

One in six Texas women live in poverty; report says child-care changes could help ^[1]

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Source: Kera News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 14 Feb 2017

AVAILABILITY

Read online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Women often walk a rougher road than men when it comes to economic stability.

A new report from the Dallas Women's Foundation, the Austin-based Center for Public Policy Priorities, and Texas Woman's University shows 17 percent of Texas women live in poverty, compared to 14 percent of men.

Researchers have identified four building blocks that are basically essential for women who want to be financially secure: health insurance, housing, education and child care. [Click on each building block to see the report that corresponds].

Zooming In On Child Care

Work support is a key issue for women on the financial edge – crucial for economic stability. Frances Deviney with the Center for Public Policy Priorities explains how child-care costs can weigh down low-income mothers and families.

“For a family of three that lives below \$24,000 a year, we’re talking about spending 30 percent of income for paid child care every year,” she says. “That is a child-care cost burden, for most families, and that’s not necessarily guaranteeing quality.”

An Expensive Necessity

That 30 percent figure is an average — which means many people have to spend even more.

Deviney says the typical Texan spends \$7,000 to \$9,000 a year on full-time child care. (For comparison, the average cost of tuition and fees at a Texas public university is about \$8,300 a year.)

The new report reveals about 14 percent of Texas families had a major job disruption because of a problem with child care.

“That means they can’t take a job because they don’t have child care in place, they have to quit a job because their child care gets disrupted, or they have to reduce their hours, working because of child-care issues,” she says. “That’s not only economically tragic for the family, but it’s economically tragic for the businesses they’re working on, because it’s expensive to have turnover and it’s expensive to lost productivity like that.”

Looking Ahead

Nonprofit leaders say one solution is more family-friendly policies at work — things like paid sick leave and paid family leave, dependent care reimbursement accounts and the option to telecommute. Another concept these researchers are pushing is public/private partnerships. An example would be the city or state working with corporations to subsidize or maybe even provide subsidized child care at work.

Roslyn Dawson-Thompson, who's president and CEO of the Dallas Women's Foundation, says making quality, affordable child care available to everyone, including low-income moms and those of color, will make Texas stronger.

“As we look at the future of our work force, as we look at the future reality, how we not countenance the importance of equity across every dimension for women and children, because we will not have a healthy Texas economy, we will not have a healthy future if we do not take care of this,” she says.

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Region: United States ^[3]

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