

Low Wage Rates and Low Income Very Common for Employed Single Mothers

A recent study by economists at the University of Massachusetts examined low-wage and low income work in the United States over the thirty year period 1979-2009.¹ This study defined “low-wage” as an hourly wage less than two-thirds of the state median hourly wage, and “low income” as a family income less than 200% of the official poverty level. The study found that during these 30 years, 34% of employed single mothers were *both* working at a low-wage *and* in a family with a low income. The 34% rate for employed single mothers was almost triple the 12.5% rate for all employed persons, and almost double the 18% rate for employed single fathers. In 2009, the last year covered by this study, 39% of employed single mothers were in low-wage work, and 36% of employed single mothers were both low-wage and low income.²

There were similar findings in an earlier study of low wage work commissioned by the federal government.³ This study found that 44% of employed single mothers were in low-wage work in 1996 defined by the study as an hourly wage less than \$7.50.

(July 2012. Contact Timothy Casey, tcasey@legalmomentum.org, for further information.)

¹ Albelda, Randy and Michael Carr. 2012. *Low-Wage and Low-Income Workers In the U.S., 1979-2009*. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts, Center for Social Policy, Working Paper 2012-1. Available at http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1059&context=csp_pubs.

² Personal communication from Randy Albelda.

³ Schochet, Peter and Anu Rangarajan. 2004. *Characteristics of Low-Wage Workers and Their Labor Market Experiences: Evidence from the Mid-to Late 1990s*. Submitted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. to Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/low-wage-workers04/report.pdf>.