

Current Population Reports

Population Characteristics

Household and Family Characteristics: March 1997

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Introduction

Reports of the continuing rapid decline of the traditional American family are greatly exaggerated. From 1970 to 1990, married-couple households with children did decline sharply from 40 to 26 percent of all households (Figure 1). But, since 1990, decline has been slower—only a small decline to 25 percent in 1997.

In this report, we discuss the demographic changes in the composition of families and households that occurred from 1970 to 1997, highlighting the period from 1990 to 1997. Since 1990, the composition of American households and families has remained relatively stable. We also look at the characteristics of different types of families and households

A “household” is a person or group of people who occupy a housing unit. The “householder” is usually the person in whose name the housing unit is owned or rented.

A “family” is made up of two or more people living together who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption, one of whom is the householder.

A “family group” includes all family living arrangements: families, related subfamilies, and unrelated subfamilies.

“Own children” under 18 are never-married sons and daughters of the householder, including step- and adopted children.

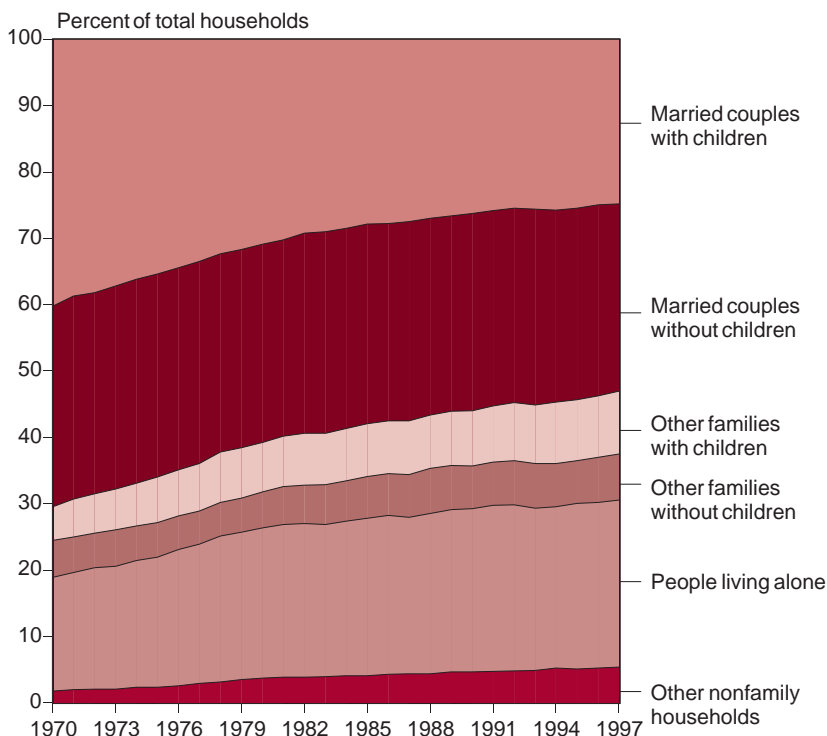
A “nonfamily household” consists of a person living alone or a householder who shares the home with nonrelatives only, for example, boarders or roommates.

Then and Now

- | in 1990 | in 1997 |
|---|---|
| 1) Married couples with own children under 18 made up 26 percent of all households. | 1) Married couples with own children under 18 make up 25 percent of all households. |
| 2) There were 2.63 people per household. | 2) There are 2.64 people per household. * |
| 3) 51 percent of all families had no own children under 18. | 3) 51 percent of all families have no own children under 18. * |
| 4) 24 percent of families with own children under 18 were maintained by one parent. | 4) 28 percent of families with own children under 18 are maintained by one parent. |
| 5) 14 percent of one-parent family groups were father-child family groups. | 5) 17 percent of one-parent family groups are father-child family groups. |
| 6) 33 percent of mother-child family groups had a never-married mother. | 6) 41 percent of mother-child family groups have a never-married mother. |

* These values for 1997 are not statistically different from the values for 1990.

Figure 1. Household Composition: 1970 to 1997



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Surveys

in 1997 using data from the March Current Population Survey.

Households

Growth in the number of households has slowed dramatically in the 1990s.

In 1997, the number of U.S. households reached 101 million, up from 93.3 million in 1990.¹ The rate of growth in the number of households has slowed during the past 27

¹The Bureau of the Census produces several different estimates of the number of households using different estimation methods. The Current Population Survey, on which this report is based, is the best source for estimates of the demographic characteristics of U.S. households; housing estimates, derived from decennial census and administrative data, are the best source of the actual number of households.

years. Between 1970 and 1980, the number of households increased by an average of 1.7 million per year. During the 1980s, growth slowed to 1.3 million per year. Thus far in the 1990s, growth has been 1.1 million per year.

Growth in the number of households depends on population growth, changes in the age composition of the population, and decisions that individuals make about their living arrangements. Changes in the median age at first marriage, divorce rates, the condition of the economy, and improvements in the health of the elderly over time are also among the factors that can influence the rate of growth and the composition of households.

The decline in family households began to stabilize in the 1990s.

U.S. households encompass a wide variety of living arrangements, but to discuss them, some definitions are needed. One person in the household is designated as the householder — usually the person who owns or rents (maintains) the house or apartment. Households are divided into two major types: “family households” and “nonfamily households.” Family households must contain at least one relative of the householder. Family households are further categorized into those maintained by a married couple and “other families” maintained by men or women with no spouse at home. These other families can be one-parent families with children,

Table A.

Households by Type and Selected Characteristics: 1997

[Numbers are in thousands, except averages and percentages]

Characteristics	All households	Family households				Nonfamily households		
		Total	Married couple	Other families		Total	Female householder	Male householder
				Female householder	Male householder			
All households	101,018	70,241	53,604	12,790	3,847	30,777	17,070	13,707
Race and Hispanic origin								
White	85,059	58,934	47,650	8,339	2,944	26,125	14,644	11,481
Black	12,109	8,455	3,851	3,947	657	3,654	1,985	1,669
Hispanic ¹	8,225	6,631	4,520	1,617	494	1,593	740	854
Size of household								
1 person	25,402	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	25,402	14,961	10,442
2 people	32,736	28,367	21,268	5,462	1,638	4,369	1,840	2,529
3 people	17,065	16,380	11,416	3,866	1,099	685	190	494
4 people	15,396	15,206	12,524	2,025	658	190	43	148
5 people	6,774	6,680	5,544	880	256	94	22	72
6 people	2,311	2,289	1,874	297	118	22	10	13
7 people or more	1,334	1,318	978	262	78	15	5	10
Average size	2.64	3.25	3.27	3.16	3.22	1.25	1.16	1.35
Percent with own children under 18	34.3	49.4	46.8	61.6	44.4	(X)	(X)	(X)
Age of householder								
Under 25	5,160	2,964	1,333	1,245	386	2,197	1,007	1,189
25 to 34	19,314	13,737	9,902	2,803	1,034	5,577	2,043	3,534
35 to 44	23,823	19,026	14,254	3,769	1,001	4,797	1,793	3,004
45 to 54	18,843	14,383	11,484	2,198	701	4,459	2,220	2,239
55 to 64	12,469	8,997	7,536	1,126	334	3,472	2,203	1,269
65 and over	21,408	11,134	9,095	1,649	390	10,274	7,803	2,471

¹ People of Hispanic origin may be of any race. X Not applicable.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.

sisters sharing a home, or any combination of relatives, as long as no spouse of the householder lives in the household. Nonfamily households include people living alone or living only with nonrelatives, for example, boarders or roommates.² In this report, we will focus most of our attention on family households.

Traditionally, families have accounted for a large majority of all households — as recently as 1940, nine out of ten households were family households. By 1970, this proportion had fallen to 81 percent, and by 1980, it had fallen another 7 percentage points to 74 percent (Figure 1). Thereafter, the family household category began to stabilize, declining only 4 percentage points to 70 percent of all households in 1997. Of the 101 million households in 1997, 70.2 million were family households and 30.8 million were nonfamily households (Table A).

In contrast, nonfamily households increased from 19 percent in 1970 to almost 30 percent in 1990. From 1990 to 1997, the percentage of nonfamily households stabilized at that level. In 1997, five-sixths of these nonfamily households were people living alone. There was a striking difference between female and male nonfamily householders. Women, who made up 55 percent of the nonfamily householders, often were elderly — 46 percent of these women were 65 or older. In contrast, only 18 percent of the male nonfamily householders were 65 or older.

The average household size has remained relatively unchanged since 1990.

In 1997, the average number of people per household was 2.64, down from 3.14 in 1970. Between

1970 and 1990, the share of households with 5 or more people decreased from 21 percent to 10 percent (Figure 2). During the same period, the share of households with only 1 or 2 people increased from 46 to 58 percent. Since 1990, the distribution of households by number of members has remained unchanged.

In 1997, only 34 percent of all households contained “own” (birth, adopted, or step-) children of the householder — unchanged since 1990. By definition, nonfamily households contain no own children, although they may include other people under 18 who are not relatives of the householder. Presence of own children in married-couple and other family households is discussed in the next section of this report.

Households are more likely to be in the sun belt and in urban areas than in the past.

The geographical distribution of U.S. households has shifted away from the “rust belt” toward the “sun

belt” during the past 27 years. In 1970, 52 percent of all households were in the Northeast and Midwest and 48 percent were in the South and West. In 1997, these figures were 43 percent and 57 percent, respectively.

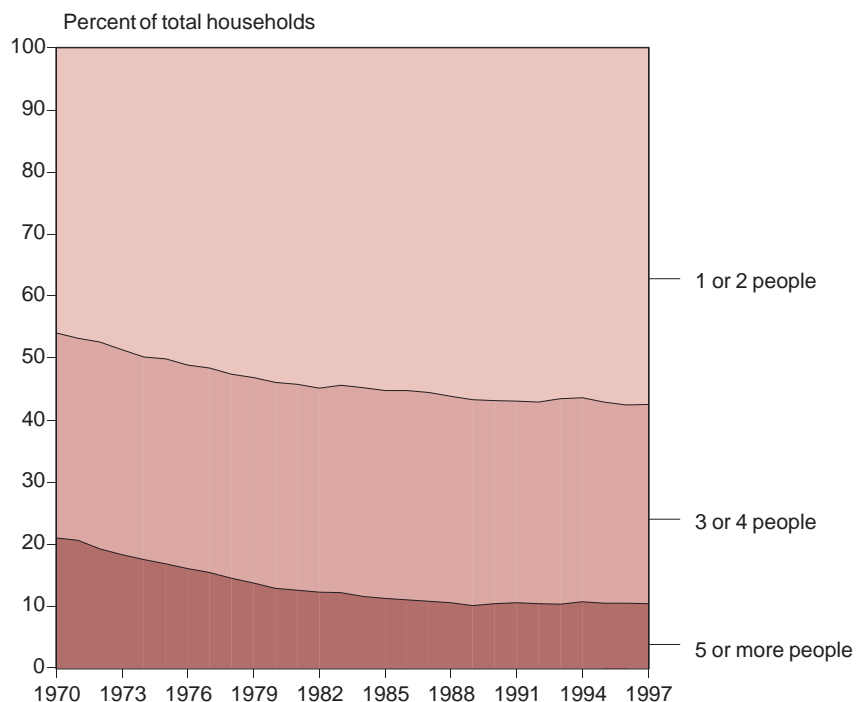
Households also have become more urbanized during this period. The share of households in metropolitan areas increased from 69 percent in 1970 to 80 percent in 1997.

Families

In 1997, 76 percent of the 70.2 million American families were maintained by married couples (Table B). The remaining 24 percent were maintained by women or men with no spouse present. More than three-fourths of the latter group were maintained by women.

The number of families maintained by people with no spouse present is increasing rapidly. Since 1970, the number of female-householder families has increased by 133 percent (from 5.5 million to 12.8 million). The number of male-householder

Figure 2.
Households by Size: 1970 to 1997



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Surveys.

²Some nonfamily households may include families—related individuals—who are not related to the householder. These families are not family households according to our definitions, and are not included in the estimates of families presented in this report.

Table B.

Families by Type, Race and Hispanic Origin¹, and Selected Characteristics: 1997

[Numbers are in thousands, except averages and medians]

Characteristics	Married couple families					Other families				
	All families	All races	White	Black	Hispanic ¹	Female householder				Male householder
						All races	White	Black	Hispanic ¹	All races
All families	70,241	53,604	47,650	3,851	4,520	12,790	8,339	3,947	1,617	3,847
Size of family²										
2 people	29,780	21,504	19,804	1,140	929	6,080	4,348	1,521	581	2,196
3 people	16,239	11,456	10,081	901	917	3,777	2,490	1,149	518	1,006
4 people	14,602	12,442	10,859	972	1,176	1,776	983	706	306	383
5 people	6,326	5,479	4,700	526	780	692	323	340	123	156
6 people	2,108	1,803	1,494	188	427	245	121	114	47	60
7 people or more	1,186	920	712	124	292	220	76	118	43	46
Average size	3.19	3.25	3.20	3.59	4.17	3.02	2.86	3.31	3.43	2.85
Own children under 18										
Without own children under 18	35,575	28,521	25,736	1,877	1,558	4,916	3,342	1,354	479	2,138
With own children under 18	34,665	25,083	21,914	1,974	2,962	7,874	4,997	2,594	1,138	1,709
One own child under 18	14,334	9,510	8,314	716	983	3,821	2,506	1,175	500	1,003
Two own children under 18	13,295	10,152	8,910	752	1,053	2,629	1,723	814	393	513
Three or more own children under 18	7,037	5,420	4,690	506	926	1,423	769	605	246	192
Total own children under 18	63,923	47,518	41,310	3,803	6,599	13,758	8,399	4,809	2,257	2,647
Average per family with own children under 18	1.84	1.89	1.89	1.93	2.23	1.75	1.68	1.85	1.98	1.55
Age of own children³										
Of any age	44,872	31,077	27,013	2,580	3,461	11,303	7,362	3,514	1,404	2,492
Under 25 years	40,096	28,835	25,179	2,296	3,255	9,185	5,839	3,000	1,261	2,076
Under 18 years	34,665	25,083	21,914	1,974	2,962	7,874	4,997	2,594	1,138	1,709
Under 12 years	25,821	18,944	16,523	1,532	2,422	5,693	3,548	1,953	852	1,184
Under 6 years	15,394	11,585	10,169	876	1,649	3,095	1,837	1,155	502	715
Under 3 years	8,761	6,838	6,066	457	990	1,511	848	608	290	411
Under 1 year	3,014	2,395	2,169	126	373	455	275	168	91	165
Six to 17 years	26,378	18,973	16,487	1,599	2,232	6,179	3,920	2,025	868	1,226
Members 65 and older										
Without members 65 and older	56,858	43,018	37,999	3,231	4,000	10,671	6,778	3,347	1,415	3,169
With members 65 and older	13,383	10,586	9,651	620	521	2,119	1,561	489	203	678
Family without own children under 18	12,686	10,074	9,268	580	440	1,971	1,480	438	178	642
Family with own children under 18	697	512	384	40	81	149	82	52	24	36
Householder's age										
Under 25 years	2,964	1,333	1,184	114	242	1,245	726	458	212	386
25 to 34 years	13,737	9,902	8,736	727	1,317	2,803	1,658	1,060	419	1,034
35 to 44 years	19,026	14,254	12,456	1,106	1,349	3,769	2,457	1,152	458	1,001
45 to 54 years	14,383	11,484	10,149	905	756	2,198	1,508	587	262	701
55 to 64 years	8,997	7,536	6,699	523	476	1,127	751	322	148	334
65 to 74 years	7,120	5,949	5,511	329	288	933	676	231	79	238
75 years or more	4,014	3,146	2,915	148	92	716	564	137	40	152
Median age	44.7	46.9	46.3	44.8	39.9	41.2	42.3	38.6	38.5	39.8
Householder's marital status										
Married, spouse present	53,604	53,604	47,650	3,935	4,520	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)
Married, spouse absent	2,691	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	2,159	1,300	758	366	532
Separated	2,133	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	1,792	1,081	638	304	341
Other	558	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	367	219	120	62	191
Widowed	2,677	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	2,264	1,660	503	179	413
Divorced	6,032	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	4,648	3,630	863	444	1,384
Never married	5,238	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	3,720	1,749	1,823	629	1,518

X Not applicable.

¹People of Hispanic origin may be of any race. ²Note that "size of family" and "size of household" are different. Household members include all people living in the household, whereas family members include only the householder and his/her relatives. ³Age categories are not mutually exclusive.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.

families grew by 213 percent (from 1.2 million to 3.8 million). In contrast, married-couple families grew only 20 percent (from 44.7 million to 53.6 million). However, most of this change occurred before 1990.

From 1990 to 1997, growth was only 17 percent for female-householder families, 33 percent for male-householder families, and 2 percent for married-couple families.

Nowadays fewer families contain children under 18.

In 1997, 51 percent of all families contained no own children under 18 at home. This figure is 7 percentage points more than in 1970, when only 44 percent of families had no own children under 18 at home, but none of this change occurred since 1990.

Families without own children under 18 at home are not necessarily “childless.” Some contain other related children, for example, nieces, nephews, or grandchildren. They also may include unrelated foster children. Other families may include adult sons and daughters who are still living at home. Still other families have adult children who are living away from home. These families are in the “empty nest” stage in their life cycle.

Younger families are more likely to be without own children under 18 now than in 1970. Among married-couple families with a householder under age 35, 29 percent had no own children under 18 in 1997, compared with 23 percent in 1970. An increase in the proportion of young families without own children is what one would expect in a population which is delaying child-bearing.

In 1970, 28 percent of the householders in married-couple families were younger than 35; of these, 77 percent had own children under 18. Fewer married-couple householders were in these prime childbearing ages in 1997. Only 21 percent were under 35; of these, only 71

percent had own children under 18, a figure that has remained stable since 1980. This reflects aging of the population, as well as delayed marriage and child-bearing.

A substantial number of “other families” also are without own children under 18. “Other families” consist of a woman or man, without a spouse present, maintaining a household with one or more other family members present. In 1997, 38 percent of female-householder and 56 percent of male-householder families were without own children under 18.

One-parent families are on the rise.

Family resources and the amount of parental attention given to children is strongly influenced by the number of parents in a household. In 1970, 89 percent of families with children had both parents in the household, 10 percent had mothers only and 1 percent had fathers only. By 1990, the proportions of one-parent families had risen significantly to 20 percent for mother-only and 4 percent for father-only families, a sizeable change. By 1997, the comparable percentages had increased slightly to 23 and 5, respectively.

More adult sons and daughters are living at home.

Nearly 22 million adult sons and daughters were living in a household maintained by one or both parents in 1997 compared with 15 million in 1970. Fifteen percent of all families included one or more own children age 18 or older in 1997, an increase of 4 percentage points since 1970. In 1997, of the 22.0 million own children 18 or older living in their family of origin, 14.0 million lived with both parents, 6.5 million with their mother only, and 1.4 million with their father only. The increasing age at first marriage means that fewer young adults in the 1990s are setting up their own households than was the case a generation ago. Increases in the

cost of setting up and maintaining a household in the 1990s may also mean that young adults today are not as well equipped financially to maintain a residence separate from their parents as they were in the 1970s.

Families are smaller than a generation ago.

The average number of people in a family was 3.19 in 1997, up from 3.17 in 1990 but down from 3.58 in 1970. Only two people were present in 42 percent of all families. Fully 40 percent of married-couple families consisted of the husband and wife alone.

Families with a White householder were smaller than those with Black or Hispanic householders: 3.13 people for Whites, 3.41 for Blacks, and 3.94 for Hispanics³. White married-couple families had an average size of 3.20, compared with Blacks at 3.59, and Hispanics at 4.17. Female-householder families, with no spouse present, followed a similar pattern: for Whites 2.86, for Blacks 3.31, and for Hispanics 3.43 people.

Families with no spouse present have younger householders than married-couple families.

The median age of female householders, with no spouse present, was 41.2, compared with 39.8 years for male householders, with no spouse present, and 46.1 for householders in married-couple families. Among those with no spouse present, 29 percent of the female, and 39 percent of the male, householders had never married.

A majority of single mothers with children under 6 have never been married.

In 1997, 58 percent of Black female householders with own children under 18 and no spouse present had never been married. Comparable proportions were 42 percent for Hispanics and 25 per-

³People of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

cent for Whites. Among single mothers who had own children under 6 only, 85 percent of Blacks, 73 percent of Hispanics, and 56 percent of Whites had never married. Percentages of never-married mothers with own children 6 to 17 only, were 44 percent of Blacks, 30 percent of Hispanics, and 14 percent of Whites. These percentages could be explained by a trend over time away from marriage, as well as by marriages after women had their first children.

Family Groups With Own Children Under 18

Family groups with own children under 18 include all one- and two-parent living arrangements with children. They include families with householders maintaining their own home and families living in a home maintained by another relative (related subfamilies) or a nonrelative (unrelated subfamilies).

Today, more family groups have only one parent.

How have the relative numbers of different types of family groups with own children under 18 changed over time? In 1970, there were 29.6 million family groups, compared with 37.6 million in 1997. Of these, the proportion that contained both a mother and a father dropped from 87 percent in 1970 to 72 percent in 1990 and continued to decline to 68 percent in 1997. Two-parent family groups with own children were almost all maintained by married couples (25.1 million of 25.6 million). The small number of other two-parent family groups were almost all related subfamilies.

The number of family groups with children headed by mothers with no spouse present increased from 3.4 million in 1970 to 10.0 million in 1997. Of these, 79 percent were mother-child families, 16 percent were related subfamilies, and 5 percent were unrelated subfamilies. This suggests that a considerable

number of mother-child sub-families may be dependent on parents or other relatives for housing as they are unable to support themselves. The number of men living with their children but with no spouse present grew from 0.4 million to 2.0 million between 1970 and 1997.

Mother-child family groups are demographically diverse and reflect a wide variety of living arrangements.

Mothers in mother-child families who maintain their own households are older and are more likely to have been married compared with those who live in a relative's household (Figures 3a and 3b). Almost two-thirds of mothers who maintained their own households were previously married, and more than half were over 35 years of age.

A woman may continue to live with her parents or move back in with them after having a child of her own. Families of this type are known as related subfamilies. Mothers in related subfamilies were younger and more likely never to

Figure 3a. **Marital Status of Mothers in Mother-Child Family Groups: 1997**

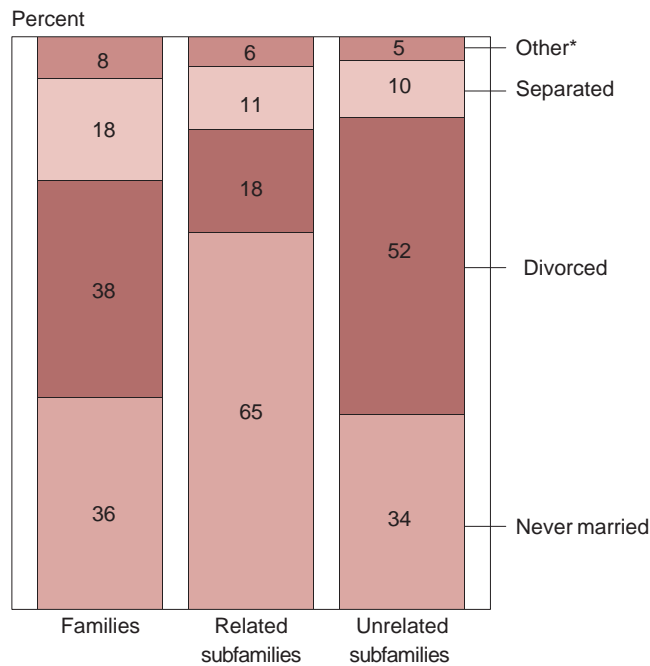
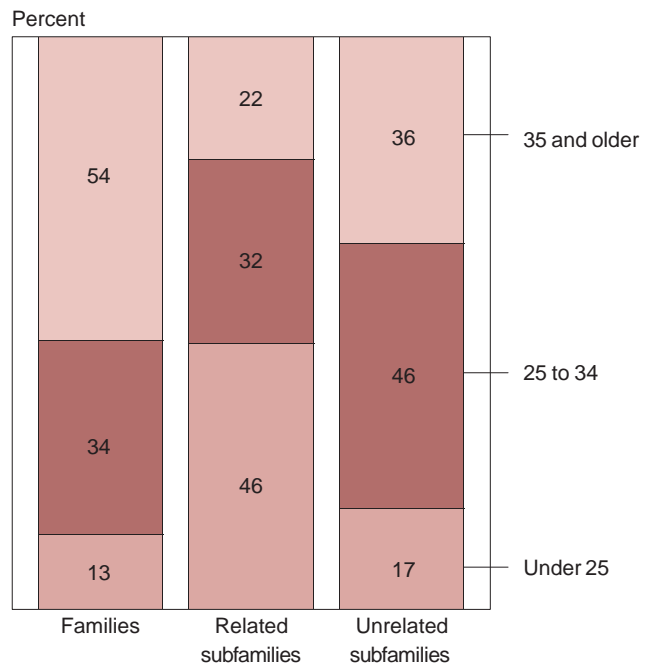


Figure 3b. **Age of Mothers in Mother-Child Family Groups: 1997**



*"Other" includes widowed and married, spouse absent, not separated
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.

have married than those in the other two types of mother-child families. In 1997, about two-thirds of mothers in related subfamilies were never married and 46 percent were under 25. Young unmarried mothers may be more likely to live in the homes of relatives for the financial and emotional support they provide. Later, these mothers may move out and set up their own households either as a mother-child or married-couple family. Other types of mother-child related subfamilies also occur — one-third were either divorced or married with absent spouses (due to marital separation or some other reason). About half of the mothers in these mother-child related subfamilies were 25 years of age or older.

Unrelated subfamilies consisting of a mother and her children also encompass a variety of living arrangements and are demographically diverse. A mother might be the unmarried partner, roommate, boarder, or live-in employee of the householder. About half of these mothers were divorced. Their median age (32.1 years) was less than that of mothers maintaining their own families (41.2 years). Like mothers in related subfamilies, some of the mothers in unrelated subfamilies may establish their own family households later.

Source of the Data

Most estimates in this report come from data obtained in March 1997 from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Some estimates are based on data obtained from the CPS in earlier years and from decennial censuses. The Bureau of the Census conducts the CPS every month,

although this report uses only data from the March survey.

Accuracy of the Estimates

All statistics are subject to sampling error, as well as nonsampling error such as survey design flaws, respondent classification and reporting errors, data processing mistakes, and undercoverage. The Census Bureau has taken steps to minimize errors in the form of quality control and editing procedures to reduce errors made by respondents, coders, and interviewers. Ratio estimation to independent age-race-sex-Hispanic population controls partially corrects for bias attributable to survey undercoverage. However, biases exist in the estimates when missed people have characteristics different from those of interviewed people in the same age-race-sex-Hispanic group.

Analytical statements in this report have been tested and meet statistical standards. However, because of methodological differences, use caution when comparing these data with data from other sources. Contact Andy Zbikowski, Demographic Statistical Methods Division, at 301-457-4214 or on the Internet at azbikows@census.gov for information on the source of the data, the accuracy of the estimates, the use of standard errors, and the computation of standard errors.

More Information

Detailed tables with characteristics of households and families by metropolitan/nonmetropolitan residence, region, tenure of housing unit, and other variables, as well as some historical tables, are available on the Internet (<http://www.census.gov>); search for households

and families data by clicking on the "Subjects A-Z" button and selecting "Families" under "F" or "Households" under "H".

To receive a paper copy of these tables, send your request for "PPL-93, Household and Family Characteristics: March 1997," along with a check or money order in the amount of \$39.00 payable to Commerce-Census-88-00-9010, to U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, P.O. Box 277943, Atlanta, GA 30384-7943, or call our Statistical Information Office on 301-457-2422. A copy of these tabulations will be made available to any existing CPR P20 subscriber without charge, provided that the request is made within 3 months of the issue date of this report. Contact our Statistical Information Office on 301-457-2422.

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