

# Paid Sick Days

www.paid sick days.org

## Background

Every day, millions of workers are forced to lose pay or put their jobs at risk just because they need to recover from illness or to care for a sick child. That's because half of our nation's workers are not able to take a single paid sick day when they are ill. Paid sick days campaigns are mobilizing millions of working people across the country to win a basic workplace guarantee of paid sick days. It's time to bring our nation's policies into sync with the reality of working families.

### **More than 57 million workers—nearly half (48 percent) of the workforce—have no paid sick days.**

- More 57 million private-sector workers in the United States do not have a single paid sick day to recover from illness. The situation is even worse for those who are most in need: over three out of four low-wage workers (79 percent) have no access to paid sick days.<sup>1</sup> For millions of workers struggling to make ends meet, with little or no savings to fall back on, not having paid sick days means losing pay or even a job when they get sick or need to care for an ill family member.
- One in six workers say they or a family member have been fired or disciplined—or told they would be—for taking time off work due to illness or to care for a sick relative.<sup>2</sup>

### **Sick children and elderly parents suffer when their working care givers do not have access to paid sick time to care for them.**

- To maintain their health and development, children need access to routine medical visits and immunizations—and they inevitably get sick. Studies show that children get well faster when a parent cares for them.<sup>3</sup> But 94 million workers do not have paid sick days they can use to care for a sick child.<sup>4</sup> Many parents cannot afford an unpaid day off and are forced to make the difficult decision to send their children to school or child care sick, or leave them home alone.
- Working women and men are increasingly tasked with caring for elderly parents or relatives. By 2020, one in three U.S. households will have care giving responsibilities for elderly or disabled relatives, up from one in four in 2006.<sup>5</sup> Yet, nearly half of workers lack access to paid time off to provide care to elderly relatives or accompany them to doctor visits.

### **Workers lacking paid sick days are more likely in jobs requiring frequent contact with the public.**

- More than three in four food service and hotel workers (78 percent) don't have a single paid sick day. Workers in child care centers, retail and nursing homes also overwhelmingly lack paid sick days.<sup>6</sup>
- Nearly half of stomach flu-related outbreaks caused by the *norovirus* are linked to ill food-service workers—and they are among the least likely to have paid sick days. *Norovirus* accounts for 23 million cases of foodborne illness a year.<sup>7</sup>

### **Healthy workers are critical to a productive economy.**

- If workers were offered seven paid sick days a year, our national economy would

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<sup>1</sup> Calculations by Dr. Vicky Lovell, Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Poll conducted by National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, released Sept. 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Jody Heymann, Alison Earle, and Brian Egleston, "Parental Availability for the Care of Sick Children," *Pediatrics* 98 (August): 226-230, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Calculations by Dr. Vicky Lovell, Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> National Alliance for Caregiving and the MetLife Mature Market Institute, "The MetLife Caregiving Cost Study: Productivity Losses to U.S. Business", July 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Calculations by Dr. Vicky Lovell, Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Restaurant News, "NRA virus confab frames contagious workers as leading food safety threat," Aug. 27, 2007.

experience a net savings of \$8.1 billion a year due to increased productivity and reduced turnover.<sup>8</sup>

- Our national economy can't afford "presenteeism," when sick workers come to work rather than stay at home. "Presenteeism" costs our national economy \$180 billion annually in lost productivity. For employers, this costs an average of \$255 per employee per year and exceeds the cost of absenteeism and medical and disability benefits.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Voters overwhelmingly support paid sick days.**

- A national poll conducted by Lake Research Partners in 2007 found that nine in 10 voters (89 percent) support a basic labor standard guaranteeing paid sick days. Support for paid sick days is consistent among both women and men, and strong across party lines: while support among Democrats is highest (94 percent), support among Independents and Republicans is also high at 90 percent and 83 percent, respectively.<sup>10</sup>

## **Policy Suggestions**

Currently, no state or federal law guarantees paid sick days for workers. However, San Francisco became the first jurisdiction in the country to guarantee paid sick days in November of 2006, and Washington, DC followed in 2008. State and local advocates are supporting paid sick days efforts across the country, and grassroots support is growing. In 2009, more than a dozen states plan to launch paid sick days campaigns.

- **States can enact a basic labor standard of paid sick days**, similar to the federal Healthy Families Act, which would guarantee workers seven paid sick days a year to recover from illness, care for a sick child or family member, or attend diagnostic or preventative medical appointments.
- **States can also include provisions for paid safe days**, which guarantees workers with paid time off to use to recover from or seek services related to domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

## **For More Information**

Contact Rachna Choudhry at the National Partnership for Women & Families at [rchoudhry@nationalpartnership.org](mailto:rchoudhry@nationalpartnership.org).

Visit [www.paidicksickdays.org](http://www.paidicksickdays.org).

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<sup>8</sup> Vicky Lovell, Valuing Good Health: An Estimate of Costs and Savings for the Healthy Families Act, Institute of Women's Policy Research, 2005. (Updated 2007.)

<sup>9</sup> Ron Goetzal, et al, Health Absence, Disability, and Presenteeism Cost Estimates of Certain Physical and Mental Health Conditions Affecting U.S. Employers, Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, April 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Lake Research Partners, "National Paid Sick Days Polling," conducted for National Partnership for Women & Families, June 2007.

# **Key Findings from National Polling on Paid Sick Days**

Conducted by Lake Research Partners

Sept. 25, 2007

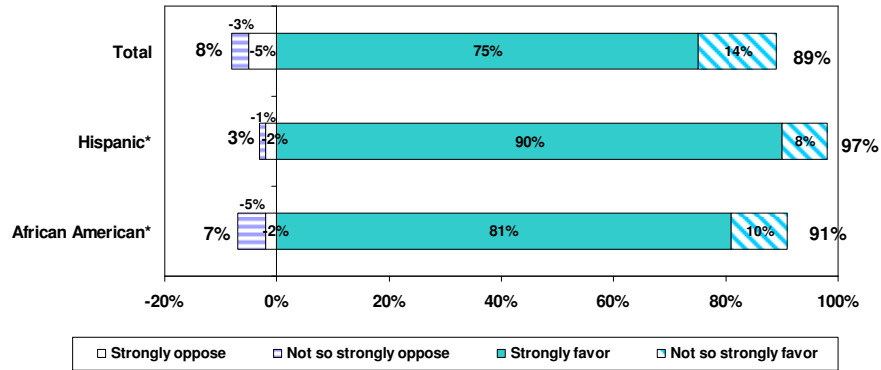
## **Summary of Key Findings**

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- Eighty-nine percent of voters favor paid sick days as a basic labor standard.
- Support for paid sick days is strong across party lines: 94 percent of Democrats; 90 percent of Independents; and 83 percent of Republicans support paid sick days.
- Nearly one in eight voters surveyed said that they or an adult worker in their family had been fired or penalized by their employer for taking time off from work to care for a sick family member or recover from their own illness.

## Overall, voters overwhelmingly favor a basic labor standard guaranteeing paid sick days.

Q.: Overall do you favor or oppose a basic labor standard that would guarantee all workers a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves or immediate family members? [If favor/oppose, Ask: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?] (Split sampled question)

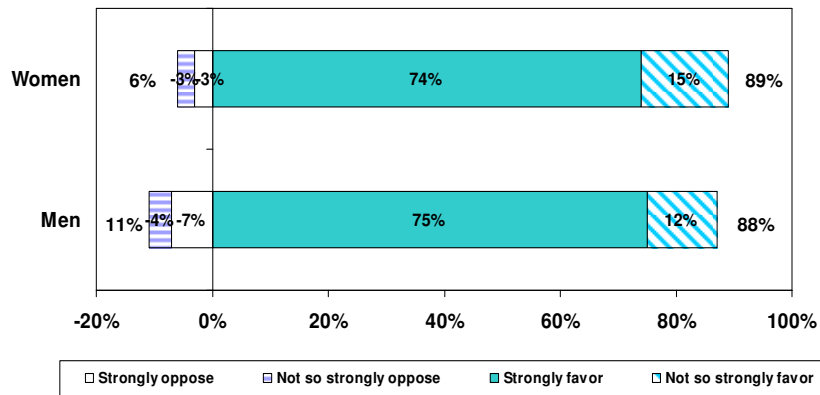


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## Support for paid sick days is equally high among men and women.

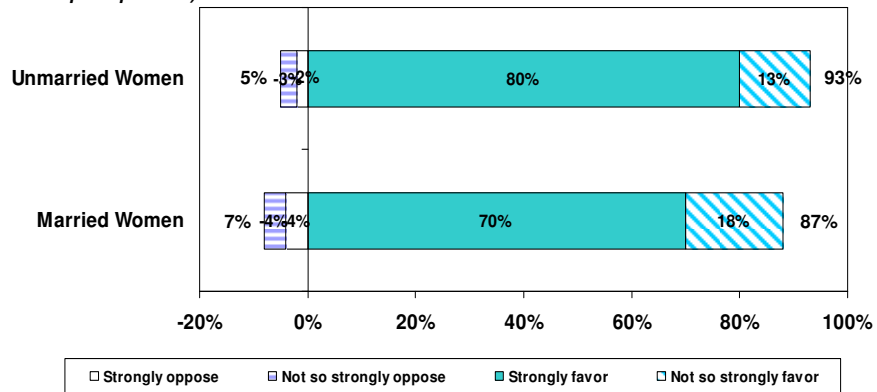
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## Unmarried women voters in particular support paid sick days as a basic labor standard.

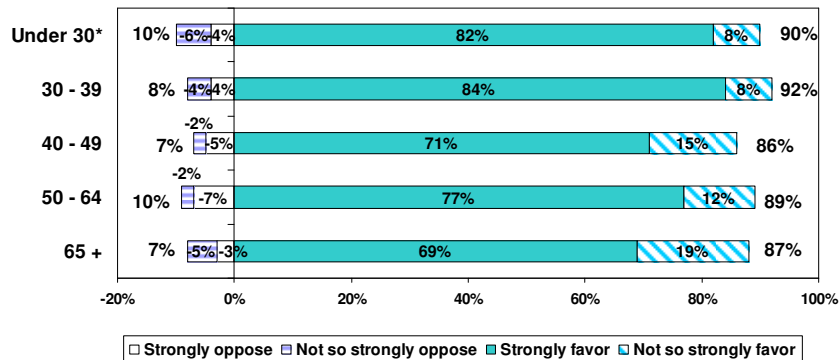
Q.: Overall do you favor or oppose a basic labor standard that would guarantee all workers a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves or immediate family members? [If favor/oppose, Ask: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?] (Split sampled question)



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## Support for a basic labor standard of paid sick days is particularly strong among younger voters under age 40.

Q.: Overall do you favor or oppose a basic labor standard that would guarantee all workers a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves or immediate family members? [If favor/oppose, Ask: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?] (Split sampled question)

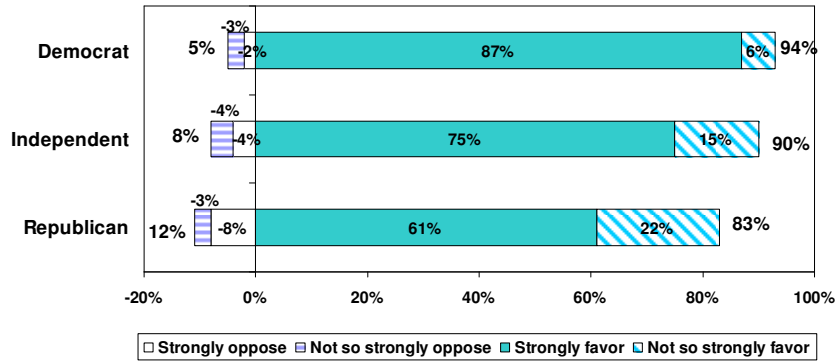


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## Support for a basic labor standard of paid sick days crosses party lines, though Democrats voice particularly intense support.

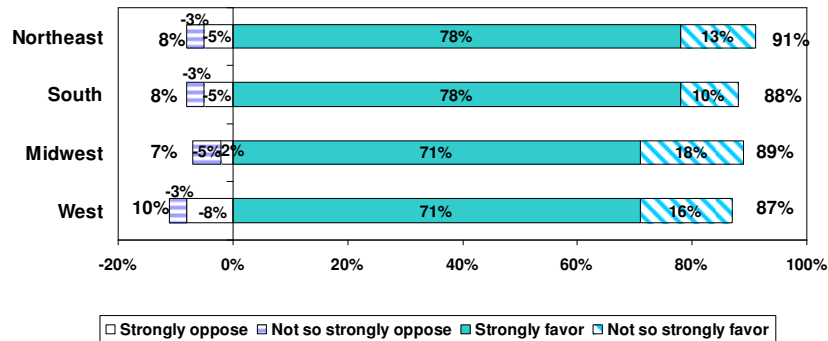
*Q.: Overall do you favor or oppose a basic labor standard that would guarantee all workers a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves or immediate family members? [If favor/oppose, Ask: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?] (Split sampled question)*



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## Support for paid sick days is intense across all regions.

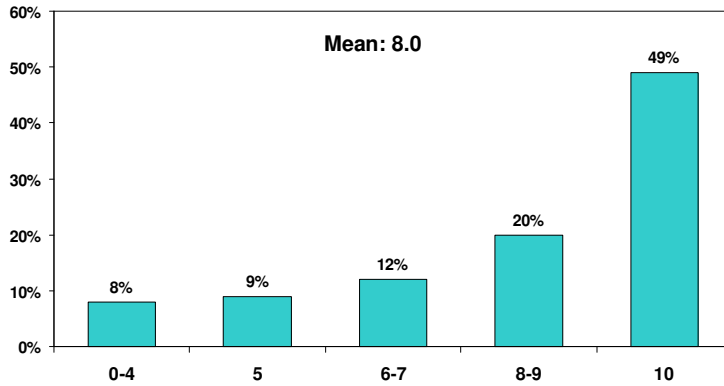
*Q.: Overall do you favor or oppose a basic labor standard that would guarantee all workers a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves or immediate family members? [If favor/oppose, Ask: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?] (Split sampled question)*



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## Voters' support for paid sick days is strong—and equated to a decent wage.

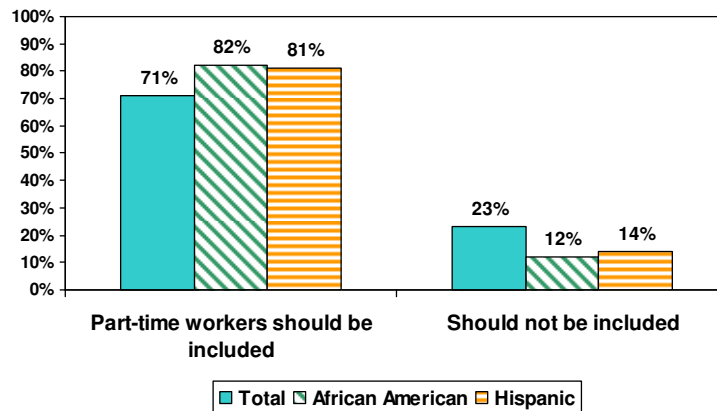
*Q.: On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means that you agree very strongly and 0 means that you don't agree at all, please tell me if you agree or disagree with the statement: Paid sick days is a basic workplace standard, just like being paid a decent wage. (Split sampled question)*



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## Voters strongly agree that part-time workers should be included in paid sick days policies.

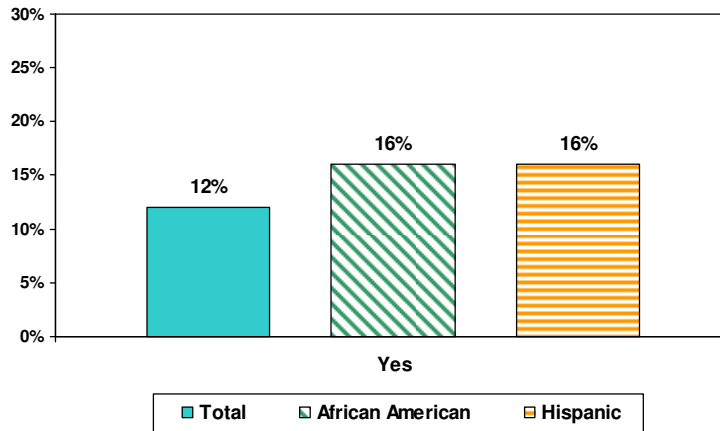
*Q.: Should part-time workers be included in paid sick days policies on a pro-rated basis or should they not be included?*



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## Nearly one in eight surveyed report that they or a family member had been disciplined for taking a sick day.

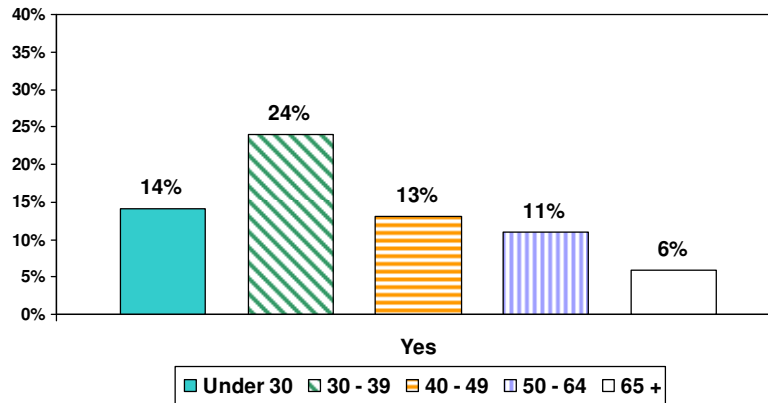
*Q.: Have you or any other adult worker in your family ever been fired, suspended, written up or otherwise penalized by an employer for taking time off from work to care for a sick child or family member, or to cope with an illness yourself?*



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## Nearly a quarter of voters ages 30 – 39 say they or a family member had been disciplined for taking a sick day.

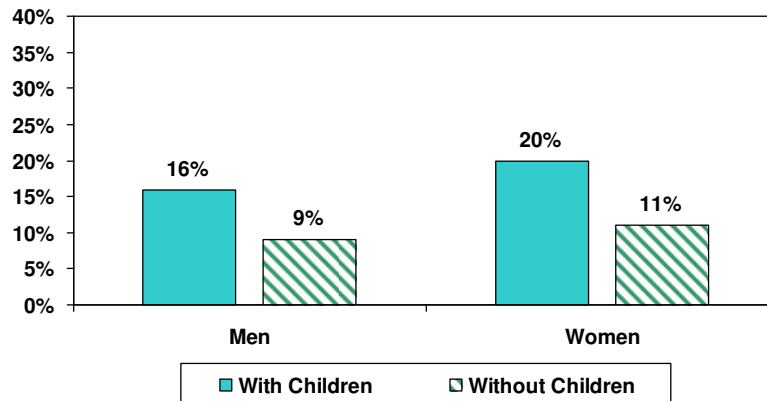
*Q.: Have you or any other adult worker in your family ever been fired, suspended, written up or otherwise penalized by an employer for taking time off from work to care for a sick child or family member, or to cope with an illness yourself?*



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## Parents are more likely to report that they or a family member had been disciplined for taking a sick day.

*Q.: Have you or any other adult worker in your family ever been fired, suspended, written up or otherwise penalized by an employer for taking time off from work to care for a sick child or family member, or to cope with an illness yourself?*



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## Demographics

- Half (51 percent) of respondents are employed or self-employed.
- The majority of employed or self-employed workers (86 percent) work full time.
- Three in ten (30 percent) have children under 18 years living with them.
- Eighteen percent say that they or a family member belong to a union.

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## Survey Methodology

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Lake Research Partners designed and administered this survey, which was conducted by phone using professional interviewers. The survey reached 1,200 likely voters nationwide. The survey was conducted between June 20th and 27th, 2007.

Telephone numbers for the survey were drawn from a random digit dial sample (RDD). Data were weighted slightly by gender, party identification, age, region, race and education to reflect the overall universe. In interpreting survey results, all sample surveys are subject to possible sampling error; that is, the results of a survey may differ from those which would be obtained if the entire population were interviewed. The margin of error for the sample is +/-2.8%.

# Fact Sheet

IWPR #B254a

February 2007

## Women and Paid Sick Days: Crucial for Family Well-Being

Balancing work with personal and family health-care concerns is a major stressor for many working women. Women continue to be overrepresented in part-time and low-wage positions, those least likely to offer employer benefits such as paid sick days. Nevertheless, working women remain our families' primary caregivers. For too many women, being sick or having an ill family member presents an untenable choice: stay at work when you shouldn't, or lose pay (and perhaps a job) by staying home.

### More than 22 million working women lack basic sick days benefits

- ◇ More than 22 million working women (22,416,000) do not have paid sick days (Table 1).<sup>1</sup>
- ◇ 47 percent of women working in the private sector have no paid sick days.<sup>2</sup>
- ◇ In the industries that employ the most women—retail trade and accommodations/food service—55 percent and 78 percent of workers are without paid sick days, respectively (Table 2). In those two industries alone, almost 9 million women (8,780,000) lack paid sick days.<sup>3</sup>
- ◇ 27 percent of low-income women (with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty level) put off getting health-care because they cannot take time off from work. 18 percent of women at all income levels face this situation.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1. Percent and number of women workers with and without paid sick days, 2006**

	Women workers with paid sick days		Women workers without paid sick days		Total number of women workers
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	
<b>Private sector</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>23,392,000</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>20,979,000</b>	<b>44,371,000</b>
Federal, state, and local government	88	10,801,000	12	1,437,000	12,239,000
Total, private and public sectors	60	34,194,000	40	22,416,000	56,609,000

Note: Rows and columns may not sum to totals due to rounding. Self-employed, private household, agricultural, and military workers are excluded.

Source: Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey, the November 2005 through October 2006 Current Employment Statistics, and the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

**Table 2. Number of women workers in the seven largest private-sector industries for women, by percent of workers without paid sick days, 2006**

Seven largest industries for women	Number of women employed (thousands)	Percent of workers without paid sick days	Number of women without paid sick days (thousands)
Accommodation and food service	5,947	78	4,639
Administration and waste services	3,326	69	2,295
Retail trade	7,529	55	4,141
Manufacturing	4,096	48	1,966
Professional and technical services	3,413	31	1,058
Health care and social assistance	3,413	29	990
Finance and insurance	3,937	18	709
Total	31,660	50	15,797

Note: Columns may not sum to totals due to rounding. Self-employed, private household, agricultural, and military workers are excluded.  
 Source: Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey, the November 2005 through October 2006 Current Employment Statistics, and the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

## Women are still the primary family caregivers

- ◇ 80 percent of mothers assume primary responsibility in the family for selecting their children’s doctor, taking children to doctor’s appointments, and arranging for their children’s follow-up care.<sup>5</sup>
- ◇ 40 percent of working mothers lack both sick and vacation leave, and 53 percent of working mothers cannot take days off for sick children. (Working fathers have more flexibility: 30 percent lack both sick and vacation leave, and 48 percent cannot stay home when their children are sick.)<sup>6</sup>
- ◇ Half (49 percent) of working mothers must miss work when their child is sick with a minor illness, such as a cold or ear infection (compared with 30 percent of working fathers).<sup>7</sup>
- ◇ Half (49 percent) of all working mothers who do stay home with sick children do not get paid for the time off. 75 percent of women living in poverty do not get paid when they must miss work to care for a sick child.<sup>8</sup>

## Most women in low-wage jobs have no paid sick days

- ◇ 57 percent of women workers in the ten largest low-wage occupations for women are without paid sick days (Table 3 and Figure 1).

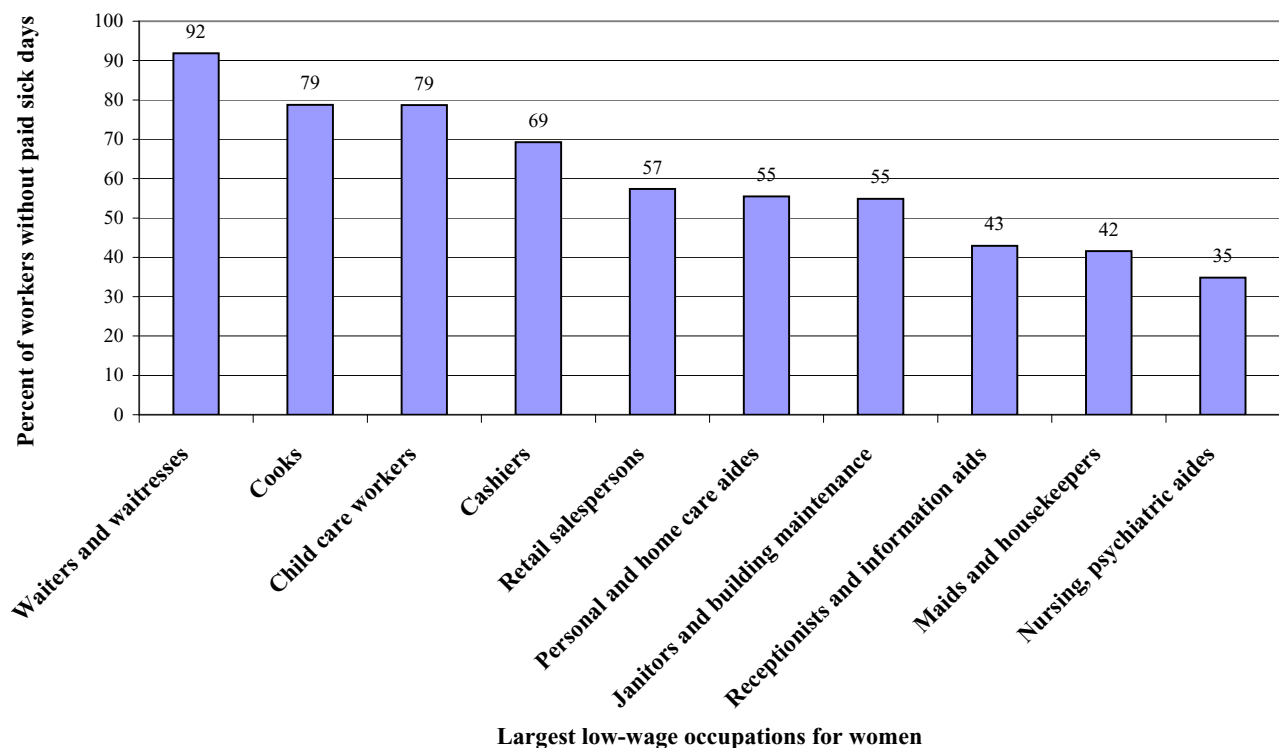
**Table 3. Number of women workers without paid sick days in the ten largest low-wage occupations for women, by percent of workers without paid sick days, 2006 (full-time wage and salary workers) <sup>9</sup>**

Ten largest low-wage occupations for women	Number of women employed (in thousands)	Percent of workers without paid sick days	Number of women without paid sick days (in thousands)
Waitresses	556	92	512
Cooks	433	79	342
Child care workers	414	79	327
Cashiers	1,064	69	734
Retail salespersons	810	57	462
Personal and home care aides	328	55	180
Janitors and building cleaners	421	55	232
Receptionists and information clerks	846	43	364
Maids and housekeepers	724	42	304
Nursing, psychiatric, home health aides	1,181	35	413
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,777</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>3,870</b>

Note: Columns may not sum to totals due to rounding.

Source: Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey, the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, and Highlights of Women’s Earnings in 2005 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Report 995).

**Figure 1. Percent of workers without paid sick days in the ten largest low-wage occupations for women**



Source: Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey and the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

## Methodology

Paid sick days coverage rates are from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey (NCS), a nationally representative U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) payroll survey of more than 10,000 private-sector establishments. (Private household, agricultural, and military employers and the self-employed are not included.) The March 2006 NCS did not survey local and state governments, so participation rates for workers in those sectors are from IWPR’s analysis of the 1996-1998 Employee Benefits Survey, the precursor to the NCS.<sup>10</sup> The NCS data are on whether *jobs* are covered by a paid sick days policy; incumbents in those jobs may not yet have met employer-imposed eligibility thresholds related to job tenure. To adjust for eligibility, data from the BLS’ Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey on the percent of workers who are new hires, by industry, were multiplied by the average number of days between date of hire and eligibility for paid sick days (78 days); NCS “access” rates were reduced by the results.

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey, the November 2005 through October 2006 Current Employment Statistics, and the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Salganicoff, Alina, Usha R. Ranji, and Roberta Wyn. 2005. *Women and Health Care: A National Profile*. Melona, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation.

<sup>5</sup> Salganicoff, Ranji, and Wyn 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Heymann, Jody S. 2000. *The Widening Gap: Why America’s Working Families Are in Jeopardy and What Can Be Done About It*. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>7</sup> Wyn, Roberta, and Ojeda, Victoria. 2003. *Women, Work, and Family Health: A Balancing Act*. Melona, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> An occupation is designated as low-wage if at least one-third of its incumbents earn poverty wages (less than \$9.62 per hour), according to Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of the 2005 monthly Current Population Surveys. Data not shown for Preschool and kindergarten teachers, which employs 495,000 women, due to inadequate sample size for determining paid sick days coverage. Employment data by occupation are from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ *Highlights of Women’s Earnings in 2005*. Paid sick days participation data are from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey and the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

<sup>10</sup> Lovell, Vicky. 2004. *No Time to be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers When Workers Don’t Have Paid Sick Leave*. IWPR Publication No. B242. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

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