

# THE DENVER POST

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 12, 2013



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## DENVER & THE WEST

### WOMEN'S STRIDES IN STATE MASKING SOME DISPARITIES

Colorado ranks first in the nation for women in state legislature, fifth for women with a bachelor's degree or higher, and eighth for its share of women in the workforce. But the strong state of women's social and economic status in Colorado masks disparities among women of different races and ethnicities. »4A

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Study of Colorado women and girls

# Major gains in status made

**But the research project finds serious disparities between whites and minorities in social and economic measurements.**

By Colleen O'Connor *The Denver Post*

The lives of women and girls in Colorado have greatly improved in recent decades — especially if the women are white, according to a report released Wednesday by The Women's Foundation.

Colorado ranks first in the nation for its proportion of women in state legislature, fifth for the proportion of women with a bachelor's degree or higher, and eighth for its share of women in the workforce.

But the strength of women's social and economic status in Colorado masks disparities among women of different races and ethnicities, the report said.

In Colorado between 1999 and 2008-10, the gender wage gap between white women and white men narrowed, but the gap between women from the largest racial and ethnic groups and white men grew larger.

White women's earnings as a percentage of white men's grew to 77 percent from 73 percent.

Latinas' earnings as a percentage of white men's fell to 53 percent from 56 percent, African-American women's fell to 66 percent from 68 percent, and Asian-American women's fell to 67 percent from 70 percent.



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The 160-page report, "The Status of Women and Girls in Colorado," is the first major research project since 2000 from The Women's Foundation of Colorado, and is the focus of a statewide summit being held Wednesday at the University of Denver.

The report analyzes how 2.5 million Colorado women and girls are doing in five key areas: economic security and poverty; employment and earnings; educational opportunity; personal safety; and community leadership.

Like past reports, it will be used to help donors and foundations establish investment priorities, and to help state and local organizations make policy and program decisions.

The 2000 report was based on data from 1995, so the new report is more timely — incorporating

financial impacts of the recession — and also multifaceted.

"There is a lot more data broken into race and ethnicity, and the regional analysis is better in the sense of variations across the state. Really (significant) differences can get lost between state averages," said foundation president and CEO Louise Atkinson.

That becomes evident when looking at something like unemployment. In 2011, unemployment averaged 7.8 percent for women in Colorado, more than twice as high as the unemployment rate in late 2007, when the Great Recession started.

But African-American women had the highest unemployment rate at 12.4 percent, followed by Latinas at 9.5 percent, white women at 7.4 percent

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and Asian-American women at 6.6 percent.

In Colorado, regional differences can affect the trajectory of a woman's career. Statewide, women are substantially more likely than men to work in professional occupations: 26 percent of employed women, compared with 19 percent of employed men.

Also, they're almost equal to men when it comes to managerial occupations: 16 percent of employed women compared with 18 percent of employed men.

But a vast difference exists at the regional level. In Boulder from 2008 to 2010, 50 percent of women had professional and

managerial jobs (compared with 52 percent of men), but in the southern part of the state, only 35 percent of women had these high-level jobs (compared with 28 percent of men.)

"The new data gives us a huge lift in terms of how we do our regional strategy, especially in terms of how we invest with partners across the state," said Atkinson. "When a region needs a specific type of help, we need to understand what that means."

In 2011, three in 10 women had a family income at or below poverty level, with Latina, African-American and American Indian women much more likely to face economic hardship.

Fifty percent of Latinas — or 158,689 women — had family



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incomes below or near the federal poverty line.

Among African-American women, 46 percent, or 28,173, had incomes at or near the federal poverty line, compared with 48 percent of American Indian women (5,165).

Among white women, 22 percent (310,992) were poor or near poor, compared with 25 percent (14,827) of Asian-American women.

At the upper end of the economic ladder, women also faced challenges. Colorado ranked low nationally for female representation on corporate boards, the report said.

"One study of corporate board leadership in Colorado found that 54 percent of companies surveyed had only one or two women serving on their boards," the report said. "A separate study

found that in all 92 publicly traded companies headquartered in Colorado, only 7 percent of board seats were held by women (52 of 697 board seats)."

"A lot of our partner organizations and friends are focused on that, and we've already decided we're going to get together and talk about this," said Atkinson. "We're going to form a cohort to address this even further. We're not going to wait any longer."

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