

WOMEN OF COLOR IN NEW YORK CITY:

**THE CHALLENGES OF THE
NEW GLOBAL ECONOMY**



WOMEN OF COLOR POLICY NETWORK

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ROUNDTABLE OF INSTITUTIONS OF PEOPLE OF COLOR

Women of Color Policy Network

Women of Color in New York City: The Challenges of the New Global Economy

Although there is much to celebrate about the new global economy, there is a growing concern that a growing number of women of color are being left behind. Single heads of households with limited skills carry a major burden. However, even women with four or more years of college and extensive work experience continue to face barriers.

Opportunities for many women of color to move out of poverty remain scarce. The unemployment and underemployment rates of women of color are among the highest in the city and the state. Their access to jobs remains limited to a narrow range of industries and government agencies. Many women lack health insurance for their children and themselves. There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of women of color incarcerated.

One of the critical barriers to assessing and improving the conditions of women of color are the limited and inconsistent methods of collecting and reporting statistical data for these women. Federal mandates exist for collecting but not reporting data. This incomplete and inconsistent data makes it difficult to tell the story of how major policy issues directly impact the lives of women. This problem is particularly pronounced for Asian-Pacific Islander and Native American women. Much of the data collected on major issues lumps Asian-Pacific Islander and Native American women into the “other” category. In addition, women of color are poorly represented in the policy and academic arenas where these data are analyzed.

This report provides preliminary data of trends in income, unemployment, welfare, and incarceration for women of color. The data are extracted from a number of local and national sources and are identified in each area. Comparisons are usually made with national and city-wide averages and with white women. The Policy Network will closely track the data in this report and add policy prescriptions for each area. It also intends to enhance the data with interviews, and focus groups.

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INCOME DISPARITIES, UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT

According to *Pulling Apart In New York* by the Fiscal Policy Institute (New York, 2000) income inequality in the New York Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (New York City plus Westchester, Rockland and Putnam Counties) is growing at a disturbing pace. More than half the income of all families in the New York PSMA goes to the richest fifth of the families, while less than 3 percent goes to the poorest fifth. In the late 1990s, the average income of the bottom fifth was \$7,774. The average income of the richest fifth was \$155,485, or 20 times greater than those at the bottom.

The roots of the growing inequality are manifested in a number of arenas. It is especially noticeable in the stubbornly high unemployment and underemployment rates for women of color. Throughout the recent period of economic growth in the city, the unemployment rates of black women and Latinas remained in double digits. Indeed, in 1996, the unemployment rate of Latinas reached 17 percent and a year later, the unemployment rate of black women reached 15 percent. These were the highest rates for both groups since the late 1970s when the Bureau of Labor Statistics began reporting data by race and gender. While the rates for both groups dropped to 10 percent in 1999, they were still twice the rates of white males, and nearly twice those of white women. Employment-population ratios also reveal that less than half of the non-institutional population of Latino women were employed in 1999, and only half of the city's black women. A major concern is the extreme volatility of the unemployment rates for black and Latino women in recent years, and their limited prospects for full time employment (See Figure 1).

1992/1997/1999: Unemployment in U.S. and New York City (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1992; 1999; New York State Department of Labor, Office of Research and Statistics, 2001)

	1992	1997	1999
U.S.:	7.5 percent	4.9 percent	4.2 percent
NYC:	11.0 percent	9.4 percent	6.7 percent

1992/1997/1999: Unemployment for Women in New York City

	1992	1997	1999
Black women:	11.0 percent	15.0 percent	10.1 percent
Hispanic women:	14.0 percent	13.0 percent	10.4 percent
White women:	8.8 percent	8.2 percent	5.6 percent

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1998: Underemployment for Women in New York State¹ (*The State of Working New York: The Illusion of Prosperity*: New York in the New Economy, Fiscal Policy Institute, 1999)

NY:	11.0 percent
Black women:	18.0 percent
Hispanic women:	19.0 percent
White women:	8.0 percent

1992/1999: Employment-Population Ratio (The proportion of the population that is employed).

	1992	1999
U.S.:	61.5 percent	64.7 percent
Black women:	43.6 percent	50.0 percent
Hispanic women:	34.3 percent	40.6 percent
White women:	40.6 percent	46.2 percent

FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AND CHILDREN IN POVERTY²

Poverty rates are another manifestation of the growing gap between the beneficiaries of economic growth and those left behind. There is considerable evidence that even persons who work full-time are not guaranteed an income above the poverty line. However, for lower income women of color, whose access to the job market is limited or sporadic, poverty is often chronic. The differences by race and by gender are stark. In the late 1990s, blacks were twice as likely to be in poverty as whites, and Latinos, more than three times as likely. Among female-headed households with children under 18 years of age, those headed by black women were more than two and one half times as likely to be poverty as their white counterparts, and Latinas more than three times as likely.

1997: Poverty Rates in New York City

Hispanic:	38.1 percent
Black:	27.3 percent
White:	13.2 percent

¹ People are considered underemployed for reasons such as lack of childcare.

² Information for this section is taken from, *Poverty in New York City 1996*, and *Poverty in New York City: An Update, January 1999*, reports prepared by the Community Service Society of New York.

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1995: Poverty Rates in New York City among Female-headed Households with Children under 18

All:	57.0 percent
Hispanic:	71.0 percent
Black:	58.0 percent
White:	21.0 percent

1995: Children in Poverty in New York City

All:	41.8 percent
Black:	51.0 percent
Hispanic:	59.8 percent
White:	12.2 percent

WELFARE REFORM

The personal and family options for poor women of color have been significantly influenced by changes in the welfare system. However, the full extent of the relationship has been limited by the lack of access of research and advocacy groups to data from City agencies.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 created Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), replacing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and removing the major income floor for poor women. It eliminated the entitlement to welfare benefits, mandated work in exchange for public assistance, and limited the receipt of welfare to five years. In December of this year, 43,910 TANF recipients, roughly 10 percent of the total, will reach their five year limit in New York City (New York State Comptroller's Office, 2001).

In 1996, New York City's AFDC rolls had 854,794 recipients. By February 2001, the rolls had declined to 435,981, the lowest level in decades (www.ci.nyc.ny.us/hra_facts.html). While this news has been well received by some segments of the public, many advocates for the poor are advising caution reminding us that leaving welfare does not necessarily mean leaving poverty or gaining full-time employment. (Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, *After Welfare: A Study of Work and Benefit Use After Case Closing*, Interim Report Submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, July 1999; Office of the Comptroller, "Staff Analysis of New York State's Welfare Evaluation Report: After Welfare: A Study of Work And Benefit Use After Case Closings," November, 2000).

The largest percentage declines in recipients-primarily women-have been white women, who form a small share of the total TANF population. Overall, the number of households receiving TANF declined by 21 percent between 1996-1999, but the participation of white women was reduced by 45 percent. Latino households declined by 21 percent and Black households by 20 percent (NYC caseload data from an analysis of the 1999 Housing

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Vacancy Survey by the CUNY Data Services for the PRLDEF Institute for Puerto Rican Policy, 2000).

As a result of their high poverty and unemployment rates, black and Latino women and their households continue to make up the dominant share of the city's welfare clients. In 1999, Latinos were 54 percent of the TANF households; blacks were 39 percent, whites, 5 percent and Asians 2 percent.

ARRESTS⁴ AND INCARCERATION⁵ AMONG WOMEN

Arrests and incarceration of black and Latino women increased dramatically during the 1990's. Between 1992 and 1997, a period of economic prosperity in New York City, the arrests of black women and Latinas increased by more than 50 percent. Nationally and in New York, the principal reason for the incarceration of women were drug offenses. Incarceration for these arrests fell disproportionately on black women and Latinas. In 1995 in New York State, over 80 percent of the Latinas and nearly two-thirds of the black women were in prison because of a drug offense compared to 40 percent of white women.

1992 to 1997: Distribution of Female Arrests in New York City

Black:	58.0 percent
Hispanic:	31.0 percent
White:	7.0 percent
Other	4.0 percent

1992 to 1997: Increase in Arrests of Women in New York City

All:	46.0 percent
Black:	51.0 percent
Hispanic:	54.0 percent
White:	18.0 percent
Other:	93.0 percent

⁴ Information on arrests was obtained from New York State Division of Criminal Justice Service, 1992 and 1997.

⁵ Information on incarceration was obtained from The Sentencing Project's report on *Gender and Justice: Women, Drugs, and Sentencing Policy*, November 1999 and the *State of New York Department of Correctional Services, Female Offender: 1997-1998*, September 1999.

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1992 to 1997: Increase in Misdemeanor Arrests of Women in New York City

All:	67.0 percent
Black:	67.0 percent
Hispanic:	86.0 percent
White:	14.0 percent
Other:	82.0 percent

1992 to 1997: Increase in Felony Arrests of Women in New York City

All:	27.0 percent
Black:	28.0 percent
Hispanic:	18.0 percent
White:	30.0 percent
Other:	125.0 percent

New York State

- In New York State (1998), approximately 55 percent of all female inmates were African American, 29 percent were Hispanic, 16 percent were white and less than 1 percent were other ethnic groups.
- In New York State (1995), black and Hispanic women accounted for 91 percent of the female prisoners sentenced for drugs although they were only 32 percent of the state's female population.
- In New York State (1998), 72 percent of the Hispanic women sentenced to prison were convicted of a drug offense, as were 56 percent of black women and 30 percent of white women.
- In New York State (1998) 34 percent of white females sentenced for a violent felony offense compared with only 20 percent of Hispanic females and 29 percent of black females.
- In New York State (1998), 55 percent of the women admitted to prisons were black, 29 percent were Hispanic and 16 percent white. Seventy-one percent (71 percent) of the women were from New York City compared to 65 percent of men.
- In New York State (1998), 75 percent of the women under custody reported being the parent of one or more children.
- Since 1980, the rate of women in prison nationally has been nearly doubled the rate for men. There are now nearly seven times as many women in state and federal prisons as in

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1980, an increase from 12,300 in 1980 to 82,800 by 1997, or a rise of 573 percent. This compares to a 294 percent increase in the male prison population during this period.⁶

⁶ Information was obtained from The Sentencing Project's report on *Gender and Justice: Women, Drugs, and*

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- Nationally, black women are incarcerated at a rate eight times that of white women.
- Nationally, by January 1997, 77 percent of Hispanic women prisoners, 59 percent of black women and 34 percent of white women had been sentenced for drug convictions.
- Nationally, 5.1 percent of black and Hispanic females are likely to go to prison or jail at least once during their lifetime, compared to 0.5 percent of white females.

Health

Women of color are in poorer health and they have less access to comprehensive health care than their white counterparts. According to 1997 data, black women show lower rates of early diagnosis of invasive cancers of all major types, including breast, uterine, and colon. Data on Asian-Pacific Islander women and Native Americans is notoriously poor. Data from the New York City Department of Health show that between 1993-1999, the incidence of AIDS cases among black women was four to seven times that of white women. The incidence among Latinas was three to four times that of white women. Asian-Pacific Islander and Native American women are usually identified as “others” and when data is collected because of federal regulations, there is no regulation mandating its dissemination. In addition, the Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO) has identified financial, language and cultural barriers as major obstacles to health care.

Breast Cancer Incidence and Mortality rates Among Women of Color in New York City (1993-1997) ⁷

	Rates per 100,000	Avg. Annual Cases
Whites incidence	100.7	3207.8
Whites mortality	28.0	990.2
Blacks incidence	73.6	975.8
Blacks mortality	28.2	370.8
Latinas incidence	59.2	565.4
Latinas mortality	15.7	145.6
Asian-Pac. Islanders incidence	79.1	258.8
API's mortality	13.6	41.6

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Women Diagnosed with AIDS in New York City⁸

The AIDS epidemic has dramatically impacted the lives of women of color. While the aggregate number of women diagnosed with AIDS in New York City declined from 2952 to 592 between 1995 and 1999, women of color continue to be disproportionately represented. In 1999, black women were 59 percent of the cases and Latinas 32 percent. In each year between 1993 and 1999, black women have constituted more than half of the new cases and on average Latinas one-third.

	1993 (%)	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
White	13	12	12	10	9	8	9
Black	53	52	53	57	59	59	59
Latina	34	36	35	32	32	33	32
Asian-Pacific Isl.	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1
Native American	0	0	0	0	<1	0	0

HUMAN RIGHTS

According to human rights advocates, the human rights of women are often violated by contemporary drug policies. Human Rights Watch argues that New York State's Rockefeller Drug Laws, enacted in 1973, have long been regarded as among the nation's harshest. They eliminate most judicial discretion in sentencing by requiring lengthy mandatory minimum sentences for many first-time offenders, and are augmented by other provisions that call for increased mandatory minimum sentences for second and persistent offenders. For example, sale of two ounces or possession of four ounces of a narcotic drug is felonies subject to a mandatory minimum sentence of fifteen years, the same sentence given to a murderer. This penalty applies regardless of an offender's role in the drug trade or any other extenuating circumstances. The Rockefeller drug laws have had a dramatic impact on women. Since women offenders in New York are more likely than men to have been convicted and imprisoned for a drug offense, they are more likely to be subject to the state's harsh mandatory sentencing. Further, minority women are disproportionately affected.

The Human Rights Committee of the fifty-third session of the United Nations, in comments dated April 7 1995, expressed concern that the human rights of women and children of color were being negatively affected by the high poverty rates and lack of access to education among these groups. Despite these concerns, the issues of women of color in the United States were poorly represented in Beijing+5 recently held in New York City.

⁸ AIDS data as reported by New York City Department of Health in *AIDS in New York City*.

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Women of Color in Academia and Policy-Making

Although the lives of women of color are being reshaped by welfare and criminal justice policies, they are largely excluded from academic institutions that would allow them to develop research and theories about their conditions.

- White women received 38 percent of the doctorates awarded to women between 1992 – 1997, Asian-Pacific Islander 19 percent, blacks 17 percent, “others” 15 percent, Hispanics 10 percent, and Native Americans 1 percent.
- In 1997, white women were 82 percent of all the female doctorates in the country. Blacks were 6 percent, Asian-Pacific Islander were 4 percent, Hispanics were 4 percent, Native Americans were less than one percent and “others” were 2 percent.
- A recent survey of Schools of Public Administration, Management and Public Policy revealed that 87 percent of core faculty were white, 8 percent were black, 2 percent were Hispanics, and 2 percent were Asian-Pacific Islander in 1997-1998. Women of color had the smallest share of faculty positions. (NASPPA Survey, 1999).
- Schools of public policy and administration face major barriers incorporating issues of race/ethnicity and gender into their courses. The reasons cited by faculty in the NASPPA survey were lack of faculty knowledge, lack of student interest, and the absence of materials.

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