

# WOMEN IN AMERICA

*Social and Economic  
Achievements and Challenges*

*Women's Studies*

**Charlotte G. Harris  
Andrea M. Berger**  
*Editors*

NOVA

**WOMEN'S STUDIES**

**WOMEN IN AMERICA: SOCIAL  
AND ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENTS  
AND CHALLENGES**



**CHARLOTTE G. HARRIS**

**AND**

**ANDREA M. BERGER**

**EDITORS**



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## PREFACE

The demographic landscape of the United States has changed considerably in recent decades. Changing roles of women have reshaped patterns in marriage and divorce, childbearing, living arrangements and aspirations for education and career development. Immigration has increased. These trends have in turn affected the age, sex, racial and ethnic composition of the population. All these trends both affect, and are affected by, economic growth and technological change. This book provides a statistical picture of women in America in five critical areas: demographic and family changes, education, employment, health, and crime and violence. By presenting a quantitative snapshot of the well-being of American women based on Federal data, this book greatly enhances our understanding of both how far American women have come and the areas where there is still work to be done.

Chapter 1- The White House Council on Women and Girls was created by President Obama in early 2009 to enhance, support and coordinate the efforts of existing programs for women and girls. When President Obama signed the Executive Order creating the Council on Women and Girls, he noted that the issues facing women today “are not just women’s issues.” When women make less than men for the same work, it impacts families who then find themselves with less income and often increased challenges in making ends meet. When a job does not offer family leave, it impacts both parents and often the entire family. When there’s no affordable child care, it hurts children who wind up in second-rate care, or spending afternoons alone in front of the television set.

Chapter 2- Since his first day in office, President Obama has worked to lay the foundation for economic growth that creates good jobs and incomes for all Americans. *Many of these policies have been particularly important for*

*women. These policies have helped stave off a second Great Depression and get our economy growing again, but job growth is still not fast enough. The President is committed to continuing to push for an economy that provides economic security and jobs for America's women.*

This report lays out the economic landscape facing women today and details some of the many ways the Administration is committed to making sure the government is working for all Americans and especially American women.

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## *Chapter 1*

# **WOMEN IN AMERICA: INDICATORS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING**

*U. S. Department of Commerce Economics  
and Statistics Administration*

## **FOREWORD**

The White House Council on Women and Girls was created by President Obama in early 2009 to enhance, support and coordinate the efforts of existing programs for women and girls. When President Obama signed the Executive Order creating the Council on Women and Girls, he noted that the issues facing women today “are not just women’s issues.” When women make less than men for the same work, it impacts families who then find themselves with less income and often increased challenges in making ends meet. When a job does not offer family leave, it impacts both parents and often the entire family. When there’s no affordable child care, it hurts children who wind up in second-rate care, or spending afternoons alone in front of the television set.

The Council’s mission is to provide a coordinated Federal response to the challenges confronted by women and girls and to ensure that all Cabinet and Cabinet-level agencies consider how their policies and programs impact women and families. The Council also serves as a resource for each agency and the White House so that there is a comprehensive approach to the Federal government’s policy on women and girls.

In support of the Council on Women and Girls, the Office of Management and Budget and the Economics and Statistics Administration within the Department of Commerce worked together to create this report, which for the first time pulls together information from across the Federal statistical agencies to compile baseline information on how women are faring in the United States today and how these trends have changed over time. We believe that the information in this report is vitally important to inform the efforts of the Council on Women and Girls—and may be equally important in providing facts to a broad range of others who are concerned with the well-being of women and girls, from policymakers to journalists to researchers.

This report provides a statistical picture of women in America in five critical areas: demographic and family changes, education, employment, health, and crime and violence. By presenting a quantitative snapshot of the well-being of American women based on Federal data, the report greatly enhances our understanding both of how far American women have come and the areas where there is still work to be done.

Each page of this report is full of the most up-to-date facts on the status of women. Of particular note are the following:

- As the report shows, women have made enormous progress on some fronts. Women have not only caught up with men in college attendance but younger women are now more likely than younger men to have a college or a master's degree. Women are also working more and the number of women and men in the labor force has nearly equalized in recent years. As women's work has increased, their earnings constitute a growing share of family income.
- Yet, these gains in education and labor force involvement have not yet translated into wage and income equity. At all levels of education, women earned about 75 percent of what their male counterparts earned in 2009. In part because of these lower earnings and in part because unmarried and divorced women are the most likely to have responsibility for raising and supporting their children, women are more likely to be in poverty than men. These economic inequities are even more acute for women of color.
- Women live longer than men but are more likely to face certain health problems, such as mobility impairments, arthritis, asthma, depression, and obesity. Women also engage in lower levels of physical activity. Women are less likely than men to suffer from heart disease or diabetes. Many women do not receive specific recommended



preventative care, and one out of seven women age 18-64 has no usual source of health care. The share of women in that age range without health insurance has also increased.

- Women are less likely than in the past to be the target of violent crimes, including homicide. But women are victims of certain crimes, such as intimate partner violence and stalking, at higher rates than men.

Facts alone can never substitute for actions that directly address the challenges faced by women of all ages and backgrounds. But facts are deeply important in helping to paint a picture of how the lives of American women are changing over time and in pointing toward the actions and policies that might be most needed. The White House Council on Women and Girls has supported Administration efforts to ease the burden of going to college; increase the number of girls interested in science, technology, engineering and math; and promote equal pay for women. We also fought for passage of the Affordable Care Act, which provides health insurance to millions, and coordinated an unprecedented government-wide effort to end violence against women and girls. Yet, we know there is much more to do. The Council on Women and Girls is committed to raising the visibility of women's lives, as well as thinking strategically about how to address these challenges. Reports like this one help us to achieve that goal.

We thank those who worked on putting this report together, and are particularly grateful to the Federal statistical agencies that regularly collect and report these data so that all Americans can better understand the society and economy in which we live.

**Valerie Jarrett**

Chair, Council on Women and Girls and Assistant to the President and Senior Advisor

**Christina Tchen**

Executive Director, Council on Women and Girls, Chief of Staff to the First Lady

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was conceived at the Office of Management and Budget to support the White House Council on Women and Girls. To facilitate agency decision-making and priority-setting on the basis of firm evidence, this report assembles the Federal government's significant data and statistical resources to present a portrait of the well-being of American women in several key areas.

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<b>Crime and Violence</b>	Bureau of Justice Statistics Department of Justice	James P. Lynch Allen J. Beck Donald J. Farole

The report is a product of many people's work. The Department of Commerce's Economics and Statistics Administration was asked to coordinate the work and prepare the final report. Our efforts relied heavily on the work of individuals in Federal statistical agencies who provided the data and substantive portions of the report. Our thanks go, in particular, to the following individuals who contributed significantly to various chapters of the report and provided the statistical content on which this report is based.

We have also benefited greatly from the comments and suggested edits that were made by our colleagues who reviewed this report. Their astute observations greatly enhanced our work.

We are particularly grateful for the work done by the staff at the Economics and Statistics Administration in the preparation of this report. Jane W. Molloy coordinated the work with the data agencies while David Beede, Beethika Khan, Francine Krasowska, and Rebecca Lehrman provided substantive comments and edits. We also appreciate the work of James K. White and Sabrina Montes, who assisted in editing the final product.

We also want to thank Katherine K. Wallman, Chief Statistician, Office of Management and Budget, and Rochelle W. Martinez of her office for their help in conceptualizing this report and engaging the statistical agencies in this collaboration.

Finally, we deeply appreciate the work of the staff in the Office of Management and Budget, for their input and assistance. Meaghan Mann, Ariel D. Levin, Rebecca Leventhal, and Pooja Kadakia all helped to plan, design, and edit this report.

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Executive Office of the President

## INTRODUCTION

This report, prepared for the White House Council on Women and Girls, presents selected indicators of women's social and economic well-being

currently and over time. The report is intended for a general audience, with the hope that it will be useful to policymakers, policy analysts, journalists, policy advocates, and all those interested in women's issues.

The indicators have been grouped into five areas of interest:

- **People, Families, and Income.** This section describes various demographic characteristics and trends in women's marriage, living arrangements, childbearing, and poverty. The Census Bureau is the primary source of the data (*census.gov*).
- **Education.** This section describes levels and trends in women's educational attainment, school enrollment, and fields of study. The data are primarily from the National Center for Education Statistics (*nces.ed.gov*).
- **Employment.** This section describes levels and trends in women's employment, earnings, and time use. The Bureau of Labor Statistics is the main source of the data (*bls.gov*).
- **Health.** This section describes levels and trends in women's life expectancy, prevalence of chronic health conditions, access to health care, and health insurance coverage. The data come primarily from the National Center for Health Statistics (*cdc.gov/nchs*).
- **Crime and Violence.** This section describes levels and trends in women's victimization, crime, and involvement in the criminal justice system. The data come primarily from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (*bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov*).

## Using the Document

Each section of this report consists of a two-page narrative introduction followed by a single page for each of the indicators. Each indicator page has bullet points about the indicator, followed by a chart illustrating some of the bullet points. References for the introductions, bullets, and charts, as well as explanatory notes, are located in the Detailed Sources and Notes section at the end of the report. Unless otherwise indicated, all comparisons of statistics for various subpopulations at a particular point in time, as well as comparisons of statistics over time, are statistically significant.

Racial and ethnic data were included when they were available; however, in many instances such data were not available. For example, racial and ethnic data about the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, in particular,

were less available than data about the non-Hispanic White, Hispanic, and African American populations—a data shortcoming that President Obama’s Executive Order 13515, “Increasing Participation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Federal Programs” (October 14, 2009), is designed in part to address over time.

While there is interest in the economic and demographic characteristics and needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and families, no data are currently available from Federal data sources, so such information is not included in this report.

## **Getting Additional Information**

The statistical agency websites listed above and the references listed in the Detailed Sources and Notes section at the end of the report contain a wealth of additional information about women’s social and economic well-being. Anyone who wants additional information on these topics is strongly encouraged to look at these resources.

## **I. PEOPLE, FAMILIES, AND INCOME**

The demographic landscape of the United States has changed considerably in recent decades. Life expectancy has increased significantly. Changing roles of women have reshaped patterns in marriage and divorce, childbearing, living arrangements, and aspirations for education and career development. Immigration has increased. These trends have in turn affected the age, sex, racial and ethnic composition of the population. All these trends both affect—and are affected by—economic growth and technological change. A comprehensive sorting out of the causes and effects of these many demographic changes is beyond the scope of this report. However, it is clear that these complex and multidimensional phenomena affect women and men differently.

Demographic changes have resulted in an aging population with a larger female share. Until about 1950, the population was majority male. Now, nearly 51 percent of the population is female, with four million more females than males. The long-term trends that resulted in a female majority in the population were driven in part by midcentury reductions in immigration (particularly by men) coupled with life expectancy increases for women that

outpaced those of men. The gender imbalance is even larger at age 65 and older, where women have a 57 percent population share.<sup>1</sup>

## **Marriage and Childbirth**

Major changes have occurred in marriage and family formation patterns over the past 50 years. At the peak of the 1946–1964 baby boom, both women and men were typically marrying in their late teens or early twenties. The median age at first marriage has increased since the 1960s for both sexes. Women continue to be younger than men (by about two years) when first married. At age 65 or older, 95 percent of both men and women have married at least once; however, at these older ages, three times as many women as men are widowed.

The typical age at which women have their first child has been rising in recent decades. Since the mid- 1970s, there has been a sharp decline in the proportion of women in their twenties who have had a child. The likelihood of a woman having her first child at age 30 or older increased roughly six-fold from about 4 percent of all first-time mothers in the 1970s to 24 percent in 2007. Delays in marriage and childbearing are associated with a reduction of about one child per mother by the end of the childbearing years (in 2008, mothers had on average about 2.3 children each).<sup>2</sup>

The trends toward delaying first marriage and childbirth coincide with an increase in schooling among young men and women, and rising labor force participation by women. College graduates marry and begin families several years later than their less-educated counterparts. Of women in their mid-twenties, those without a high school diploma are three times as likely to have had a child as are women with at least a college degree. Nevertheless, the most recent data indicate that eight out of 10 women still go on to have children, compared to nine out of 10 women in the mid-1970s. Although there is a large difference across education levels in the percent of women in their mid-twenties with children, this difference is much smaller for women in their forties with children.

## **Households and Income**

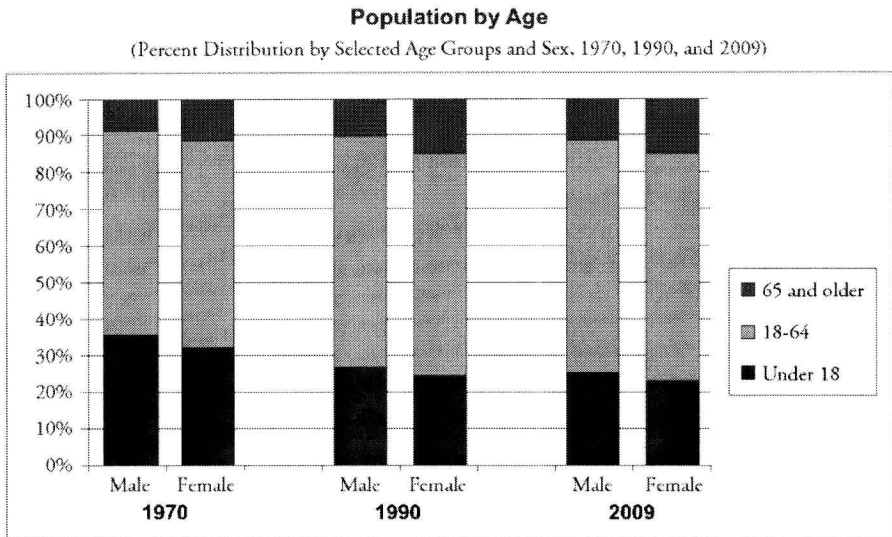
Delays in marriage and childbearing are reflected in living arrangements. While married couples head the majority of households, increasing numbers of

men and women cohabit with partners or live without a spouse or partner. Women are more likely than men to live without a spouse, especially women age 65 and older (reflecting their higher degree of widowhood). Women who live alone have the lowest median income of any type of household, including households with only a male who lives alone. Similarly, households headed by women with other relatives but no spouse also have lower income levels than households headed by men with other relatives but no spouse. Married-couple households have higher levels of household income relative to their non-married counterparts.

Differences in poverty rates have narrowed somewhat over the last decade, although women continue to experience higher poverty rates. While women comprise nearly half of the employed labor force, they continue to earn less than men. Changes in household and family structure, including a rise in female householders (with and without children), also have contributed to higher poverty rates for women. Furthermore, older women are more likely to be poor than older men.

### **1. While the Populations of Both Men and Women are Aging, Women Continue to Outnumber Men at Older Ages**

- In 2009, a greater share of the population was 65 or older than in 1970, with women outnumbering men in the older population. In 2009, about 15 percent of women were 65 and older vs. 11 percent of men, compared to 11 percent and 9 percent, respectively, in 1970. (See chart.)
- People under age 18 account for a smaller share of the population in 2009 than in 1970, and males continue to outnumber females at younger ages. The share of this age category has fallen dramatically since 1970, from 36 percent to 25 percent for males and from 33 percent to 23 percent for females. (See chart.)
- Higher shares of Black (27 percent), Hispanic (35 percent), and American Indian and Alaskan Native (30 percent) females are under 18 years of age, compared to 22 percent of White females and 22 percent of Asian females in 2009. Lower shares of Black (10 percent), Hispanic (7 percent), Asian (11 percent), and American Indian and Alaskan Native (8 percent) women are 65 and older, compared to 16 percent of White women.



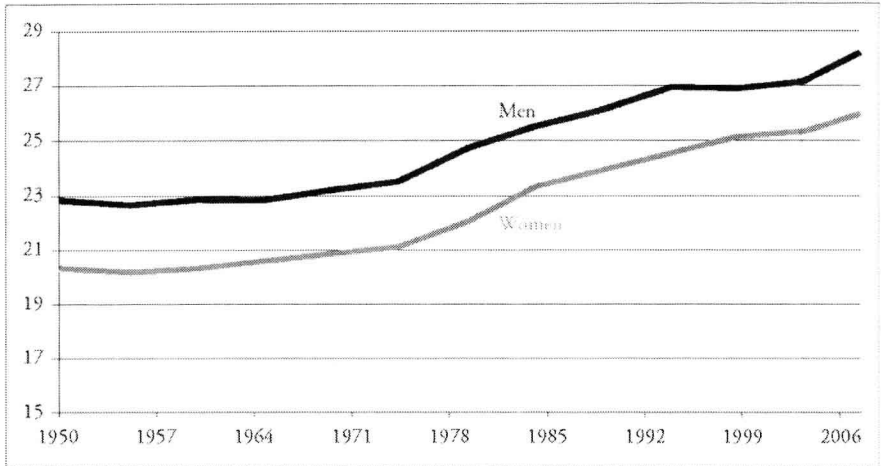
Source: Census Bureau.

## 2. Both Women and Men are Delaying Marriage

- Both women and men are marrying about five years later on average than they did in 1950. (See chart.)
- People with more education tend to marry later than those with less education. In 2008, college- educated women typically married at age 30, compared to age 26 for women without a high school diploma. College-educated men typically married at age 31, compared to age 29 for men without a high school diploma.
- Since 1950, women have typically been about two years younger than men when first married. (See chart.)
- Non-Hispanic White and Hispanic women and men tend to marry earlier than Black women and men. The typical age of first marriage is 27 for both non-Hispanic White and Hispanic women, and 29 for non-Hispanic White and Hispanic men, compared to age 31 for Black women and men.



**Median Age at First Marriage**  
(1950–2009)



Source: Census Bureau.

### 3. Fewer Women are Married than in the Past

- The percentage of adults who are married declined between 1970 and 2009, from 72 percent to 62 percent for women and from 84 percent to 66 percent for men. In 2009, 15 percent of women and 20 percent of men had never married, compared to 7 percent and 9 percent, respectively, in 1970. (See chart.)
- In 2009, among those 65 and older, 44 percent of women were married, compared to 74 percent of men. Widowed women account for about 41 percent of women 65 and older, but only 13 percent of men 65 and older are widowed.
- More women are widowed and divorced than men. Never married and divorced persons have accounted for an increasing share among both women and men over the past four decades. (See chart.)
- Non-Hispanic White and Hispanic women are much more likely to be married than Black women (64 percent, 65 percent and 42 percent, respectively), and much less likely to have never married (11 percent, 18 percent and 32 percent, respectively).