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Reports

Battle to Succeed: Challenges and Obstacles Faced by NYC Women

Key Findings March 26, 2003

- Women in New York City complete their education at a lower level than men in New York City, and women and men nationwide.
- The annual median income for women in New York City is nearly \$4,500 less per year than the income of men.
- There is a greater unemployment gap between NYC women and men, than between women and men nationally.
- Among women between the ages of 25 and 34, HIV is the leading cause of death.
- Nine percent of births in New York City are to teenage mothers.
- More than one-third of households with minor children in New York City are supported by single mothers; nearly half of these households live below the poverty level.
- Reports of rape to the Police Department have risen over the past year, despite an overall decrease in crime in New York City.
- Reports of domestic violence and the number of women seeking shelter from abusive partners have risen.
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death among all women.

General Profile

New York City is the largest city in the nation, with a population of more than eight million people, 4.2 million of whom are women.[1] The city's ethnic breakdown of the female population is: 34.7% white, 26.6% Latina, 25.9% African-American, 9.3% Asian, and 3.6% other.[2] Nearly a third (31.1%) of the city's women live in Brooklyn, 27.4% live in Queens, 19.2% live in Manhattan, 16.9% live in the Bronx, and 5.4% live on Staten Island.

Education

The education level of women in New York City lags far behind women throughout the rest of the country.

According to the most recent census data, nationwide, 7.4 percent of women over the age of 25, or one in thirteen, achieved less than an 8th grade education. In New York City,

the number is far worse, with 12.5 percent, or one in eight women, not making it past the 8th grade. Additionally, only 72% of women in the city earned a high school diploma, while nationwide the percentage is over 85%. This reality places the women of our city at a social and economic disadvantage.

Fortunately, there has been some movement in the right direction, with girls in our city's public schools nearly closing the gap in standardized test scores. In 2002, 35% of girls in the 3rd, 5th, 6th, and 7th grades scored proficient or advanced on the City Math Test as compared to 35.4% of boys. Girls outperformed boys on the combined state and city English Language Arts (ELA) Reading Test, with 42.8% scoring either proficient or advanced, compared to 36% of boys.[3]

However, a number of national studies continue to point to a disparity in academic achievement between boys and girls. A 1998 study commissioned by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (AAUWEF)[4] found that while the number of girls taking math and science courses has increased, boys still outnumber girls in computer and technology classes and despite the gains that girls have made in math and science, they continue to display less confidence in these areas as well as in the areas of computers and technology. The study also reports that boys score better on math, science, history and geography exams, while girls score higher on reading and writing exams.

According to the AAUWEF study, girls are still receiving messages from society, marketers and the media that discourage them from participating in these subjects. The New York City Department of Education can affect the types of courses female students choose. Special effort should be made to encourage girls to take classes relating to computers and technology, two areas where they remain underrepresented. This will help not only in closing the education gap between boys and girls, but it will also open up a career path in technology to which many young women have not had access.

Education is a major priority in our city regardless of students' gender; however, the substantial disparity in education levels between men and women in New York City should not exist. In order for women in New York to have the same opportunities as women and men in the rest of the nation, they must have comparable academic achievement.

The issue of quality education has been a major concern of the Public Advocate's Office, which recently conducted two studies that point to a number of problems in New York City's school system. The Public Advocate's Office found that despite millions of dollars given to schools to lower class size in kindergarten through 3rd grade, New York City classes in these grades are still well above state and national standards.[5] The Public Advocate's Office also investigated the source of a large number of high school students who had been forced to drop out of school. The investigation uncovered that students are being pushed out by the thousands from their schools because the students are unable to comply with higher standards and schools are being pressured through greater accountability to ensure all students comply with the new standards and continually improve on test scores.[6]

Work Place

Salary and unemployment

New York City women's educational disadvantage results in part in a salary discrepancy between the sexes. Among full-time workers over the age of 16 in New York City, women annually earn \$4,486 less than men. Unemployment rates for women in the city are also higher than rates among men. Census data from 2000 showed that unemployment for women in New York City was 10.1%, compared to 9.1% for men. The unemployment gap between men and women is much greater in New York than it is in the rest of the nation, where women's unemployment in 2000 was 5.8% compared to the male unemployment rate of 5.6%.

Occupation

In order for women to close the salary gap, they must branch out into careers dominated by men. However, women continue to cluster into a much more limited group of careers than men. Most women make their living in management and professional jobs in the fields of education, entertainment, medicine, law and community service. The second most common occupation category for women is sales and office-related. Together, these two categories represent the occupations of 73.6% of New York City women.

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