

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Economists and others study and write about the “gender gap” in employment, which refers to the discrepancy in opportunities available to men and women entering the labor market and in their experience and level of success in that market. The gender gap indeed exists, particularly among Black people in the labor force, who are among the “working poor”¹. In 2009, nationally, the working poor rate was higher for Black women (14%) than for Black men (10%). These statistics are even grimmer for those who did not have a high school diploma or GED – the working poor rate was 32% and 23% for Black women and Black men, respectively².

The majority of New Yorkers who enter The HOPE Program’s work readiness program each year are Black and one half of all clients are women. Given differences in outcomes among men and women within our program as revealed in previous research, we wanted to further study the so-called gender gap and the associated factors and barriers.

This report – based primarily on the experience of 703 HOPE enrollees over the period from July 2007 through December 2010 – presents findings related to program completion, job placement and retention outcomes for men and women to inform workforce development programs.

Key Findings:

- Women without an educational credential³ were the most at risk: they were significantly less likely to complete The HOPE Program’s training, especially if they had young children living with them⁴.
- Women who completed the program were less likely to be placed in jobs than their male colleagues. Additionally, when placed in jobs, women without a credential earned lower hourly wages.
- Women with young children living with them were much more likely to accept part-time rather than full-time employment compared to women with older children or those with no childcare responsibilities. For the latter, the split between full-time and part-time jobs was almost comparable with that for male clients.

¹ The working poor are defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as people who participate in the labor force - either working or looking for work - for at least 27 weeks during the year but whose incomes still place them below the official poverty level.

² The Bureau of Labor Statistics, “A Profile of the Working Poor, 2009.” Online at: <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpswp2009.pdf>

³ In this analysis, **educational credential** refers to a high school diploma or GED.

⁴ For the purposes of this analysis, we define young children as children under the age of 7.

- Interestingly, women with an educational credential had outcomes more in line with their male colleagues: their completion rates were not impacted by the presence of young children living with them, and, among those placed in jobs, their average wages and their likelihood to take a full-time job were closer to those of the men.

Recommendations:

Recommendations at the end of the report speak specifically of ways to focus on the needs of women, particularly those without an educational credential and those with childcare responsibilities, who need to enter or re-enter the workplace. These include:

- Up-front focus and clarity around childcare and back-up childcare arrangements, particularly for women without an educational credential for whom this has been a more significant barrier.
- Early conversation to put in place medium-term plans that lay out a path including program completion, placement in jobs geared realistically to current skill levels and, importantly, an advancement map aimed at more education and skills development which would lead to better and higher paying jobs.
- Continued engagement with women dealing with competing priorities around home and family, program requirements, needs for additional training and education and possible lack of motivation given the short term opportunities available at their current skill and educational levels.

The HOPE Program (www.thehopeprogram.org)

Founded in 1984, The HOPE Program helps New Yorkers transcend poverty and prepares them to find, keep and grow careers. Located in downtown Brooklyn, HOPE empowers individuals living in extreme poverty to achieve economic self-sufficiency through work readiness training and assistance with job placement and advancement.