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Take Action Advocacy Day: A look at the state of working women in Colorado

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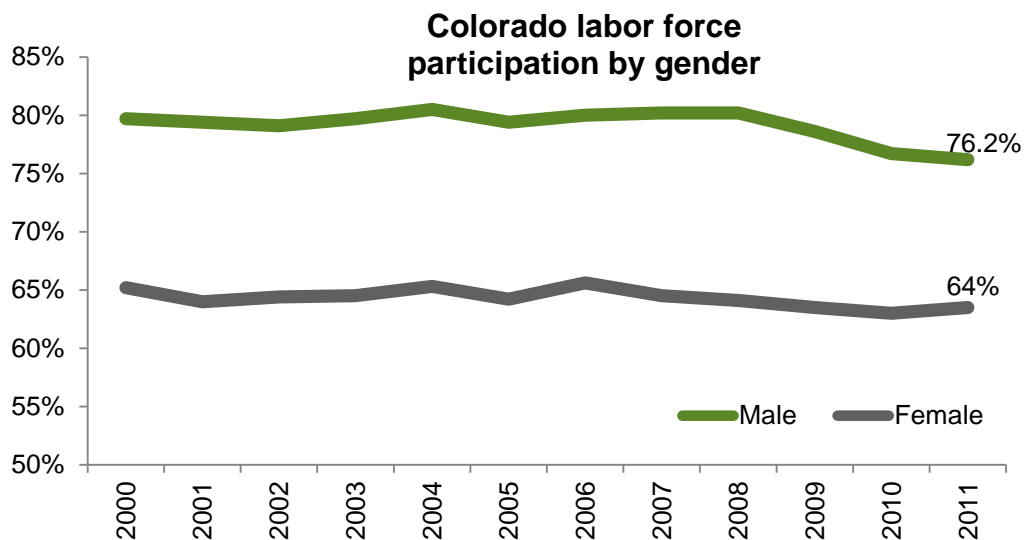
The Colorado Center on Law & Policy today will co-host the Take Action Advocacy Day for women at the State Capitol in Denver. Along with the Women and Family Action Network, the center hopes to bring together as many as 200 women and girls to discuss policy changes that can improve their lives.

This event also provides a chance to draw on our recent report, *State of Working Colorado 2012*, to highlight issues directly affecting women's economic security, whether it's the relationship between income and educational attainment or the persistence of the pay gap between genders.

Labor force participation by gender

The labor force participation rate measures the share of the working-age population that has work or is looking for a job. The rate is calculated by dividing the number of people with jobs or looking for jobs by the total working-age population, people age 16 and older. Women have made large gains by entering the historically male-dominated labor force. Even in 2011, however, women participated in the labor force at a rate about 12 percentage points lower than men. (Figure 1)

Figure 1



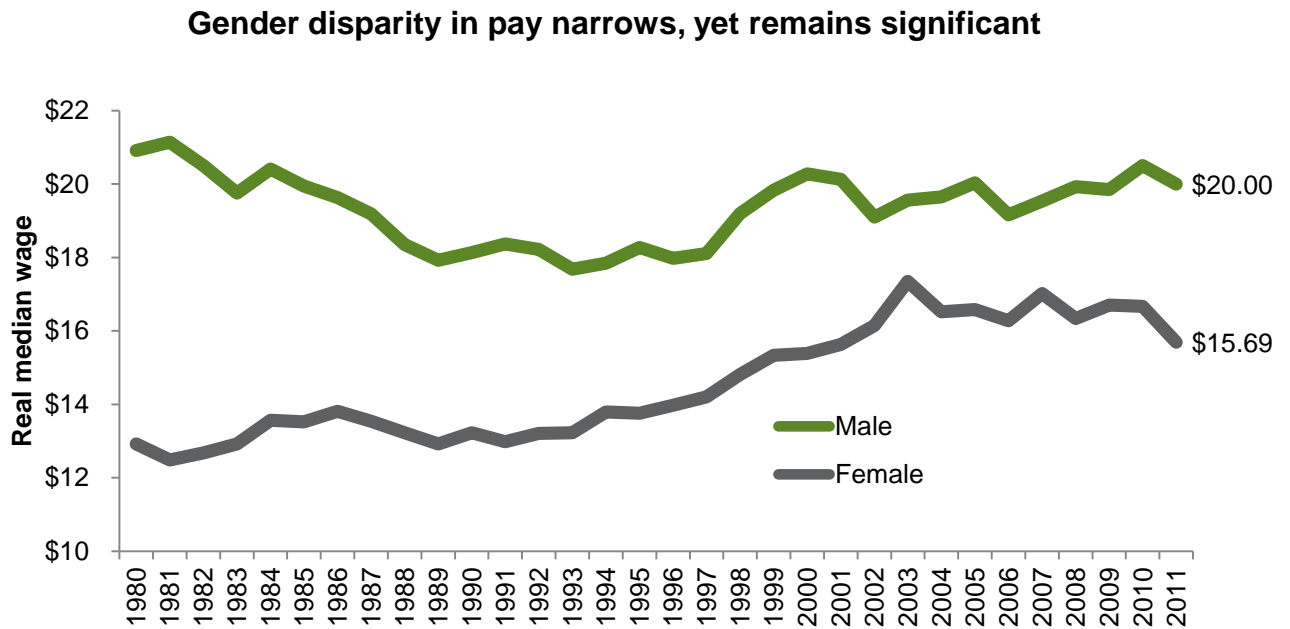
Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey

Wages

In 1980, the median wage for a woman in Colorado was almost half that for a man. Since then, women have made substantial progress in raising their earnings relative to men, increasing their real median wage as much as 30 percent at their peak in 2003. (Figure 2) At the same time, men's wages in Colorado have declined slightly.

But the gap in pay between genders has not closed. In 2011, the real median wage for a woman was only 78 percent of that for a man in Colorado. (Figure 2) And despite gains in recent years, the gap is widening again.

Figure 2



Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey data

Occupation income by gender

The degree of income inequality between the genders varies by occupation. But the overall picture is clear – even within the same industries, women earn less than men in Colorado. On average, women in Colorado earn 78 percent of the salary for men in the same industry. (Figure 3) Women working in legal and sales occupations face the largest income inequality, earning 50 and 65 percent of their male peers, respectively. Of Colorado’s industries, women are closest to their male colleagues’ income in community and social services occupations. (Figure 3)

Figure 3

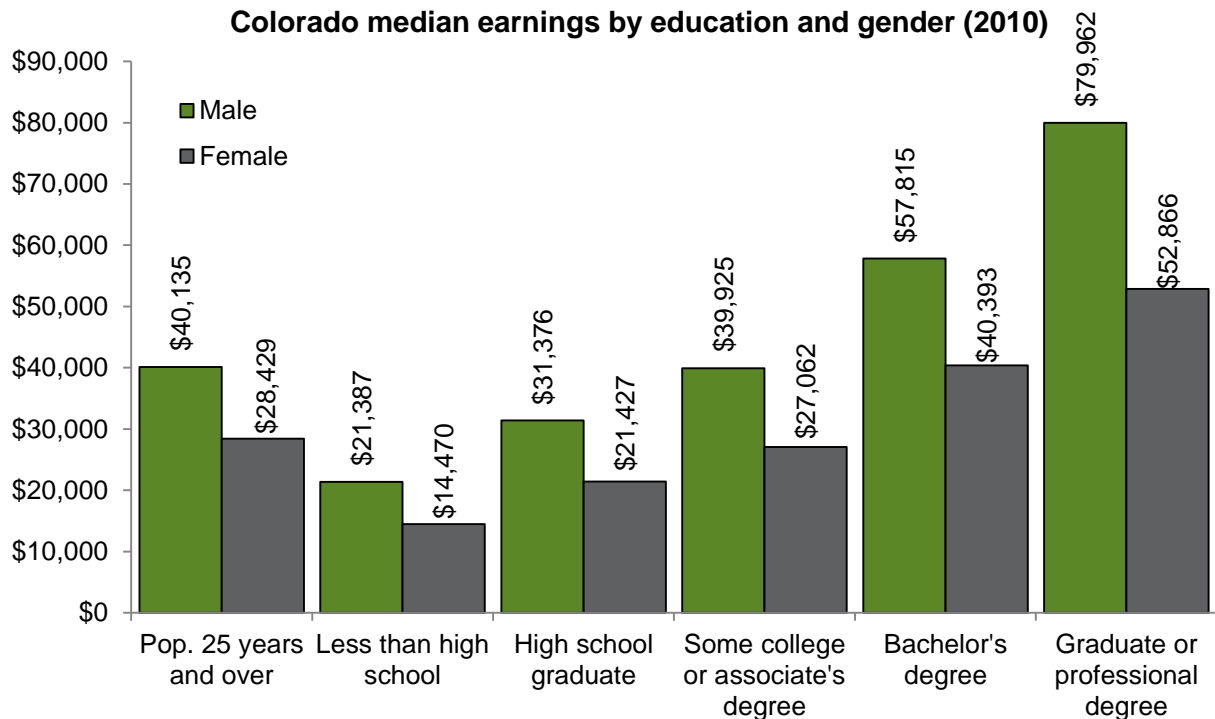
MEDIAN ANNUAL INCOME BY GENDER IN COLORADO OCCUPATIONS (2010)				
Occupation	Male income	Female income	Wage difference	Female / male wage
All occupations	\$46,500	\$36,551	\$9,949	78.6%
Legal	\$110,806	\$56,774	\$54,032	51.2%
Sales and related	\$47,401	\$30,558	\$16,843	64.5%
Healthcare practitioner and technical	\$78,759	\$54,201	\$24,558	68.8%
Personal care and service	\$30,579	\$21,397	\$9,182	70%
Management	\$75,045	\$55,081	\$19,964	73.4%
Production, transportation and material moving	\$35,859	\$26,521	\$9,338	74%
Building and grounds cleaning, and maintenance	\$27,330	\$20,271	\$7,059	74.2%
Business and financial operations	\$67,525	\$50,884	\$16,641	75.4%
Farming, fishing, and forestry	\$24,380	\$18,722	\$6,108	76.8%
Protective service	\$50,658	\$39,390	\$11,268	77.8%
Education, training and library	\$54,358	\$43,945	\$10,413	80.8%
Architecture and engineering	\$75,254	\$62,370	\$12,884	82.9%
Life, physical, and social science	\$64,769	\$54,674	\$10,095	84.4%
Office and administrative support	\$37,415	\$32,229	\$5,186	86.1%
Healthcare support	\$30,145	\$25,994	\$4,151	86.2%
Computer and mathematical	\$76,119	\$65,683	\$10,436	86.3%
Arts, design, entertainment, sports and media	\$51,547	\$44,947	\$6,600	87.2%
Food preparation and serving related	\$21,688	\$18,949	\$2,739	87.4%
Construction and extraction	\$38,832	\$34,231	\$4,601	88.2%
Installation, maintenance and repair	\$42,049	\$38,737	\$9,338	92.1%
Community and social services	\$41,877	\$40,662	\$1,215	97.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey

Women and education

Education consistently proves to be a dominant variable in determining economic security. The trend of more education leading to higher earnings is consistent across genders. Though both men and women benefit from more education, the difference in median earning between men and women increases the more education they attain. (Figure 4) In 2010, the median earnings for men without a high school diploma were almost \$7,000 more than for women; moreover, the median earnings for men with a bachelor's degree were over \$17,000 more than for women. Though the numbers highlight the importance of education, the gender inequality in earnings cannot continue to go unaddressed.

Figure 4



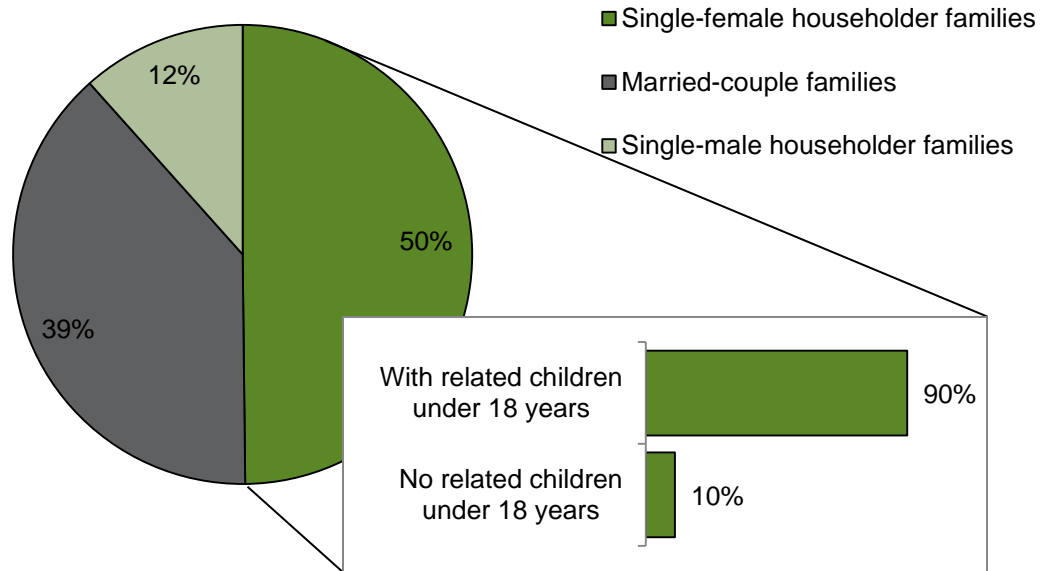
Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey

Poverty and household type

Not all family types are equally susceptible to poverty. Of those families living in poverty in Colorado, half are single-female households, while about 12 percent are single-male households. (Figure 5) Of those single-female households, 90 percent are women supporting children.

Figure 5

Colorado family types below federal poverty level are overwhelmingly single women with children (2010)

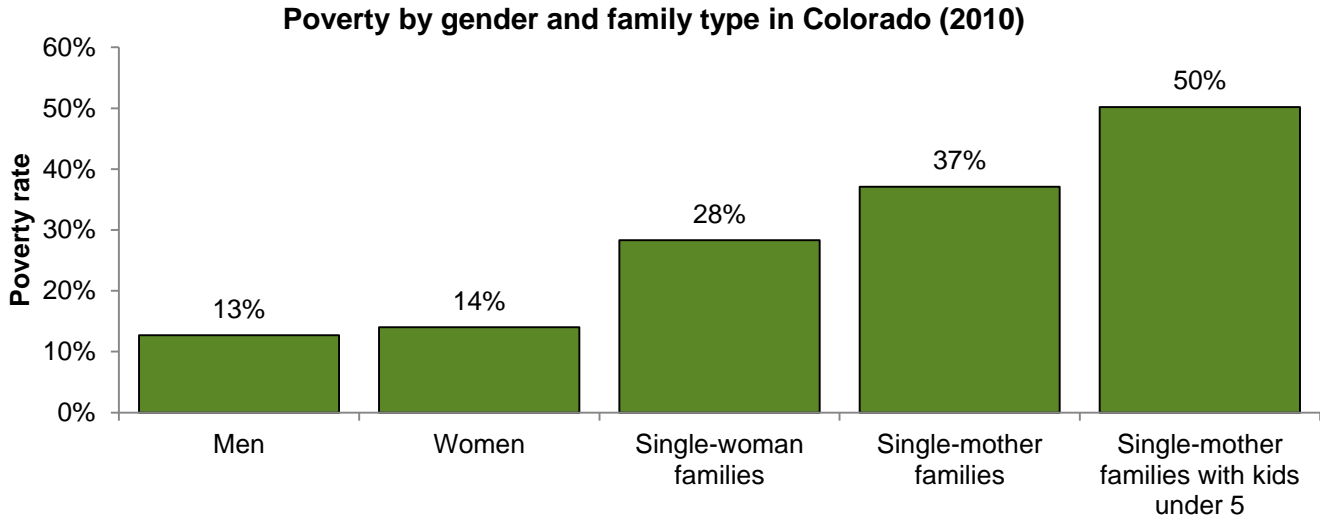


Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey

Single mothers hit hardest by poverty

Women are generally harder hit by poverty in Colorado than men, especially single-mother families. Disturbingly, 50 percent of all single mothers with children under age 5 live below the poverty line. (Figure 6) This statistic highlights the serious need for public policy to facilitate adequate family support systems like child care.

Figure 6

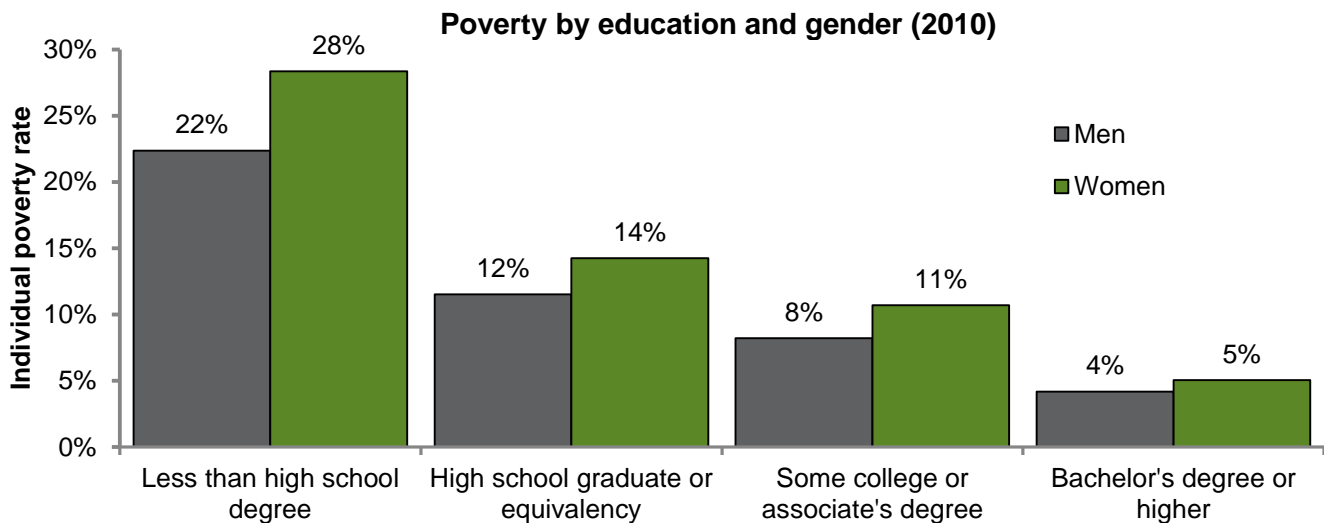


Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. Rates based on 100 percent FPL

Education, Gender, and Poverty

Though more education helps reduce one’s likelihood of living in poverty, gender disparities in pay contribute to a persistent gap in the likelihood of men and women living in poverty. Even with higher levels of education, a higher percentage of women live in poverty than do men. (Figure 7)

Figure 7



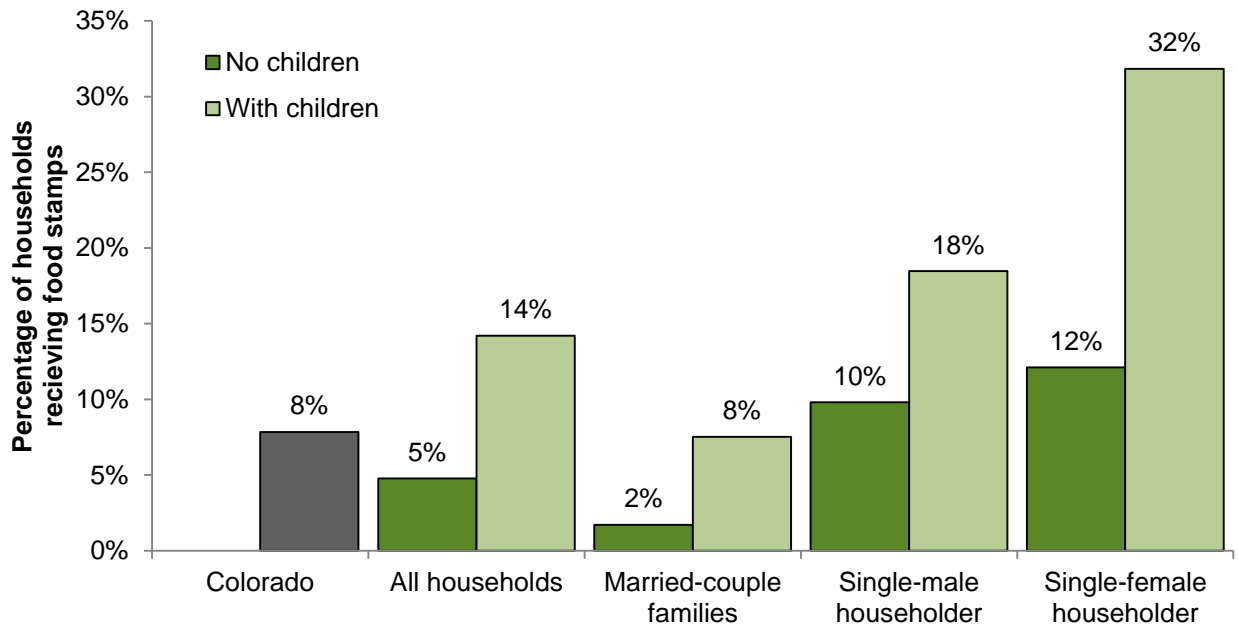
Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. Rates based on 100 percent FPL

Families and food assistance

Among Colorado households, three distinctions emerge with respect to food stamps. First, single-parent homes have higher food stamp reciprocity rates than married-couple homes. Second, among single-parent homes, single-mother households have higher rates than single-father homes. And across the board, households with children have dramatically higher rates of food stamp reciprocity than childless households. (Figure 8) In 2010, single-mother families in Colorado relied on food stamps at roughly four times that rate of the state average. (Figure 8)

Figure 8

Colorado food stamp reciprocity by family type



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey
With/without children refers to the presence of children under the age of 18 in the household.

Gender inequality remains

Despite great strides toward gender equality in Colorado's economy, the data show there's still progress to be made. Compared to men, women participate in the labor force at a lower rate. Women have lower earnings, even in the same occupations and with the same education levels. They experience higher rates of poverty across education levels, especially when raising children, and they rely on food stamps at a higher rate than men.

Take Action Advocacy Day is an opportunity for women to learn how to influence the policies that affect their lives. The data show the challenges women continue to face in Colorado's economy. But these challenges have public policy solutions that will not only improve the lives of women but benefit all of Colorado's communities.

For more data on Colorado workers, see the State of Working Colorado 2012.

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