



## Press Release

**For Immediate Release**  
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### **MOTHERS STILL CARRY PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR FAMILY HEALTH-- TRADEOFFS BETWEEN CARING FOR CHILDREN AND JOB EARNINGS COMMON**

*Survey finds half of working mothers must miss work to care for their sick children  
leading to lost wages and job insecurity*

Menlo Park, CA-- The responsibilities of managing family health and well-being principally fall on women, often at the expense of women's ability to advance in their jobs and earn income. An issue brief released today by the Kaiser Family Foundation reports on the role of women in taking care of children's health needs, balancing family health responsibilities with employment commitments, and caring for elderly or sick relatives.

*Women, Work and Family Health: A Balancing Act*, presents a new analysis, prepared by researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation and the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, based on the 2001 *Kaiser Women's Health Survey*. This issue brief provides new data on the multiple responsibilities that mothers balance, often alone, to meet their family's health care needs, and discusses the impact of these responsibilities on their earnings and careers.

"The fact that women play a major role in the health care needs of their families won't come as a surprise to most mothers," said Alina Salganicoff, Ph.D. vice president of the Kaiser Family Foundation and one of the study authors. "What is surprising is the extent to which taking on these responsibilities translates into lost income and job insecurity for many women."

One in ten women also shoulder caring for a sick or disabled family member. Many do this despite their own health problems, poor income, and significant employment responsibilities.

Highlights from this analysis include:

***Mothers manage most family health concerns, but many mothers lack insurance coverage***

- Approximately 80% of mothers say they assume the major role in selecting their children's doctor, taking children to doctor's appointments, and follow-up care, 16% of mothers say these jobs are shared with a partner or spouse; and 2% say fathers take the primary role;
- Single mothers, not surprisingly, must shoulder over 90% of these responsibilities alone;
- Decisions about children's health insurance are also likely to fall on women, 58% of mothers report they are primarily responsible for decisions about their family's health insurance;
- More than one in five (22%) women with children under 18 are uninsured.

***Working mothers must make tradeoffs between caring for children and earnings from their jobs***

- Almost half (49%) of working mothers report that they must miss work when their child is sick with a minor illness, such as a cold or ear infection, compared with 30% of working fathers;
- Of these mothers who miss work when their child is sick, half again (49%) do not get paid when they stay home to care for their child. This is because women are more likely to work in part-time or low-wage jobs where they don't get benefits like sick leave or vacation time. Two-thirds of low-income (below 200% of the federal poverty level)

(more)

women and 75% of poor (below 100% of the poverty level) women do not get paid when they must miss work to care for a sick child;

- Nearly one-third (30%) of working mothers fear that their colleagues will not be understanding when they miss work, and 35% are concerned that their job evaluation will suffer as a result of their absence.

***Women continue to take a significant role in caring for sick or disabled family members***

- One in ten women are caring for a sick or disabled child or relative; 54% care for ailing parents or in-laws and 18% for their children;
- Despite the fact that two-thirds are employed, 42% of women caregivers are low-income;
- One in five female caregivers report their own health is fair or poor and 43% have a chronic health condition that requires ongoing medical care;
- Despite their greater health needs, one quarter of women caregivers are medically uninsured.

For more information on the Foundation's work in Women's Health Policy, please visit our website at <http://www.kff.org/women>.

Copies of *Women, Work and Family Health: A Balancing Act* (pub# 3336) prepared by Roberta Wyn, Ph.D. and Victoria Ojeda, M.P.H of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and Alina Salganicoff, Ph.D. and Usha Ranji, M.S. of the Kaiser Family Foundation are available online at <http://www.kff.org/content/2003/3336/> or by calling the Foundation's publications request line at 1-800-656-4533.

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