

THE FERTILITY OF AMERICAN WOMEN IN 2004

Hospitals, care providers, insurance companies, and baby food manufacturers are among the many groups interested in the number of newborns. The U.S. Census Bureau uses information on changing child-bearing patterns to help project the number of people who will be living in the United States in the future.

In the early 1900s, women averaged about four children during their childbearing years, while those living during the Great Depression averaged about two. After World War II, the total fertility rate for women climbed to 3.7 by 1957, then fell to 1.8 by the mid-1970s.¹ During the past decade, the total fertility rate has fluctuated between 2.0 and 2.1—just below the level required for natural replacement of the population.

In June 2004, 61.6 million women aged 15 to 44 lived in the United States, according to the June Fertility Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS). During the preceding 12 months, 3.7 million of these

women gave birth—resulting in a fertility rate of 61 births per 1000 women.² First-time mothers accounted for 1.5 million of these births—producing a first-birth rate of 24 births per 1,000 women.

Among women aged 40 to 44 in 2004, 19 percent were childless—twice the percentage of women this same age who were childless in 1976, as illustrated in Figure 1. Women approached the end of their child-bearing years with an average of 1.9 children in 2004, compared with 3.1 in 1976.

² The CPS estimate is lower than the estimated number based on vital statistics reports (about 4.1 million for 2004) because the CPS counts only women and not births resulting from multiple deliveries and includes only births to women aged 15 to 44. Also, 10 days of births were not counted in the June 2004 CPS. For more information, see the full report listed at the end of this chapter.

¹ The estimates in this report (which may be shown in text, figures, and tables) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level unless otherwise noted. For more information on the accuracy of the data, see Appendix A.

Words That Count

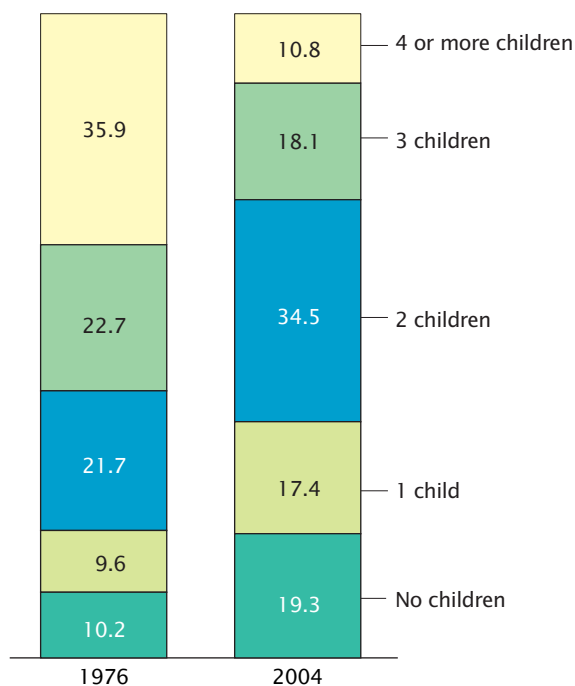
Fertility rate, in this report, is defined as the number of women who reported having a child in a 12-month period ending in June per 1000 women aged 15 to 44. Nearly all women end their childbearing by age 45.

Total fertility rates are hypothetical estimates of lifetime childbearing based on age-specific birth rates for a calendar year.

Replacement level fertility is the number of births per woman (approximately 2.1) required to maintain the population at the same size in the long term, assuming no international migration.

Children ever born is the number of children a woman has ever had, excluding stillbirths.

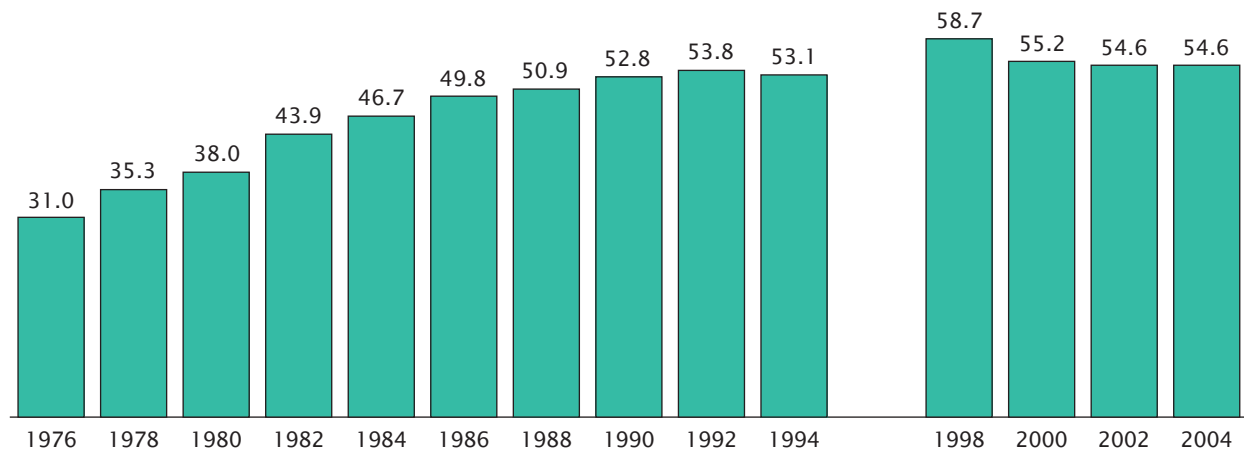
Figure 1.
Women Aged 40 to 44 by Number of Children Ever Born: 1976 and 2004
(Percent distribution)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, June 1976 and June 2004.

Figure 2.
Labor Force Participation Rates of Women Who Had a Child in the Last Year for Selected Years: June 1976 to June 2004

(In percent)



Note: Before 1990, the numbers are based on women aged 18 to 44. After 1990, the numbers are based on women aged 15 to 44.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, June 1976 to June 2004.

Birth Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin

Among the racial and ethnic groups studied (non-Hispanic White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic), Hispanic women (any race) were the only ones reaching the end of their childbearing years with more births than the number required for natural replacement—2.3 births by age 40 to 44.³ Black and non-Hispanic White women were below the replacement level, averaging about 1.8 to 1.9 births by that age.

Foreign-born women aged 15 to 44 represented about 15 percent of all women of childbearing age living in the United States in 2004. During the year prior to the 2004 survey, 794,000 foreign-born women gave birth, resulting in a fertility rate of 84 births per 1,000 women. The fertility rate for native women was lower, at 57 births per 1,000 women.

³ Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group such as Asian may be defined as those who reported Asian and no other race (the race-alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Asian regardless of whether they also reported another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). The body of this report (text, figures, and tables) shows data using the first approach (race alone). Use of the single-race population in this report does not imply that this is the preferred method of presenting data. The Census Bureau uses both approaches.

In this report, the term “non-Hispanic White” refers to people who are not Hispanic and who reported White and no other race. The Census Bureau uses non-Hispanic Whites as the comparison group for other race groups and Hispanics.

Data users should exercise caution when interpreting aggregate

Nonmarital Childbearing

One-third of all births during the year occurred to unmarried mothers. Of the 1.2 million unmarried women giving birth during the year, 1 million were never married and 145,000 were divorced or widowed at the time of the survey.

Out-of-wedlock childbearing occurred predominantly among younger women. Eighty-eight percent of teenagers giving birth were unmarried, compared with 52 percent of mothers in their early twenties.

Unmarried women living with an opposite-sex partner are less likely to give birth than married women but more likely than never-married women. In 2004, 3.7 million unmarried women of childbearing age were living with a male, unmarried partner. During the year, there were 65 births for every 1,000 women in this

results for the Hispanic population or for race groups because these populations consist of many distinct groups that differ in socioeconomic characteristics, culture, and recency of immigration. In addition, the CPS does not use separate population controls for weighting the Asian sample to national totals. Data were first collected for Hispanics in 1972 and for Asians and Pacific Islanders in 1987. For further information, see <www.bls.census.gov/cps/ads/adsmain.htm>.

Because Hispanics may be any race, data for Hispanics overlap slightly with data for the Black and Asian and Pacific Islander populations. Based on the population of women aged 15 to 44 in the June 2004 CPS, 3.4 percent of the single-race Black population and 1.7 percent of the single-race Asian population were also Hispanic. Data for the American Indian and Alaska Native population, the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander population, and the Two or More Races population are not shown here based on their small sample size in the June CPS.

Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns of First-Time Mothers: 1961–2000

Before the 1970s, women commonly left work upon becoming pregnant. Forty-four percent of first-time mothers worked during their pregnancy in the time period 1961–1965, compared with 67 percent in the time period 1996–2000, according to the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).⁴ About half of first-time mothers worked into their last month of pregnancy in 1996–2000, up from 23 percent in 1961–1965.

New mothers take a variety of types of leave according to the SIPP, including paid, unpaid, and disability. Quitting, being let go, and having an employer go out of business are other circumstances that may lead to time away from a job. In the late 1990s, 30 percent of women took more than one type of leave.

⁴ The data in this report were collected from June through September 2001 in the second wave (interview) of the 2001 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), from August through November 1996 in the second wave of the 1996 SIPP, from January through April 1986 in the fourth wave of the 1985 SIPP, and from January through March 1986 in the eighth wave of the 1984 SIPP. The population represented is the civilian noninstitutionalized population living in the United States.

In the time period 1996–2000, 26 percent of first-time working mothers quit their job, compared with 36 percent of these women in the time period 1981–1985. When other types of unpaid leave (unpaid maternity leave, sick leave, vacation, or other) are taken into consideration, the percentages look more stable, with about 70 percent of all women in both time periods taking unpaid leave or quitting.

As women have become an integral part of the workforce, employers have become more likely to offer paid maternity leave. In the early 1980s, 37 percent of women who worked during their pregnancy used paid leave. By the 1986–1990 time period, 43 percent of mothers received paid leave. Since that time, the proportion has remained stable. In the 1996–2000 time period, 26 percent of women took no leave during their pregnancy, while 1 percent took no leave after giving birth.

In the early 1960s, 14 percent of all mothers returned to work within 6 months after their child was born and 17 percent returned by the end of the year. In the late 1990s, 57 percent returned in 6 months and 65 percent returned by the end of the year.

group, compared with 88 births for every 1,000 married women and 36 births for every 1,000 women living without a partner. In contrast, first births were highest among unmarried women living with a partner. During the year, there were 42 first births for every 1,000 women in this group, compared with 32 for married women and 17 for women without a partner.

Out-of-wedlock childbearing was less frequent among women with higher educational attainment. During the 12 months prior to the 2004 survey, the majority of births to women without a high school diploma were out-of-wedlock (52 percent), compared with 9 percent of births to women with a professional degree.

Employment for New Mothers

Since 1990, the majority of women with infants (children less than 1 year old) have been in the labor

force—either working or looking for work, as shown in Figure 2. In 2004, 55 percent of these new mothers were in the labor force. Among new mothers, 41 percent of those aged 30 to 44 worked full-time, compared with 32 percent of those aged 20 to 24, and 13 percent of those aged 15 to 19. Young mothers were more likely to be unemployed than older mothers. Among new mothers in the labor force, 1 in 10 mothers aged 15 to 19 were unemployed, compared with 4 in 100 of those aged 30 to 44.

Changes in the labor force participation of women with infants could signal changes in the need for child care, in child-rearing practices, in future childbearing patterns, and in the need for employer-sponsored maternity leave benefits, among other impacts.

Mothers' Participation in Government Programs in 2001

In 2001, the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) found that 16 percent of all women aged 15 to 44 were covered by 1 of 6 public assistance programs:⁵

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Food stamps
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Medicaid
- Housing assistance
- General assistance or other welfare

Twenty-nine percent of women who had a birth in the last 12 months participated in public assistance programs, compared with 17 percent of mothers who did not have a birth in the last year and 12 percent of childless women.

⁵ The data come from Wave 2 of the 2001 SIPP conducted from June through September 2001. For more information on the programs studied, see page 2 of the full report: *Participation of Mothers in Government Assistance Programs: 2001* (P70-102) by Terry A. Lugaila.

Some women participated in more than one program. Fourteen percent of new mothers participated in two to five programs. Among mothers aged 15 to 44 who had not had a recent birth, 8 percent participated in this many programs. Seventy-two percent of all mothers participating in two or more programs received both food stamps and Medicaid.

Among all women aged 15 to 44 who were program participants, WIC recipients were the most likely to have had a child in the last year (40 percent). Program participants receiving housing assistance were the least likely to have had a recent birth (8 percent).

Among all mothers, participation was highest among women aged 15 to 19. Sixty-three percent of new mothers and 51 percent of those without a recent birth participated.

Regardless of whether or not a mother had a birth in the last year, mothers participating in these programs were more likely than their nonparticipating counterparts to be living without a spouse. Among women aged 15 to 44 who had had a recent birth, 40 percent of program participants were married and living with their husbands, compared with 82 percent of new mothers who did not receive assistance.

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Reports: *Fertility of American Women: June 2004* (P20-555) by Jane Lawler Dye and *Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns of First-Time Mothers: 1961–2000* (P70-103) by Julia Overturf Johnson and Barbara Downs.

Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau's Web site <www.census.gov>. Go to the top of the Census Bureau's home page and click on "Subjects A to Z." Click on "F" and select "Fertility of American Women Data."

For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Reports: *Fertility of American Women: June 2004* (P20-548) by Jane Dye, and *Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns of First-Time Mothers: 1961–2000* (70-103) by Julia Overturf Johnson and Barbara Downs, and *Participation of Mothers in Government Assistance Programs: 2001* by Terry A. Lugaila (P70-102).

Contact the Census Bureau's Customer Services Center at 301-763-INFO (4636) or e-mail <pop@census.gov>.