

OUR VIEW

Million-dollar questions behind the single-parent income gap

Disparity between male, female single heads of households is pronounced in St. Louis County

How far can you stretch \$16,000 per year? If you're a single mom living in St. Louis County, chances are you know the answer. You know it when you pay the rent, shop for your family's clothes that you can't quite afford or put gas in the tank of a car you hope will keep running without major repairs. In St. Louis County, \$16,000 is the median yearly income for a single mother of children 18 and younger, according to Census figures cited by the Women's Foundation of Minnesota.

By contrast, single-father households in the county have a median income of \$42,300, and married couples \$68,900 per year.

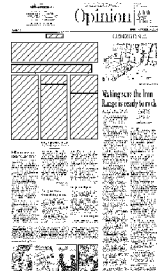
"What is going on to cause such a huge gap in pay?" **Lee Roper-Batker**, president of the Minneapolis-based foundation, asked after unveiling the figures and the group's "Status on Girls in Minnesota" report in Duluth yesterday. As detailed by reporter Nina

Petersen-Perlman today, the disparity is especially pronounced in St. Louis County compared to elsewhere in the state.

Roper-Batker's query on the gap is the million dollar question, or actually more than that — a difference of \$1.04 million if figured over a 40-year career. But it's on the micro-economic scale that the numbers pinch the most. A rent payment of \$700 per month would eat up half the \$16,000. Food — stretched to the minimum at \$350 monthly — another quarter. Clothing, transportation and other bare necessities quickly illustrate why poor is the operative word behind working poor.

Part of the disparity can be explained by the fact that there are more female single heads of households than male, and that the figures are medians, not averages. If there are only a few single dads, their numbers can be easily skewed.

But however the numbers



fall, the only real difference is gender — what else is there separating men from women?

Yes, there are reasons:

Deadbeat dads leave women with kids they don't support. Pregnancy and child care can take away from time earning. A teen mother is far more likely to become the parent responsible for raising a child and having her education interrupted, and future earning power diminished, than a teen dad. Cycles of poverty perpetuate themselves. And women as a whole haven't caught up with men in earning power.

Lots of reasons. No excuses.