

# Women & the Economics of Childcare\*

Ellen Baxt

## BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Who did the childcare in your family during the pandemic? Why?
2. Think of some jobs you have had. Are men and women equally represented in those jobs? Or are women *overrepresented* in some? Try using *overrepresented* in a sentence.
3. What does the phrase *on average* mean?

## Women Do More than their Fair Share of Low-Wage Work

This section of *The Change Agent* is called “Caring for Our Children.” Here is a question: Who do you think wrote the stories? Men or women or both? The answer: five out of five stories are by women. That is 100%! Why are women so *overrepresented* in this group? Maybe it is because they spend more time than men caring for children in the home.

Why do women do more of the childcare work in the home? One reason is that, *on average*, women earn less than men. In fact, they make 82



Photo by Allison Shelley, [Flickr](#).

cents for every dollar that a man makes. They are *overrepresented* in jobs that make less money. (See the chart on the left.)

Men, on the other hand, are *overrepresented* in jobs that pay more. Did you know that only 11% of people in all construction jobs are women? So, if you are in a family with a mother and father, there is a good chance the father earns more than the mother. If one person has to leave their job to take care of the children, whom would you pick?

## The Pandemic and a Childcare Crisis

During the pandemic, many schools and daycare centers closed. This meant that women had to do more childcare. Without a safe place for their children, many mothers quit their jobs to stay home with their children. Some mothers worked from home while they took care of their children. (That’s what I did, and it did not work well at all.)

The U.S. did not have a plan to help parents keep working during the pandemic. Many of us

Low-wage Jobs by Gender, 2013	
The 10 largest low-wage occupations	% women
Childcare workers	95%
Home health aides	89%
Housecleaners	88%
Personal care aides	84%
Cashiers	72%
Waiters	70%
Food preparers and servers	65%
Bartenders	58%
Food preparers	56%
Hand packers and packagers	49%
Source: BLS, Occupational Employment Statistics, 2013; Current Population Survey, 2013.	

\* Two versions of this article are available: [beginner intermediate](#) (pp. 37-38) and [advanced intermediate](#) (pp. 39-42).

already knew we have a childcare crisis in this country, but the pandemic made it even clearer. Soon, politicians started creating plans to get moms back to work. I couldn't believe that in 2021, the U.S. did not have a plan to help provide childcare so that mothers who wanted to could work.

Well, better late than never! Politicians are thinking of new ideas that will support families. In New York City, where I live, the mayor has a plan to provide more free or low-cost daycare. On a national level, President Biden wants free pre-school for 3- and 4-year-olds. These plans would help provide childcare so that parents can work, instead of having to stay home caring for children.

Biden's policy would also increase the pay of childcare workers to at least \$15 per hour. That is a good step! Women are often the ones taking care of children. We should pay them well for this important work!

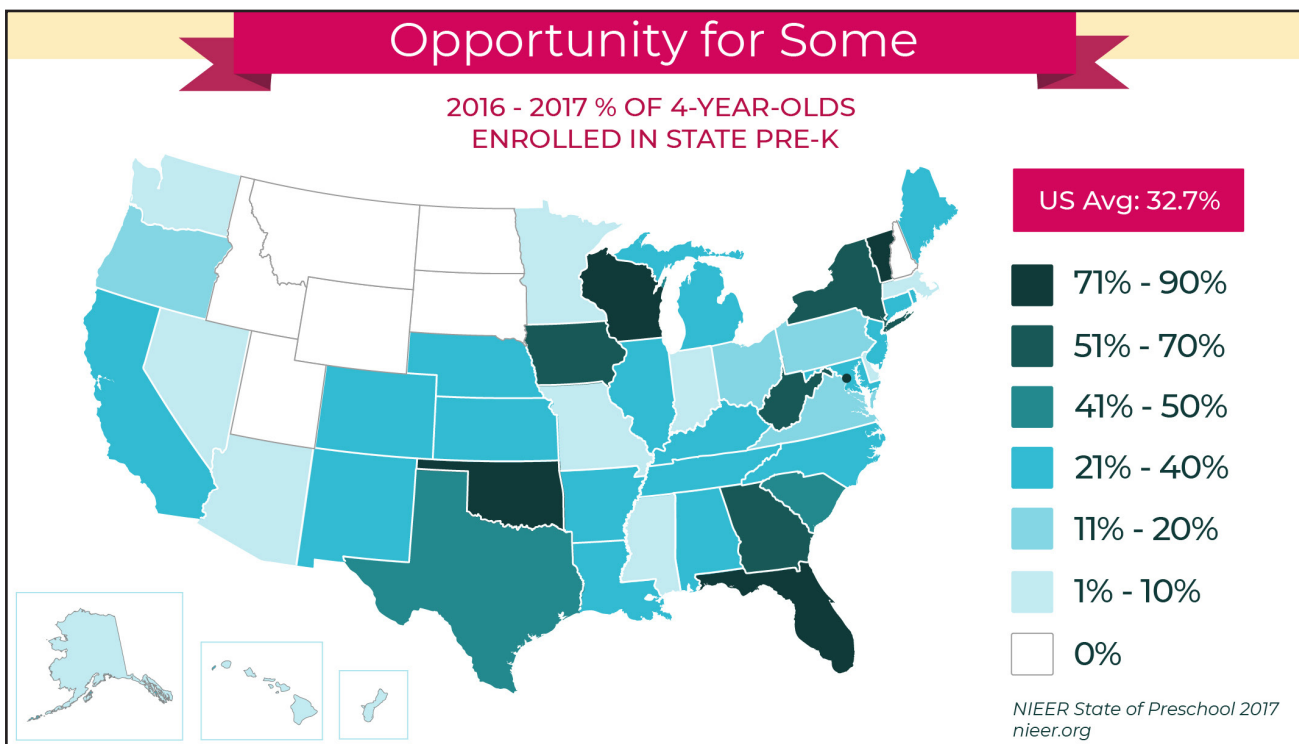
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*Ellen Baxt writes lessons and trainings on incorporating career exploration into basic education classes. She lives in New York City.*

**Sources:** <https://blog.dol.gov/2021/03/19/5-facts-about-the-state-of-the-gender-pay-gap>; <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2018/05/18/450972/unequal-division-labor/>; <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/401-21/recovery-all-us-city-expand-child-care-working-families>; <https://www.nytimes.com/article/biden-rescue-family-plan.html>

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. According to the author, what is one reason women might do more childcare than men?
2. According to the author, how did the pandemic affect women's childcare responsibilities?
3. Does the author approve of new policies that will support families? How do you know?
4. Look at the map below. What percentage of children in your state attend state-funded preschool?
5. Have your children attended state-funded preschool? If so, what was your experience?
6. What do you think about universal, state-funded preschool? Do some research to learn more and then write a letter to your legislator and let him/her know what you think (see the p. 43).



This map shows which states offer state-funded preschool and what percentage of children receive the benefit. <https://nieer.org/>