

Trends in labor force participation of married mothers of infants

Following a long-term advance, the labor force activity of married mothers of infants began to decline in the late 1990s for a variety of demographic groups and since 2000 has been relatively stable

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The most striking feature of women's labor market gains during the post-World War II period was the entry of married mothers into the work force. In 1948, only about 17 percent of married mothers were in the labor force. By the 1980s, labor force participation had become an integral part of their lives. In 1985, for example, 61 percent of married mothers were working or looking for work. (See chart 1.) By 1995, their labor force participation rate had reached 70 percent. In fact, married mothers accounted for much of the increase in total labor force participation during the postwar period.¹

In recent years, however, the labor force participation of married mothers, especially those with young children, has stopped its advance.² In 2005, the participation rate of married mothers with preschoolers was 60 percent, about 4 percentage points lower than its peak in 1997 and 1998.³ Married mothers with children under a year old (infants) showed the most dramatic changes. After reaching a peak of 59.2 percent in 1997, the participation rate for married mothers of infants fell by about 6 percentage points to 53.3 percent in 2000 and has shown no clear trend since then. In comparison, the participation rate of married mothers of school-age children (aged 6 to 17) fell by just 2 percentage points, from 77 percent in 1997 to about 75 percent in 2005.⁴ (See chart 2.)

This article explores the characteristics of married mothers of infants and recent trends in their labor force participation. The data in this article are from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly survey of 60,000 households that provides a large amount of demographic, family relationship, and labor force information.⁵

Profile of married mothers of infants

Before investigating the trends in labor force participation rates among married mothers of infants, this article begins with a look at their demographic characteristics. In 2005, there were 2.4 million married mothers whose youngest child was less than 1 year old. The characteristics of married mothers with infants vary somewhat from those of married mothers overall. Not surprisingly, those with infants were younger, on average, than married mothers in general. Among married mothers of infants, in 2005, about 79 percent were under the age of 35. In contrast, just 36 percent of all married mothers were under 35. (See tables 1 and 4.)

Married mothers aged 25 and older with infants are well educated, on average. Nearly half (47 percent) had a college degree, compared with 35 percent of all married mothers of that age group.⁶ Another 26 percent of married mothers of infants had completed 1 to 3 years of college, compared with 29 percent of all mothers. The proportions of married mothers of infants who were white non-Hispanic (67 percent), black non-Hispanic (7 percent), Asian non-Hispanic (7 percent), or Hispanic (18 percent) were very similar to those of other mothers.⁷ About 21 percent of mothers with infants were born outside the United States, also about the same as the proportion for all mothers. (See table 1.)

Mothers of infants have more children, on average, than mothers of school-age children. For the mothers of infants, 27 percent had three or more children under age 18, compared with 16 percent

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Chart 1. Labor force participation rates of women by marital status and presence of children, March 1948–2005

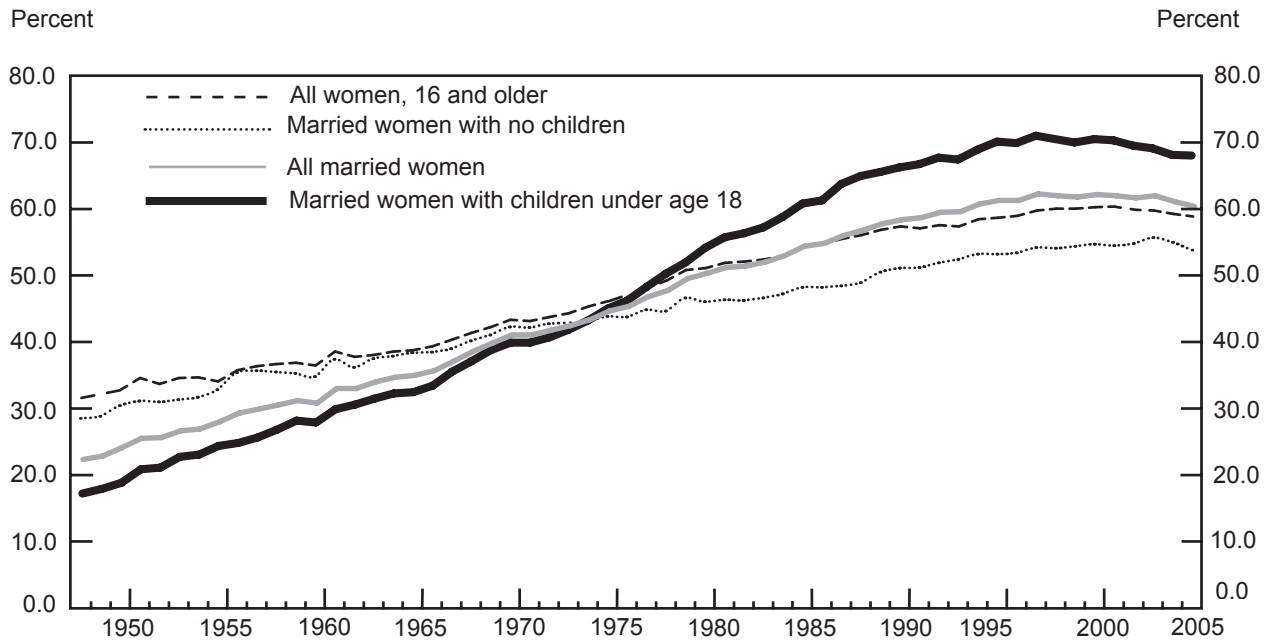


Chart 2. Labor force participation rates of married mothers by age of youngest child, 1994–2005

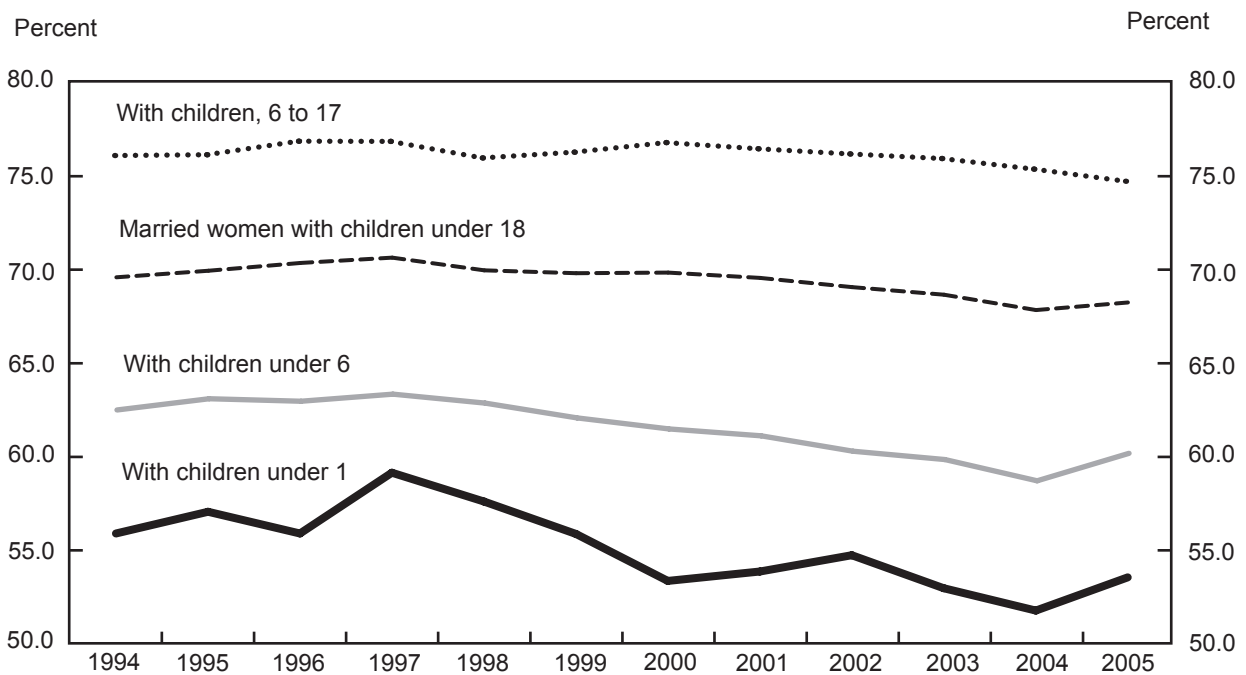


Table 1. Selected characteristics of married mothers by age of youngest child, annual averages, 1997 and 2005

[Numbers in thousands]

Characteristic	With children under 18, total		With children 6 to 17, none younger		Children 3 to 5, none younger		Children under 3			
							Total		Children under 1	
	1997	2005	1997	2005	1997	2005	1997	2005	1997	2005
Married mothers, 16 years and older, total	25,704	25,942	13,792	14,231	4,863	4,760	7,049	6,951	2,448	2,398
Percent distribution	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Age										
16 to 24 years	5.3	4.8	.3	.5	4.8	4.3	15.4	14.0	19.0	17.4
25 to 34 years	34.2	30.9	15.2	13.0	50.0	44.3	60.5	58.2	62.1	61.2
35 to 44 years	45.6	43.0	58.2	50.3	42.2	45.9	23.1	26.3	18.3	20.8
45 years and older	14.9	21.3	26.3	36.2	3.0	5.6	1.0	1.6	.5	.6
Race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity										
White non-Hispanic	74.9	68.5	76.8	70.9	71.5	64.8	73.5	66.0	73.8	67.2
Black or African-American non-Hispanic	7.3	7.1	7.8	7.4	8.1	7.5	6.0	6.2	5.2	6.7
Asian non-Hispanic	—	6.0	—	5.5	—	6.5	—	6.5	—	6.5
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	12.3	16.9	10.2	14.6	14.7	19.7	14.7	19.5	14.9	18.0
Educational attainment¹ (25 years and older)										
Less than a high school diploma	10.4	10.2	11.1	10.2	10.9	11.4	8.6	9.4	7.6	8.7
High school graduates, no college	33.1	26.4	36.2	29.6	33.0	24.4	25.9	20.2	23.7	18.5
Some college or associate degree	28.8	28.5	28.2	29.6	29.1	28.4	29.8	26.1	30.2	25.5
Bachelor's degree and higher	27.7	34.9	24.6	30.6	26.9	35.9	35.7	44.3	38.5	47.4
Nativity										
Native born	84.9	79.4	86.8	81.6	82.9	76.1	82.4	77.2	82.1	78.6
Foreign born	15.1	20.6	13.2	18.4	17.1	23.9	17.6	22.8	17.9	21.4
Employment status										
In labor force	18,165	17,690	10,614	10,636	3,257	3,114	4,295	3,939	1,448	1,282
Labor force participation rate	70.7	68.2	77.0	74.7	67.0	65.4	60.9	56.7	59.2	53.5
Employed	17,535	17,058	10,296	10,296	3,135	2,987	4,105	3,776	1,379	1,225
Employment-population ratio	68.2	65.8	74.7	72.3	64.5	62.7	58.2	54.3	56.3	51.1
Unemployed	630	632	318	340	122	128	191	164	69	58
Unemployment rate	3.5	3.6	3.0	3.2	3.7	4.1	4.4	4.2	4.8	4.5
Not in labor force	7,539	8,252	3,178	3,595	1,606	1,645	2,754	3,012	1,000	1,111

¹ As percent of civilian noninstitutional population 25 years and older.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because data for all groups are not always presented and also due to rounding. Children refer

to own children and include sons, daughters, stepchildren, and adopted children. Not included are nieces, nephews, grandchildren, or other related children, and all unrelated children living in the household. Dash indicates data are not available or do not meet publication criteria.

of mothers of school-age children. Among married mothers of infants, about one-third had just one child, compared with 44 percent of mothers of school-age children. (See table 2.)

Trends among demographic groups

A decline in participation rates such as that experienced by married mothers of infants in the late 1990s can reflect a variety of factors, including weaker labor market conditions (such as slow earnings or job growth, employers having fewer job openings

or offering fewer family-friendly policies); demographic changes (such as a shift in the group's age, ethnicity, or foreign-born composition); changes in cultural or societal attitudes (a society might begin to place a higher value on stay-at-home mothers, for example); and shifts in personal preferences.⁸ Information on employers' policies and individuals' attitudes is not collected in the CPS, but the survey is a rich source of demographic data.

The subsections that follow discuss participation rate trends in several key demographic categories.

Table 2. Percent distribution of married mothers by number of children and age of youngest child, annual averages, 2000 and 2005

Number of children	With children under 18, total		With children 6 to 17, none younger		Children 3 to 5, none younger		Children under 3			
							Total		Children under 1	
	2000	2005	2000	2005	2000	2005	2000	2005	2000	2005
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
One child	38.4	38.0	43.8	44.4	26.2	24.9	35.8	33.9	37.6	35.4
Two children	40.3	40.4	39.8	39.8	44.7	45.0	38.3	38.4	36.4	37.2
Three children	15.4	15.7	12.6	12.4	20.5	20.9	17.6	18.9	17.4	18.9
Four children	4.2	4.3	2.9	2.5	6.2	6.9	5.6	6.2	5.5	5.8
Five or more children	1.5	1.5	.6	.7	2.5	2.4	2.6	2.7	3.0	2.7

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals due to rounding. Children refer to own children and include sons, daughters, stepchildren and adopted children. Not included are nieces, nephews, grandchildren,

or other related children, and all unrelated children living in the household. Comparable data are not readily tabulated before 2000.

Educational attainment. The educational attainment of women has risen dramatically in the post-World War II period. For instance, among all women aged 25 and older, the proportion with at least 1 year of college more than tripled, rising from about 15 percent in 1960 to 53 percent in 2005.⁹ (Among men, this proportion almost tripled, going from 18 percent to 53 percent.) Labor force activity rose at every level of education. The participation rate for women with a college degree rose from about 57 percent in 1962 to 73 percent in 2005, while the rate for women with some college (but not a bachelor’s degree) went from 42 percent to 67 percent.¹⁰

The declines in labor force activity in the late 1990s by married mothers of infants have occurred across all educational levels and, for most groups, by about the same magnitude. After peaking at 71 percent in 1997, the participation rate of those with a college degree had fallen by about 9 percentage points by 2000. The participation rate for mothers with less than a high school diploma fell by 8 percentage points, as did the rate for those with some college. Since 2000, participation rates for these groups showed little change. High school graduates’ participation rates declined almost every year from 1997 to 2005. (See table 3.)

Participation rates fell in all education categories for a variety of reasons. For college-educated women, there are two possible explanations that can be supported with CPS data.¹¹ The first is that married women with college degrees typically have husbands with similar levels of education. These husbands are likely to be relatively high earners, providing their wives with more financial resources to draw upon and more choice about whether to work after the birth of children. So while college-educated mothers have a relatively large investment in human capital (that is, their formal education), they also are more able, on average, to afford to leave the work force, at least temporarily.¹² (The effects of husbands’ earnings on their wives’ labor force participa-

tion are examined in more detail later in this section.)

The second potential factor in the decline in labor force activity among college-educated mothers of infants that can be supported with CPS data is related to job demands. Women aged 25 and older with at least a bachelor’s degree who worked full time have a relatively lengthy workweek, averaging 42.2 hours in 2005. Within this group, the workweek was particularly long for women with a professional or doctoral degree—about 45 hours. These relatively heavy work hours, on average, may give highly educated women an incentive to step back from the work force once they become mothers.¹³ Husbands’ earnings and work demands explain only part of the changes in labor market attachment, however, as the overall statistics reflect many complex individual decisions that are only partly related to economic factors.

Among mothers with less education, their lower average earnings mean that they are less able to afford child care. At the same time, their opportunity costs of not working are lower. However, as with the college graduates, why these mothers have lower rates of labor force activity now as compared with a few years ago is a question that cannot be answered fully by economic measures.

Race and ethnicity. Race and Hispanic ethnicity are important factors in married mothers’ labor force participation. Married black or African-American mothers of young children historically have been more likely to work or look for work than have either married white or Asian mothers, and far more likely to work than married Hispanic mothers. In 2005, 65 percent of black non-Hispanic married mothers of infants were in the labor force, compared with 58 percent among white non-Hispanic married mothers, 51 percent among Asian non-Hispanic mothers, and 34 percent among Hispanic mothers. The participation rate of white mothers fell by 4.5 percentage points since 1997, while the rate for black mothers stayed about the same. (Strictly

Table 3. Labor force participation rates of married mothers of infants by selected characteristics, annual averages, 1994–2005

[In percent]

Characteristic	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Married mothers of infants, 16 years and older, total	55.9	57.0	55.9	59.2	57.6	55.8	53.3	53.8	54.7	52.9	51.7	53.5
Age												
16 to 24 years	45.5	46.6	44.4	47.6	47.8	45.5	45.4	45.9	44.3	43.9	39.7	42.6
25 to 34 years	58.2	60.0	58.6	62.2	60.7	59.4	56.2	55.7	57.1	54.5	53.7	55.5
35 to 44 years	61.0	60.4	59.4	60.5	57.9	55.4	53.2	55.6	57.1	55.7	55.9	56.5
45 years and older	77.6	59.8	73.8	67.9	43.9	64.3	44.6	51.8	47.3	54.7	65.5	63.6
Race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity												
White non-Hispanic	59.0	59.4	59.1	62.0	60.1	58.8	55.4	57.1	57.4	56.6	56.3	57.5
Black or African-American non-Hispanic	61.9	66.2	64.8	63.2	69.0	68.9	64.6	68.8	66.5	59.8	58.8	64.6
Asian non-Hispanic	—	—	—	—	—	—	54.0	47.5	53.8	50.9	41.1	51.4
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	38.9	41.0	38.8	45.0	39.6	37.1	39.3	38.2	39.9	37.5	37.7	34.3
Educational attainment (25 years and older)												
Less than a high school diploma	27.8	31.7	31.5	35.3	33.0	27.6	27.1	28.2	26.4	25.6	28.2	28.2
High school graduates, no college	53.4	54.5	51.9	52.4	52.9	52.7	50.5	48.9	51.7	47.3	46.7	46.5
Some college or associate degree	63.4	62.0	61.9	64.9	64.3	62.3	57.1	60.9	60.2	55.0	59.3	58.8
Bachelor's degree and higher	67.8	68.1	67.6	70.6	65.7	65.0	62.0	61.5	62.7	63.9	59.9	62.9
Nativity												
Native born	—	—	59.6	63.0	60.8	59.7	57.2	58.1	59.1	58.1	57.3	58.5
Foreign born	—	—	37.5	41.4	40.8	38.4	36.4	36.0	37.7	34.6	32.3	35.0

NOTE: Children refer to own children and include sons, daughters, stepchildren, and adopted children. Not included are nieces, nephews, grandchildren, or other related children, and all unrelated

children living in the household. Dash indicates data are not available or do not meet publication criteria.

comparable data for Asians from the CPS are not available prior to 2000.) Hispanic mothers' labor force participation rate fell by about 6 percentage points between the late 1990s and 2005.

Foreign born and native born. Since the mid-1990s, the CPS has collected information monthly on whether individuals were born in the United States or in another country. These data show that mothers who were born abroad are much less likely to be in the labor force than are mothers who were born in the United States. As can be seen in table 3, just 35 percent of immigrant married mothers of infants were either working or looking for work in 2005, compared with 59 percent of native-born mothers. The labor force participation rate of immigrant mothers declined by about 6 percentage points since 1997—about the same as the decline among native-born mothers (5 percentage points).

The relatively low participation rates for Hispanic and foreign-born married mothers of infants are especially noteworthy for this analysis because their numbers have been growing. The proportion accounted for by Hispanics rose from 15 percent in 1997 to 18 percent in 2005, while the proportion accounted for

by immigrants rose from 18 percent to 21 percent over the same period. (See table 4.) This suggests that the growth in these two groups could be partly responsible for the overall decline in married mothers' participation. Further analysis, however, showed that the rise in the groups' share of the population explains only a small part of the overall decline in participation rates. Because these subgroups represent a minority of married mothers of infants, their effect on the overall participation rate of these mothers has been modest, despite their growth in numbers and their relatively low levels of labor force participation.¹⁴

Age of mother. Labor force participation rates of mothers rise along with the age of the mother. Young mothers have especially low participation rates. In 2005, about 43 percent of married mothers aged 16 to 24 with an infant were in the labor force, more than 10 percentage points lower than the rates for mothers aged 25 to 34 and 35 to 44. All age groups saw declining labor force activity in the late 1990s. From 1997 to 2000, the participation rate of mothers aged 16 to 24 fell by 2 percentage points, and the rate for those aged 25 to 34 fell by 6 percentage points, while the rate

Table 4. Selected characteristics of married mothers of infants, annual averages, 1994–2005

[Numbers in thousands]

Characteristic	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Married mothers of infants, 16 years and older, total	2,666	2,541	2,553	2,448	2,544	2,392	2,461	2,360	2,363	2,381	2,441	2,398
Percent distribution	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Age												
16 to 24 years	22.2	22.5	20.6	19.0	19.0	19.9	20.0	18.7	18.2	17.2	17.8	17.4
25 to 34 years	61.8	60.5	61.6	62.1	61.7	59.4	58.3	59.1	60.5	62.0	61.0	61.2
35 to 44 years	15.6	16.5	17.4	18.3	18.7	19.8	20.9	21.3	20.5	20.0	20.5	20.8
45 years and older4	.6	.3	.5	.7	.8	.8	.9	.9	.7	.6	.6
Race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity												
White non-Hispanic	74.9	76.7	73.5	73.8	75.0	71.7	70.6	68.0	69.5	67.6	66.9	67.2
Black or African-American non-Hispanic	6.4	6.0	5.9	5.2	6.0	6.9	6.6	6.9	6.1	5.7	5.2	6.7
Asian non-Hispanic	—	—	—	—	—	—	5.2	4.7	6.0	6.4	6.7	6.5
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	14.4	13.7	15.3	14.9	13.6	15.4	16.9	19.3	17.5	18.5	19.3	18.0
Educational attainment¹ (25 years and older)												
Less than a high school diploma	9.1	7.2	8.8	7.6	7.4	7.8	8.0	8.9	7.7	9.4	8.7	8.7
High school graduates, no college	28.0	26.5	24.9	23.7	23.6	23.7	21.5	21.6	20.9	19.4	20.0	18.5
Some college or associate degree	29.5	29.6	29.2	30.2	28.0	27.9	28.9	27.7	26.0	25.6	26.5	25.5
Bachelor's degree and higher	33.4	36.7	37.1	38.5	41.0	40.6	41.5	41.8	45.5	45.6	44.8	47.4
Nativity												
Native born	—	—	83.1	82.1	83.9	82.0	81.2	80.6	79.4	78.1	77.6	78.6
Foreign born	—	—	16.9	17.9	16.1	18.0	18.8	19.4	20.6	21.9	22.4	21.4
Employment status												
Labor force	1,489	1,449	1,426	1,448	1,465	1,336	1,312	1,270	1,292	1,260	1,262	1,282
Participation rate	55.9	57.0	55.9	59.2	57.6	55.8	53.3	53.8	54.7	52.9	51.7	53.5
Employment	1,396	1,363	1,351	1,379	1,404	1,285	1,259	1,212	1,216	1,196	1,203	1,225
Employment-population ratio	52.4	53.6	52.9	56.3	55.2	53.7	51.2	51.4	51.5	50.2	49.3	51.1
Unemployment	93	86	75	69	61	51	53	58	77	64	59	58
Unemployment rate	6.3	6.0	5.3	4.8	4.2	3.8	4.1	4.6	5.9	5.1	4.7	4.5
Not in labor force	1,176	1,091	1,126	1,000	1,079	1,056	1,149	1,090	1,071	1,121	1,179	1,115

¹ As percent of civilian noninstitutional population 25 years and older.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because data for all groups are not always presented and also due to rounding. Children

refer to own children and include sons, daughters, stepchildren, and adopted children. Not included are nieces, nephews, grandchildren, or other related children, and all unrelated children living in the household. Dash indicates data are not available or do not meet publication standards.

for older mothers (aged 35 to 44) fell by 7 percentage points.¹⁵ Since 2000, the rates for younger mothers have continued to trend downward, while the rates for other mothers have shown little change.

Mothers under age 35 with infants accounted for a declining share of all married mothers of infants over the period from 1997 to 2005, while mothers aged 35 to 44 years accounted for an increasing one. A rising proportion of older mothers in the population would have raised the overall participation rate of mothers, other factors remaining unchanged. However, the falling participation rates of older mothers offset any upward pressure attribut-

able to their increasing share of the population.

Number of children. The more children a woman has, the less likely she is to be in the labor force. Among married mothers of infants, those whose infant was their only child had a participation rate of 60 percent in 2005. This compared with a rate of 55 percent for those with two children and 46 percent for those with three children. (See table 5.) Since 2000, there has been a small increase in the number of married mothers of infants who have other children at home.¹⁶ According to Census Bureau tabulations, there has been virtually no change in the

number of children overall per married-couple family since around 1980.¹⁷

Earnings of husbands. Women whose husbands are relatively highly paid might be expected to have greater choice about whether to work when they have children. In fact, married mothers of infants whose husbands' earnings were in the highest quintile (top 20 percent) had one of the lowest participation rates—48 percent in 2005. Wives whose husbands had the lowest earnings (bottom 20 percent) had a similar rate—about 47 percent. Wives whose husbands were in the middle earnings quintile had the highest participation rate—64 percent.

Among men 25 years and older who worked full time, the earnings increase from 1997 to 2005 for those in the ninth decile (that is, just 10 percent have higher earnings) was nearly four times that of the men in the first decile (the lowest 10 percent)—about 37 percent, compared with 10 percent (in nominal dollars). The inflation rate during the period, as measured by the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U), was about 22 percent.¹⁸ In fact, only men with earnings above the median had pay increases that ex-

ceeded inflation over the period from 1997 to 2005.

Despite the uneven earnings growth of men 25 years and older, nearly all quintiles showed participation rates for mothers of infants that remained lower in 2005 than they had been in 1997. The only exception was the group of mothers whose husbands were in the lowest quintile of earnings; their participation rate was essentially unchanged.¹⁹ Mothers of infants with husbands in the highest quintile and in the second-lowest quintile had the largest declines in their participation rates—9 and 8 percentage points, respectively. (See table 6.)

AFTER A LENGTHY AND DRAMATIC ADVANCE, labor force participation rates for married mothers of infants peaked in 1997 and have been relatively stable since 2000. This pattern held across most demographic categories. Groups with a history of lower participation rates for women—such as Hispanics and the foreign born—account for a growing share of the population, but this has served to lower participation rates only modestly for married mothers of infants overall. □

Table 5. Labor force participation rates of married mothers of infants by number of children, annual averages, 2000–05

Number of children	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
All married mothers of infants	53.3	53.8	54.7	52.9	51.7	53.5
One child	57.2	60.1	63.1	61.1	57.4	59.5
Two children	55.8	55.0	53.0	54.0	53.7	54.8
Three children	47.4	48.1	48.3	41.5	43.6	46.1
Four children	38.2	37.6	43.5	39.8	40.2	40.6
Five or more children	37.1	28.7	31.6	30.9	32.9	36.6

NOTE: Children refer to own children and include sons, daughters, stepchildren, and adopted children. Not included are nieces, nephews, grandchildren, or other related children, and all

unrelated children living in the household. Comparable data are not readily tabulated before 2000.

Table 6. Labor force participation rates of married mothers of infants by earnings quintiles of their husbands, annual averages, selected years

Quintile of husbands' weekly earnings	1994	1997	2000	2005
All mothers of infants with an employed husband ..	58.1	57.7	53.4	53.3
Lowest 20 percent	54.0	47.3	46.5	46.9
Second 20 percent	61.5	59.2	60.4	51.3
Middle 20 percent	62.9	66.2	58.4	64.4
Fourth 20 percent	61.2	59.4	55.5	56.5
Highest 20 percent	50.7	56.3	46.4	47.7

NOTE: Labor force participation rates shown are for married mothers of infants whose husbands were employed in a wage and salary job. Earnings data measure usual weekly earnings and exclude the self-employed. Children refer to own children and

include sons, daughters, stepchildren, and adopted children. Not included are nieces, nephews, grandchildren, or other related children, and all unrelated children living in the household.

Notes

¹ For a detailed description of trends in labor force participation since World War II, see Abraham Mosisa and Steven Hipple, "Trends in labor force participation in the United States," *Monthly Labor Review*, October 2006, pp. 35–57. For the latest BLS labor force projections, see Mitra Toossi, "Labor force projections to 2014: retiring boomers," *Monthly Labor Review*, November 2005, pp. 25–44. Longer term perspectives on women's changing roles are presented in Mitra Toossi, "A century of change: U.S. labor force from 1950 to 2050," *Monthly Labor Review*, May 2002, pp. 15–28; and Claudia Goldin, "The Quiet Revolution That Transformed Women's Employment, Education, and Family," *The American Economic Review, Papers and Proceedings of the One Hundred Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association, Boston, MA, January 6–8, 2006*, May 2006.

² Data prior to 1994 are from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (formerly called the Annual Demographic Supplement) to the Current Population Survey. Starting in 1994, data are annual averages compiled from monthly estimates, unless otherwise noted.

³ The labor force participation rate is the labor force level for a particular group divided by the civilian noninstitutional population of that group. The labor force is the sum of the employed plus the unemployed.

⁴ Previous interruptions in the growth of women's participation rates were analyzed in two articles by Howard Hayghe: "Are women leaving the labor force?" *Monthly Labor Review*, July 1994, pp. 37–39; and "Developments in women's labor force participation," *Monthly Labor Review*, September 1997, pp. 41–46.

⁵ In this article, a mother is defined as a woman with one or more own children under the age of 18 with whom she lives. Children include sons, daughters, adopted children, and stepchildren. Not included are nieces, nephews, grandchildren, other related children, and unrelated children. A married mother is a mother whose husband is present in the household.

⁶ Educational attainment data from the CPS are typically confined to persons 25 years and older, an age at which most people have completed their formal education.

⁷ In this article, data by race are for non-Hispanic persons. Persons who are identified as Hispanic, an ethnic category, can be of any race.

⁸ The cost of child care has been identified as a significant factor in a mother's decision to return to work. See Lisa Barrow, "An Analysis of Women's Return-to-Work Decisions Following First Birth," Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, September 1998. Other research finds that working and non-working women have different values. See Mahshid Jalilvand, "Married women, work, and values," *Monthly Labor Review*, August 2000. A link between women's falling participation rate and a weakened demand for labor is examined in Heather Boushey, "Are Women Opting Out? Debunking the Myth," Center for Economic and Policy Research, Briefing paper, November 2005.

⁹ From a table on the Census Bureau Web site: <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/cps2005/tabA-1.xls>. In 1992, the categories used to classify educational attainment were revised to reflect the highest degree or diploma attained rather than the number of years of school completed. For a detailed description of the change, see Robert Kominski and Paul Siegel, "Measuring education in the Current Population Survey," *Monthly Labor Review*, September 1993, pp. 34–38. The comparisons between 1950, 1960, and

later years use data as of March of the respective years rather than annual averages, which began to be produced for educational attainment data only in 1992.

¹⁰ *Educational Attainment of Workers: March 1962*, Special Labor Force Report No. 30 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1963). For historical comparability, these participation rates are for age 18 and older.

¹¹ On the other hand, higher income mothers have greater opportunity costs associated with not working and also are more able to afford child care. For a study of the relationship between wives' employment growth and husbands' earnings, see Chinhui Juhn and Kevin M. Murphy, "Wage Inequality and Family Labor Supply," *Journal of Labor Economics*, January 1997, pp. 72–97.

¹² Press coverage has featured college-educated women who are having difficulty finding jobs after an absence from the work force to raise children, especially jobs at or near their former levels of pay and responsibility. Examples are "Getting Back on Track," *Newsweek*, September 25, 2006; "After Years Off, Women Struggle to Revive Careers," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 2004; "Workplaces Prepare for Reentry," *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2005; "The Baby Sabbatical," *American Demographics*, February 1, 2002. The unemployment rate for college-educated mothers of infants was essentially the same in 1997 and 2005—around 2 percent. The jobless rate for all women was 5 percent in both years.

¹³ Although the CPS does not include measures of overwork or stress, in a study by the Families and Work Institute entitled "Overwork in America" (Executive Summary, 2004), women reported feeling overworked somewhat more often than men. Another study by the institute, "Highlights of the National Study of the Changing Workforce" (Executive Summary, 2002), found significantly higher levels of interference between one's work and family life compared with 25 years earlier.

¹⁴ Shift-share calculations found that had the proportions of four selected population groups stayed the same between 1997 and 2005, the labor force participation rate of married mothers of infants would have been 54.6 percent in 2005 instead of 53.5 percent. The groups were Hispanic native-born, Hispanic foreign-born, non-Hispanic foreign-born, and native-born non-Hispanic mothers of infants. These groups are mutually exclusive and include all married mothers of infants. In 2005, nearly 60 percent of Hispanic married mothers of infants were born outside the United States, while one-half of foreign-born married mothers of infants were Hispanic.

¹⁵ There are relatively few teenage married mothers of infants, accounting for about 10 percent of the 16- to 24-year age group and just about 2 percent of the total.

¹⁶ The year 2000 is used for comparison because the data are more readily tabulated beginning in that year.

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, table FM-3, "Average Number of Own Children Under 18 Per Family, by Type of Family: 1955 to Present." <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/fm3.pdf>.

¹⁸ Unpublished tabulations from the Current Population Survey, available from the Division of Labor Force Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

¹⁹ Earnings data in the CPS are collected from one-quarter of the sample each month. CPS earnings estimates include wage and salary workers only and exclude the self-employed. The earnings data presented here are further restricted to married fathers of infants.