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## **It's Catching: Public Opinion toward Paid Sick Days in New Jersey**

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### *INTRODUCTION*

Paid (or earned) sick days typically refer to time off that employees earn and use to recover from illness or to care for a sick family member. In New Jersey, 38% of the private sector workforce – 1.2 million workers – do not have a single paid sick day that they can take when they or their family members get sick.<sup>1</sup> Without paid sick days, these workers face a difficult choice between staying home to recover from an illness and thereby risking their families' economic security, or going to work and potentially putting their coworkers' or the public's health at risk.

While no federal law provides an paid sick days standard, policies have been passed in cities and states across the nation, including San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Washington DC, New York City, Connecticut State, and most recently Jersey City, NJ. Additionally, the Newark City Council is currently considering a similar ordinance, and legislation has been introduced in both houses of the New Jersey State legislature.

In light of paid sick days policy efforts underway in New Jersey and as a part of its work on family-friendly workplace practices, the Rutgers Center for Women and Work included questions regarding favorability and access to paid sick days in the September 2013 public opinion poll conducted by the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling at Rutgers University. The September 2013 poll surveyed 925 New Jersey residents to assess their opinions and attitudes toward paid sick days (PSD). In this report, we provide descriptive information and analyses of the poll results finding, among other things, high levels of support for PSD across all groups of respondents. Specifically, we find that an

overwhelming majority (83%) of NJ residents support paid sick days policy, and that support extends across all political affiliations. We also find that over 37% of residents lack access to paid sick days and that access is particularly limited for Hispanic and Latino workers, younger workers, and those who work part-time or earn less than \$50,000 per year. Important between-group differences in sick days access and concerns about use have implications for future research on PSD as well as for policy.

### *RESEARCH ON PAID SICK DAYS*

Research shows that providing paid sick days to employees who are ill or who need to care for ill family members is associated with a range of benefits for the employer, employee, and community. Workers, for instance, will benefit from their increased economic and job security. At the same time, employers benefit from their employees' stronger workplace attachment and increased worker retention and productivity.<sup>2</sup>

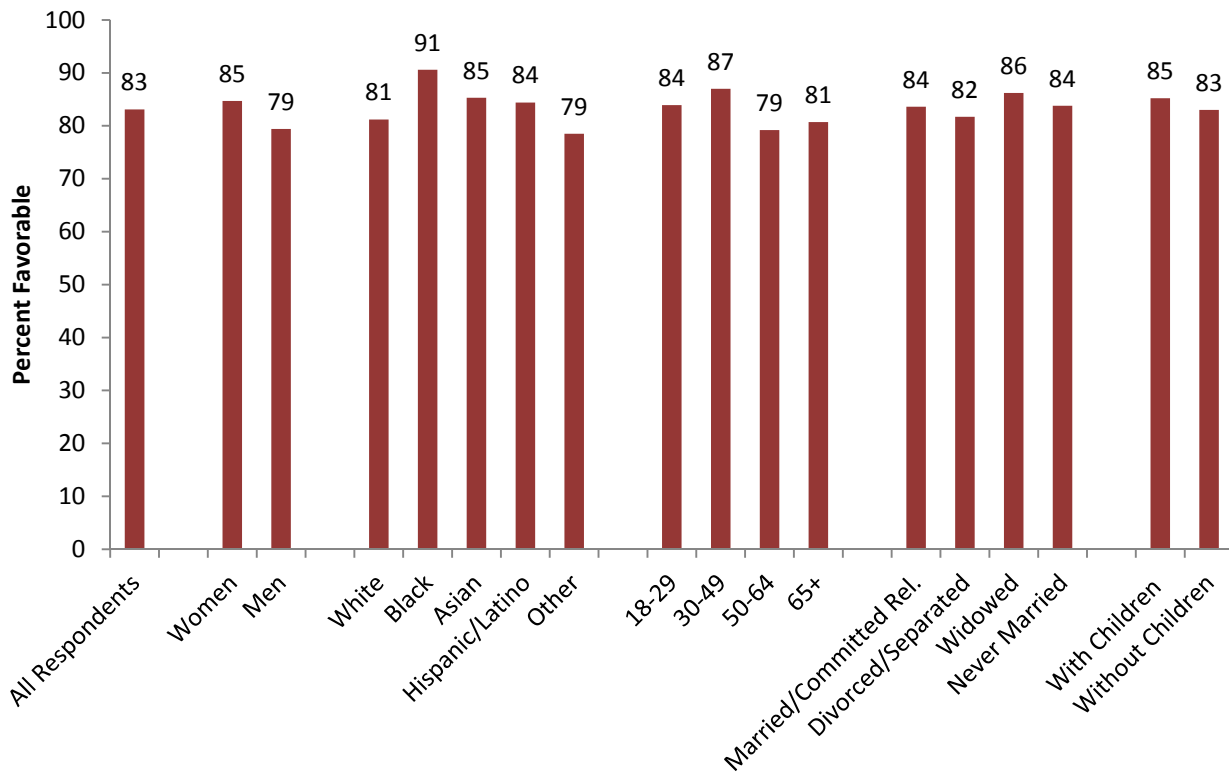
As primary family caregivers, women bear a disproportionate share of the responsibility for caring for family members, including not only children but also the elderly and the disabled.<sup>3</sup> They are also responsible for a substantial share of their families' incomes.<sup>4</sup> And, while women are less likely than men to have sick leave,<sup>5</sup> they are more likely than men to be absent from work due to their own illness.<sup>6</sup> Women are also more likely than men to miss work in order to care for their children<sup>7</sup> and to be let go from their jobs because of illness in the family.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, having young children increases women's, but not men's, likelihood of missing work, and each child under the age of six adds about 5% to the probability that a mother will be absent from work during a one-year period.<sup>9</sup> Poor women are among those with the least access to leave, with two-thirds of low-income women and three-fourths of very poor women lacking access to time off to care for sick children.<sup>10</sup>

There is also substantial research that shows the positive impact of paid sick days on public health. Lacking alternatives, many workers go to work while ill, sometimes spreading contagion. A recent study in Washington State found that in the past year 42% of grocery store and supercenter workers had gone to work while ill, and two out of three (66%) said that they did this because they did not have access to paid sick days.<sup>11</sup> According to the Health Impact Assessment of paid sick days policies in New Jersey conducted by Human Impact Partners in April 2011, a paid sick days standard would reduce the spread of pandemic and seasonal flu in New Jersey, reduce emergency room usage, protect the public from diseases carried by sick workers in restaurants and nursing homes, and enable workers to stay home when they are sick or need to care for a sick dependent.<sup>12</sup>

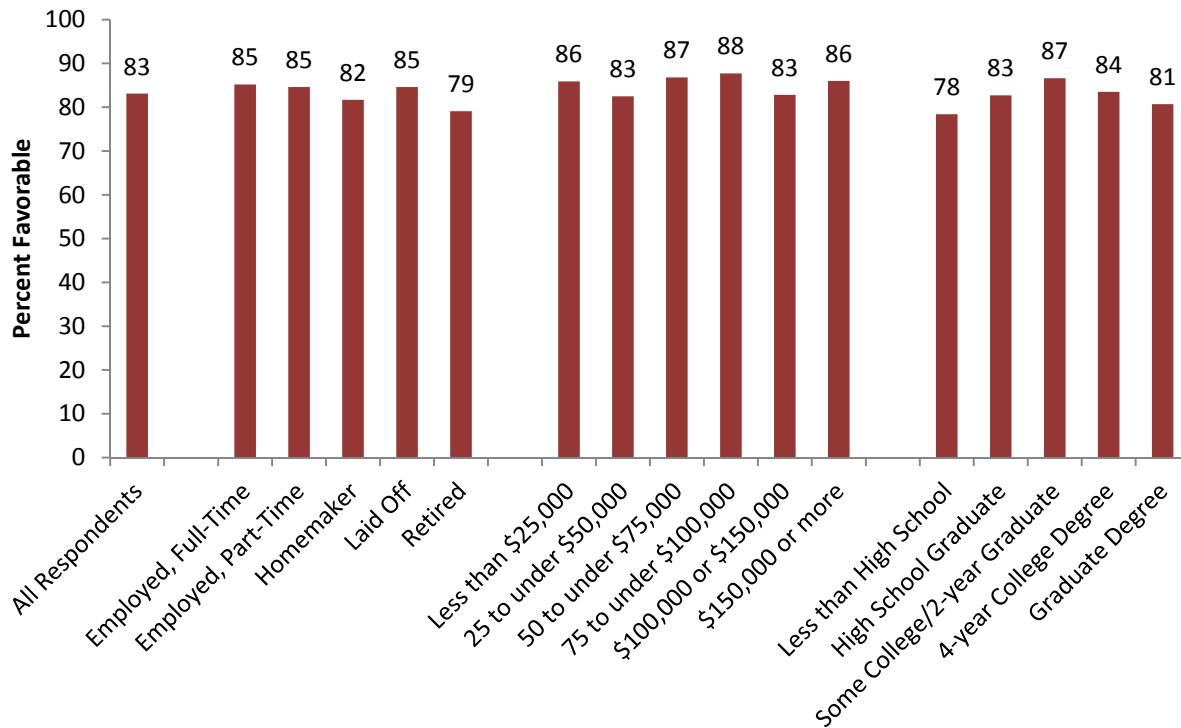
**FAVORABILITY**

In September 2013, the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling at Rutgers University conducted a public opinion poll using a sample that, when weighted, is representative of New Jersey residents.<sup>13</sup> After hearing a description of paid sick days (PSD), respondents were asked: “In general, do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose requiring all employers to provide employees with a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves or immediate family members?” More than four in five New Jersey residents (83.1%) indicated a strong or somewhat favorable opinion of PSD, 10.6% indicated a strong or somewhat oppositional opinion, and 6.3% did not know.<sup>14</sup> Though large majorities of both groups favor PSD, favorability was significantly more prevalent among women (84.7%) than among men (79.4%) ( $\chi^2=5.67$ ,  $p<.05$ ). There were also statistically significant differences in favorability by race/ethnicity, with Black residents having the highest proportion of those with favorable opinions (90.6%) ( $\chi^2=10.74$ ,  $p<.05$ ) [Figures 1a and 1b; for full text of survey questions, refer to Appendix A; for polling results and unweighted sample sizes, refer to Appendix B].

**FIGURE 1a: Paid Sick Days Favorability by Sex, Race/Ethnicity, Age, Marital Status, and Parenting Status**



**FIGURE 1b: Paid Sick Days Favorability by Employment, Income, and Education**



As the remarkably high and consistent proportions of those favoring PSD would suggest, there were very few statistically discernible differences by age, marital status, parenting status, employment status, income, or education.

By far, the strongest predictor of whether an individual favored or opposed PSD was his or her political party affiliation. The voter-groups with the highest proportions of individuals holding favorable opinions of PSD were, in order, Democrats (91.2%), Independents (81.3%), and Republicans (72.5%) ( $\chi^2=26.77$ ,  $p<.001$ ).<sup>15</sup> As shown by Table 1, registered women voters who are Democrats comprised the largest group in the sample and held the highest levels of favorability toward PSD (91.7%). Women were more likely than men to hold favorable opinions of PSD in every political party category, although gender differences were small for Democrats (1.2 percentage point difference), compared both to Independents (7.1 percentage point difference) and to Republicans (8.2 percentage point difference). Regardless of political party, a strong majority of all respondents favored PSD.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 1: Percent Strongly or Somewhat Favoring PSD by Political Party and Gender**

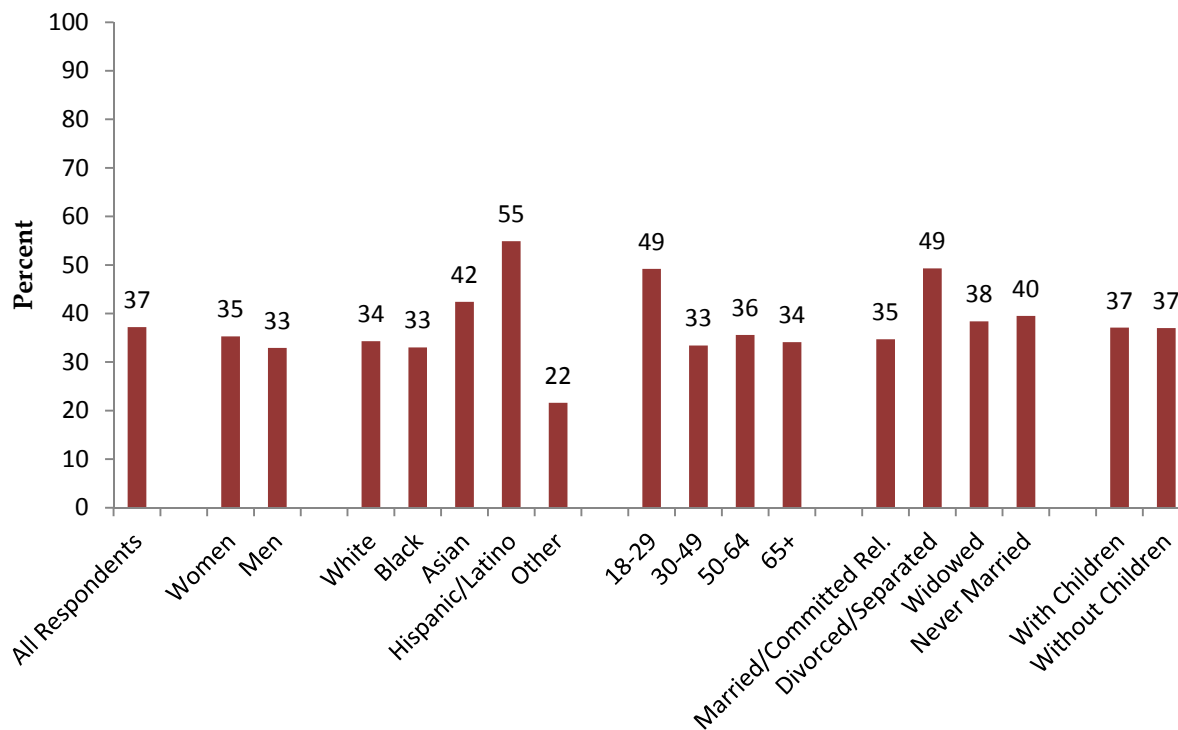
	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%
<b>Democrats</b>	90.5	91.7	91.2
<b>Independents</b>	77.8	84.9	81.3
<b>Republicans</b>	68.5	76.7	72.5

NOTE: Percentages are weighted to represent New Jersey registered voters.

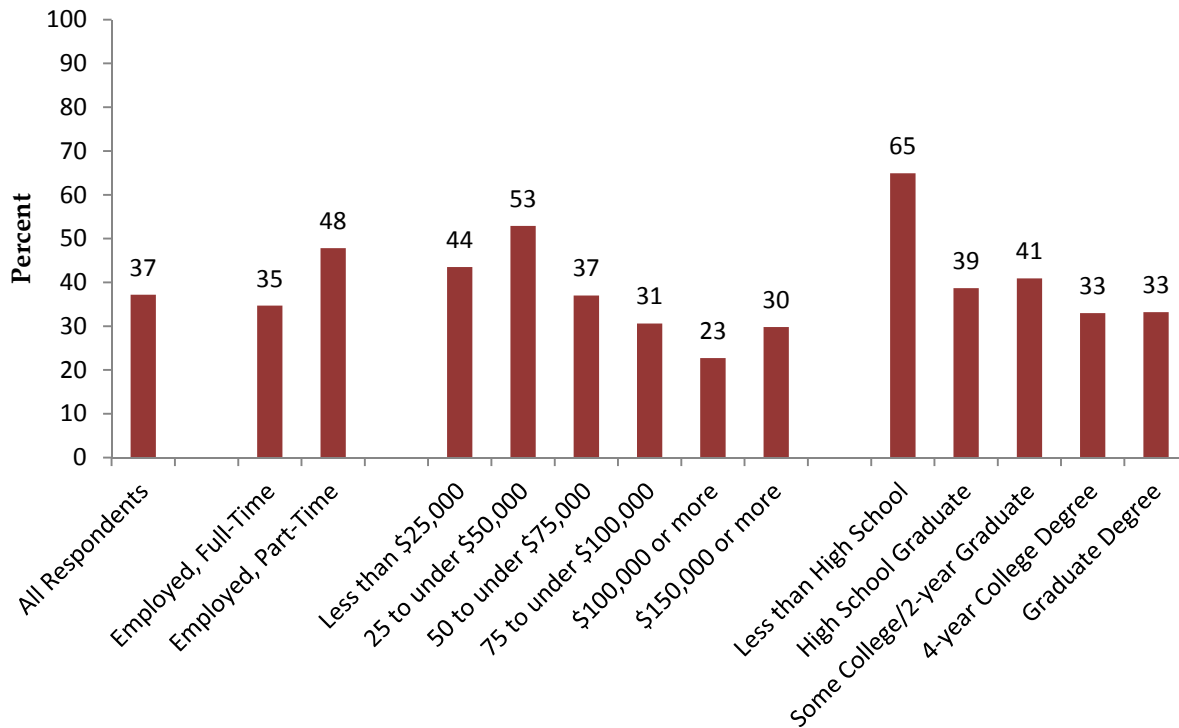
**ACCESS TO PAID SICK DAYS**

Our survey found that 37.2% of New Jersey workers were without access to paid sick days in September 2013, a proportion that is consistent with the 38% estimate reported by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research in 2011.<sup>17</sup> However, as shown by Figures 2a and 2b, lack of access to PSD is particularly high for several groups. Close to half or more of all Hispanic and Latino workers, young adults between the ages of 18 and 29, those with less than a high school degree, and those earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000 annually reported having no paid sick days.

**FIGURE 2a: Percent with Jobs that do not have Paid Sick Days by Sex, Race/Ethnicity, Age, Marital Status, and Parenting Status**



**FIGURE 2b: Percent with Jobs that do not have Paid Sick Days by Employment, Income, and Education**



Respondents who indicated that they had worked outside the home at any time were then asked: “Has any of the following affected your decision to take a day off from work to recover from an illness or to care for a sick family member?” Possible responses included the following:

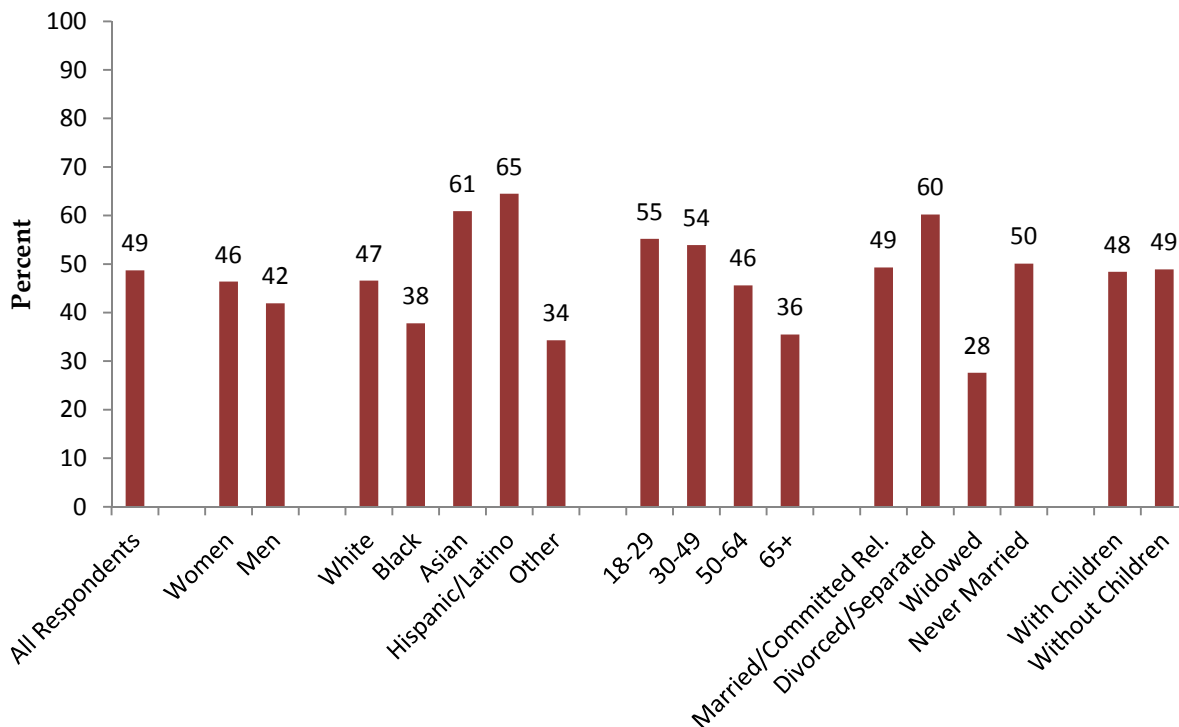
- I could not financially afford to take the time off.
- I was afraid I’d lose my job if I took a sick day.
- I had too much work to do to take a sick day.
- My job did not have paid sick days.
- I was afraid that I would receive a bad performance review for taking the time off.

Of the 813 respondents who reported having worked outside the household, the majority (74.4%) indicated an affirmative response to at least one of the concerns listed above. As we will describe further below, some demographic groups, including young adults (ages 18 to 29), Asian and Hispanic/Latino workers, low-income earners (earning less than \$50,000 per year), and those with low levels of educational attainment, reported far more vulnerability to this set of work-related concerns than did other demographic groups.

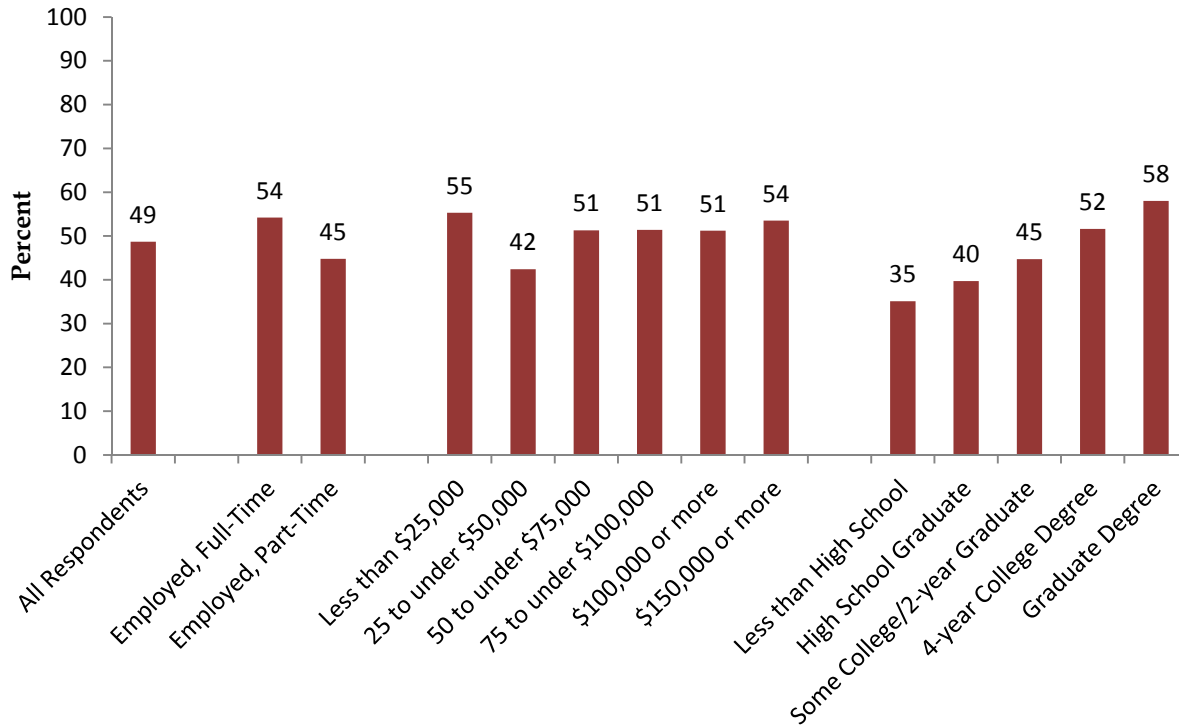
Overall, the most frequently identified worry about using sick days was that of having too much work to do, with nearly half of all respondents identifying this as a factor. Well over a third of respondents (38.3%) worried about whether they could financially afford the time off, 28.4% feared receiving a bad performance review, and nearly a quarter (24.7%) feared losing their jobs.

As shown in Figures 3a and 3b, concerns about having too much work to do in order to take a sick day were particularly prevalent among Asian and Hispanic/Latino workers, as well as workers who identified their marital status as divorced or separated. Concerns about having too much work to do were relatively even across income groups but were strongly related to educational level; specifically, the likelihood of identifying such a concern increased steadily with the level of education reported.

**FIGURE 3a: Percent with Concerns about Too Much Work by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Age, Marital Status, and Parenting Status**



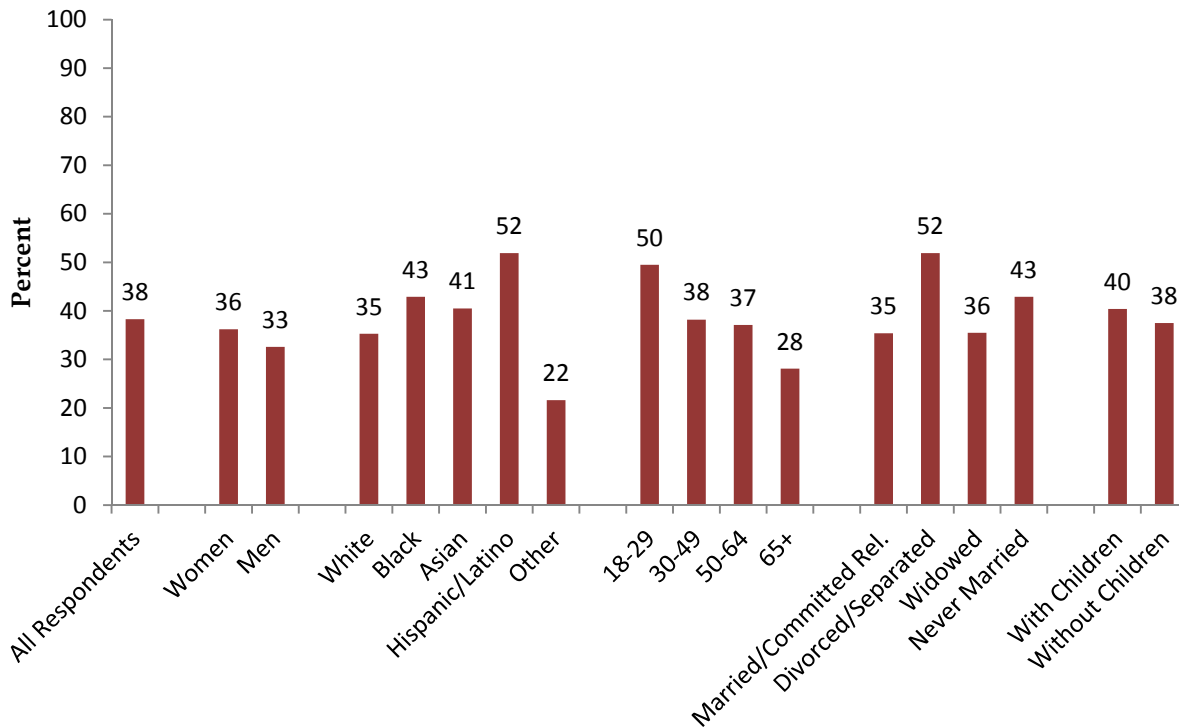
**FIGURE 3b: Percent with Concerns about Too Much Work by Employment, Income, and Education**



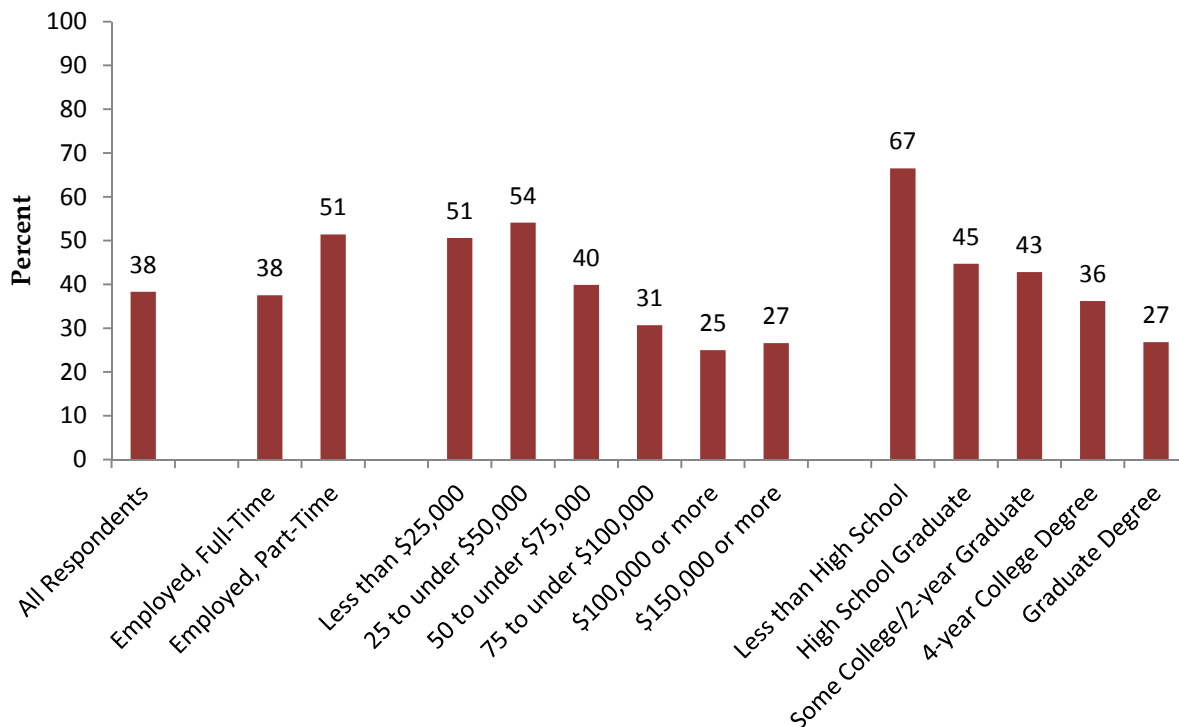
As shown in Figures 4a and 4b, nearly two of every five New Jersey workers (38%) believed they could not financially afford to take time off from work when sick. The groups most likely to have concerns about the financial impact of time off included Hispanic/Latino workers (52%), young adult workers (50%), divorced or separated workers (52%), those who work part-time (51%), lower-income earners (51% for those earning less than \$25,000; 54% for those earning from \$25,000 to less than \$50,000), and those with less than a high school diploma (67%).



**FIGURE 4a: Percent who could not Financially Afford to Take the Time Off by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Age, Marital Status, and Parenting Status**

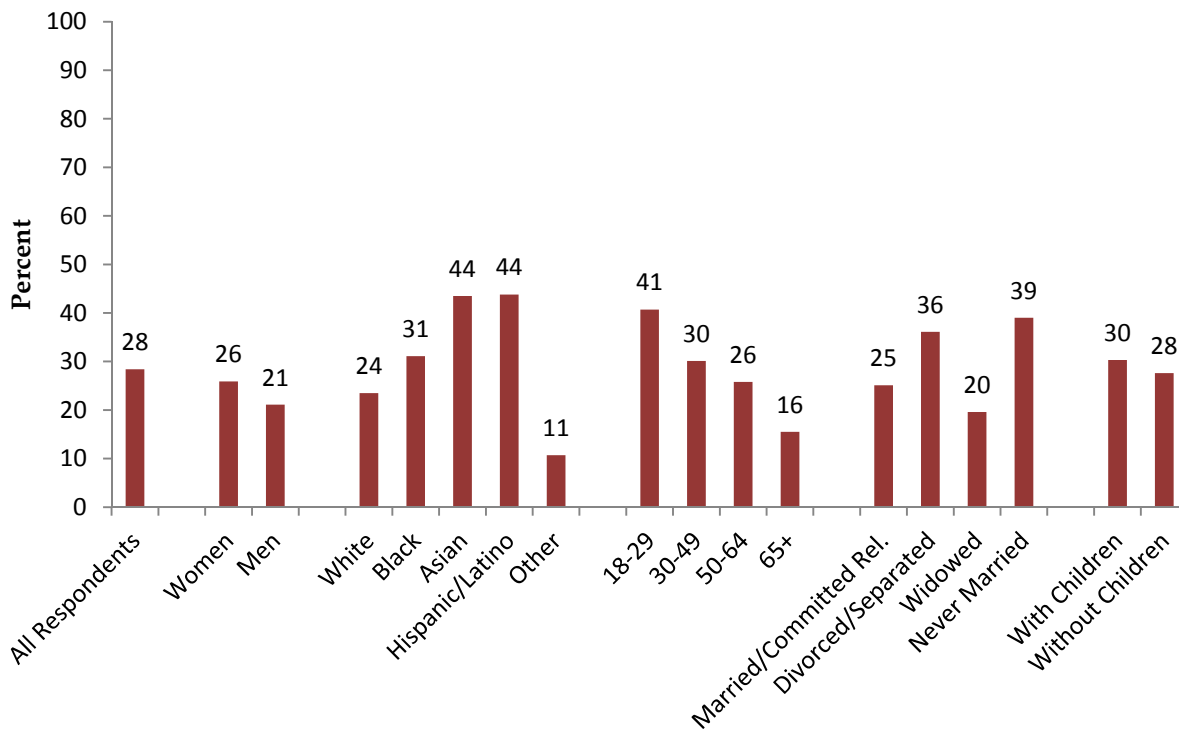


**FIGURE 4b: Percent who could not Financially Afford to Take the Time Off by Employment, Income, and Education**

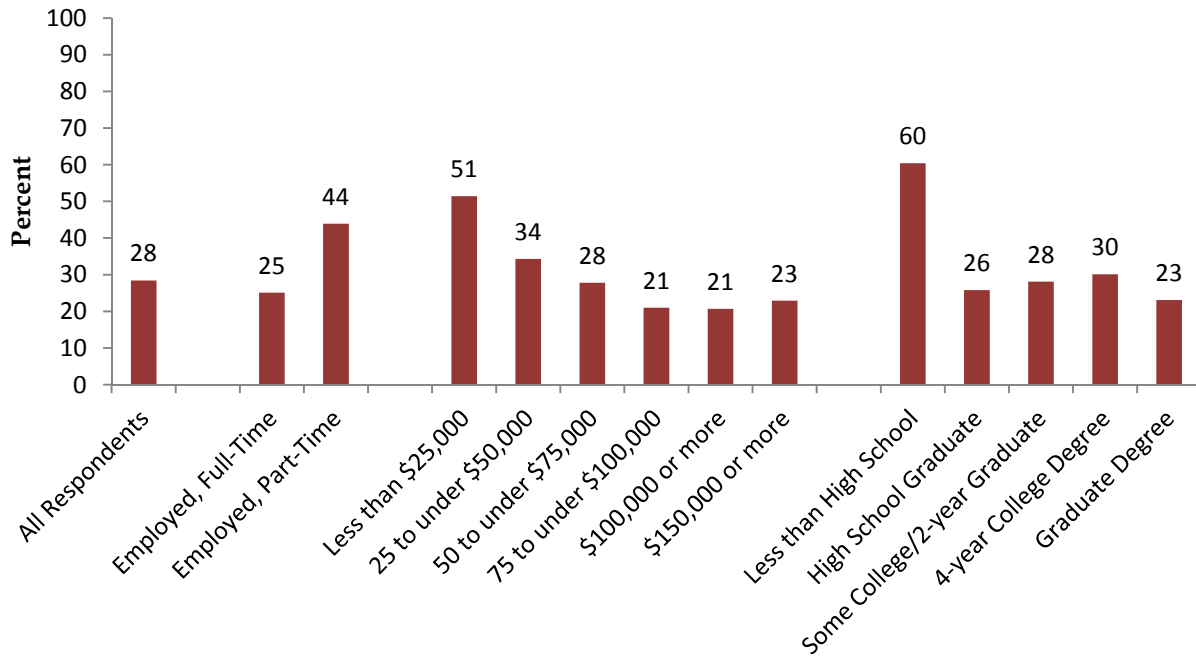


As shown in Figures 5a and 5b, those groups most likely to have concerns about high levels of work and financial stability were also most likely to have concerns about receiving bad performance reviews related to their use of sick time. Concerns about a bad performance review were most common among Asian and Hispanic/Latino workers (44%, relative to 28% on average), young adult workers (41%), workers who were never married (39%), those who work part-time (44%), lower-income earners (51% for those earning less than \$25,000), and those with less than a high school diploma (60%).

**FIGURE 5a: Percent with Concerns about Receiving a Bad Review by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Age, Marital Status, and Parenting Status**

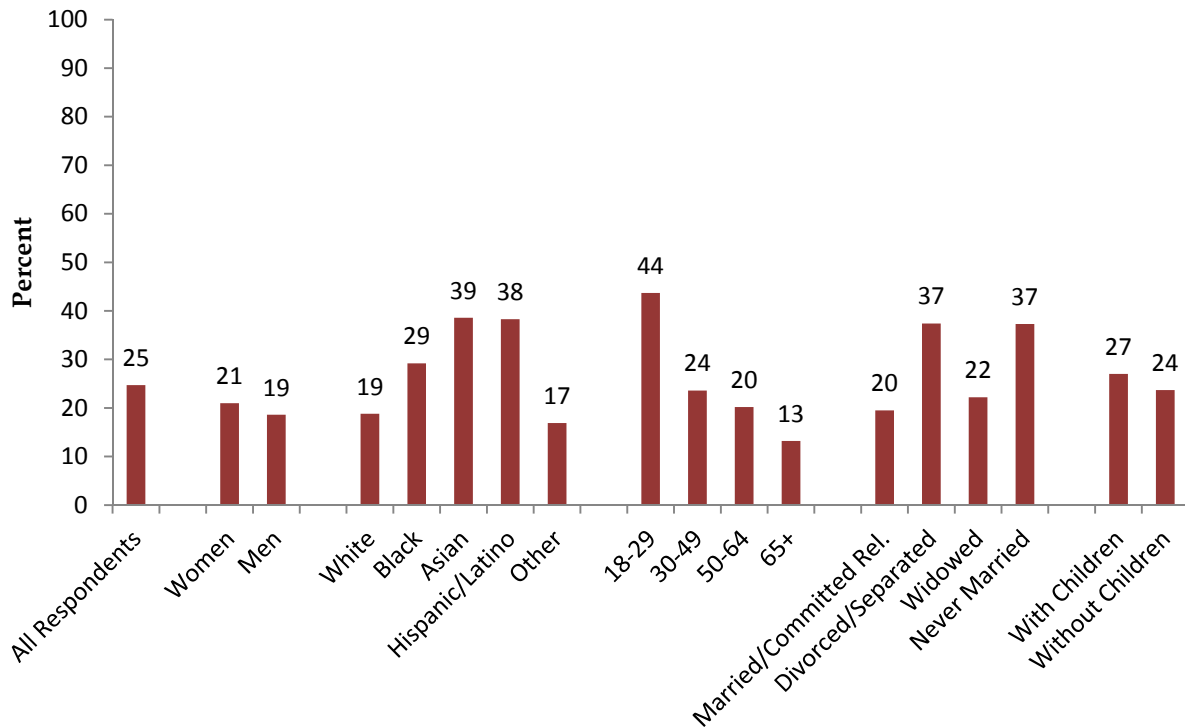


**FIGURE 5b: Percent with Concerns about Receiving a Bad Review by Employment, Income, and Education**

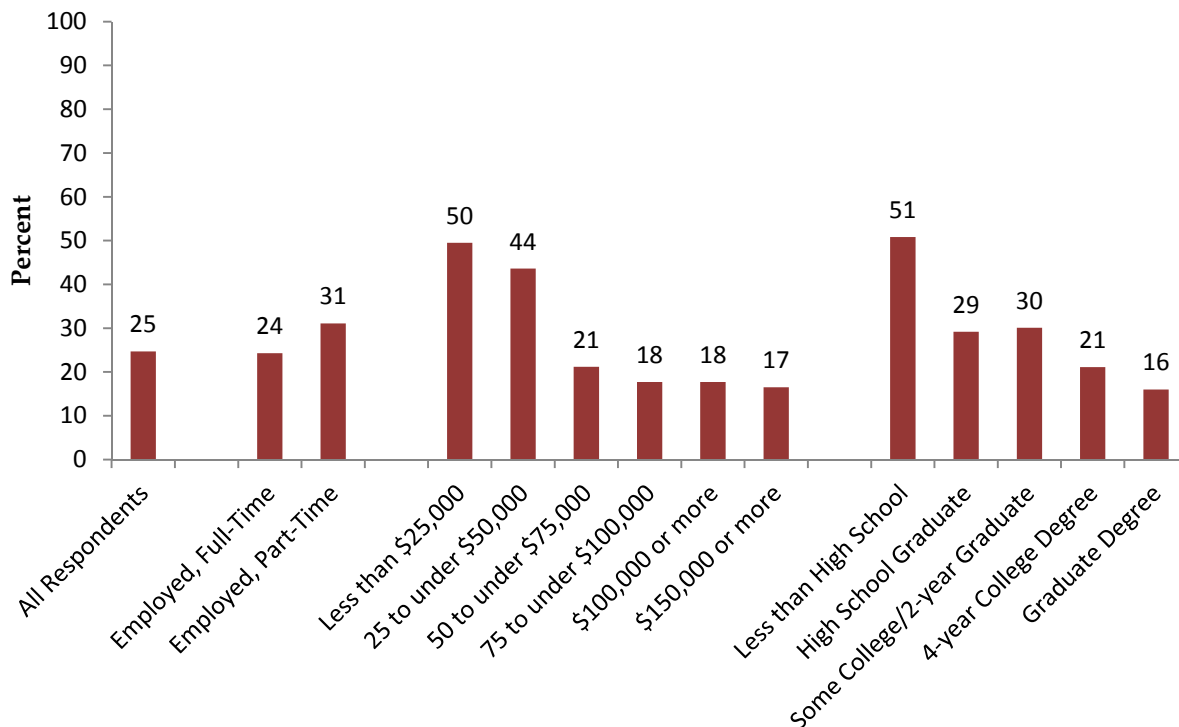


Perhaps the clearest indicator of job insecurity was evidenced by those who feared losing their jobs if they took time off from work for sickness. As shown in Figures 6a and 6b, Asian (39%) and Hispanic/Latino workers (38%) were once again disproportionately likely to identify this concern. Well over a third of all young adult workers (44%), divorced, separated, and never married workers (37%), lower-income earners (50% and 44% respectively), and those with less than a high school diploma (51%) indicated that fears about job loss had affected their decisions about taking a day off for illness.

**FIGURE 6a: Percent with Concerns about Losing their Jobs by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Age, Marital Status, and Parenting Status**



**FIGURE 6b: Percent with Concerns about Losing their Jobs by Employment, Income, and Education**



## *CONCLUSION*

The results of the Eagleton Public Opinion Poll questions on paid sick days show overwhelming public support for the policy across all demographic groups and political affiliation.

While there is overwhelming public support, survey results clearly document a persistent need -- 37.2% of NJ residents currently lack paid sick days. Our findings also underscore the need for *paid and secure* time off; 38.3% of respondents reported that they financially could not afford the time off; 28.4% feared receiving a bad performance review; and nearly a quarter (24.7%) feared losing their jobs. Some worker groups, including young adults, Asian and Hispanic/Latino workers, low-income earners, and those with low levels of educational attainment, are far more vulnerable to this set of concerns than are other worker groups.

As policy makers in New Jersey consider establishing a minimum standard of paid sick days, our findings show that New Jerseyans overwhelmingly support the policy. Moreover, many of those New Jersey residents who are vulnerable in others ways – through their early career experiences, low incomes, or low levels of education – are also least likely to have paid sick days that they can use to recover from an illness or care for a sick family member without fear of job loss or other penalty.

## Appendix A Rutgers-Eagleton Poll Questions

Paid Sick Days, also called “earned sick days” or “sick pay,” is a term for time off employees earn and are able to use when they need to stay home and care for their own illness or a sick family member. They can use this time off without losing their job or a days’ wages. Not all workplaces offer paid sick days. But some cities and states have passed or are considering laws requiring all employers provide access to paid sick days for employees.

1. In general, do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose requiring all employers to provide employees with a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves or immediate family members?
  
2. Has any of the following affected your decision to take a day off from work to recover from an illness or to care for a sick family member? For each, please tell me yes or no.
  - A I could not financially afford to take the time off.
  - B I was afraid I’d lose my job if I took a sick day.
  - C I had too much work to do to take a sick day.
  - D My job did not have paid sick days.
  - E I was afraid that I would receive a bad performance review for taking the time off.
  
3. The state legislature is considering a bill giving all New Jersey employees access to paid sick time. Employees would earn one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked. Sick time could be used for the employee or a family member in the event of illness, injury, or domestic violence. This would set a minimum state standard, and employers could provide more sick time if desired. Based on this description, what is your opinion NOW about paid sick days?

## Appendix B Rutgers-Eagleton Poll Response Tables

Appendix B reports percentages weighted to represent NJ residents. Sample sizes (n) are reported without weights. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

1. In general, do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose requiring all employers to provide employees with a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves or immediate family members?

	N	Strongly Favor	Somewhat Favor	Somewhat Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Refused/ Don't Know/ Not Applicable
All Residents	925	63.4	19.7	6.6	4.0	6.3
Women	503	68.1	18.2	5.1	3.2	5.4
Men	422	58.5	21.3	8.1	4.9	7.2
White	657	58.4	22.9	7.6	5.7	5.4
Black	89	84.5	6.1	5.3	1.6	2.5
Asian	45	68.6	16.8	1.2	1.6	11.9
Hispanic/Latino	70	62.0	22.4	6.4	1.9	7.3
Other	64	61.7	16.7	8.2	3.6	9.7
18-29	89	63.8	20.2	4.6	2.1	9.4
30-49	219	68.0	19.0	5.3	4.0	3.7
50-64	318	60.1	19.1	8.2	5.4	7.2
65+	299	59.1	21.5	8.8	4.2	6.2
Married/Com. Rel.	585	61.2	22.4	6.7	5.0	4.7
Div./Sep.	92	66.1	15.6	6.7	6.2	5.3
Widowed	103	66.3	19.9	5.6	0.8	7.5
Never Married	124	70.1	13.7	7.2	1.2	7.8
With Children	230	63.2	22.0	6.5	5.2	3.1
Without Children	685	64.4	18.6	6.7	3.5	6.9
Employed, Full-Time	388	65.7	19.5	6.3	4.8	3.8
Employed, Part-Time	89	71.5	13.1	6.0	4.0	5.4
Homemaker	49	56.9	24.8	5.3	2.0	11.0
Laid Off	21	80.9	3.7	0.0	15.4	0.0
Retired	282	59.3	19.8	10.0	3.6	7.2

Less than \$25,000	82	72.5	13.4	4.3	1.1	8.7
25 to under \$50,000	120	67.0	15.5	11.7	1.1	4.7
50 to under \$75,000	137	65.5	21.3	4.2	4.5	4.5
75 to under \$100,000	134	71.6	16.1	5.0	5.1	2.3
\$100,000 or \$150,000	123	66.5	16.3	7.4	6.0	3.8
\$150,000 or more	111	48.9	37.1	7.5	4.7	1.7
Less than High School	34	51.3	27.1	10.6	6.4	4.6
High School Graduate	181	65.2	17.5	10.0	3.2	4.1
Some College/2-year Graduate	229	68.3	18.3	4.6	3.2	5.7
4-year College Degree	256	64.0	19.4	6.7	3.8	6.0
Graduate Degree	215	59.9	22.8	4.7	5.9	6.8
Democrats	331	72.7	18.5	3.3	2.2	3.3
Republicans	166	48.4	24.1	10.6	8.7	8.2
Independents	280	61.2	20.1	7.8	5.0	5.8

2. Has any of the following affected your decision to take a day off from work to recover from an illness or to care for a sick family member? For each, please tell me yes or no.

	N	Could Not Afford	Feared Loss of Job	Had Too Much Work	No Paid Sick Days	Feared Bad Review
All Residents	813	38.3	24.7	48.7	37.2	28.4
Women	448	36.2	21	46.4	35.3	25.9
Men	365	32.6	18.6	41.9	32.9	21.1
White	590	35.3	18.8	46.6	34.3	23.5
Black	77	42.9	29.2	37.8	33	31.1
Asian	35	40.5	38.6	60.9	42.4	43.5
Hispanic/Latino	57	51.9	38.3	64.5	54.9	43.8
Other	54	21.6	16.9	34.3	21.6	10.7
18-29	72	49.5	43.7	55.2	49.2	40.7
30-49	200	38.2	23.6	53.9	33.4	30.1
50-64	283	37.1	20.2	45.6	35.6	25.8
65+	258	28.1	13.2	35.5	34.1	15.5
Married/Com. Rel.	522	35.4	19.5	49.3	34.7	25.1
Div./Sep.	81	51.9	37.4	60.2	49.3	36.1



Widowed	88	35.5	22.2	27.6	38.4	19.6
Never Married	109	42.9	37.3	50.1	39.5	39
With Children	209	40.4	27	48.4	37.1	30.3
Without Children	601	37.5	23.7	48.9	37	27.6
Employed, Full-Time	362	37.5	24.3	54.2	34.7	25.1
Employed, Part-Time	78	51.4	31.1	44.8	47.8	43.9
Less than \$25,000	65	50.6	49.5	55.3	43.5	51.4
25 to under \$50,000	101	54.1	43.6	42.4	52.9	34.3
50 to under \$75,000	123	39.9	21.2	51.3	37	27.8
75 to under \$100,000	124	30.7	17.7	51.4	30.6	21
\$100,000 or \$150,000	118	25	17.7	51.2	22.7	20.7
\$150,000 or more	102	26.6	16.5	53.5	29.8	22.9
Less than High School	26	66.5	50.8	35.1	64.9	60.4
High School Graduate	147	44.7	29.2	39.7	38.7	25.8
Some College/2-year Graduate	205	42.8	30.1	44.7	40.9	28.1
4-year College Degree	237	36.2	21.1	51.6	33	30.1
Graduate Degree	196	26.8	16	58	33.2	23.1

3. The state legislature is considering a bill giving all New Jersey employees access to paid sick time. Employees would earn one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked. Sick time could be used for the employee or a family member in the event of illness, injury, or domestic violence. This would set a minimum state standard, and

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<sup>1</sup> Institute for Women’s Policy Research. 2011. “Access to Paid Sick Days in the States.” Retrieved October 22, 2013 ([http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/access-to-paid-sick-days-in-the-states-2010/at\\_download/file](http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/access-to-paid-sick-days-in-the-states-2010/at_download/file)).

<sup>2</sup> Lovell, Vicky. 2003. “No Time to Be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers When Workers Don’t Have Paid Sick Leave.” Institute for Women’s Policy Research, Washington DC. Retrieved September 17, 2013 (<http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/no-time-to-be-sick-why-everyone-suffers-when-workers-don2019t-have-paid-sick-leave>).

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<sup>13</sup>The Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University surveyed New Jersey residents to assess their opinions of paid/earned sick days policy in general, as well as proposed New Jersey paid sick days legislation in particular. Using random digit dialing (both landline and cell phone), the survey selected a random sample of 925 New Jersey residents. Data can be weighted to be representative of New Jersey residents (based on most recent U.S. Census Data) or New Jersey registered voters (based on most recent American Community Survey data). All results are reported using weighted data. The margin of error for reported results is +/-3.2% at a 95% confidence interval. This poll was paid for by the Rutgers Center for Women and Work with funding from NJ American Federation of Teachers and administered by the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling.

<sup>14</sup>With the exception of analyses using political party affiliation (which were weighted to represent NJ registered voters), data have been weighted to be representative of NJ residents (weighted for sex, race, age, and Hispanic ethnicity).

<sup>15</sup>Analyses using political party affiliation (Table 1) were weighted to be representative of NJ registered voters. All other analyses have been weighted to be representative of NJ residents (weighted for sex, race, age, and Hispanic ethnicity).

<sup>16</sup>The Rutgers-Eagleton survey also asked whether residents favored or opposed specific legislation giving all New Jersey employees access to paid sick days. The distribution of responses to this question closely mirrored (and was not statistically significantly different than) the distribution of responses to the general question.

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## **ABOUT THE CENTER FOR WOMEN AND WORK**

The Center for Women and Work (CWW) is an innovative leader in research and programs that promote gender equity, a high-skill economy, and reconciliation of work and well-being for all. CWW is located in the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and is a member of the Institute for Women's Leadership Consortium. To find out more about CWW, visit our website at: [cww.rutgers.edu](http://cww.rutgers.edu).

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