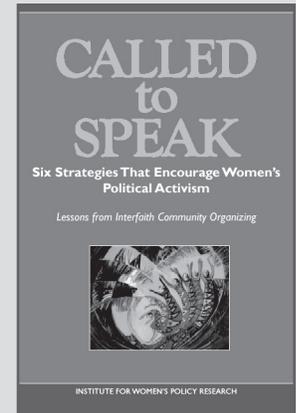
By Amy Caiazza

This report outlines strategies to encourage women's political activism and urges groups concerned with social justice to cultivate women's political leadership.

April 2006

IWPR No. I916, 76 pages, \$10

Research-in-Brief (IWPR No. I917)



### REPORT

#### ***Solving the Nursing Shortage through Higher Wages***

By Vicky Lovell.

This report looks in detail at trends in nurse employment and wages.

March 2006

IWPR No. C363A, 34 pages, \$10

(See pages 1 and 4 for more information about this report)

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Contact Amy Lin at [Lin@iwpr.org](mailto:Lin@iwpr.org) or (202) 785-5100 ext. 38, or visit [www.haworthpress.com/web/JWPP/](http://www.haworthpress.com/web/JWPP/)

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