



The Status of Women in the Asheville Metropolitan Area, North Carolina

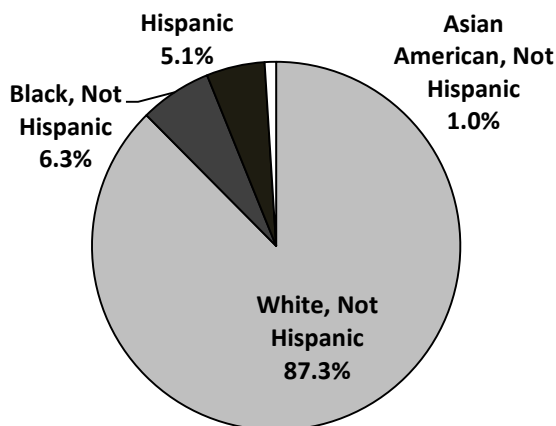
Introduction

Women in the Asheville, North Carolina metropolitan area,¹ and in North Carolina as a whole, have made much progress during the last few decades. The majority of women work—many in professional and managerial jobs—and women are a mainstay of the economic health of their communities. Yet, not all women are prospering. This fact sheet provides basic information about the status of women in the Asheville area (which includes Buncombe and Madison counties), 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 region.

Basic Facts About Women in the Asheville Metropolitan Area

Approximately one in eight women in the Asheville metropolitan area is a woman of color, making this area less racially and ethnically diverse than the state as a whole, where one in three women are from minority backgrounds. The proportion of women in the Asheville area who are foreign-born, however, is not much lower than in the state overall (five percent compared with seven percent; Table 1). The median age among women in the Asheville area is 42, four years older than in the state and the United States as a whole. Eighteen percent of women in the metropolitan area are 65 years and older, compared with 15 percent in the state. As in the United States, and North Carolina overall, one in two women in the Asheville area is married.

Figure 1. Distribution of Women and Girls by Race and Ethnicity in Asheville Metropolitan Area, All Ages, 2008–2010



Note: Total does not add to 100 due to rounding.
 Source: IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

Table 1. Basic Demographic Statistics for Women and Girls

| | Asheville Area | North Carolina | United States |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Total Population | 256,954 | 9,561,558 | 309,349,689 |
| Number of Women and Girls, All Ages | 133,661 | 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, Not Hispanic | 87.3% | 66.3% | 64.9% |
| Black, Not Hispanic | 6.3% | 22.2% | 12.9% |
| Hispanic | 5.1% | 7.9% | 16.2% |
| Asian American, Not Hispanic | 1.0% | 2.3% | 5.1% |
| American Indian, Not Hispanic | N/A | 1.1% | 0.7% |
| Proportion of Women Who Are Foreign-Born, All Ages | 5% | 7% | 13% |
| Proportion of Women Who Are Married, Aged 18 and Older | 50% | 50% | 49% |

Notes: Data for the Asheville metropolitan area are for 2008–2010. Data for North Carolina and the United States are for 2010 only. N/A indicates data not available.

Source: IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 and 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

Work and Earnings



The majority of women aged 16 and older in the Asheville area are in the workforce. Nearly six in ten (59 percent) are either employed or actively looking for work, the same proportion as in North Carolina as a whole. The proportion of women in the labor force in Buncombe and Madison counties is considerably lower than the proportion of men in the workforce (68 percent; Table 2), as it is in most jurisdictions. Women’s labor force participation varies somewhat across the largest racial and ethnic groups. Hispanic women in the Asheville area have the highest labor force participation rate at 64 percent, followed by white women (59 percent) and black women (57 percent).²

In Buncombe and Madison counties, as in the state as a whole, the labor force participation rate for women with dependent children is substantially higher than the rate for all women (75 percent of women with dependent children in the Asheville area are in the labor force; Table 2). Yet, despite the higher workforce participation rates among mothers, mothers of children under age 18 are much less likely than fathers with dependent children to be in the labor force. Ninety-three percent of fathers with dependent children in the Asheville area are in the workforce, suggesting that women are more likely than men to cut back on employment when they are parents (Table 2).

While the majority of employed women in Buncombe and Madison counties work full-time (68 percent), employed women in this area, as in the state and the nation as a whole, are more likely to work part-time than employed men (32 percent compared with 20 percent).³ The reasons for women’s higher rates of part-time work vary. 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 and Madison counties), 20 percent of women, compared with only 3 percent of men, give these reasons for working part-time.⁴ In addition, although the Great Recession has led both men and women to experience an increase in part-time work for economic reasons during the last few years, women are more likely to work in the sectors and occupations where jobs are only available on a part-time basis (Shaefer 2009).⁵ Part-time workers are much less likely than full-time workers to have access to paid leave, healthcare, and employer supported pensions (Society for Human Resource Management 2011).

In addition to these differences in hours worked, women and men in the Asheville area tend to work in different occupations. Four in ten women in Buncombe and Madison counties work in professional and managerial jobs, a higher proportion than men (39 percent compared with 33 percent; Table 2). While the strong representation of women in these jobs is a sign of their educational and professional advancement during the last few decades, women in the Asheville area are still less likely than men to work in management positions (7 percent compared with 11 percent).⁶

In addition, there are marked differences in women's and men's professional specializations. Men in Buncombe and Madison counties are more likely than women to work in computing, architecture, and engineering professions (5 percent compared with 1 percent), whereas women are more likely than men to work in education and health care practitioner occupations (19 percent compared with 8 percent). Women are also more likely to work in office and administrative support jobs (20 percent compared with 6 percent), while men are much more likely to work in construction, repair, and transportation jobs (24 percent compared with 3 percent).⁷

Despite holding a higher share of professional and managerial occupations, women in the Asheville area have lower median annual earnings than men. This is, at least partially, explained by women's lower representation in management jobs and the unequal distribution of men and women across occupations. In 2008–2010, women's median annual earnings in Buncombe and Madison counties combined for full-time, year-round work were \$31,000, compared with \$36,500 for men: women earned only 85 cents for every dollar earned by a man (Table 2). Median earnings for both women and men in the Asheville area are lower than in the state overall, but the difference in earnings for men is greater than for women, explaining the lower earnings gap in the Asheville area compared with the state and the nation as a whole (83 percent and 79 percent, respectively; Table 2).⁸

Educational Attainment

Women in the Asheville metropolitan area are comparatively well-educated. One-third (32 percent) of all women aged 25 years and older in this area have a bachelor's degree or more, a higher proportion than men (29 percent) and than women in the state and the nation overall (27 percent and 28 percent, respectively; Table 2).

Yet, almost four in ten women in the Asheville area have not completed high school or do not hold educational qualifications beyond a high school diploma (38 percent, or an estimated 36,500 women aged 25 years and older).⁹ Proportionately more men have such low educational attainment (41 percent; Table 2). Women with this level of education, however, are less likely than men to have jobs with earnings that are high enough to sustain a family. Median earnings for women with only a high school diploma or the equivalent in 2010 were \$26,731, compared with \$31,508 for men with this same level of education.¹⁰ Women with some college education or an associate's degree earn more (\$30,492) than women with only a high school diploma, but less than men with just a high school diploma or the equivalent. Such earnings for women are well below the annual income a family of one adult and two children needs to afford essential living expenses in the Asheville area (Table 3).

In this area, as in the state and the nation as a whole, having a bachelor's degree raises the level of earnings for both women and men (\$42,527 for women and \$60,984 for men) but does not reduce the gender gap in earnings.¹¹ In the Asheville area, as in the state and the nation as a whole, the difference in earnings between men and women is even larger when those with a bachelor's degree or higher are compared. College-educated women in

Buncombe and Madison counties combined earn only 70 cents for every dollar earned by a college-educated man, even though the comparison includes only people who work full-time, year-round—workers with the highest attachment to the labor market (Table 2).

| Table 2. Overview of Women's and Men's Economic Status | | | |
|---|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| | Asheville | North Carolina | United States |
| Labor Force Participation Rate, Aged 16 and Older | | | |
| Women | 59% | 59% | 59% |
| Men | 68% | 70% | 70% |
| Mothers With Children Under 18 Years | 75% | 74% | 73% |
| Fathers With Children Under 18 Years | 93% | 94% | 94% |
| Percent of Employed Women and Men Who Work Full-Time, Aged 16 and Older | | | |
| Women | 68% | 72% | 71% |
| Men | 80% | 84% | 84% |
| Percent of Employed Women and Men in Professional or Managerial Occupations, Aged 16 and Older | | | |
| Women | 39% | 40% | 39% |
| Men | 33% | 30% | 33% |
| Median Annual Earnings, Full-Time, Year-Round Workers, Aged 16 and Older | | | |
| Women | \$31,000 | \$33,000 | \$36,000 |
| Men | \$36,500 | \$40,000 | \$45,500 |
| Gender Earnings Ratio, Aged 16 and Older | | | |
| Gender Earnings Ratio by Educational Attainment, Aged 25 and Older | | | |
| Less Than High School Diploma | N/A | 76% | 74% |
| High School Diploma or the Equivalent | 85% | 75% | 74% |
| Some College or Associate's Degree | 85% | 76% | 76% |
| Bachelor's Degree or Higher | 70% | 70% | 71% |
| Proportion of Women and Men with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, Aged 25 and Older | | | |
| Women | 32% | 27% | 28% |
| Men | 29% | 26% | 29% |
| Proportion of Women and Men with a High School Diploma or Less, Aged 25 or Older | | | |
| Women | 38% | 40% | 42% |
| Men | 41% | 46% | 44% |
| Percent of Women and Men Living At or Below Poverty, Aged 18 and Older | | | |
| Women | 15% | 17% | 15% |
| Men | 14% | 13% | 12% |
| Percent of Households Receiving Food Stamps | | | |
| Percent of Women and Men without Health Insurance Coverage | | | |
| Women | 23% | 21% | 19% |
| Men | 29% | 26% | 25% |

Note: Data for the Asheville metropolitan area are for 2008–2010. Median annual earnings in 2010 inflation-adjusted dollars.

Data for North Carolina and the United States are for 2010 only.

Source: IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 and 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

Poverty

A substantial number of women in the Asheville area have incomes that leave them below or close to the federal poverty line. Approximately 16,000 women aged 18 and older have incomes at or below the poverty line, and another 21,600 are *near* poverty (living with incomes between 100 and 200 percent of the federal poverty line).¹² Women in Buncombe and Madison counties combined are slightly more likely to live in poverty than men (15 percent compared with 14 percent; Table 2), and more than half of all adults in these counties with poverty incomes are women (55 percent).¹³ Just over one in ten households in the Asheville area receives food stamps, a slightly lower proportion than in North Carolina as a whole (11 compared with 13 percent; Table 2).

Poverty is especially a problem for families headed by non-married mothers. These families make up one-quarter of all families in Buncombe County with children under 18 (data not available for Madison), but half of all families in Buncombe County poverty with dependent children (Table 3). In North Carolina as a whole, only one in ten (eleven percent) of non-married mothers with young children (under five) and incomes below the qualifying poverty threshold receives any welfare cash assistance.¹⁴

Child Care



The lack of affordable child care is a major constraint for many families in North Carolina and the United States. In the absence of quality, affordable child care, women may decide to interrupt their tenure in the labor market, reducing their ability to provide for their families, put aside resources for retirement, or save for emergencies. Alternatively, they may have to put their children in low-quality and unreliable care.

In North Carolina, the average annual fees for 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 the Asheville area, over 9,500 children qualify for child care subsidies because their parents earn too little to afford the fees; yet fewer than one in five eligible children receives any subsidy for child care, and child care subsidy payment rates for eligible children are substantially below the market rates for child care in the state (Table 3 and Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services 2012).

Table 3. The Status of Children: Family Income, Poverty, and Child Care

| | Buncombe | Madison | North Carolina |
|---|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Family Income | | | |
| Annual Income a Family of One Adult and Two Children Needs to Afford Essential Living Expenses, 2010 | \$39,428 | \$41,009 | \$41,920 |
| Median Annual Income of Married-Couple Families with Children under 18 Years, 2008–2010²² | \$65,408 | \$53,657 | \$70,124 |
| Median Annual Income of Non-Married Fathers with Children under 18 Years, 2008–2010²² | \$27,976 | \$51,339 | \$29,874 |
| Median Annual Income of Non-Married Mothers with Children under 18 Years, 2008–2010²² | \$23,925 | \$10,074 | \$20,393 |
| Poverty | | | |
| Number of Families in Poverty with Children Under 18 Years, 2008–2010 ² | 4,948 | N/A | 254,650 |
| Share of Families in Poverty with Children that are Headed by Non-Married Women, 2008–2010 ² | 50% | N/A | 61% |
| Share of All Families with Children Under 18 that are Headed by Non-Married Women, 2008–2010 ² | 25% | N/A | 29% |
| Child Care | | | |
| Children Eligible for Child Care Subsidy, SFY 2010–2011 ³ | 8,871 | 806 | 391,549 |
| Budget Available to Serve Eligible Children, SFY 2010–2011 ³ | \$9,400,256 | \$696,223 | N/A |
| Percent of Eligible Children Receiving Subsidized Child Care Services, SFY 2010–2011 ³ | 20% | 17% | N/A |
| Budget per Child Eligible for Child Care Subsidy, SFY 2010–2011 ³ | \$1,059.66 | \$863.80 | N/A |
| Total Number of Children Age 0 to 5 Enrolled in Child Care, 2011 ⁴ | 4,848 | 259 | 207,953 |

Note: N/A indicates data is not available.

Sources: ¹Sirota and McLenaghan (2010).

²IWPR compilations of 2010 and 2008–2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder; data for North Carolina is for 2010 only (U.S. Department of Commerce 2012).

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

⁴Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012).

Health

Close to one-quarter of women aged 18–64 (23 percent; Table 2) in the Asheville area do not have basic health insurance coverage, a slightly higher proportion than in the state or the nation overall (21 percent and 19 percent, respectively). Lack of health insurance coverage leaves women without the resources for basic wellness and check-up visits, as well as for dealing with serious medical problems.

Women in Buncombe County have considerably higher rates of mortality from heart failure and stroke than in the state as a whole (data for Madison County not available), a pattern that is likely a reflection of Asheville’s older demographic. Women in Buncombe County, however, have similar rates of mortality due to breast, uterine, and ovarian cancer to women in the state and the nation overall (Table 4). The pregnancy rate for teens aged 15–19 in Buncombe County is below the rate for teens in North Carolina as a whole (data not available for Madison; Table 4).

Table 4. Overview of Women's Health Status

| | Buncombe | Madison | North Carolina | United States |
|---|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Total Number of Teen Pregnancies (15–19 Years), 2010¹ | 275 | 11 | 15,957 | N/A |
| Pregnancy Rate Among Teens Aged 15–19 (per 1,000), 2010¹ | 40.0 | N/A | 49.7 | N/A |
| Average Mortality Rates Among Women (per 100,000)² | | | | |
| Breast Cancer, 2005–2009 | 25.9 | N/A | 23.5 | 23.0 |
| Cervical Cancer, 2005–2009 | N/A | N/A | 2.3 | 2.4 |
| Uterine Cancer, 2005–2009 | 3.9 | N/A | 4.0 | 4.2 |
| Ovarian Cancer, 2005–2009 | 7.9 | N/A | 7.9 | 8.2 |
| Heart Failure Death Rate per 100,000, 35 Years and Older, 2009³ | 51.7 | N/A | 20.9 | 23.3 |
| Stroke, 2009 (Mortality Rate Only)³ | 44.0 | N/A | 38.7 | 33.4 |
| Diabetes, 2009 (Mortality Rate Only)³ | N/A | N/A | 26.5 | 24.9 |

Notes: Mortality rates are crude rates per 100,000.

N/A Rates based on small numbers (fewer than 20 cases) are unstable and are not reported.

Source: ¹North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (2012).

²National Cancer Institute (2012).

³Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012).

Conclusion

Although many women in the Asheville area are doing well, the data reviewed in this briefing paper point to a number of areas of concern, such as the gender wage gap, substantial rates of poverty, the high cost of child care, and lack of basic health insurance coverage for many women and men. 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 are aware of their obligations under the federal anti-discrimination statutes;
- Providing training to employers on best practices for recruiting and retaining women workers, particularly in sectors where they are now under-represented;
- Encouraging pay transparency and increasing awareness of resources to help women find out about going wage rates and strategies for negotiating their wages;
- Monitoring workforce development to ensure that women and men have equal access to training in high-growth, well-paid careers;
- Providing career counseling and financial supports to women with lower levels of education; and
- Ensuring that those who need it receive ‘Work First’ assistance (North Carolina’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program).

Methodological Notes

This briefing paper presents data for the Asheville Metropolitan Statistical Area, defined to include Buncombe and Madison counties. 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.) and on American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder. To ensure sufficient sample sizes that allow for reliable reporting, IWPR used estimates that combine several years of data (2008–2010) for the Asheville area. Data for North Carolina and the United States are for 2010 only, the most recent data available. Child care data come from various published sources, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation Data Center Kids Count, 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 North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, and the National Cancer Institute. To define the Asheville metropolitan area, IWPR aggregated Public Use Micro Data Area variables (PUMAS), which are the smallest geographical unit available in the American Community Survey data.

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Notes

¹ The Asheville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is comprised of Madison and Buncombe counties.

² IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010). Sample sizes are too small to reliably report the labor force participation rates for Asian American and American Indian women in the Asheville area.

³ IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

⁷ IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 and 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

⁸ Because these estimates are based on the American Community Survey, they are not strictly comparable to IWPR's standard calculation of the gender wage gap for the United States, which is based on the Current Population Survey (CPS). In 2010, the national earnings gap based on the CPS was 23 percent (Hegewisch and Williams 2011).

⁹ Table 2 and IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

¹⁰ IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

¹¹ IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

¹² IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 and 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010)

¹³ IWPR analysis based on IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

¹⁴ IWPR analysis based on IWPR analysis of 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

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