

## **What's at Stake: Women and Work/ Family Policies**

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The ongoing struggle to meet both work and family obligations is a constant for most women these days, though it only rarely turns up in election debates and is even less frequently considered a high priority by candidates.

But we as women know that the lack of realistic work/family policies seriously impacts women's lives as well as families' economic security, and that these are issues that we need our elected official to address.

### **Women as Workers and Caregivers**

Currently almost 2.3 million women are in North Carolina's labor force.<sup>1</sup> Women make up almost half (47.3 percent) of North Carolina's workers, and women's wages are essential to supporting our families.<sup>2</sup>

Women are also caregivers, frequently providing unpaid care to our children and other family members. Nearly three out of four NC mothers with children under 18 are in the labor force, many of them as their family's primary breadwinners.<sup>3</sup> By the time they reach 44, 81% of all American women are mothers.<sup>4</sup>

Women are also the primary unpaid caregivers for the elderly or disabled adults in their families and communities. In 2009, a study found that 1.2 million North Carolinians cared for adult family members, partners, or friends suffering from chronic illness.<sup>5</sup> It's estimated that between 69-75% of caregivers nationally are women, and that they provide an estimated \$148 to \$188 billion in informal, unpaid care annually.<sup>6</sup> The majority (74 percent) of caregivers have simultaneously been employed at some point in their caregiving experience.<sup>7</sup> And a growing number of women belong to the "sandwich" generation, caring for both their children and their parents. According to estimates from the Pew Research Center, at least one out of every eight Americans between the ages of 40 and 60 years of age is caring for an aging parent while also raising their own children.<sup>8</sup>

Our nation's labor force has changed over the past several decades, but our country is still stuck with 1950's workplace policies that fail to recognize the dual demands placed on women. Even as more women are participating in paid work, we continue to lack many family-friendly policies that citizens of most other industrialized countries take as a given like paid family leave, a minimum number of paid sick days, workplace flexibility, and protection from family responsibilities discrimination.

### **Paid Family Leave**

While the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was a major step forward for workplace policies, many workers are still not covered as result of the law's eligibility restrictions.. And even those who are covered are not entitled to any paid leave. In fact, neither federal nor NC law \ requires employers to provide any paid family leave \ to care for a workers' own health, for a sick family member, or to bond with a new child.<sup>9</sup>

Of the 173 countries that were the subject of a study of international workplace policies, there were only four countries that didn't provide some form of paid family leave for new mothers. The four countries that did not – and do not – have some form of paid leave for new mothers are Papua New Guinea, Swaziland, Lesotho, and the United States. As a result, having a baby is a top cause of "poverty spells" in this country--a time when a family's income dips below what it needs for basic living expenses like food and rent.<sup>10</sup>

The lack of these basic supports places families in economic jeopardy when a new child is born or an employee, spouse, child, or elderly parent faces illness.

Over half of America's mothers (51%) return to work within four months of giving birth<sup>11</sup>, many because there is no requirement for paid maternity leave. Even those covered by FMLA may not be able to afford taking unpaid time off. This has serious implications for infants' health. Returning to work is a leading cause in the drop in breastfeeding rates, which could be delayed if women had time to establish nursing before having to return to work.<sup>12</sup> Paid family leave has also been shown to reduce infant mortality by as much as 20%.<sup>13</sup> NC currently ranks 44<sup>th</sup> in terms of infant mortality rates<sup>14</sup>, a situation that could be improved if parents had paid leave to care for their infants. Finally, paid family leave

has impacts on families' economic security. A recent study found that women who took paid leave after a child's birth reported stronger labor force attachment and positive changes in wages the year after the child's birth.<sup>15</sup>

**Paid Sick Days** Every day across the state working mothers get sick or need to care for their sick children, but North Carolina's workers don't have protection under state or federal laws providing pay for time missed due to short-term illnesses. When employees cannot earn paid sick days to care for themselves or their families, we are all affected. 1.4 million North Carolinians lack even a minimum number of paid sick days to care for their own health, and even fewer can take time off to care for their children when they are sick.<sup>16</sup> As a result, mothers are too often forced to choose between a day's pay and caring for their sick children. This has negative impacts on the children's health, as well as negative public health impacts as sick children are sent to school or day care and sick adults report to work.<sup>17</sup>

### **Budget Cuts Exacerbate Work/ Family Challenges**

Recent budget cuts to early learning programs, child care subsidies, and programs providing in-home care giving services for the disabled and the elderly have increased the difficulties for women trying to balance work and family responsibilities.

Too often in budget debates elected leaders fail to recognize the essential role these programs play in keeping women in the work force and enabling us to support our families.<sup>18</sup>

### **Pay Inequity and Discrimination**

While women are struggling to find ways to balance work and family responsibilities and remain in the workplace to bring needed income to our families, we continue to face additional challenges in the form of pay inequity, underemployment, and discrimination.

Women in NC still only earn 80.7 percent of men's earnings<sup>19</sup> and are overrepresented in part-time work, which is more likely to pay lower wages and less likely to offer benefits. In 2010, 28.1% of women in North Carolina worked part-time, compared to 17.6 percent of men.<sup>20</sup>

And mothers face additional discrimination. A recent study found that with equal resumes moms are 79% less likely to be hired than non-moms, and offered \$11,000 lower starting salaries. Fathers were offered more.<sup>21</sup> Think of what families could do with that deserved, and earned money if women were paid equally for equal work.

### **What's at Stake in the Election**

Women have come a long way in the workplace, but we continue to face real and significant challenges. North Carolinians---both women and men--- are struggling to balance work and family,<sup>22</sup> and the vast majority want to see policy makers put laws in place that will let them fulfill their responsibilities at work without giving short shrift to their families. In fact, 76 percent of registered voters support laws to provide paid leave for family care and childbirth, 69 percent support laws to provide paid sick days; and 64 percent support policies to provide workers with the right to a flexible work schedule.<sup>23</sup>

But this won't happen if our lawmakers fail to understand that these issues are a priority for voters.

By raising these issues at candidate forums, posing them in letters to the editor, and supporting candidates who support family-friendly workplace policies, we can help create the kind of workplaces we all deserve.

**For more information, please visit:**

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

<http://www.ncfamiliescare.org/>

<http://familyvaluesatwork.org>

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

<sup>1</sup> Schoenbach, Sabine and Louisa Warren, Time to Care: How North Carolina can Promote Health, Support Workers, and Strengthen Families, North Carolina Justice Center citing U.S. Census Bureau, ACS American Community Survey, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Schoenbach, Sabine and Louisa Warren, Time to Care: How North Carolina can Promote Health, Support Workers, and Strengthen Families, North Carolina Justice Center citing Economic Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey data, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Schoenbach, Sabine and Louisa Warren, Time to Care: How North Carolina can Promote Health, Support Workers, and Strengthen Families, North Carolina Justice Center citing Economic Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey data, March 2009.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.now.org/issues/mothers/facts.html>

<sup>5</sup> Schoenbach, Sabine and Louisa Warren, Time to Care: How North Carolina can Promote Health, Support Workers, and Strengthen Families, North Carolina Justice Center citing Feinberg, Lynn, Susan C. Reinhard, Air Houser, and Rita Choula. July 2011. "Valuing the Invaluable: 2011 Update-the Growing Contributions and Costs of Caregiving," AARP Public Policy Institute.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.now.org/issues/mothers/facts.html>

<sup>7</sup> Schoenbach, Sabine and Louisa Warren, Time to Care: How North Carolina can Promote Health, Support Workers, and Strengthen Families, North Carolina Justice Center citing Feinberg, Lynn, Susan C. Reinhard, Air Houser, and Rita Choula. July 2011. "Valuing the Invaluable: 2011 Update-the Growing Contributions and Costs of Caregiving," AARP Public Policy Institute.

<sup>8</sup> <http://seniorinsider.com/relationships/relationship-articles/the-sandwich-generation>

<sup>9</sup> Schoenbach, Sabine and Louisa Warren, Time to Care: How North Carolina can Promote Health, Support Workers, and Strengthen Families, North Carolina Justice Center.

<sup>10</sup> Mendel, Richard. September 2007. "Family Values at Work: It's About Time!," MultiState Working Families Consortium.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.now.org/issues/mothers/facts.html>

<sup>12</sup> Schoenbach, Sabine and Louisa Warren, Time to Care: How North Carolina can Promote Health, Support Workers, and Strengthen Families, North Carolina Justice Center citing Sundbye, Annamaria and Ariane Hegewish. May 2011. "Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Leave in the United States," Institute for Women's Policy Research.

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.momsrising.org/issues\\_and\\_resources/maternity](http://www.momsrising.org/issues_and_resources/maternity)

<sup>14</sup> Price, Jay. November 2, 2011. "Infant Mortality Drops in NC," News & Observer

<sup>15</sup> Houser, Linda and Thomas P. Vartanian, "Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public, Rutgers Center for Women and Work, January 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Schoenbach, Sabine and Louisa Warren, Time to Care: How North Carolina can Promote Health, Support Workers, and Strengthen Families, North Carolina Justice Center citing Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of 2009-2010 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) and 2009 American Community Survey.

<sup>17</sup> Schoenbach, Sabine and Louisa Warren, Time to Care: How North Carolina can Promote Health, Support Workers, and Strengthen Families, North Carolina Justice Center citing Smith, Tom W. and Jibum Kim at NORC. June 2010. "Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences," Public Welfare Foundation.

<sup>18</sup> "Women and the Economy," North Carolina Justice Center, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> "Women and the Economy," North Carolina Justice Center, 2012, citing U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Briefs. Issued September 2010. Men and Women's Earnings for States and Metropolitan Statistical Areas: 2009.

<sup>20</sup> "Women and the Economy," North Carolina Justice Center, 2012, citing Economic Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey Data, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Schoenbach, Sabine and Louisa Warren, Time to Care: How North Carolina can Promote Health, Support Workers, and Strengthen Families, North Carolina Justice Center citing Correll, Shelly J., Stephen Benard, and In Paik, 2007. Getting a Job: Is there a Motherhood Penalty? Am. J. of Sociology

<sup>22</sup> Schoenbach, Sabine and Louisa Warren, Time to Care: How North Carolina can Promote Health, Support Workers, and Strengthen Families, North Carolina Justice Center citing Boushey, Heather and Joan Williams. 2010. "The Three Faces of Work-Family Conflict: The Poor, the Professionals, and the Missing Middle," Center for American Progress and the Center for WorkLife Law.

<sup>23</sup> Schoenbach, Sabine and Louisa Warren, Time to Care: How North Carolina can Promote Health, Support Workers, and Strengthen Families, North Carolina Justice Center citing Institute for Women's Policy Research. October 29, 2010. "Press Release: Majority of Workers Support Workplace Flexibility, Job Quality, and Family Support Policies."

