

Social Work & Women's Issues

General Background

The majority of both the U.S. population and the clients that social workers serve are women. Attention to women's issues is essential because of the discrimination women continue to face in many aspects of their lives. Women perform the majority of the world's work, but control a disproportionately small share of its resources. In much of the world, economic, political, social, and cultural forces operate unfavorably for women and girls. As a result, women are adversely affected in the areas of education; health care, including reproductive and mental health; crime, especially as victims of violence; employment; and social welfare, especially income maintenance programs. The well-being of women and their families is negatively impacted at all stages of the life cycle, from girlhood through old age.

The social work profession has a long-standing commitment to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. It is vital for policymakers to develop a critical consciousness about gender that enables its ramifications to be made visible in every issue, in every policy, and in every practice. We are very pleased with the President's creation of the Council on Women and Girls and hope this Council will analyze all policies and practices for their gender effect.

Recommendations

- **Employment:** Support legislative and administrative strategies that address pay equity and comparable worth initiatives in both the public and private sectors. We also support initiatives that conceptualize caregiving as work, and value it socially, legally, and economically, including integrating unpaid caregiving labor into the nation's gross domestic product.
- **Public Assistance Programs:** Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) should be comprehensively funded and address structural causes of poverty, as well as, provide temporary assistance, including creating stable jobs with living wages; allowing education (including college) and training as alternatives to work requirements; subsidizing child care and health insurance coverage while on TANF, and continuing benefits after leaving the program. In addition NASW supports reforming Social Security and Medicare to provide increased retirement security for women who are disproportionately poor as they age.
- **Health and Behavioral Health:** Ensure adequate access, funding and increased research on health and behavioral health services and issues that address the special needs of women. NASW supports reproductive freedom

and safe access to the full range of reproductive health services for all women. In addition, funding should be available for prevention and intervention efforts that address all forms of violence against women across the life span, including adequate health and behavioral health services, crime victim assistance, and other social services.

- Global Women’s Issues: The Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEAFDW) should be ratified by the United States. The United States should support international programs and policies that address women’s rights as human rights, including having women in each country involved in defining their needs, identifying their oppressions, supporting measures to eliminate violence against women, slavery and human trafficking, and developing programs that meet their needs.

Additional Resources

Hunter, S., Sundel, M., & Sundel, S. (2002). *Women at Midlife*. Washington, DC: NASW Press

National Association of Social Workers. (2009). *Family Planning and Reproductive Choice*. *Social work speaks: National Association of Social Workers policy statement, 2009-2012* (8th ed., pp. 127-133). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

National Association of Social Workers. (2009). *Women in the Social Work Profession*. *Social work speaks: National Association of Social Workers policy statement, 2009-2012* (8th ed., pp. 359-366). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

National Association of Social Workers. (2009). *Women’s Issues*. *Social work speaks: National Association of Social Workers policy statement, 2009-2012* (8th ed., pp. 367-373). Washington, DC: NASW Press.