

# Statistics Show The Future is Dim for Girls in Tennessee

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Do you have a daughter or a granddaughter? How about a son? If your daughter grows up in Tennessee, her future won't shine as bright as his. Oh, in her elementary years, she'll be confident and outspoken in school, and will probably be better at math. As she grows, though, she'll get quieter, his math scores will improve, and hers will drop. Later she'll tell herself she's not good at math anyway, and she'll avoid looking for high paying jobs in science or technology.

If they have entry level summer jobs, he's more likely to receive higher wages, and that trend will continue. They'll both experience sexual harassment, as eight out of ten students do, but the emotional and educational impact will be far greater on her. She's more likely to experience self doubt and shame, to have a date who's physically or verbally abusive, and to become a parent before she's eighteen. If so, the father will be much older, and will usually disappear. She's also more likely to drop out of high school.

If she makes it to graduation, she'll earn seventy-one cents for every dollar your son makes. If she goes to college the gap between their wages will be even greater. She'll lean towards female-dominated jobs, such as teaching or nursing, where she probably can't earn a living wage without a four-year college degree. Your son, however, will likely make a living wage whether or not he goes to college.

Once she has that degree, she's less likely to make it to the top of her profession, as CEO, school superintendent or hospital administrator. She's certainly less likely to own her own business. She's less likely to vote, and she won't run for office, much less win an election. In Tennessee, she'd never even consider running for Governor, U.S. Senator, or U.S. Representative. In Maryville, she might make it to the County Commission, but odds are she'll never be on the City Council.

There's a much greater chance she'll suffer domestic violence and sexual assault. Because Tennessee spends half the national average on services and prevention for those crimes, she'll have trouble finding help.

And if statistics help, here's a doozy. Tennessee's esteemed welfare to work program, Families First, began in 1996. In its first five years, this program served 199,859 Tennessee families, helping them secure training and education leading to better earnings. Of those families, fully

95.7% were headed by “female caretakers”. (Source: Families First Case Characteristics Study 2000, UT Center for Business and Economic Research).

Almost every family requiring economic assistance in Tennessee consists of single women, or single women with children. Why is that?

To learn more, see “The Status of Women in Tennessee”, a report published by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research in 2000. Research published by the American Association of University Women is equally informative.

You and I, as parents and as Tennesseans, must educate ourselves about the realities facing our girls and help them prepare. We must teach them to protect themselves against abuse, encourage them to explore non-traditional careers, and keep them in school no matter what it takes. We must advocate on their behalf with legislators for better protection against criminal assault, and with business leaders for fair and equal pay. Things are better than they used to be, but we still have a long way to go.

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