



SSN Forum on Support for America's Working Women

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America's women workers are vital contributors to the national economy – and to family budgets. But most struggle with inadequate pay, unpredictable schedules, and few supports for their efforts to juggle obligations at work and home. What can be done? SSN experts point to the most effective reforms.

Challenges for Working Women and Their Families

WHY LESS EDUCATED WOMEN STRUGGLE IN THE U.S. LABOR MARKET – AND HOW WE CAN HELP MORE OF THEM OPT IN

Susan L. Brown, Bowling Green State University

"Although financially advantaged women can 'opt out,' forsaking employment for work at home when employers are not sufficiently responsive to their needs, relatively few do. Instead, it is the least advantaged women who are shut out of employment. Low wages coupled with irregular work schedules and limited support for families and children prevents many less-educated women from holding down a job."

THE URGENT NEED TO SUPPORT WOMEN WORKERS ON THE LOWER RUNGS OF THE LABOR MARKET

Ruth Milkman, City University of New York Graduate Center

"Often left behind and forgotten are the majority of women working in less privileged sectors of the economy – especially women of color and immigrants, but also non-college educated white women born in the United States. Many of these working women are the sole or major wage-earners for their families."

Meeting the Challenge of Unstable and Unpredictable Hours for Women in Low-Wage Jobs

Sandra Butler, University of Maine

"Despite the fact that the home care aide occupation is one of the fastest growing in the country, these workers, along with most other low-wage employees, have very little bargaining power to affect their benefits or work schedules. Workers in this situation need backing from labor regulations."

WHAT EMPLOYERS, GOVERNMENTS, AND COMMUNITIES CAN DO STOP IMPOSING CHAOS ON AMERICA'S WORKING FAMILIES

Elizabeth Oltmans Ananat, Duke University

"Many U.S. states further disrupt family stability when they require mothers or fathers to come to administrative offices every couple of months to re-apply for ongoing programs such as child care subsidies ... States can easily improve the situation by requiring recertification only every six months."

WHY AMERICA SHOULD HAVE UNIVERSAL EARLY EDUCATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Lane Kenworthy, University of California, San Diego

"Early education ... helps to equalize opportunity by improving the capabilities of children from less advantaged homes. Researchers have not yet pinned down exactly how large this equalizing effect is, but even if it turns out to be small, early education programs still offer the vital benefit of enabling working parents to better handle and balance their obligations at work and in the family."

FIVE STEPS GOVERNMENTS, EMPLOYERS, AND NON-PROFITS CAN TAKE

Christine Percheski, Northwestern University

"Non-profits and governments should provide additional high-quality and affordable day care slots for young children along with after-school slots for children of working parents. High costs and long waiting lists for child care are a common problem for families with children, and alleviating this problem is crucial if women are to stay in jobs and be successful at work."

FOR WOMEN'S SAKE, NORTH CAROLINA LAWMAKERS SHOULD BRING BACK THE EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT

Marion Johnson, Think NC First

"At both the national and state levels, the Earned Income Tax Credit is one of the most effective tools that governments have at their disposal to boost incomes at the bottom. In the short-term, it provides a safety net for working families, keeping them above the poverty line. At the state level, the extra money helps offset state and local taxes."

TURNING THE DOUBLE DAY INTO ONE WORKING DAY AT A TIME

Randy Albelda, University of Massachusetts Boston

"Think of the possibilities as a two-sided coin. One side provides more time to workers to care – or just clean the house – especially at times when care needs are most acute. The other side of the coin ensures the availability of more care services provided through publicly financed work."

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