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Could New Orleans become the new China?

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Hard to believe that the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina's collision with the Gulf Coast is already upon us. Hard, too, to believe that the massive exodus from Katrina's wrath has left an equally massive gender gap in New Orleans.

That's what a new report by the **Institute for Women's Policy Research** concludes about the local labor market. The report shows thousands more single women (with children) left New Orleans than did men--particularly African-American women. And unlike many of their male counterparts, those women aren't returning home. They simply cannot find jobs.

In Louisiana, many jobs that existed pre-Katrina have yet to return. Many may never. In their absence, construction has quickly become the dominant industry. And men are finding those jobs more easily than women. "Women, who made up 56 percent of the local workforce before Katrina, now compose only 46 percent of the total, the research shows. Meanwhile, the number of single-mother families in the metropolitan area has dropped from about 51,000 to fewer than 17,000," according to the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*.

Women's rights advocates are asking federal, state, and local authorities for more subsidized housing for the working poor and better access to education and training, especially in nontraditional fields for women (such as construction).

If this syndrome continues, could New Orleans become the next China? China's "woman shortage" has been widely reported. By 2020, some 40 million marriage-age Chinese men will have no one to marry--that due to China's long-term one-child policy and Chinese families' preferences for boy children over girls. A 2004 story by Voice of America even reported, "Experts warn that this [shortage of women] could cause outbreaks of violence and even war. Chinese officials say the gender imbalance could trigger an increase in abductions and trafficking of women."

No one expects the female shortage in New Orleans to mirror China's in this extreme fashion. But the disproportionate gender exodus could have long-term labor market and social implications for a city struggling mightily to return to its pre-Katrina greatness.