

2017

The Status of Working Women in Rhode Island

WOMEN'Sfund
RHODE ISLAND

engage, invest, act

In partnership with:



“We ask justice, we ask equality, we ask that all the civil and political rights that belong to citizens of the United States, be guaranteed to us and our daughters forever.”

Susan B Anthony



Letter from the Executive Director of Women's Fund of RI



I am proud to serve as the Executive Director of the Women's Fund of Rhode Island (WFRI), an organization whose mission is to invest in women and girls in our community through research, advocacy and strategic partnerships designed to eliminate gender inequity through systemic change. To that end, WFRI submits our latest report, *The State of Working Women in RI*, in partnership with the Economic Progress Institute of RI.

This report highlights the need for leaders in our state to come together to help more of our young women to graduate from high school or attain their GED, and give them opportunities to enter the workplace through good paying jobs with benefits. Many higher wage jobs in RI go unfilled due to a lack of qualified applicants. With a basic education and some additional training, women can fill these positions, particularly in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) fields, helping to grow RI as a technology hub. Doing so will help our state's economy, as well as the high numbers of women who are underemployed in RI. When you learn more, you earn more.

WFRI joins with other organizations and community leaders in continuing to push for the adoption of family friendly policies such as living wages, paid sick time and paid family leave. Work/life policies

such as these are strategic business tools that benefit all workers, helping to attract/retain valued expertise and skills of employees already trained to work and avoiding costly turnover. Many business surveys show that employers report positive or no noticeable affect on profitability or morale, and other studies show that these policies have direct positive impact on women and families, who are also less likely to need/receive public assistance. While RI has made progress in this area, much remains to be done.

This report would not be possible without the assistance of many volunteers. I thank all those who spent countless hours in preparing this report, and those who will work over the next year to share the information within it. *"Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in."* Thank you for working to make RI a better community!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly Mervino". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Executive Director
Women's Fund of RI

Executive Summary

This report examines the current status of women in Rhode Island's economy, documenting the economic challenges women continue to face and the ongoing disparities between women and men in terms of wages, earnings, and poverty rates.

The report first outlines the current demographics of women in Rhode Island – including age and marital status – and looks at how these demographics relate to their role in the labor force. Rhode Island's labor force is made up almost equally of men (51 percent) and women (49 percent) which is the second highest proportion of women in the labor force in the country.

The report then explores the importance of education in setting a strong foundation for economic success and the challenges facing women of different races and ethnicities. Simply put, education opens doors to careers that pay higher wages. Rhode Island generally trails its New England neighbors in measures of educational attainment, with a smaller share of women holding bachelor's degrees or higher degrees than the national average and all neighboring states. Rhode Island women also fare poorly when looking at the lower end of the educational spectrum, with larger numbers of women in Rhode Island lacking a high school diploma than either the New England or national averages, across all races and ethnicities.

More than ever, women are important contributors to the economy. Further, as women have entered the labor force in increasing numbers over recent decades, their contributions to the economic security of their families has grown. Nationally, by 2010, nearly two-thirds of mothers were breadwinners, either sole (41.4 percent), or jointly with another parent (22.5 percent)¹. Women have helped spur greater economic productivity, generating substantial wealth for both the national and Rhode Island economies. 36 percent of women who work are working part-time, a share that places Rhode Island 6th among all states. Especially during periods of economic downturn, a substantial share of women working part-time in Rhode Island are doing so because of lack of other opportunities, and would rather be working full-time.

Despite the fact that women and men in Rhode Island comprise comparable shares of the Rhode Island labor force, women and men are distributed differently in terms of the occupational sectors in which they are working. In sectors in which larger shares of women work, this gender contrast can be seen most clearly in the "office and

¹ Heather Boushey, 2014. "Expanding Economic Opportunity for Women and Families", *Equitablog*, Washington Center for Equitable Growth. <http://equitablegrowth.org/expanding-economic-opportunity-women-families/>.

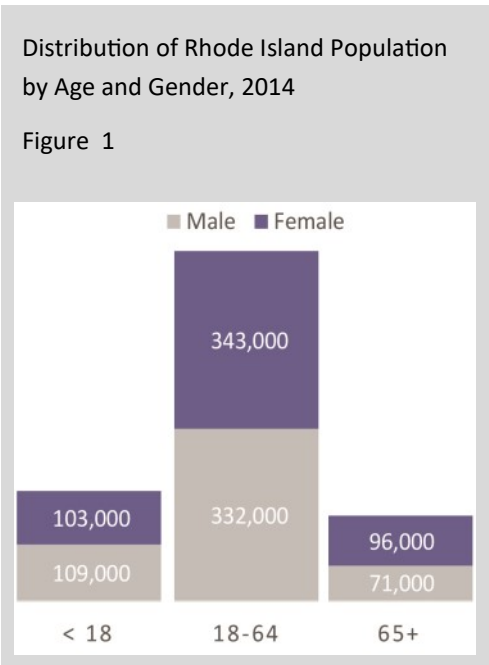
administrative support” sector, where one in five (19.6 percent) worked in 2014, compared with just 7.5 percent of men. These distributional differences matter considerably when looking at median sectoral earnings. In the office and administration support sector, women's earnings trailed the medians in all categories. Though higher than the national average, median wages for women working in Rhode Island trail those from Connecticut and Massachusetts, and continue to trail those of men, despite a modest closing of the “wage gap” over the course of the past thirty-five years. Over the past 15 years, any closing of the female to male wage gap has come at the expense of men's wages, rather than due to increases in women's median wages, which in 2015 stood nearly 40 cents lower than in 2000.

In 2015, the unemployment rate for women in Rhode Island stood at 4.9 percent, lower than the rates in Connecticut and the overall national average, but higher than in Massachusetts. The share of unemployed women in Rhode Island who had been unemployed for six months or longer was among the highest in the nation in 2015, at 36.6 percent, reflecting the lingering effect of the Great Recession on employment in the Ocean State. Poverty rates in Rhode Island largely reflect trends in other key economic indicators, with substantially higher rates of poverty among Latino and Black women than among White women, across all age groups. Older Latino women had an unemployment rate of 41.6 percent in 2014, more than four times higher than the White non-Hispanic poverty rate for older women.

Four initiatives, in the right combination, will go a long way towards advancing the well-being of Rhode Island women in the workforce. These include: the adoption of more family-friendly policies by employers, the advancement of a public policy agenda of family-friendly policies such as a living wage, paid sick time, longer paid family leave options, and enforcement of existing labor standards, and the adoption by workers of a broader range of collective actions to improve their well-being, including but not limited to unionization. In addition, it is critical to motivate and assist girls and women to enter the workplace through jobs with higher pay and benefits potential, such as positions in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) career track. This requires more of our young women to achieve high school diplomas or GED, and to attain a minimum of training through a variety of certificate programs already available in RI.

General Demographics

Women in Rhode Island make up the majority of the overall population. As Table 1 shows, women and men make up equal segments of the population in general, with a substantially larger percentage of women than men in the 65+ category.



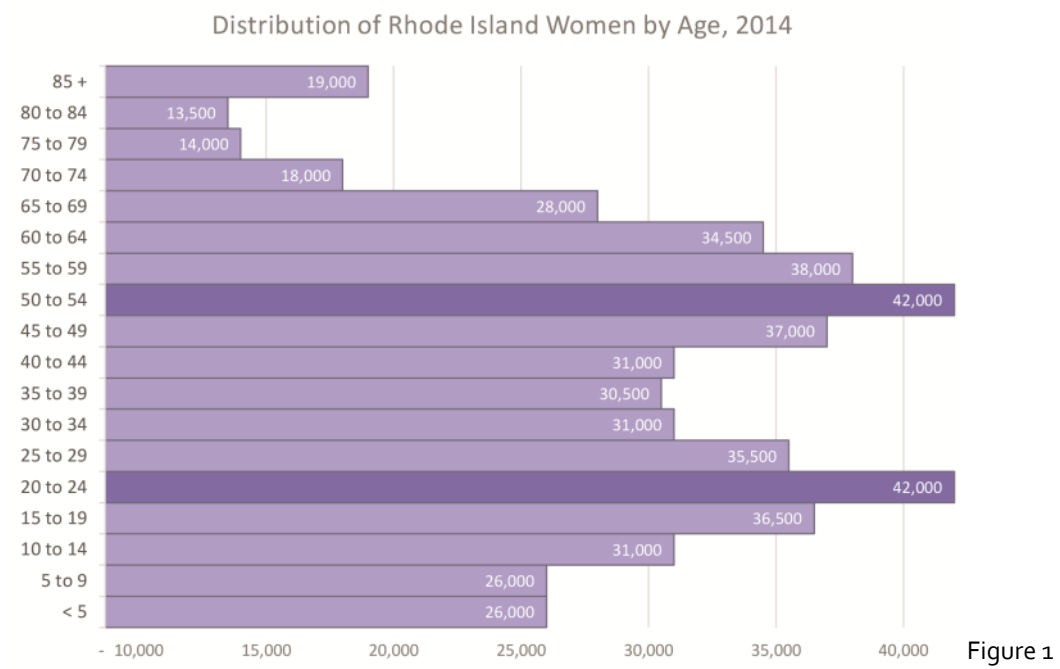
Age

Figure 1 shows the distribution of Rhode Island women by age in 2014. The greatest population numbers are in the 20-24-year-old and the 50-54-year-old categories.

Race and Ethnicity

As reflected in the overall Rhode Island population, and seen in Figure 2, Rhode Island women are primarily white, non-Hispanic. Women of color represent about a quarter of the female population.

Patterns of economic disparity based on race and ethnicity are well documented,² and as Rhode Island grows more diverse, addressing these disparities with appropriate policies aimed at closing economic gaps becomes increasingly important.

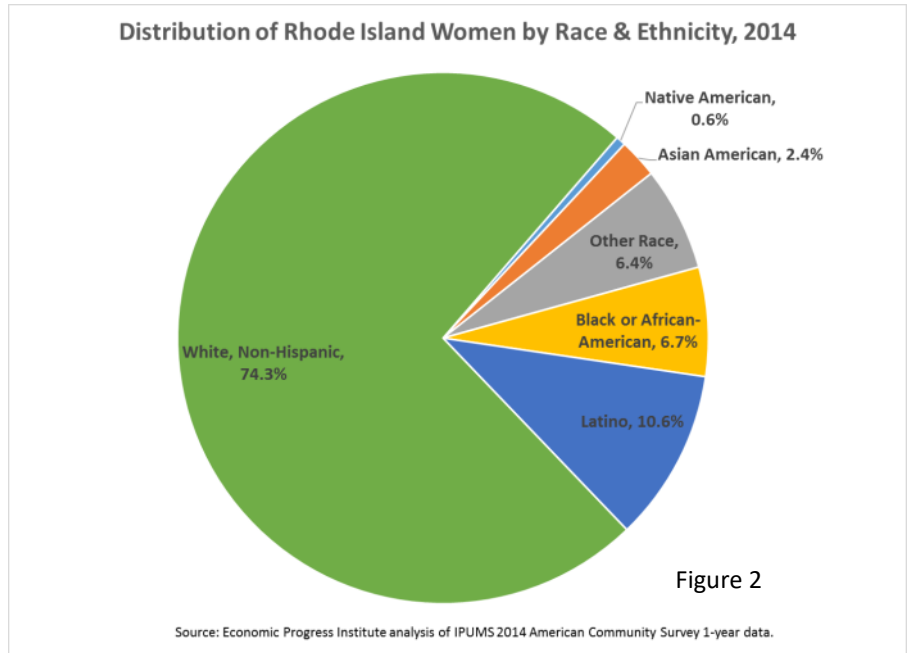


¹ Source: American Community Survey, 2014 1-year data. Table S0101

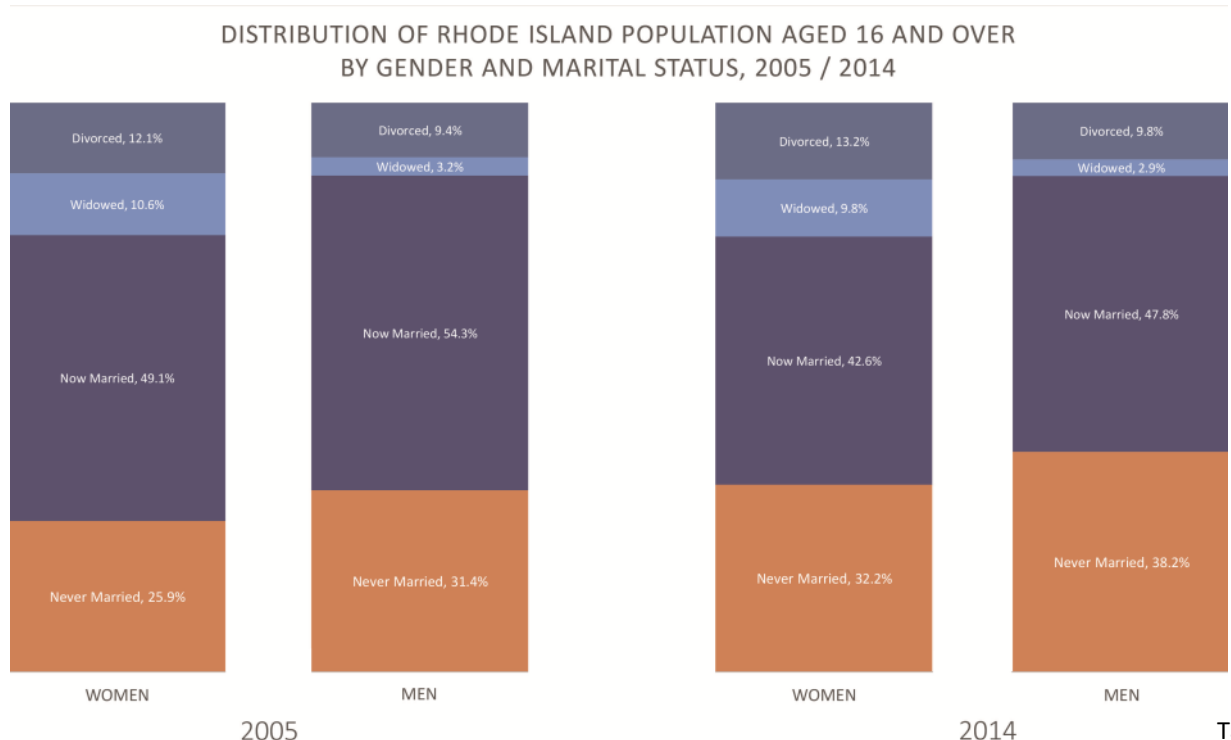
² The Economic Progress Institute, 2015. The State of Working Rhode Island: Workers of Color. <http://economicprogressri.org/index.php/2015/12/17/the-state-of-working-rhode-island-2015-workers-of-color/>

Marital Status

Fewer men and women are currently married than a decade ago, suggesting an overall change in the societal norm. Comparing 2005 data with 2014 data, we see an increase of more than six percentage points for both women and men who had never been married, and a corresponding decrease of more than six percentage points for both women and men who were currently married. Also during this time, the median age of marriage for both men and women has increased, with the ‘median age at first marriage’ having increased by 1.2 years for men, and by 2.0 years for women.³



Comparing women and men, we see in Table 2 that the share of women who were widowed (in both 2005 and 2014) is more than three times the share of men who are widowed (9.8 percent of women compared with 2.9 percent of men in 2014). This fact has a considerable bearing on the economic well-being of elder women in Rhode Island, who as we discuss later, face higher rates of poverty.



³ US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014 and 2005, 1-year estimates, Table B12007, “Median Age at First Marriage”.

Educational Attainment

Rhode Island women and men have very similar degrees of educational attainment, with fewer women having a high school diploma or less, and more women having some college or more. Nearly a third of both women and men have a bachelor’s degree or higher (see Figure 3).

It is critically important to Rhode Island’s economic future that the Rhode Island workforce—both women and men— have the formal education and training necessary to engage fully in today’s competitive economy. The Washington Center for Equitable Growth, emphasizes that enabling women to achieve their full potential builds strong families and a growing economy. In order to move towards greater workplace equity between men and women, including closing the wage gap, we need to address the concentration of women in lower wage positions. In part, this requires ensuring women have the education and training necessary to undertake a broader range of high skill jobs.

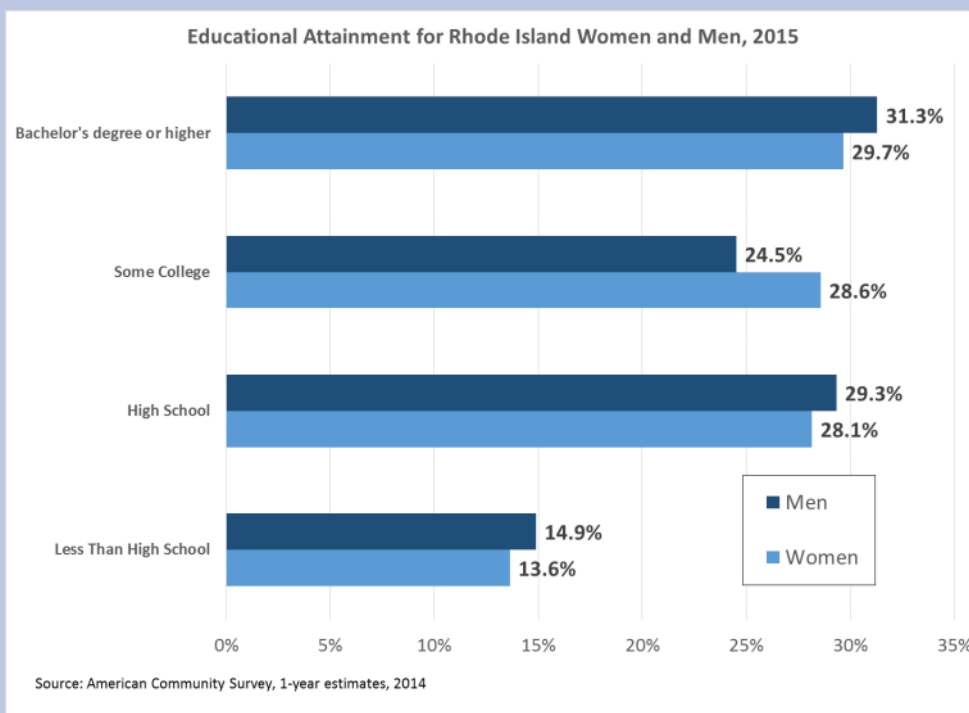


Figure 3

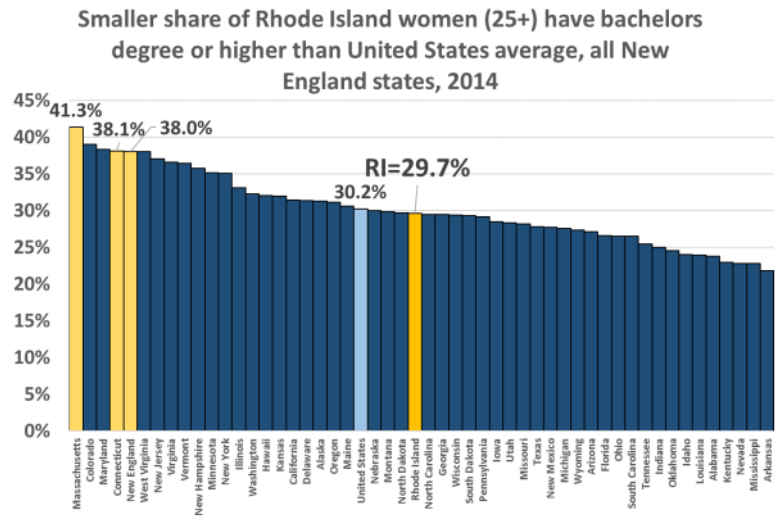
⁴ Heather Boushey, 2014. “Expanding Economic Opportunity for Women and Families”, *Equitablog*, Washington Center for Equitable Growth. <http://equitablegrowth.org/expanding-economic-opportunity-women-families/>.

What we see when we look at the data is that Rhode Island faces some stark challenges with respect to educational attainment. There is a higher share of Rhode Islanders with very low educational attainment, and a comparatively small share of Rhode Islanders with higher educational attainment, in the form of a completed Bachelor’s degree or higher. This is true for both Rhode Island women and men .

In Figure 4 we see all fifty states compared, in terms of their higher education attainment levels (i.e., with a Bachelor’s degree or higher) for women. Rhode Island has a slightly lower level of higher education (29.7 percent) attainment than the national average for women (30.2 percent), and substantially lower than the higher education rates for neighboring Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Comparing women’s educational attainment levels with those of men, Figure 5 shows that Rhode Island has a slightly larger share of men with higher education than women. The gap between the higher education levels for both men and women, as compared to our New England neighbors is substantial –more than eight percentage points separate Ocean State women from those in Connecticut, and nearly 12 percentage points separate them from Massachusetts women.

In many ways the gaps at the lower end of the educational attainment continuum are even more troubling. Fourteen percent of Rhode Island women have not completed high school, four percentage points higher than Connecticut and Massachusetts.



Source: Economic Progress Institute analysis of American Community Survey 1-year data, Table B15002

Figure 4

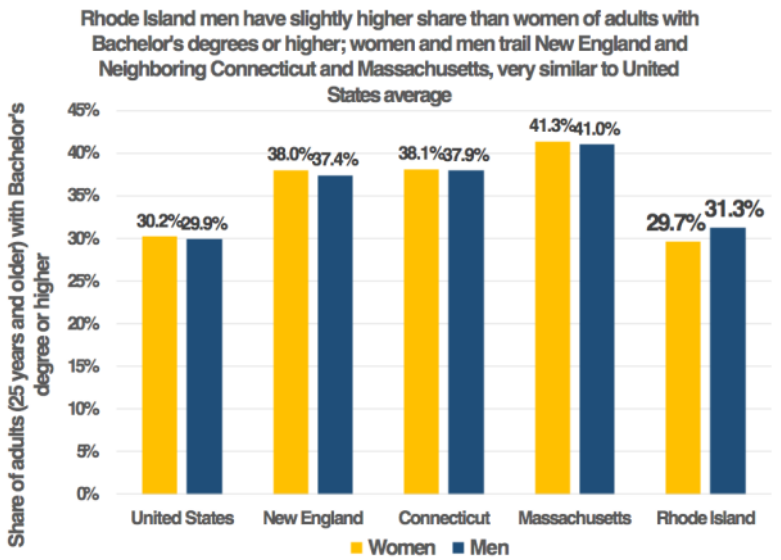
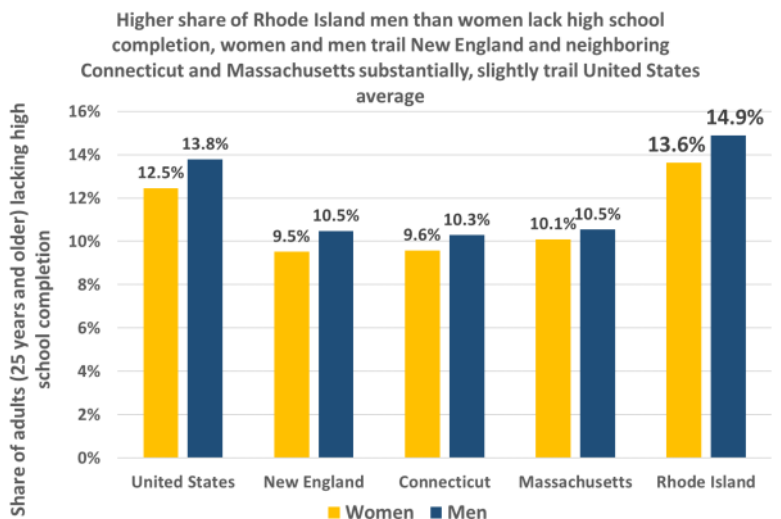


Figure 5



Source: Economic Progress Institute analysis of 2014 American Community Survey 1-year data, Table B15002 (and B15002B, D, H, I)

Figure 6

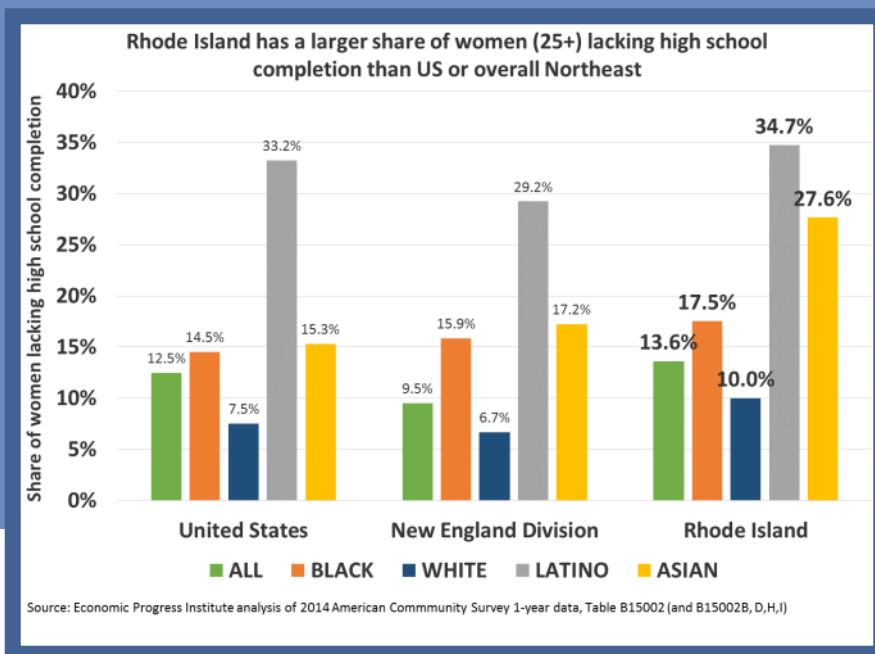


Figure 7

There are stark disparities when we look at educational attainment by race and ethnicity. In Figure 7 we see that a much smaller share of White women in Rhode Island lack a high school diploma than women of other races/ethnicities. There is a 24.7 percentage point gap between White women in Rhode Island (10.0 percent) and Latino women in Rhode Island (34.7 percent). Asian women in Rhode Island also have a very large share—more than one in four—of women lacking high school completion, while 13.6 percent of Black women lack high school completion. In comparing Rhode Island with either the United States or New England regional levels, two things jump out. The first is that Rhode Island has higher levels of women lacking high school completion for all categories of race and ethnicity. The second is that for Asian women in particular, that gap is quite large. Compared with the 27.6 percent of Rhode Island women lacking high school completion, only 15.3 percent lack high school completion nationally.

Not surprisingly, when looking at the higher education attainment levels (Figure 8), we see further disparity between Rhode Island women based on race and ethnicity. While about a third – 32.5 percent – of White Non-Hispanic Rhode Island women have higher education credentials (i.e., completion of a Bachelor’s degree or higher), only 12.3 percent of Latino women have a Bachelor’s degree or higher (with Asian and Black Rhode Island women in between). Comparing Rhode Island to the national averages, we see that the All and Black share of women in Rhode Island falls a little below national levels, the gaps between Rhode Island Latinos and Latinos nationally is a little larger, and Rhode Island’s Asian women trail significantly – by more than 18 percentage points (the gap between Asian women in Rhode Island and the New England regional level is even more dramatic – 23.1 percentage points).

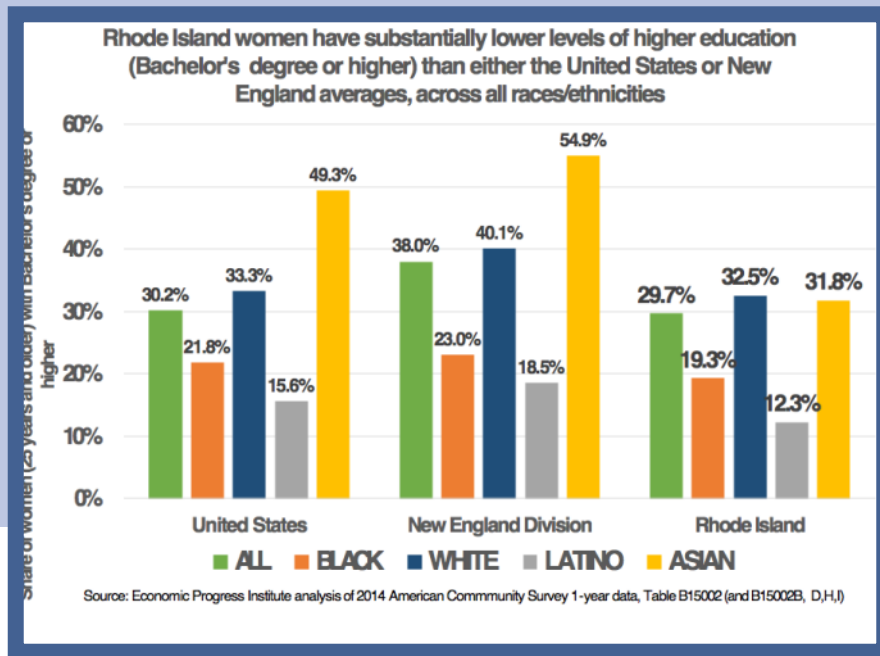
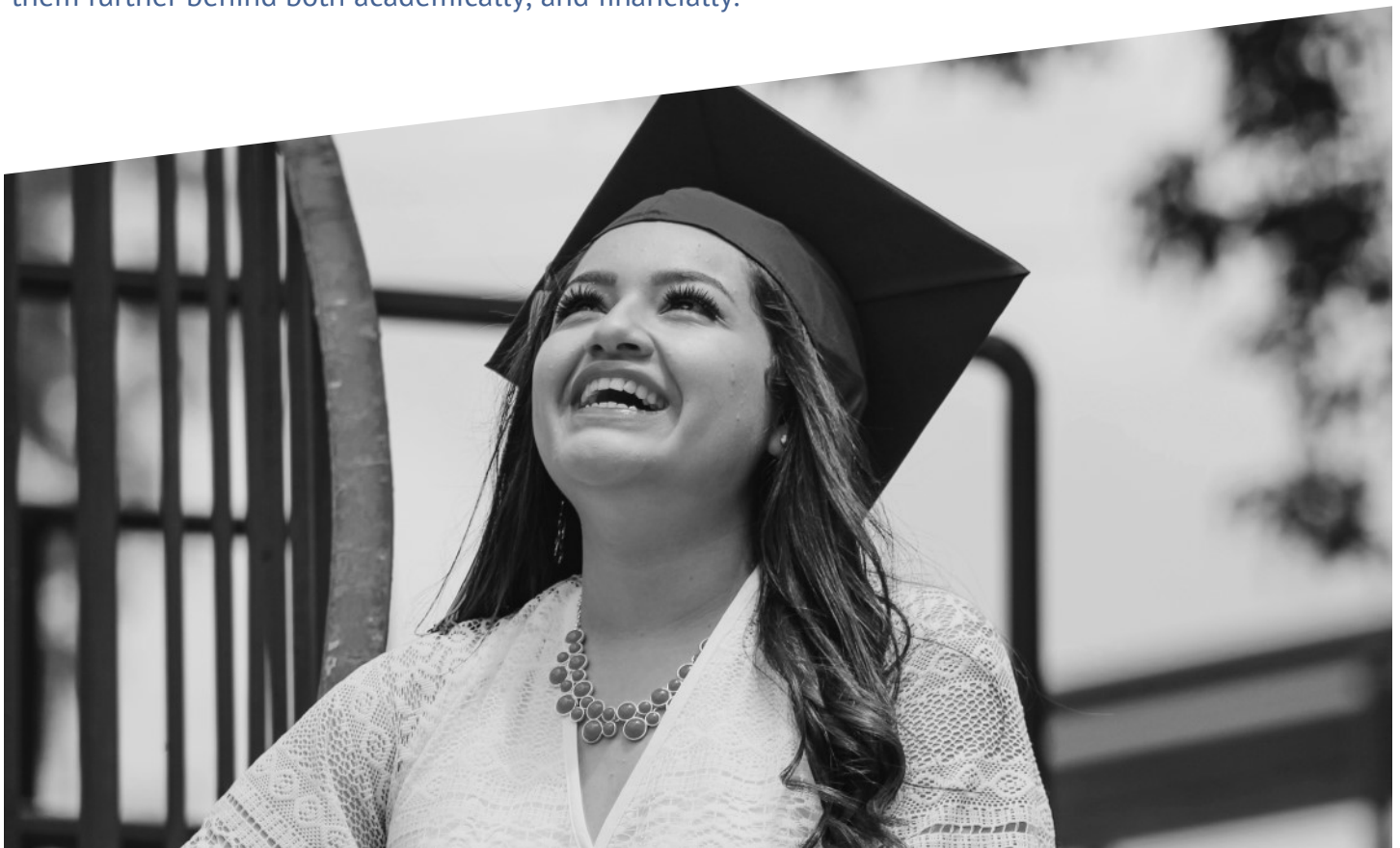


Figure 8

If Rhode Island is going to keep up in the rapidly changing global economy, we need to do a much better job helping all Rhode Island women to excel in their educational attainment. Clearly the challenges facing Latino and Asian women in Rhode Island are particularly acute. Doing more to help them get into—and then complete—higher education programs needs to be a priority to avoid leaving them further behind both academically, and financially.



Educational Attainment and Earnings: “When you learn more, you earn more”

Table 3 shows the significant “education premium” resulting as women (and men) gain additional educational credentials. We see for example that the median weekly earnings for women with less than a high school diploma was just \$480, while for those with a Master’s degree, a PhD or a Professional degree, the median weekly earning was nearly triple that, at \$1,250.

Educational attainment pays: when you learn more, you earn more.		
Educational Attainment Level	Median weekly earnings for Rhode Island women and men working full-time	
	Women	Men
Less than high school	\$480	\$750
Graduated high school	\$642	\$984
Bachelor’s degree completed	\$1,000	\$1,500
Master’s, Professional, or Ph. D	\$1,346	\$2,250
All Education Levels	\$825	\$1,192

Source: Economic Progress Institute and IPUMS analysis of three-year CPS data, 2012 - 2014

Table 3

While the benefits of acquiring additional education are evident in these data, what is also clear is that education alone will not close the gap in gender pay. In fact, in the highest level of educational attainment here, men’s weekly earnings were nearly 1.7 times these of women.

Educational Attainment and Family Well-Being

We know that economic well-being increases with educational attainment. As seen in Figure 9, as educational attainment increases, from “less than high school” through “high school graduate” and “some college” to “bachelor’s degree or higher”, poverty rates for both women and men decline. The striking disparities in poverty rates between women and men are noteworthy also. Women’s poverty rates are greater than for men, across all education levels. While these disparities are striking, it is noteworthy that the gap is smallest – both in nominal terms and percentage terms – at the highest level of education.

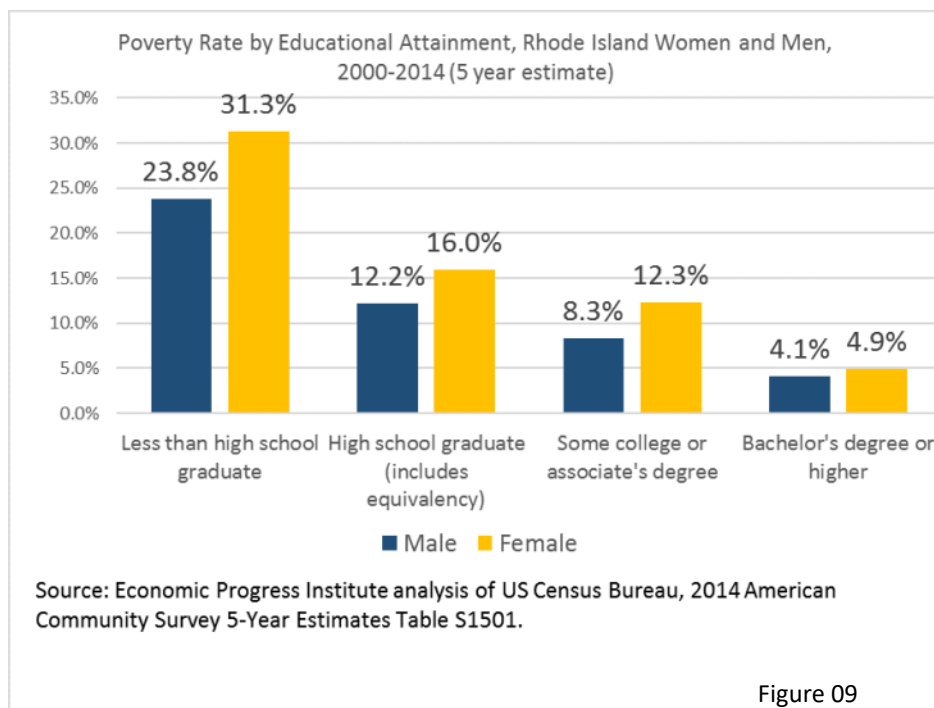


Figure 09

Women in the Labor Force

Rhode Island women, are fully engaging in the labor force, but still face significant economic challenges during the state's recovery from the Great Recession.

Looking at the employment to population ratio – or the percentage of working age women who are working, Rhode Island women at 58.2% are in the top 15 states, indicative of Rhode Island women's relatively high level of engagement in the economy.

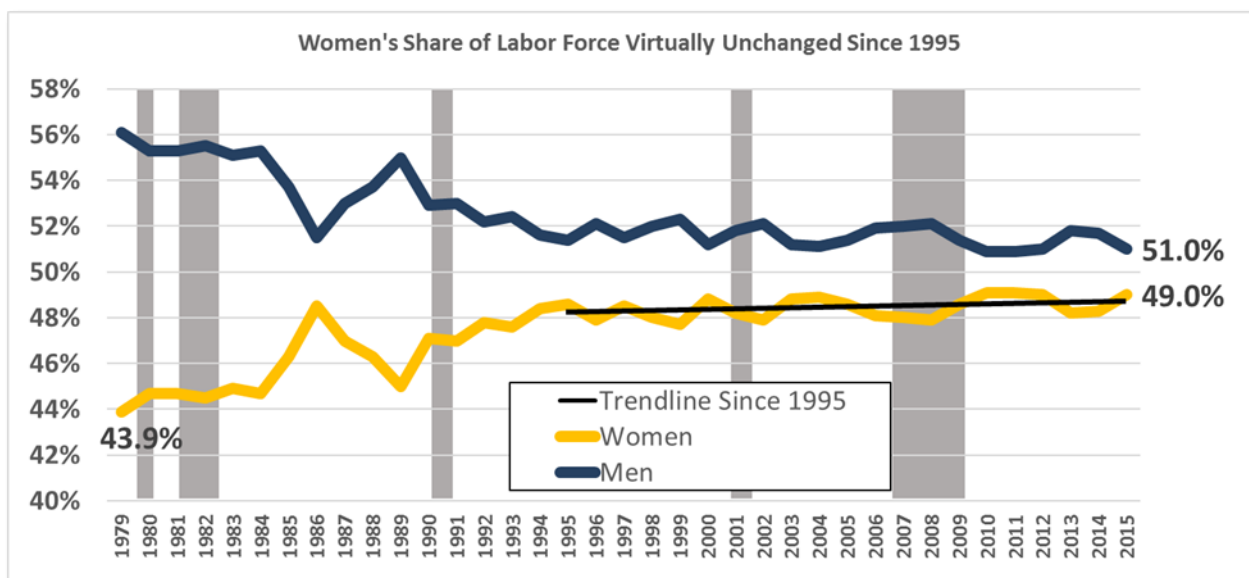


Figure 10

Source: Economic Progress Institute and Economic Policy Institute analysis of US Census Bureau CPS-ORG data.

As seen in Figure 10, women comprise 49.0 percent of the Rhode Island labor force, a share that has been quite steady since about 1995 (by which time, over a 15-year period, women's share had increased by about 15 percentage points), dramatically altering the lives of Rhode Island women, their families, and the Rhode Island economy. Increased participation of women in the workforce has contributed substantially to economic productivity increases during this window, both nationally and in Rhode Island. For women who have become co-breadwinners, this transformation, and the associated imposition on women's time and energy, has often been added to the responsibilities in the home that women had borne in previous decades. The supports for women in the workforce – things like affordable and accessible quality early child care and education, paid family leave, paid sick days, and family-friendly scheduling -- have lagged this transformational shift in the economy.⁵

⁵ See <http://www.epi.org/publication/closing-the-pay-gap-and-beyond/#epi-toc-5> and http://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/final_nwlc_ourmomentreport2015.pdf

Although women comprised a large share of the Rhode Island labor force relative to other states, it also had the 5th highest share of women working part-time (35.8%, falling between MA at 38.0%/2nd, and CT at 35.7%/7th). We see that the states with relatively high shares of women working part-time are concentrated in states with relatively high levels of family economic security, reflecting the fact that a smaller share of women in those states – including Rhode Island – may have to work full-time to help support their families.⁶ Another factor at play though, is the lingering effects of a slow economic recovery causing employers to provide less than full-time employment to a larger share of women in the workforce.

Employment Population Ratio

The employment population ratio (EPOP) signals the extent to which working age women – those 16 years of age and older -- are working. The nearly seven percentage point gap between the male and female EPOP rates evident in Figure 11 points to the extent to which working-age women may be held back from participating in the workforce, perhaps caring for their children, or an elderly parent.

We see in Figure 11 evidence of the growing engagement of Rhode Island women in the economy, but also the ebbs and flows of the economy, and most dramatically, the impact of the Great Recession. During periods of economic expansion, the EPOP tends to increase, while during periods of economic recession, we see declines in the EPOP. While the male EPOP has consistently exceeded the female EPOP, it reflects periods of economic angst, such as during the Great Recession, when the decline for men was more precipitous than for women.

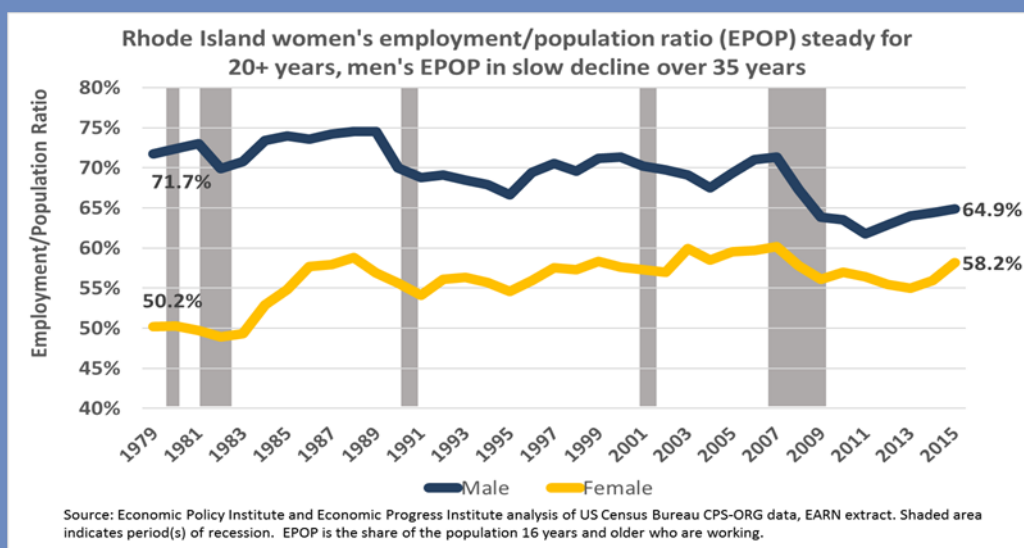


Figure 11

⁶ Source: Economic Progress Institute and Economic Policy Institute analysis of US Census Bureau CPS-ORG data.

Share of Women Workers and EPOP by Age

Figure 12 shows the distribution by age of Rhode Island working women. Nearly two-thirds (63.2 percent) of women working in Rhode Island are of “prime working age” between ages 25 and 54. The largest share of women, 22.9 percent, are in the 45-54 age group. This uptick likely reflects the greater ability of women to work after their child-rearing years are behind them.

While the overall women’s EPOP provides an overview of Rhode Island women’s involvement in the economy, drilling down by age provides important insights. As seen in Figure 13, a larger share of women work in Rhode Island than nationally across every age group. In the prime working age years, from age 25-64, the average EPOP rate ranges between 71.4 percent for women 25-34, to 74.2 percent of women aged 55-64. In comparing Rhode Island women’s EPOP across age groups to the national women’s EPOPs, we see Rhode Island women outpacing their national counterparts by the largest margins in the oldest “prime working-age” category (age 55-64, and in the next category, ages 65-74). Available data do not fully explain these discrepancies, but the type of work undertaken and the degree of financial need among women in the older stages of their work-lives provide compelling starting-points.

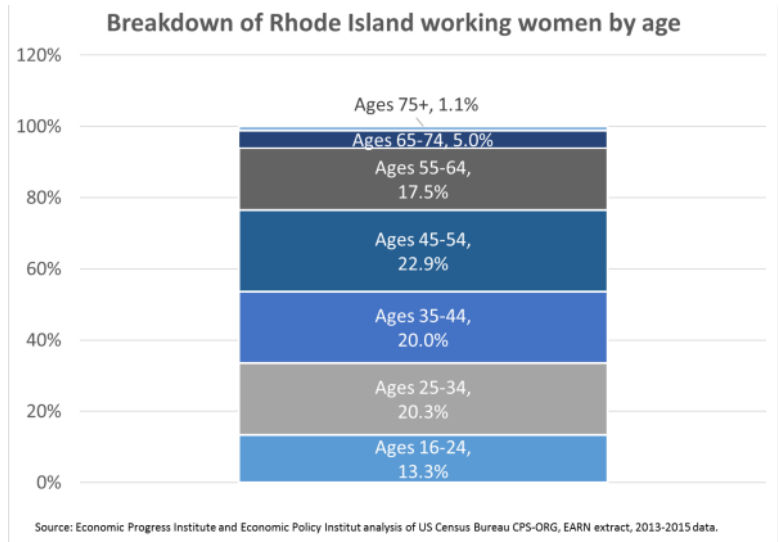


Figure 12

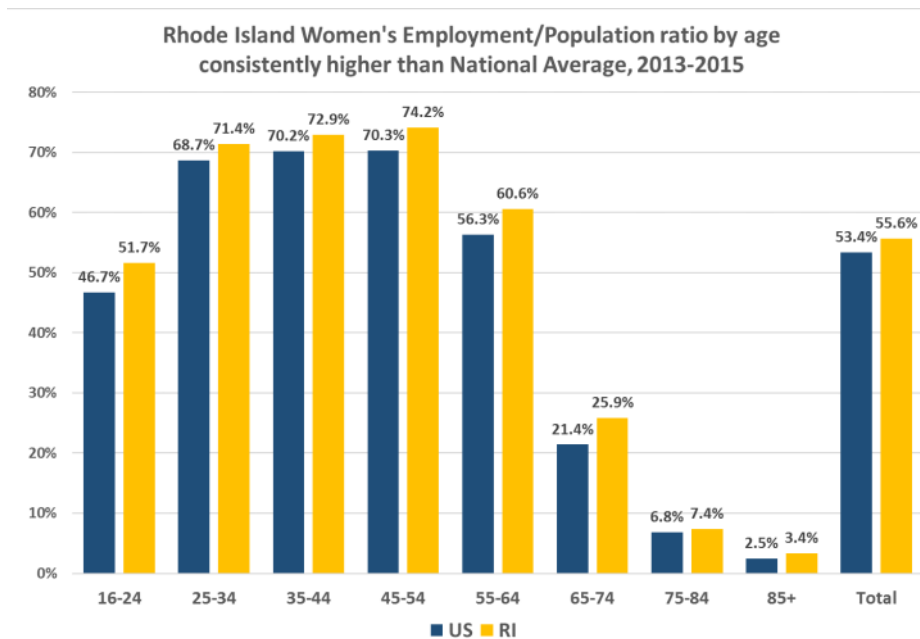


Figure 13

Source: Economic Progress Institute analysis of Economic Policy Institute's EARN-extract of the US Census Bureau's CPS-ORG 2013-2015 data

Women Working Part-Time

Many working women in Rhode Island are employed part-time. Some women work part-time by choice, but others are working part-time “for economic reasons.” This means they would rather be working full-time, but have been unable to secure full-time employment.

A little over a third (35.8 percent) of Rhode Island working women worked part-time in 2015. Of these part-time workers, 14.4 percent worked part-time for economic reasons.

As discussed above, Rhode Island has a higher share of working women working part-time (as opposed to full-time) than in most states. The southern New England states have comparatively high shares of working women who work part-time, with Massachusetts ranking 2nd with 38.0 percent working part-time, Rhode Island 6th, with 35.8 percent working part-time, and Connecticut 7th, with 35.7 percent of working women working part-time.

Rhode Island has consistently ranked higher than the US average for working women working part-time. During the Great Recession, there was an increase in part-time employment for not only Rhode Island, but also for both the United States and New England.

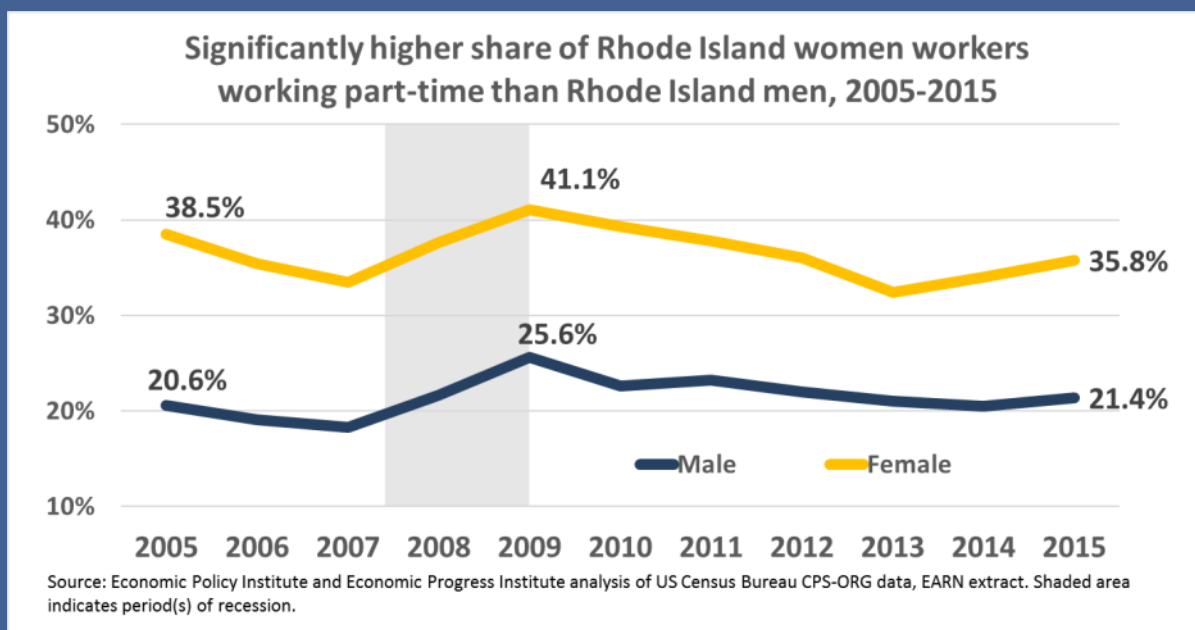


Figure 16

Figure 16 compares the share of Rhode Island working women and men who are working part-time. Over the last decade, the share of women working part-time has been consistently higher than the share of men working part-time. Part-time employment for both genders peaked in 2009 with more than 40 percent of women and more than a quarter of men working part-time.

Figure 17 shows variations in the share of women working part-time in Rhode Island and in the United States overall. The data are largely consistent with patterns one would expect – over half of women workers age 16-24 work part-time, much smaller shares of women in “prime working age” (25-64) work part-time, averaging a little less than 30 percent for Rhode Island women, with growing shares of part-time employment for older women, increasing from 46 percent of Rhode Island women 65-74, to 47 percent of women 75-84, and about 56 percent of Rhode Island women over 85 working. As mentioned above, the higher share of Rhode Island women working part-time during the prime working years compared to national averages reflects a combination of slightly higher levels of family economic security in Rhode Island compared to national averages, making part-time employment adequate to ensure family well-being, and the lingering effects of the Great Recession, still keeping some women from full-time employment.⁷

One in four women aged 65-74 are working, including over half (54 percent) working full-time. One in seven women age 75-84 are working, including over half (53 percent) working full-time. And one in fifteen women 85-years and older are working, with 44 percent of those working full-time.

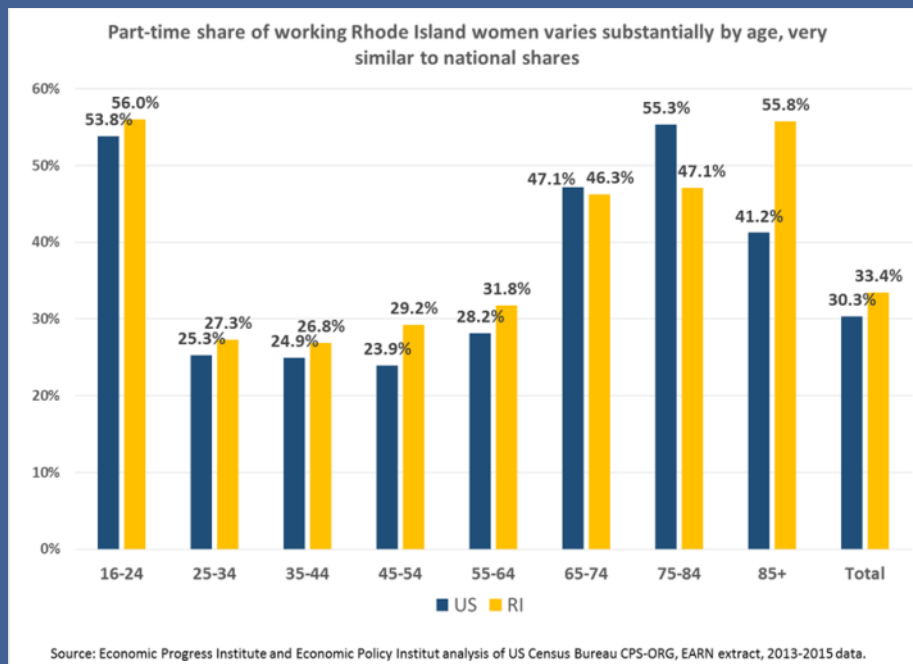


Figure 17

⁷ The reader is cautioned that in comparing the shares for workers 85 and older, which seem to show a fairly dramatic difference between Rhode Island women and women nationally, that the numbers of women in that age group working is comparatively small (ref from Figure 17 that only 3.4 percent of Rhode Island women aged 85 and older were working during this three-year period).

Part-Time Economic Reasons

While some women may be working part-time because their families can afford for them to do so, others may be forced to work part-time when they want to work full time.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) identifies the share of part-time workers who are working part-time “for economic reasons” (PTER) explaining that “persons employed part-time for economic reasons are those working less than 35 hours per week who want to work full time, are available to do so, and gave an economic reason (their hours had been cut back or they were unable to find a full-time job) for working part-time. These individuals are sometimes referred to as involuntary part-time workers.” (emphasis added).⁸ For many workers, working PTER may be an acceptable alternative to periods of unemployment.⁹

Although from the perspective of working Rhode Island women, PTER employment is certainly preferable to unemployment, the fact remains that for families struggling to make ends meet, part-time employment may not provide adequate income.

We see in Figure 18 that in 2015, a larger share of employed women in Rhode Island were working “part-time for economic reasons” (14.4 percent) than in neighboring Massachusetts (10.3 percent) or Connecticut (13.5 percent), though a smaller share than the United States average (14.9 percent).

As seen in Figure 19, the share of women working part-time for economic reasons in 2015 (14.4 percent) is down by about a third from the peak level (22.1 percent) during the Great Recession, but is still nearly double pre-recession levels (7.8 percent in 2005).

In Figure 20 we see that the share of women working part-time for economic reasons has been consistently less than the share of men over the past decade. In fact, the ratio fluctuates in a consistent range, with the male PTER rate consistently about one and a half times the female rate.

⁸ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, “Alternative Measures of Labor Underutilization for States, Second Quarter of 2015 through First Quarter of 2016 Averages”, <http://www.bls.gov/lau/stalt.htm>.

⁹ Proponents of reducing hours for a significant portion of workers during an economic down-turn, including Dean Baker from the Center for Economic and Policy Research, suggest it may be the most efficient path towards resuming “full employment”. Dean Baker, 2011. *Work-Sharing: The Quick Route Back to Full Employment*. Center for Economic and Policy Research. <http://cepr.net/publications/reports/work-sharing-the-quick-route-back-to-full-employment>.

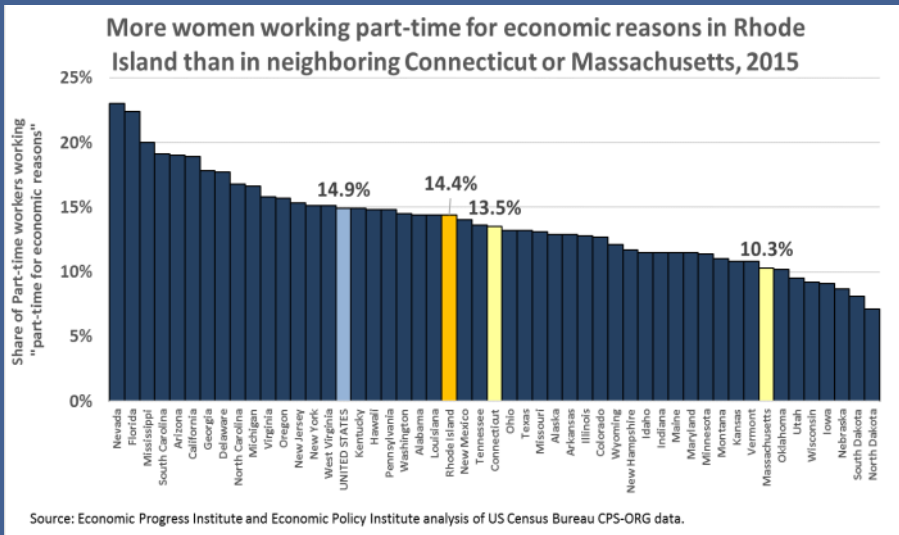


Figure 18

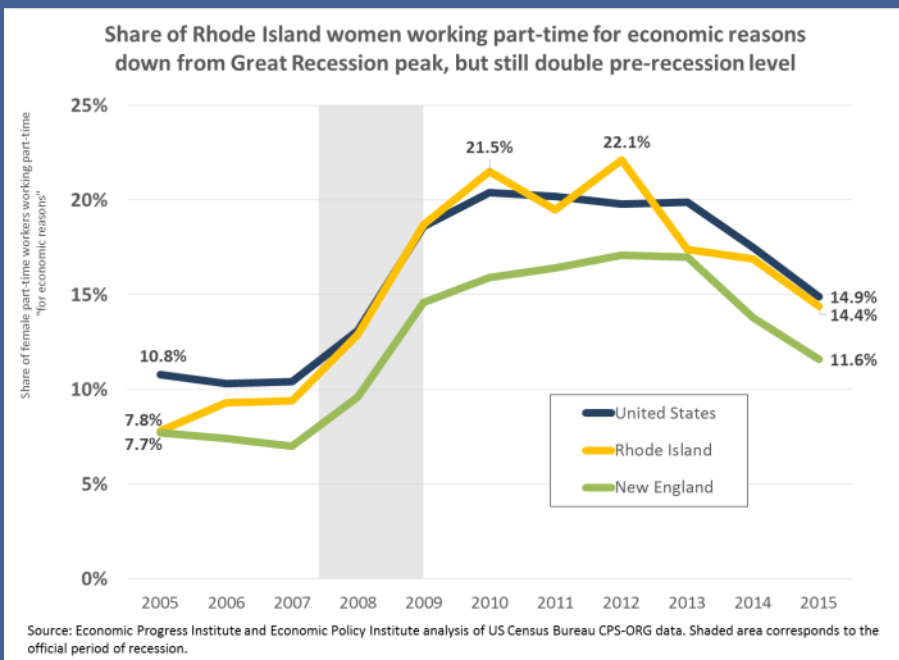


Figure 19

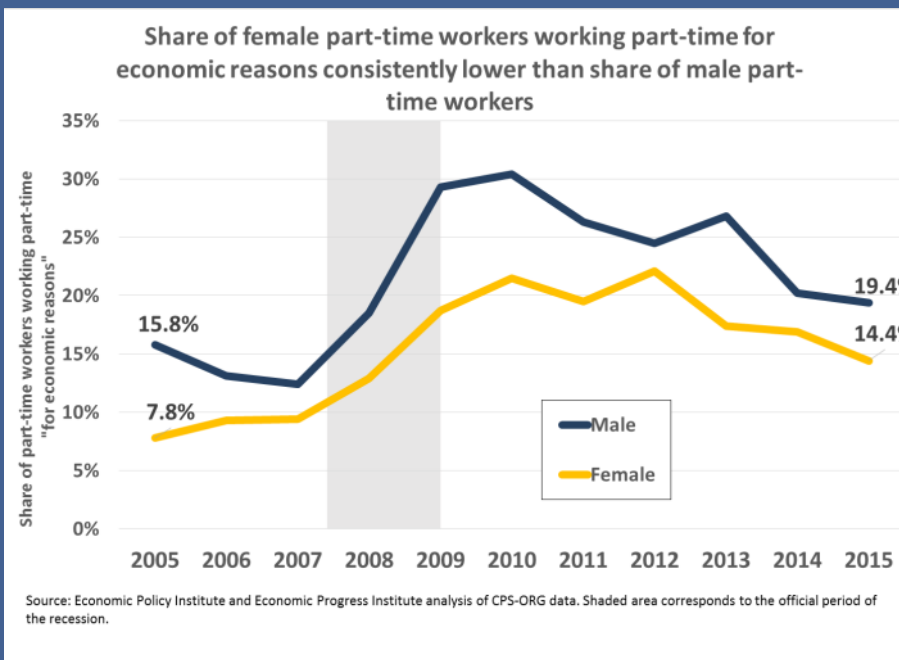


Figure 20

Occupational Breakdown

One reason women consistently earn less than their male counterparts is that they often work in lower earning jobs. A look at the distribution of women and men by occupation (Figure 21) shows that one in five (19.6%) women are working in office and administrative support jobs, the median earning of which, at \$29,484, is less the median female earning across all occupations (\$30,137), the overall median earning for both men and women, (\$34,404), and the median male earning across all occupations (\$40,389). As seen in Figure 21, there are stark differences between women's and men's occupational employment. These differences are key drivers of wage disparities between women and men. New research by economists at Cornell show that fully half (51 percent) of the pay gap between men and women is accounted for by differences in the type of work that men and women do.¹⁰

A recent Economic Policy Institute report highlights the challenges that must be overcome to shift the norms that currently drive occupational segregation by gender.

[Occupational differences between women and men—are themselves often affected by gender bias. For example, by the time a woman earns her first dollar, her occupational choice is the culmination of years of education, guidance by mentors, expectations set by those who raised her, hiring practices of firms, and widespread norms and expectations about work–family balance held by employers, co-workers, and society. In other words, even though women disproportionately enter lower-paid, female-dominated occupations, this decision is shaped by discrimination, societal norms, and other forces beyond women's control.¹¹

While this finding is true for women working in every state, variation in each state's societal norms, reflecting the unique combination of political culture, religious affiliation, and ethnic or racial customs, determines how this dynamic is manifested. While determining the mix of such factors shaping occupational choices for women in Rhode Island is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to keep such considerations in mind as we look for ways to close the wage gap between women and men working in the Ocean State.

While wages vary from one occupation to the next (further highlighted in Figure 22, which clearly shows those occupational sectors where women's wages are higher than the median wage for women in Rhode Island), there continue to be persistent gender pay gaps within occupations.

¹⁰ Francine Blau and Lawrence Kahn, 2016. The Gender Wage Gap: Extent, Trends, and Explanations, (Institute for the Study of Labor). <http://ftp.iza.org/dp9656.pdf>.

¹¹ Jessica Shieder and Elise Gould, 2016. "Women's work" and the gender pay gap: How discrimination, societal norms, and other forces affect women's occupational choices—and their pay (Economic Policy Institute). <http://www.epi.org/publication/womens-work-and-the-gender-pay-gap-how-discrimination-societal-norms-and-other-forces-affect-womens-occupational-choices-and-their-pay/>.

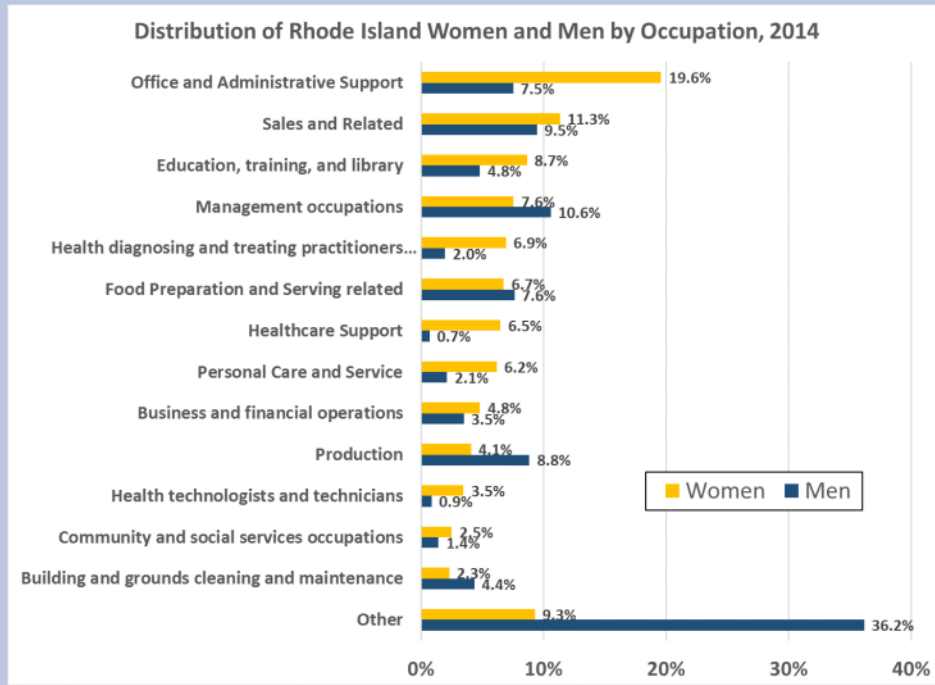


Figure 21 Source: Economic Progress Institute analysis of US Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates Table S2401 The “other” category above for men includes several male-dominated occupations, with 9.3 percent of men working in “construction and extraction” (compared to 0.0% of women), 4.7 percent of men working in “transportation” (compared to 1.0 percent of women), 4.7 percent of men working in “installation, maintenance and repair” (compared to 0.0% of women) and 3.7 percent of men working in “material moving” (compared to 0.8 percent of women).

Women's earnings in two largest occupations are below women's median earning of \$30,137

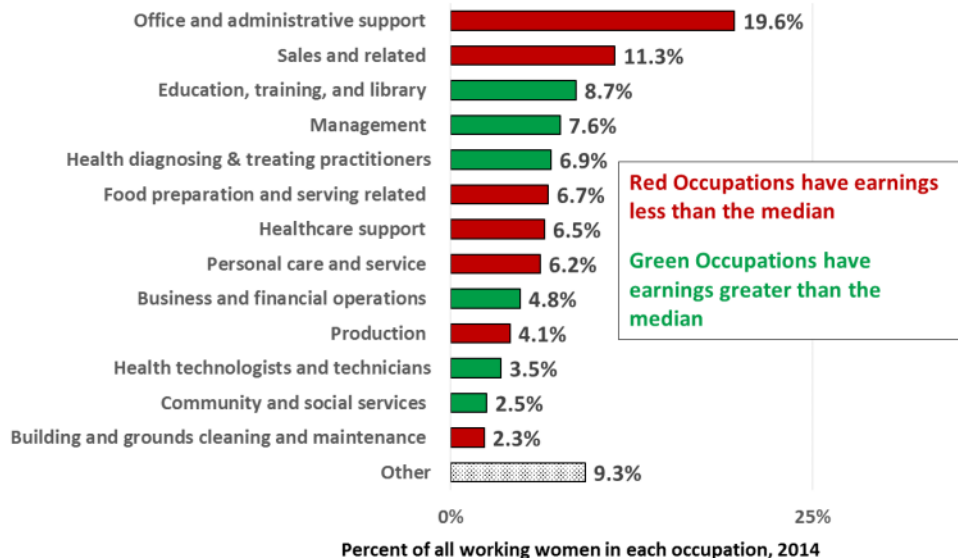


Figure 22

Changing the norms that steer girls into certain fields (and away from others) will lead to a more even gender mix in fields that have historically paid more. As noted in the Economic Policy Institute report cited above, shifting away from historical norms needs to begin at a very early stage in girls' education. Shifting expectations that currently discourage girls from pursuing careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) fields will increase their pursuit of employment in those fields, while transforming norms within those industries, where too many employers currently "foster an environment hostile to women's participation"¹² will help to keep women "upwardly mobile" within those industries.

There remains troubling evidence that there is still a very real component of discrimination driving gender pay differences. This finding is reinforced by research showing that as men enter fields traditionally occupied by women, wages in those fields goes up, while the opposite has been true (i.e., occupation wages have gone down) as women have entered fields previously dominated by men. These research findings, while not specific to Rhode Island, do nonetheless point to the challenges we face as we attempt to close the remaining wage gap between women and men in Rhode Island.¹³

Table 3 shows that the industry sector with the highest percentage of women, the health care support sector (89.7% women), also has earnings (at \$27,018) that are lower than the median female earnings.



¹² Sheider and Gould (2016), <http://www.epi.org/files/pdf/110304.pdf>, page 5.

¹³ It bears repeating that over the course of the past thirty years, there have been significant pressures keeping wages for women and men down, as corporations have prioritized executive compensation and shareholder return on investment, at the expense of worker's compensation.

Occupational Sector	RI Women in Sector	Percent of sector workers who are women	Sector Median Earnings (sector median earnings higher than women's overall median of \$30,137 are bolded)	Percent of working Rhode Island women in sector
Office and administrative support	49,817	71.5%	\$29,484	19.6%
Sales and related	28,806	53.6%	\$19,007	11.3%
Education, training, and library	22,021	63.4%	\$40,661	8.7%
Management	17,635	40.8%	\$53,694	7.6%
Health diagnosing and treating practitioners and other technical	19,227	77.3%	\$63,410	6.9%
Food preparation and serving related	17,154	46.0%	\$12,662	6.7%
Healthcare support	16,465	89.7%	\$27,018	6.5%
Personal care and service	15,738	73.7%	\$11,964	6.2%
Business and finance operations	12,218	56.9%	\$52,351	4.8%
Production	10,423	30.9%	\$17,379	4.1%
Health technologists and technicians	8,857	79.6%	\$45,310	3.5%
Community and social services	6,358	62.8%	\$39,726	2.5%
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	5,912	34.0%	\$16,346	2.3%
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media	4,360	47.5%	\$39,531	1.7%
Computer and mathematical	3,888	32.8%	\$39,903	1.5%
Legal	3,357	55.1%	\$52,708	1.3%
Life, physical, and social science	3,096	66.6%	\$55,863	1.2%
Transportation	2,638	17.5%	\$23,190	1.0%
Material moving	2,124	17.8%	\$21,038	0.8%
Fire fighting and prevention, and other protective service workers including supervisors	1,934	22.4%	\$13,597	0.8%
Architecture and engineering	996	11.5%	\$79,621	0.4%
Law enforcement workers including supervisors	552	12.1%	\$50,982	0.2%
Farming, fishing, and forestry	458	37.4%	\$13,750	0.2%
Construction and extraction	124	0.5%	\$31,756	0.0%
Installation, maintenance, and repair	87	0.7%	n/a	0.0%

Table 3

Wages

In the last few years, there has been increasing national attention to stagnant or falling wages for too many workers. It is important to dig deeper and look at how real wages have changed for women of different wage levels since 2001. Figure 24 shows that while those at the lower end of the wage spectrum have lost ground, those at the top of the wage spectrum have fared much better.

Figure 25 focuses on those in the in the 20th percentile for Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and the United States, from 2000-2015. Across that time span, only Massachusetts saw very modest wage growth (though the 2015 data point seems to mask what would otherwise appear to be a modest downward trend for Massachusetts as well).

One policy response to the decline of lower wages has been to push for increases in the minimum wage. Because the federal minimum wage has not been changed since 2009, much of this action has been at the state level. Rhode Island has increased its minimum wage four times in recent years with the 2016 wage at \$9.60/hour.¹⁴

The gap between men’s and women’s wages in this country, or “gender wage gap” remains significant – in 2015, for every dollar that men earned, women earned just 83 cents, up twenty cents from 63 cents in 1979.¹⁵

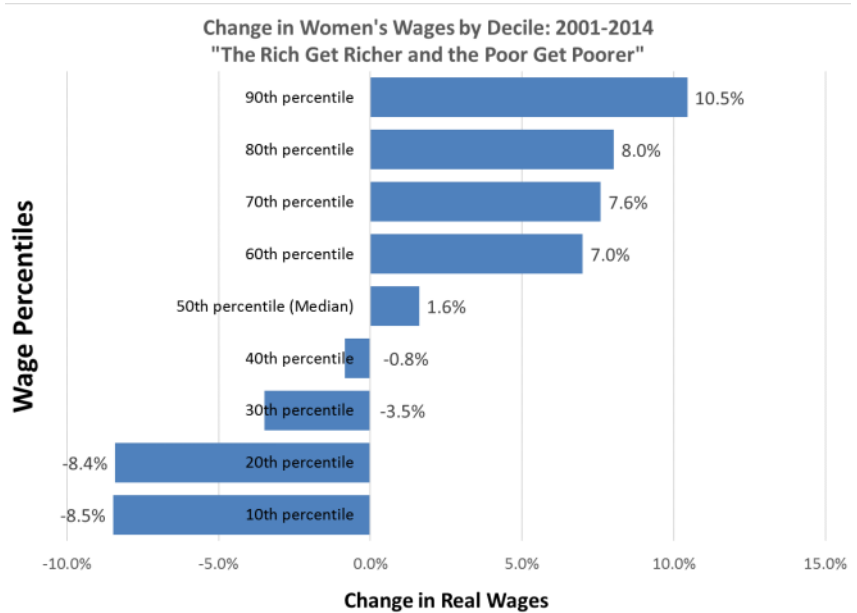
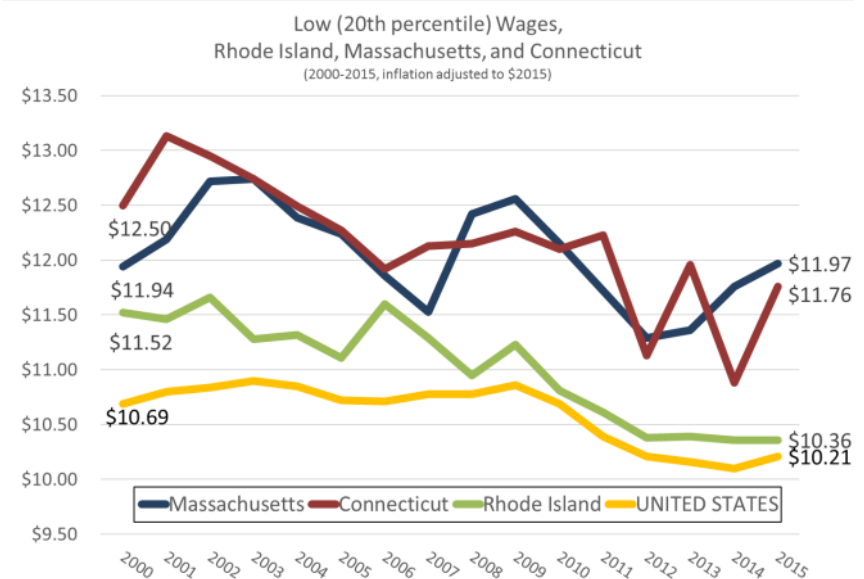


Figure 24. Source: Economic Progress Institute and Economic Policy Institute analysis of US Census Bureau CPS-ORG data.



Source: Economic Progress Institute and Economic Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey data.

¹⁴ The 2016 General Assembly did not include in its final budget the minimum wage increase to \$10.10 that had been in Governor Raimondo’s 2017 budget proposal.

Women’s Median Wages compared to Men’s

A new report from the National Partnership for Women and Families shows that the gender wage gap costs American women nearly \$500 Billion a year.¹⁶

In Rhode Island, the 2015 gap was not quite as wide, with women earning 88 cents for every dollar men earned at the median (up from 65 cents in 1979). Rhode Island has consistently paralleled the national and regional gaps fairly closely.

In Figure 26 we see Rhode Island, the United States, and New England all closing the “wage gap” between women and men, between 1979 and 2015. As discussed further below, both in Rhode Island and nationally much of the apparent ‘progress’ in closing the female to male wage gap has been as a result of declining median wages for men, hardly an ideal situation for working families trying to make ends meet.¹⁸

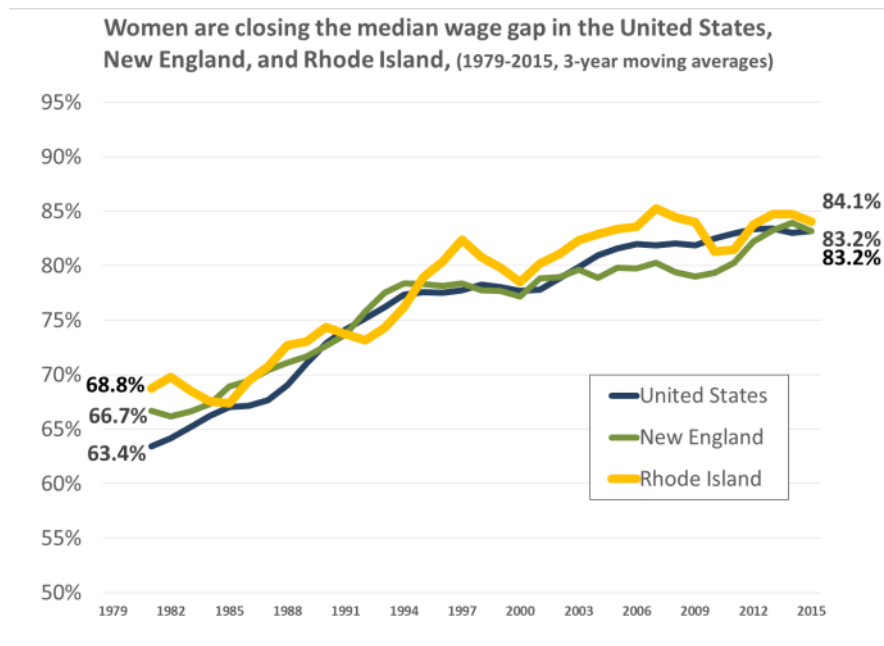


Figure 26

¹⁵ This issue is normally discussed in terms of the median wage. Comparing men’s and women’s wages at other points in the income distribution shows significant and persistent gaps also.

¹⁶ <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/news-room/press-releases/the-gender-wage-gap-costs-americas-women-nearly-500-billion-per-year-new-equal-pay-day-study-finds.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/>

¹⁷ Looking at data for other states, we are cautioned that looking at the gender gaps may not be an accurate proxy for how well women are doing in terms of their wage compensation. Despite being the “best” state for the wage gap in 1979, the median wage for the state of Arkansas was just \$10.87, nearly two dollars below the national median wage. It is only because the median wage for men in Arkansas lagged the national median even more significantly that the ratio is more favorable to women. Yet for families struggling to get by in Arkansas, having low wages for both women and men compounds the challenges faced.

¹⁸ In Figure 26 we use three-year rolling averages to moderate the fluctuations in Rhode Island’s “wage gap ratio”. We did this because so much attention is paid to the wage gap ratio, we did not want single-year wage fluctuations to convey an exaggerated sense of how well Rhode Island has done at closing the wage gap.

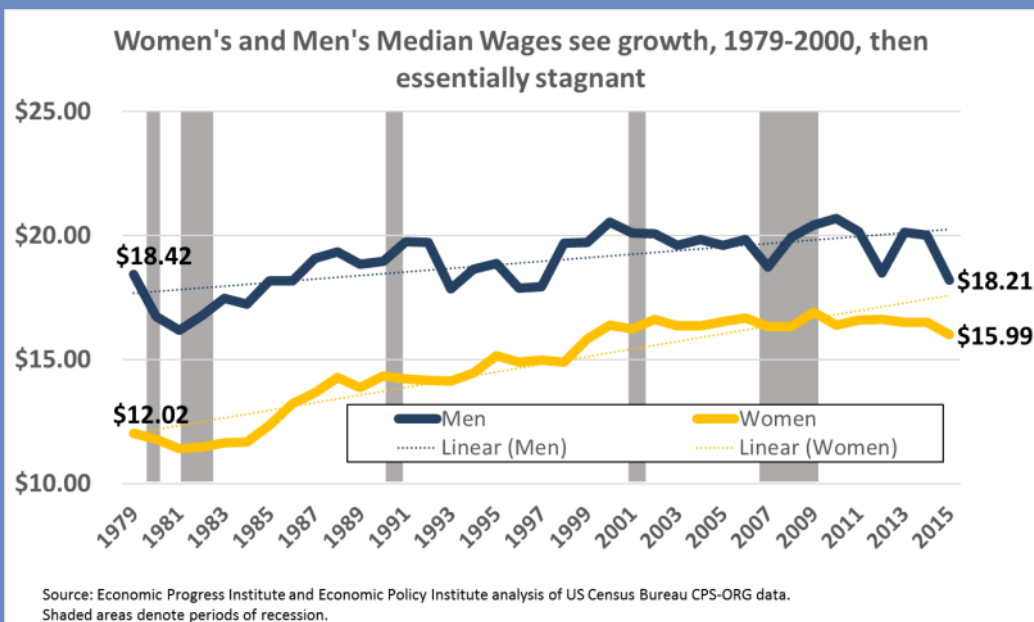


Figure 27

Looking more closely at median wages for men and women in Rhode Island since 1979, we see in Figure 27 that overall, both men's and women's median wages have risen modestly since 1979. A closer look shows that wages for both men and women grew between 1979 and 2000, fueled by a national economy with very low levels of unemployment through the late 90s. When we look just at the period from 2000-2015, in Figure 28, we see that during that period of time, median women's wages have been essentially stagnant, while men's median wages have been in decline. When looking at just the data on "the gap", we might conclude that the 21st century has been kind to women in Rhode Island, as the median wage gap has closed from 79.7 percent of men's median wages in 2000 to 87.8 percent of women's wages in 2015 (alternatively, using the three-year rolling averages in Figure 26, from 78.5 in 2000 to 84.1 percent in 2015).

In the real world, however, Rhode Island women have experienced stagnant wages, and, if they have a male partner, have seen his wages eroded over this time period. For either female headed single-parent household or a household with both a female and male wage-earner, the 21st century has been anything but kind.

In Figure 28 we see men's and women's wages since 2000. While women's wages have essentially flat-lined during this time-frame, men's median wages have more clearly deteriorated. By 2015, men's inflation adjusted wages were lower by more than two dollars than they had been in 2000. This decline has contributed to "closing the gap" between men's and women's wages in Rhode Island. It is instructive to note, however, that if one were to look only at changes in the gap, one would conclude that women in Rhode Island have been "making progress" during this time. The truth is that women's median wages have been modestly eroded, and for women with a male partner in the workforce, the greater erosion of men's wages during this time period just further erodes family income.

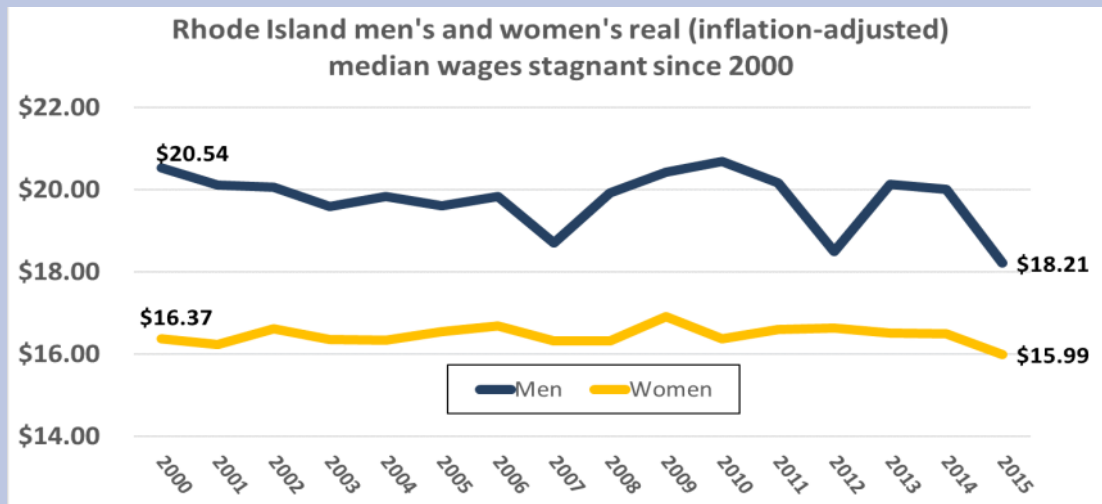


Figure 28

Earnings

Patterns seen in women's wages are normally reflected in earnings (a measure which is comprised of income from wages, from business self-employment, and from farming self-employment).¹⁹ Rhode Island women's median annual earnings of \$30,137 in 2014 ranked 13th overall, about \$5,000 less than women's median earnings in neighboring Massachusetts (\$35,045) and Connecticut (\$35,535), but also about \$2,000 more than the national average of \$28,170.²⁰

As discussed extensively above, educational attainment and occupation have significant impact on women's earnings. Whether or not women are covered by unions has a significant impact on the wages they will earn, as seen in Table 4. The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) notes that for women, the "union wage advantage" is 30.9 percent (\$212/week) nationally, an even larger union wage advantage than for men, (at \$173 and 20.6 percent). The union wage advantage is greatest for Latina women at 42.1 percent and smallest for Asian women, at 15.4 percent.

¹⁹ The broader category of "income" includes both "earnings" and all other sources of income, such as investment income.

²⁰ The measure used here includes women working part-time. An alternative, widely-used measure including only those women working full-time was not used for this report, to avoid excluding the significant share of Rhode Island women working part-time.

Unemployment

Rhode Island women's unemployment rate (4.9%) was lower in 2015 than the US national rate (5.2%), ranking in the middle of the pack – tied for 25th among all states and DC. With a 4.3 percent unemployment rate, Massachusetts had the 17th lowest female unemployment rate, while Connecticut's 5.5 percent unemployment rate for women ranked 35th lowest.

Comparing the unemployment rates for Rhode Island men and women since 2005 shows in fairly stark terms the effect of the Great Recession on both men and women. Nationally much attention was given to the impact of job losses in the manufacturing and construction sectors on men in particular. Writing in The New York Times' Economix blog, Catherine Rampell explains: “[The] recession has disproportionately hurt men, who are more likely to work in cyclically sensitive industries like manufacturing and construction. Women, on the other hand, are overrepresented in more downturn-resistant sectors like education and health care.”²¹

This explanation of what has been coined the “mancession” makes sense for Rhode Island, which lost more than one in five construction jobs (-21.1 percent) between 2007 and 2009, but there were some important ways in which the experience of Rhode Island women in the economy deviated from the “mancession” script. For example, women experienced long-term unemployment during the recession at the same rate as men. What's more, working women paired with a man facing periods of unemployment during the recession faced additional pressure as breadwinners, and shared with their male counterparts the emotional load of struggling to make ends meet with constrained family income.



²¹ Catherine Rampell, 2009. “The Mancession”, in Economix. <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/10/the-mancection/>.

Long-term Unemployment

The share of unemployed Rhode Island women who were unemployed “long-term” (more than 26 weeks) is among the worst in the country. Among the 33 states with adequate sample size to calculate long-term unemployment share of all unemployment, as seen in Figure 31, Rhode Island had the 2nd highest share of long-term unemployed women at 36.6 percent (compared with Connecticut, 4th highest at 34.5 percent, and Massachusetts, 23rd highest at 23.5 percent). We noted above the importance of ensuring that we have adequate supports in place for women in the workforce (policies such as paid family leave, paid sick days, fair family-supporting wages, and fair scheduling). The lingering high share of long-term unemployed reinforces the corresponding importance of ensuring that we have strong systems in place for dealing with women (and men) who are temporarily not working (primarily a strong unemployment insurance system, but also responsive systems for adult education and training, available to women of all ages, races and ethnicities, to help them retool for future employment).

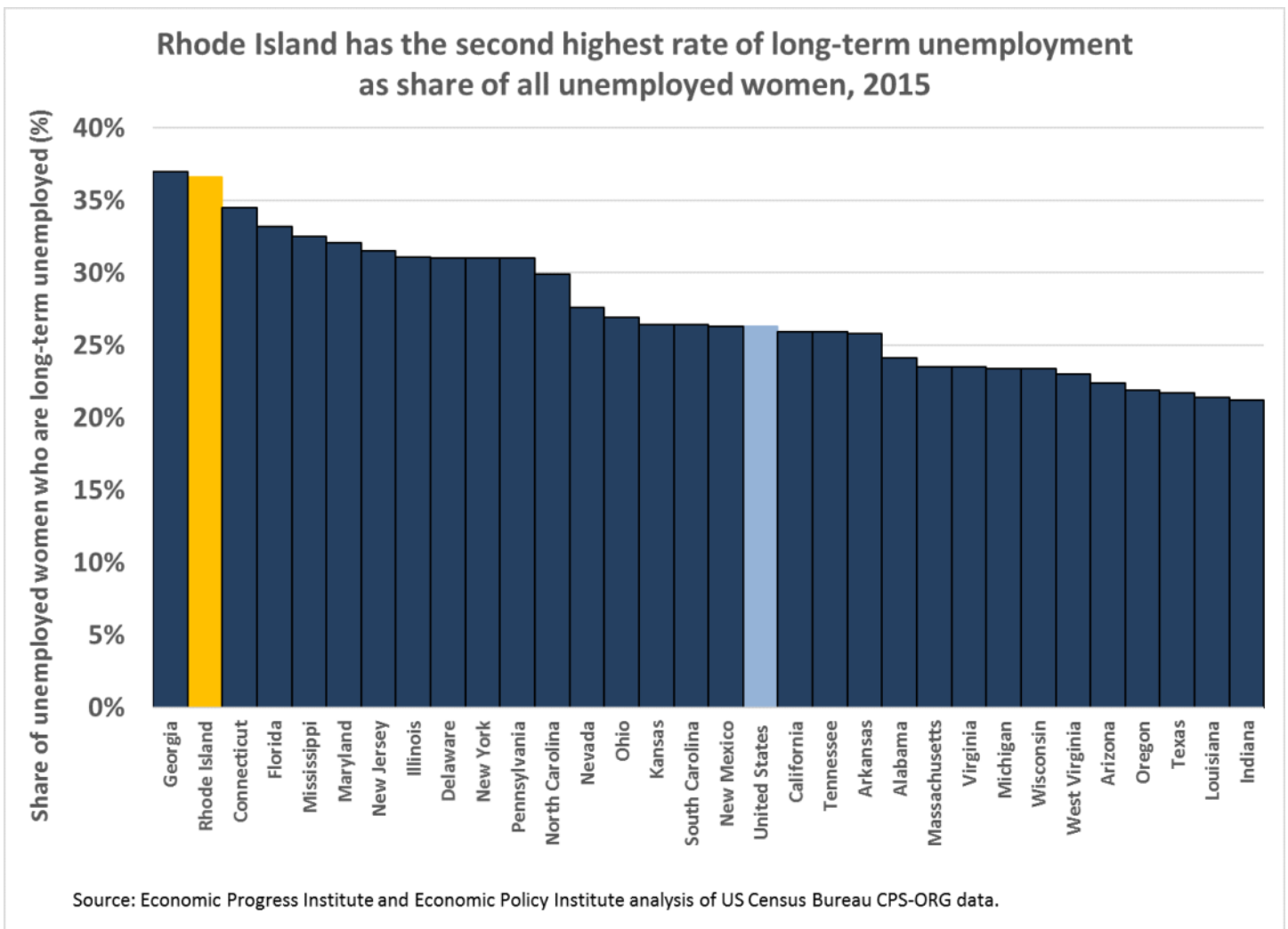


Figure 31

Apart from the obvious concern for the financial well-being of families enduring periods of prolonged unemployment, there are other considerations that make long-term unemployment particularly problematic. As The Brookings Institution explains, “there are a series of consequences that have been shown to follow workers who experience these extended spells of unemployment long into the future. For example, job skills depreciate, job networks are depleted, and workers become discouraged. The longer a worker is unemployed the less likely he or she is to find a new job and the more likely he or she is to find only a lower-paying job.”²² The Urban Institute argues that the consequences are even more dire, noting that “The long-term unemployed... tend to be in poorer health and have children with worse academic performance than similar workers who avoided unemployment. Communities with a higher share of long-term unemployed workers also tend to have higher rates of crime and violence.”²³

Given that context, the fact that at the peak of the Great Recession in 2010, half (49.6 percent) of the Rhode Island women who were unemployed had been unemployed for more than six months is alarming. Also troubling is the fact that six years after the official end of the recession, the long-term unemployment rate for Rhode Island women stood ten percentage points higher than the United States and New England rates, and more than double the long-term unemployment share in 2005, as evident in Figure 32.

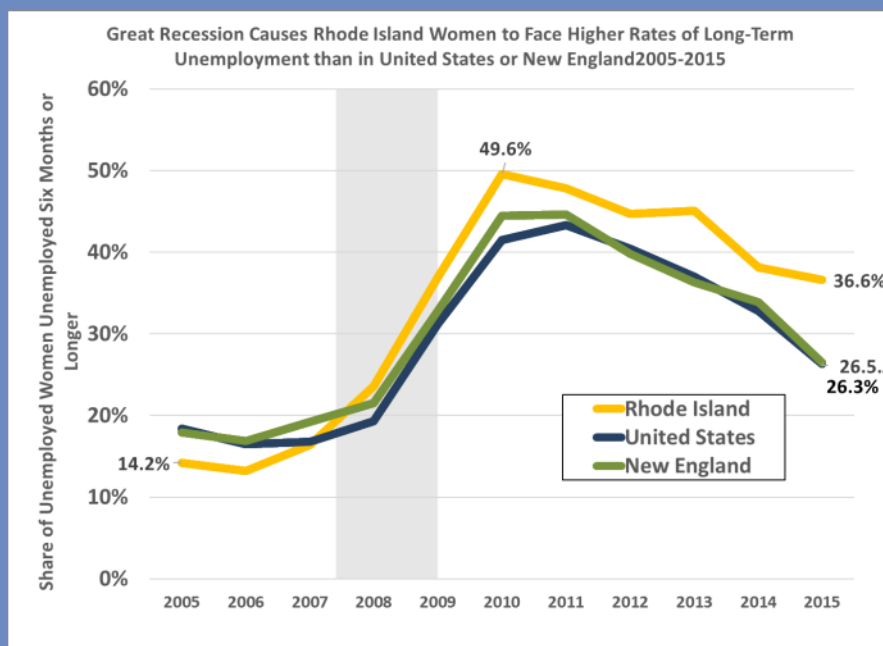


Figure 32 Source: Economic Progress Institute and Economic Policy Institute analysis of US Census Bureau CPS-ORG data.

²² Michael Greenstone, Adam Looney, and Gary Burtless, 2010. “The Great Recession’s Toll on Long-Term Unemployment”, *Brookings on Jobs Numbers*, The Brookings Institution. November 5, 2010.

²³ Austin Nichols, Josh Mitchell, and Stephan Lindner, 2013. *Consequences of Long-Term Unemployment*, Urban Institute. http://www.urban.org/research/publication/consequences-long-term-unemployment/view/full_report.

The shares of unemployed women and men who were unemployed “long-term” (more than 26 weeks), as seen in Figure 33 have been remarkably similar to each other for the past decade (the 2015 data, which appear to show a divergence are not statistically different from each other). While the steep rise from 2006 when the rates for both women and men were in the mid-teens until the peak of the Great Recession, when nearly half of the unemployed women and men of Rhode Island had been unemployed for six months or longer, the fact that several years later the long-term unemployment share remained at about four in ten is also troubling. These data also show that as one digs deeper into the data, the “mancession” label for the Great Recession masks the extent to which, at least in Rhode Island, the worst aspects of the recession were experienced equally by women.

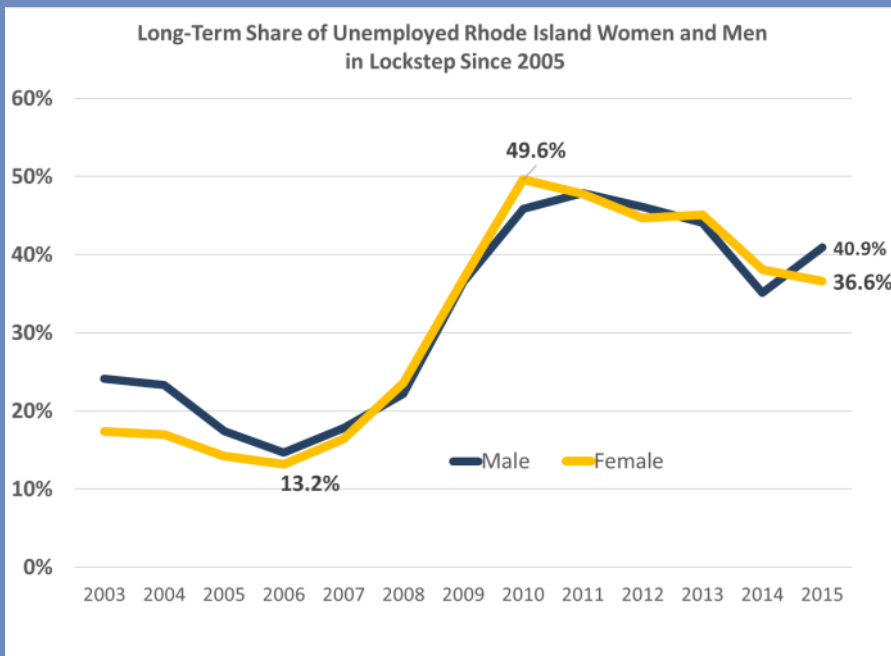


Figure 33 Source: Economic Progress Institute and Economic Policy Institute analysis of US Census Bureau CPS-ORG data.

Poverty Rate by Age, Race and Ethnicity

Given the disparities we've seen across a multitude of indicators, it is not surprising that poverty rates differ substantially across different races and ethnicities. We see in Figure 34 that across all races and ethnicities, the poverty rates for women are higher than those for men.

When looking at poverty rates by age group (prime working-age adults, and seniors), we see that for prime working age women, the Rhode Island poverty rate of 16.4 percent is the same as the national rate, but notably higher than in both CT and MA. The poverty rate for senior women in Rhode Island is slightly higher than the national rate, and both neighboring states.

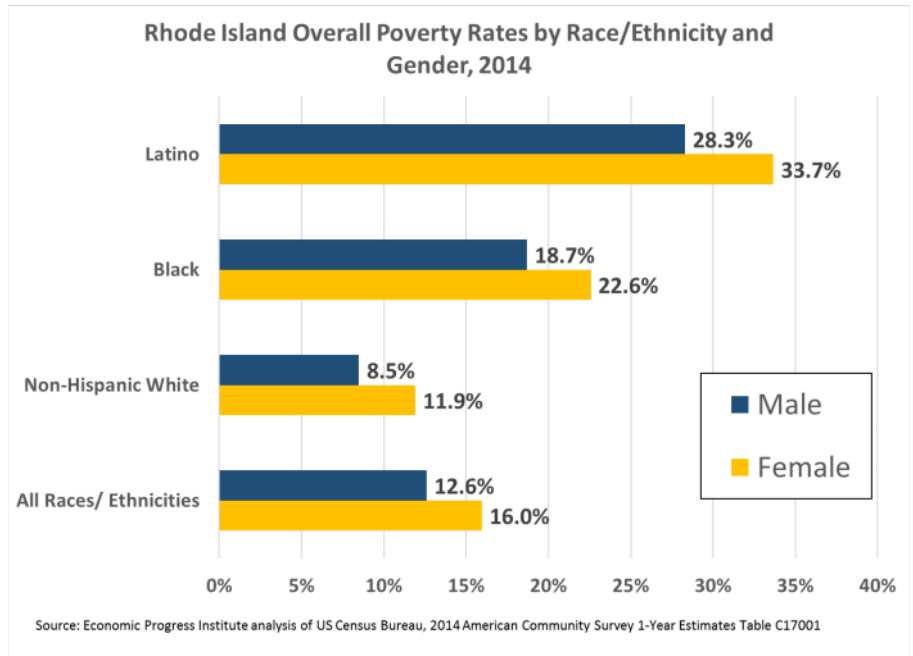


Figure 34



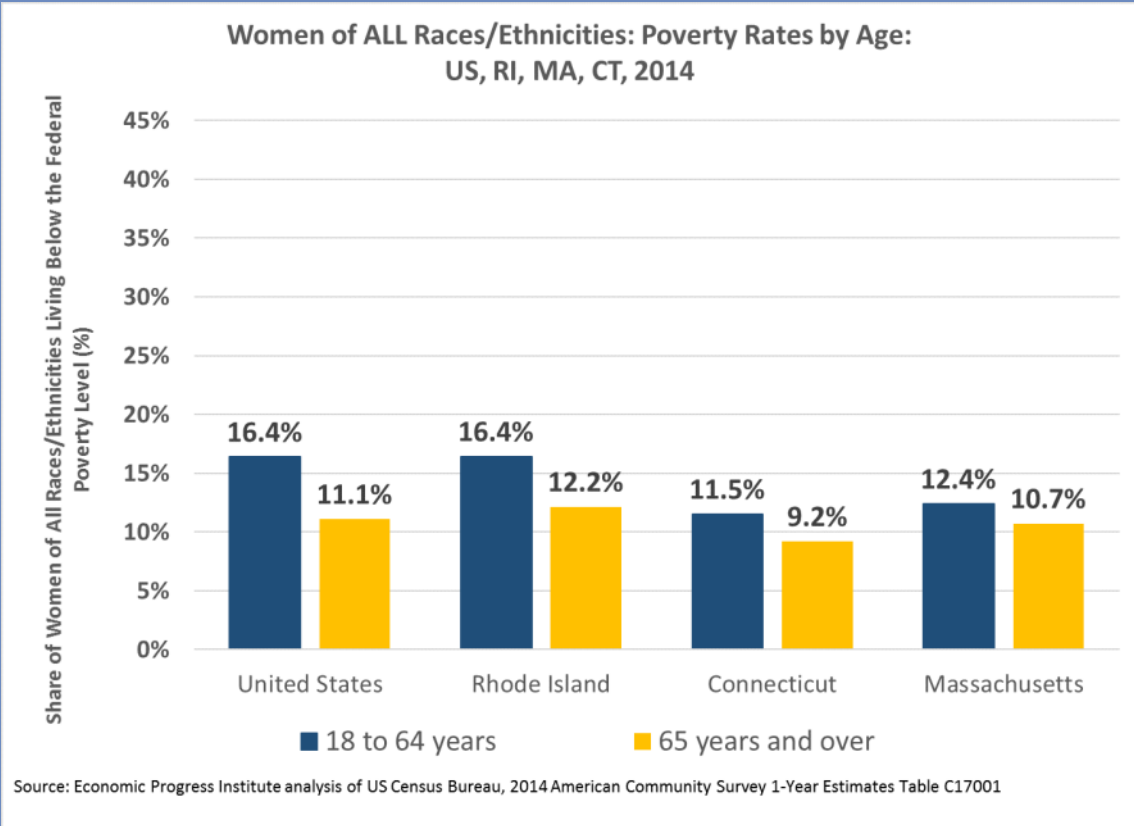


Figure 35

Women of All Races and Ethnicities

Looking just at women in Figure 35, compared to neighboring states and the United States, Rhode Island has higher poverty rates for those 65 years and older, and for those 18-64 (except comparing 18-64 with the United States average, which is the same at 16.4 percent).



Latinas in poverty

Looking just at Latinas in Figure 36, compared to neighboring states and the United States, Rhode Island has substantially higher rates than the United States and higher than both Connecticut and Massachusetts for both age categories.

The poverty rate for Rhode Island senior Latinas is nearly double the rate for Latina seniors nationwide (as it is in neighboring state of Massachusetts also). The significance of this disparity is further reinforced by the fact that across all races and ethnicities, Rhode Island's poverty rates for both age groups mirrors the national rates almost perfectly.²⁴

Black/African-American Women in Poverty

Looking just at Black women, poverty rates were higher than in neighboring Connecticut and Massachusetts and lower than the United States for Black women 18 to 64 years, and higher than neighboring Massachusetts and Connecticut, as well as the United States, for African American women age 65-years and older (See Figure 37).

White Women in Poverty

When we look only at White women (Figure 38), we see White women aged 18-64 years in Rhode Island have higher poverty rates than neighboring Massachusetts and Connecticut, and also higher than the national rate. Rhode Island's poverty rate for White women 65 years and older is also higher than both the national rate and the poverty rates in neighboring Connecticut and Massachusetts.

²⁴ This finding is also consistent with the economic disparities separating White Rhode Islanders and workers of color, particularly Latino workers found in our State of Working Rhode Island: Workers of Color Report.

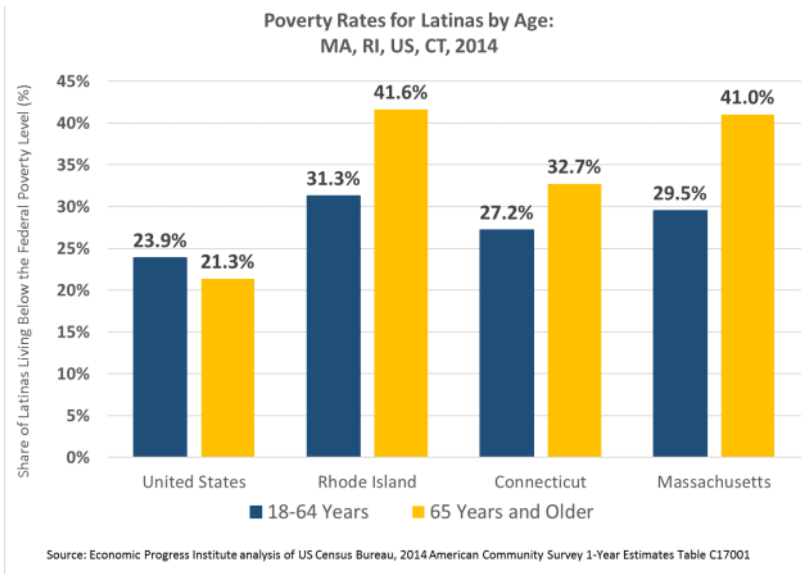


Figure 36

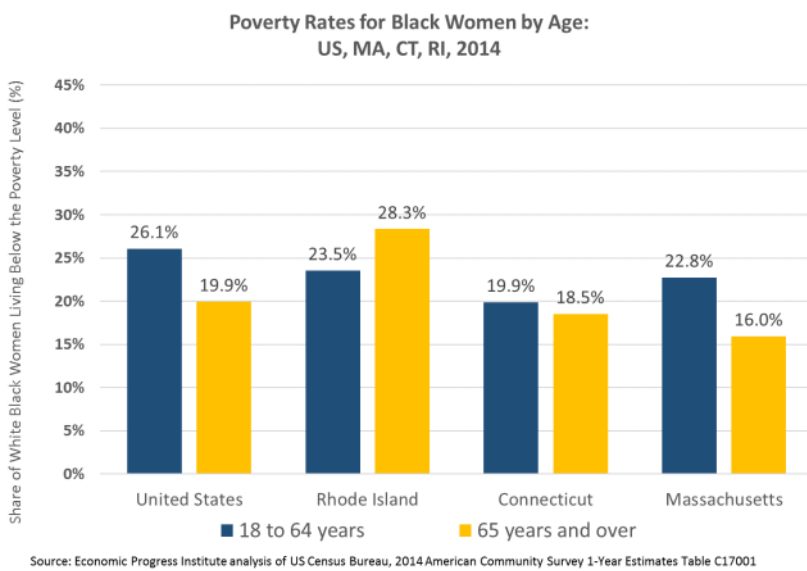


Figure 37

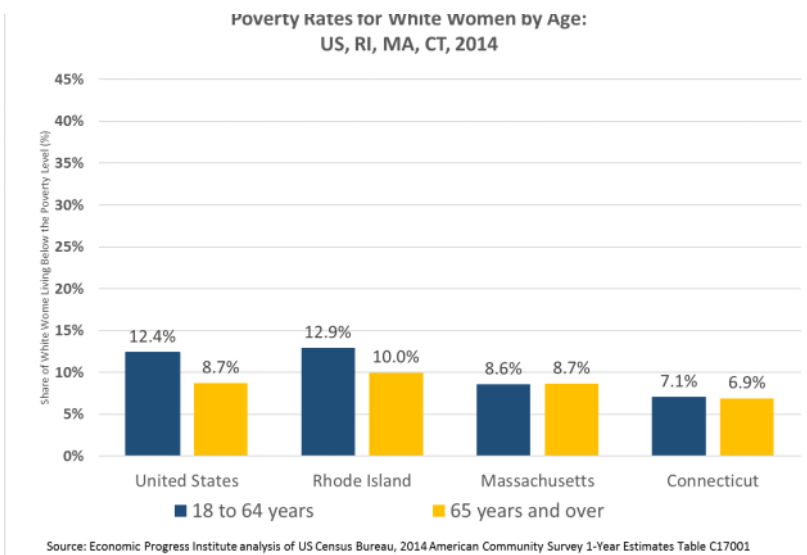


Figure 38

Older Women in Rhode Island Bear Extra Burdens

For many Rhode Island women, one of their most significant sources of economic security in their older years is provided through Social Security payments. In 2014, the retirement portion of funds received via Social Security's Old Age Security and Disability Insurance (OASDI) accounted for seventy percent of the \$3.1 billion total flowing into Rhode Island. Another 11 percent (\$348 million) went to "survivors" – many of whom were likely women in their retirement years.

In total, 87,811 Rhode Island women aged 65 or older received a total of \$104,939,000 each month (or about \$1.3 billion annually) from Social Security.²⁵

A recent AARP publication notes that one in three state retirees relies solely on Social Security, and nearly a quarter more retirees rely on Social Security for 90 percent of their family income.²⁶ These data both reinforce the critical role that Social Security plays in contributing to the well-being of Rhode Island seniors, while also drawing attention to the dire consequences for Rhode Island seniors if policy makers change the current program in ways that result in benefits cuts for Rhode Island seniors.

Yet even with Social Security providing critical income for older Rhode Island women, too many of them continue to live in poverty. A recent Rhode Island study presented 2014 American Community Survey data showing that although the overall poverty rate for women 65 years and older was 10.3 percent, those rates were considerably higher for Black females (31.0 percent) and Latino women (48.0 percent).

With such high levels of economic deprivation facing older Rhode Island women, we need to ensure we have the supports in place – things like supports for home health care workers and affordable and accessible public transportation systems—to ensure they are able to cobble together sufficient resources to live comfortably.

²⁵ Table 5J3, Number and total monthly benefits of beneficiaries aged 65 or older, by state or other area and sex, December 2014 <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2015/5j.pdf>

²⁶ Social Security 2014 Rhode Island Quick Facts, http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/general/2014/ssqf/Social-Security-2014-Rhode-Island-Quick-Facts-AARP-res-gen.pdf.



Some Policy Alternatives

Employers, Government, and Unions Raise the Bar for Women and Families

It is clear there are many features of today's economy that are not working for Rhode Island women. For women (and men) in the workforce seeking changes in their work lives to better meet the needs of families, and even the playing field between women and men there are four general approaches that can be taken. We touch on each of these four approaches below, focusing more heavily on the positive (but not widely appreciated) impact of unions as agents of change for women in the workforce.

Employers Step Up

The first is for employers to proactively recognize that it's good for their workers, good for the overall economy, and in most cases, also good for their bottom line to offer employees employment conditions, family-supporting wages and benefits. While there are some notable examples where this approach has been pursued, it has become clear that this approach alone won't drive the systemic changes needed to ensure more family friendly workplaces that allow women to achieve their full potential in the economy. There is considerable potential, however, for leaders in the corporate world to raise the bar for corporate behavior, while also being supportive of outside efforts to raise the bar. Smart employers have realized that family-friendly policies, fair wages, and equitable treatment of women and men pays off in a more productive workforce, lower turn-over rates, and a better workplace environment.

Government Regulation

The second approach is for governments—federal, state, and local—to set and enforce labor standards that ensure that employees are rewarded fairly for their work. We see this through labor standards such as the minimum wage, which currently falls far short of meeting a family's basic needs. A comprehensive suite of policies aimed at more family-friendly policies – such as paid sick leave, paid family leave, supports for child care, living wages, and fair scheduling – will go a long way towards improving equitable treatment of women in the economy.

Educational Attainment

The final approach is to support programming that supports more young women in achieving high school graduation or GED certification, and attaining a minimum level of training that allows them to enter STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) careers, which are in high demand in RI and can provide higher entry level pay and benefits than typical entry level jobs. Doing so will also help women to succeed in a globalized, knowledge based economy.

Unions and similar forms of collective action

A third approach is for workers to collectively demand a better deal for themselves. Historically, this has happened primarily through trade unions. Rhode Island working women who are represented by unions enjoy the advantages of union representation such as higher wages, better employment benefits, and greater workplace safety. While unionized workers benefit from union coverage, there are benefits for employers also, as a unionized workforce generally has high performance standards, and lower turnover rates.²⁷ Furthermore, because women covered by unions enjoy higher wages and higher rates of employer-provided health insurance, they are much less likely to draw on costly public benefits that effectively subsidize employers who treat their workers less well.

²⁷ Institute for Women's Policy Research, "Women in Unions", Hot Topics. <http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/women-in-unions>.

²⁸ Economic Progress Institute and Economic Policy Institute analysis of EARN Extract of 2013-2015 US Census Bureau CPS-ORG data

²⁹ National data are single year 2015 ACS data, published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>. Rhode Island data are not presented for the more granular breakdowns showing union coverage by age and by race/ethnicity, due to limitations in sample size, and a desire to stick with comparatively recent data.

Conclusion

We have presented critical information that outlines “the state of women in Rhode Island”. Our purpose is to leave the reader with some important takeaways that summarize the key points while laying the foundation for important conversations about how we can shape public policies to better meet the needs of Rhode Island women. By taking the right steps to support Rhode Island women, we will strengthen the Rhode Island economy and Ocean State families who are both responsible for, and beneficiaries of, a more vibrant economy.

The first key finding is that Rhode Island women—more so than women in any other state except Delaware—have increasingly joined the Rhode Island labor force, contributing to the well-being of their families, and the overall strength of the Rhode Island economy.

A related finding is that while Rhode Island has incorporated women into the workforce, policies (both corporate and public) have not evolved to give women and their families the flexibility and support needed to meet the demands of both the home and the workplace without imposing on women either economic penalties (such as reduced wages) or unsustainable stresses. These tensions are not unique to Rhode Island, but they have been amplified by the challenges facing the overall Rhode Island economy—particularly during the Great Recession and its aftermath--and manifested through challenging levels of unemployment, and stagnant wages and incomes.

Considerable attention is being focused on improving the “business climate” in Rhode Island and addressing some of the foundational challenges inherent in today’s Ocean State economy. As we turn our attention to catalyzing growth in the economy, policies that directly ensure that the needs of women working in the Rhode Island economy are met need to be at the forefront of policy discussions.

And while this is generally true for all Rhode Island women, it is even more true for Black and Latina women, who have lower levels of educational attainment and face higher poverty levels than do Non-Hispanic White women.

Rhode Island is at a watershed moment. By embracing family-supporting employment practices and public policies, we will ride a wave of continued engagement of women of all races and ethnicities in the Ocean State economy, a wave that will usher in an era of broadly shared prosperity, equity, and justice.



Index

Executive Summary	4
General Demographics	6
Educational Attainment	8
Women in the Labor Force	13
Occupational Breakdown	20
Wages	24
Unemployment	28
Poverty Rate by Age, Race, Ethnicity	32
Older Women in Rhode Island Bear Extra Burdens	36
Some Policy Alternatives	30

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Prospect Hill Foundation for funding this research and its continued support of the Women's Fund of Rhode Island.



One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

401-262-5657
www.WFRI.org