

New report could improve lives of Missouri women, researcher says

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Though women are better represented in the workforce and in higher education institutions, they still face barriers in employment, education and health care access and are more likely to live in poverty. Now, a University of Missouri expert says new research highlighting current issues affecting Missouri women provides insights that could significantly improve the lives of women throughout the state.

Kristin Metcalf-Wilson, an assistant teaching professor in the MU Sinclair School of Nursing, helped compile the Missouri Women's Report. The report includes gender-specific, county-level data and analysis explaining various aspects of women's health and economic status. In addition to showing the progress made in women's [health care access](#) and well-being, workforce and education, economic justice and [civic engagement](#), the report also indicates existing barriers in these areas.

"This report will help [health care providers](#), legislators and women's advocates better understand the relationship among health, poverty and education," Metcalf-Wilson said. "In a time with limited resources, public servants should use this report to create solutions that will improve the health of Missouri women."

For example, Metcalf-Wilson said legislators need to recognize the disparity in [socioeconomic status](#) and [health care](#) access between women and men ages 64 and older. She urges legislators to develop policy before the rest of the [baby boomer](#) population ages. Another concern

noted in the report is that, even though Missouri women now earn degrees at nearly the same rate as men, they don't have equal career opportunities or income. Overall, women earn 74 cents on the dollar compared to men; female college graduates earn 90 cents in comparison in some counties.

To reverse the growing [disparities](#), the report encourages economic policies that promote education and career opportunities, especially in science, technology, engineering and math. It also suggests affordable housing, preventative health care and treatment, anti-violence campaigns, early childhood initiatives and increased representation of women in paid government positions.

"Women do better when there's money to support services," Metcalf-Wilson said. "With an economic recession at the state level, we need to know where our money is going and where we'll get the biggest bang for our buck among different counties. Any change to assistance programs disproportionately affects women and their families since women are more likely to be the primary caregivers and single heads of household."

The 74-page report is a joint initiative commissioned by the Women's Policy Alliance, a nonprofit organization that promotes Missouri women's advancement and equity, and produced by the MU Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis. The report is a follow-up to a national study conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research in 2004, which gave the health and economic status of Missouri women a C- grade.

More information: The report was released to the public on March 7 in print and electronic form. To view the report, visit womenspolicyalliance.org/missouri-womens-report

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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