

New Directions in Workforce Development: Do They Lead to Gains for Women?

Overview

- Women are disproportionately poor: 60% of all low-wage working families are headed by women. In 2003, Women earned 76 cents for every dollar a man earned.
- Occupational segregation is one of primary factors contributing to the wage gap, and hence to women's poverty and low earnings. Women tend to be clustered in lower paying occupations in services, administrative, and retail industries.
- Since the 1990s, federal policies and funding streams supporting education and training for economically disadvantaged individuals have been eliminated or reduced, including those specifically targeting women (e.g., NEW, WANTO).
- Decreased federal investment combined with shifting economic conditions led states to develop "demand-driven" approaches to workforce development. These approaches aim to improve business competitiveness and to provide opportunities for low-skilled workers to advance into higher paying, more highly skilled jobs.

State Demand Driven Approaches: Impact for Women

- The majority of high-demand, high-paying occupations are male-dominated. Industries such as manufacturing, transportation, and construction have institutional barriers that prevent successful hiring and advancement of women.
- At the national level, four of the six growing occupations recommended for demand-driven workforce approaches are male-dominated.
- Gender biases, including at the labor market, industry, education, and firm levels lead to lower earnings outcomes for women.
- Due to systemic gender biases, all federal, state, and local workforce policies and programs must undertake a conscious effort to achieve parity of outcomes.

Recommendations: Federal Policy

- Incorporate economic self sufficiency into all federal adult education and skill development policies (e.g., 2006 Senate-passed Workforce Investment Act - S. 1021).
- Make gender parity in employment and earnings outcomes a goal of national investments in workforce policies that generate employment in high-paying, high-demand occupations.
- Increase funding for the \$1 million Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations program (WANTO).
- Ensure that WIA actively provides training opportunities for women to prepare for jobs nontraditional to their gender.
- Establish new career ladders in traditionally "women's" occupations (e.g. the Workplace Balancing Act - H.R. 2392).

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