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NEWS

Pooring Over It

A New Report Examines Poverty in the GLBT Community

By Bob Roehr

The overall rate of poverty in the U.S. was 12.5 percent in 2007, but lesbian couples and the children of same-sex partners are more likely to live in poverty than are their heterosexual counterparts, according to the first report ever to look at the subject in depth.

The report's lead coauthors, Randy Albelda and M.V. Lee Badgett, told members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered congressional caucus during a March 20 briefing that there were "many reasons to think that LGB people are at least as likely—and perhaps more likely—to experience poverty."

Badgett said "the myth of gay affluence" was what motivated her to get involved in the field. Gay magazine surveys have found that their readers are affluent, a finding typical of all magazine subscribers. Anti-gay groups have spun this into an assertion that all gays are rich and powerful and therefore do not need legal protection from discrimination.

Her earlier research debunked this myth, "but that research aimed at the middle of the income distribution." She said an out lesbian friend working at a women's homeless shelter had noted that 20-25 percent of her clients were gay or bisexual.

"This is a part of the community we don't hear much about. They are invisible in many ways." The main group of poor gay, lesbian, bi and trans people studied had been homeless children—either runaways or youth kicked out by their families, she said.

"We know that gay families have less access to the institutional supports that come with marriage, and often we see that they don't get as much family support as

their heterosexual siblings and colleagues get...and same-sex couples are twice as likely to be uninsured as people who are married."

Badgett lamented the fact that the 2000 U.S. Census did not ask questions about sexual orientation. Her analysis was based upon data from the census on same-sex unmarried couples living together, the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, and the 2003/5 California Health Interview Survey.

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— M.V. LEE BADGETT

Albelda reminded the audience that their analysis only covered couples: "Individuals are much more likely to be poor than people in two adult households." There seemed to be a synergistic effect between other risk factors for poverty and being gay or lesbian.

"Not surprisingly, lesbian couples have, statistically, significantly higher poverty rates than married heterosexual couples, and gay men have lower rates," she said.

About 20 percent of same-sex couples had children living in the household, a lower figure than their heterosexual counterparts. "What was striking was the very high level of poverty among the kids in gay and lesbian couples," Albelda said. Surpris-

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