

Bureau of the Census Statistical Brief

Mothers Who Receive WIC Benefits — Fertility and Socioeconomic Characteristics

In summer 1993, there were 36 million mothers 15 to 44 years old living in the United States. About 2.4 million of them (7 percent) were participating in the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). An additional 136,000 women in this program were expecting their first child.

This Brief examines the fertility and socioeconomic characteristics of mothers in their childbearing years who participated in WIC. It also compares them to their counterparts who did not. These data were collected in the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) between June and September 1993.

WIC mothers are younger

On average, mothers aged 15 to 44 who were WIC participants were 26 years old; those not participating were 34.

WIC was tailored for pregnant women and mothers with children under 5 years old. Consequently, WIC mothers tended also to be younger than mothers in their childbearing years who were receiving AFDC payments (30 years old, on average) or

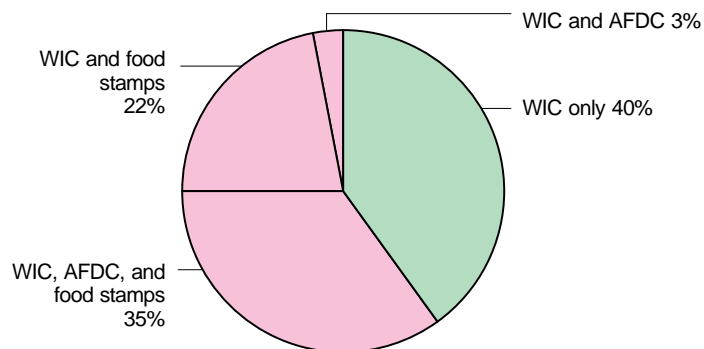


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Many WIC Mothers Participate in Other Assistance Programs

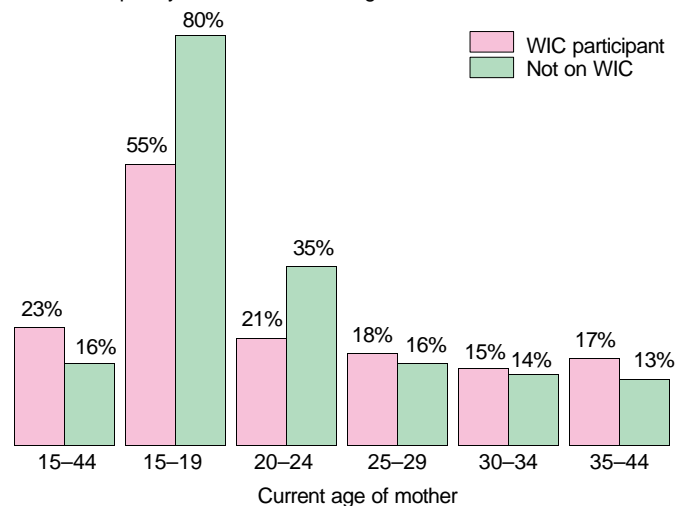
Percent distribution of mothers 15 to 44 years old currently participating in WIC, by participation in other government assistance programs: summer 1993



Note: WIC stands for Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children. AFDC stands for Aid to Families with Dependent Children.
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WIC Mothers More Likely to Have Given Birth for the First Time Before They Turned 18

Percent of mothers whose first birth occurred before they were 18 years old, by current WIC reciprocity status and current age: summer 1993



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food stamps (also 30 years old). About 13 percent of mothers in WIC were teenagers; 3 percent (or 61,000) were under 18 years old.

... begin childbearing at earlier ages ...

On average, WIC mothers were 20 years old when they gave birth for the first time, 2 years younger than their non-WIC counterparts.

... and have more children at older ages than mothers not on WIC.

Overall, mothers on WIC had an average of 2.2 children each, not different from non-WIC mothers.

But there *are* differences by age. These differences are largest at the upper end of the age spectrum — 35 to 44. WIC mothers that age had 3.7 children each — 1.4 more than mothers in that age range who weren't on WIC.

The chances of receiving WIC benefits differ by the race and Hispanic origin of the mother. But nativity doesn't make a difference.

■ *Race:* About 1 in 16, or 1.7 million, White mothers of childbearing ages were WIC recipients. This compares to 1 in 10, or 600,000, Black mothers receiving WIC.

Despite these different WIC reciprocity rates, Black and White WIC mothers had about the same number of children.

■ *Hispanic origin:* One in eight, or 500,000, Hispanic mothers 15 to 44 years old were on WIC. By comparison, about 1 in 16, or 1.9 million, mothers not of Hispanic origin were WIC recipients.

It should be noted that approximately one-half of the Hispanic WIC mothers were born outside the United States.

■ *Nativity:* About 8 percent, or 338,000, of the Nation's 4.2 million foreign-born mothers aged 15 to 44 were WIC participants. Their participation rate was not significantly

different from that of United States-born mothers (7 percent).

In addition, foreign-born WIC mothers were older than their native-born counterparts (29 years versus 26 years).

About three-quarters of all foreign-born WIC mothers were not United States citizens.

About half of WIC mothers are currently married ...

This translates into 1.3 million of the Nation's 2.4 million WIC mothers. Most (1.1 million) of these 1.3 million women had their husband present in the household; the other 244,000 were either separated or had absent husbands. Married WIC mothers had an average of 2.4 children each.

Another 900,000 WIC mothers had never been married. This group, which comprised 37 percent of all mothers on WIC, had an average of 1.9 children each.

In contrast, the majority of mothers not on WIC (75 percent) were

currently married. Only 11 percent had never been married.

... and about half had a high school diploma only.

Another 34 percent of WIC mothers were without a high school diploma. The remaining 20 percent had attended college for at least 1 year. In contrast, only 16 percent of non-WIC mothers lacked a high school diploma.

The vast majority of WIC mothers (93 percent) were not currently enrolled in school. These women, on average, had 2.3 children each and were 27 years old. Among the 167,000 WIC mothers who were enrolled in school, about half (77,000) were teenagers.

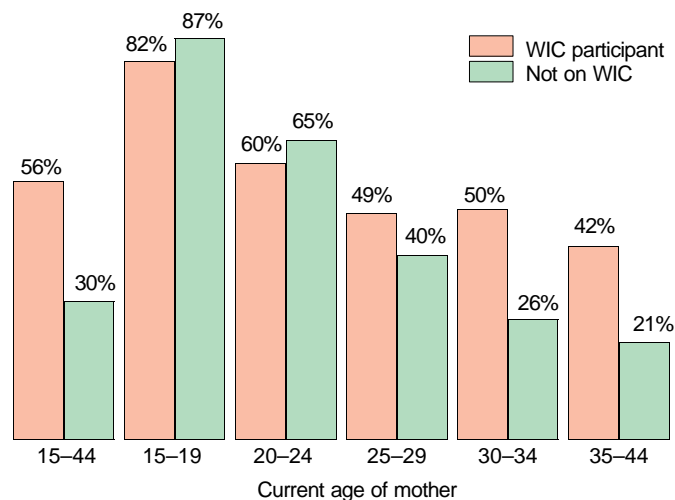
Many WIC mothers are jobless ...

Only about one-quarter of mothers receiving WIC benefits had a job during all or part of the month preceding the survey. This compares to about 2 in 3 mothers not on WIC.

On average, jobless WIC mothers supported 2.3 children each, not statistically different from the number for jobless non-WIC mothers.

WIC Mothers More Apt to Have Had Their First Birth Out-of-Wedlock

Percent of mothers whose first birth was out-of-wedlock, by current WIC reciprocity status and current age: summer 1993



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... and have very low family incomes.

Forty-four percent of WIC mothers¹ lived in families with monthly incomes of less than \$1,000. These low-income mothers supported an average of 2.4 children each.

By comparison, only 14 percent of non-WIC mothers lived in families with similar low incomes. Non-WIC mothers with low income also averaged 2.4 children each.

Importantly, about 1 in every 2 WIC mothers lived below the poverty level.

Residential patterns.

About 70 percent of WIC mothers lived in metropolitan areas. Over half of the metropolitan WIC mothers lived in central cities. In contrast, only 38 percent of metropolitan non-WIC mothers resided in central cities.

The chances that mothers aged 15 to 44 were WIC participants varied by division. Those in the Pacific Division States — California, Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, and Alaska — had the smallest chance (6 percent) while mothers in the West South Central Division States — Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas — had the greatest chance (8 percent).

About this series

This is the last in a series of three Statistical Briefs. Contact Customer Services (301-457-4100) for copies of the first Brief, *Mothers Who Receive AFDC Payments* (SB/95-2) and the second, *Mothers Who Receive Food Stamps* (SB/95-22). They are also

¹ Excludes those who did not report income.

available on the Internet (<http://www.census.gov/>).

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This Brief is one of a series that presents information of current policy interest. It may include data from businesses, households, or other sources. All statistics are subject to sampling variability, as well as survey design flaws, respondent classification errors, and data processing mistakes. The Census Bureau has taken steps to minimize errors, and analytical statements have been tested and meet statistical standards. However, because of methodological differences, use caution when comparing these data with data from other sources. For information on the source of data and the accuracy of estimates, including the use and computation of standard errors, see the "Source and Accuracy Statement for the 1993 Public Use Files from the Survey of Income and Program Participation."

What's WIC?

WIC is the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children. It is designed to improve the health status of women who are pregnant or breast feeding and of infants and children under 5 years of age. WIC is also meant to prevent the occurrence of various health problems, including substance abuse, and to provide educational information to mothers about proper nutrition.

It's funded through cash grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to State agencies, which administer the program through local agencies at no cost to eligible persons. WIC supplements the Food Stamp Program and other programs where food is distributed to needy families in lieu of food stamps or other forms of emergency food assistance.

The statistics in this Brief cover mothers who were receiving WIC benefits themselves because they were either pregnant or breast feeding or who were receiving benefits on behalf of their children under 5 years old.

WIC Mothers Versus Non-WIC Mothers

Mothers 15 to 44 years old by WIC participation status and selected fertility and socioeconomic characteristics: summer 1993

Characteristic	WIC participants					Not WIC participants				
	Mothers		Births per 1,000 mothers	Mean age of mothers in years		Mothers		Births per 1,000 mothers	Mean age of mothers in years	
	Number (thousands)	Confidence interval ¹		at time of survey	at first birth	Number (thousands)	Confidence interval ¹		at time of survey	at first birth
Total	2,432	169	2,228	26.4	20.4	33,343	517	2,167	34.1	22.3
Age										
15 to 19 years	308	61	1,306	18.2	17.0	437	72	1,081	18.0	16.1
20 to 24 years	792	97	1,735	22.1	19.2	2,689	177	1,562	22.3	18.6
25 to 29 years	645	88	2,294	27.0	21.1	5,239	244	1,936	27.3	21.1
30 to 34 years	402	69	2,779	31.5	22.4	8,026	297	2,197	32.1	22.6
35 to 44 years	285	58	3,663	38.4	22.6	16,951	411	2,349	39.4	23.2
Race										
White	1,742	143	2,186	26.3	20.7	26,684	485	2,136	34.3	22.6
Black	589	84	2,343	26.4	19.4	5,141	242	2,296	32.9	20.1
Hispanic Origin										
Hispanic ²	516	78	2,633	27.4	20.4	3,673	206	2,527	33.1	21.0
Not Hispanic	1,916	150	2,119	26.1	20.4	29,670	501	2,123	34.2	22.4
Marital Status										
Currently married	1,333	126	2,354	27.5	21.0	25,109	476	2,205	34.6	22.8
Married, husband present	1,089	114	2,292	27.0	20.9	23,210	463	2,185	34.7	23.0
Married, husband absent ³	244	54	2,632	29.6	21.6	1,899	149	2,453	33.3	20.6
Widowed or divorced	208	50	3,014	31.2	20.5	4,652	231	2,155	35.8	21.1
Never married	891	103	1,857	23.6	19.3	3,582	203	1,916	27.9	19.8
Educational Attainment										
Not a high school graduate	825	99	2,506	25.7	18.8	5,439	248	2,585	32.0	19.2
High school, 4 years	1,124	115	2,122	26.1	20.3	13,199	371	2,120	34.0	21.4
College: 1 or more years	483	76	2,000	28.1	23.1	14,705	388	2,055	35.0	24.2
Enrollment in School										
Enrolled in school	167	45	(B)	(B)	(B)	3,042	188	1,998	31.7	21.1
Not enrolled in school	2,265	163	2,272	26.7	20.4	30,301	504	2,184	34.3	22.4
Labor Force Status										
Worked all or some weeks	638	87	1,994	26.9	20.7	21,725	449	2,070	34.9	22.5
No job last month	1,794	145	2,311	26.2	20.3	11,619	351	2,349	32.6	21.8
Monthly Family Income⁴										
Less than \$500	495	77	2,334	27.4	20.4	1,745	143	2,372	31.2	20.1
\$500 to \$999	570	82	2,511	26.1	19.3	2,980	186	2,480	32.0	20.4
\$1,000 to \$1,499	455	74	2,195	25.8	20.7	3,183	192	2,189	32.9	20.9
\$1,500 and over	853	101	2,024	26.3	20.7	25,008	475	2,114	34.7	22.9
Poverty Level⁴										
Below poverty level	1,349	126	2,547	26.8	19.8	5,834	257	2,582	31.6	20.2
Above poverty level	1,024	110	1,832	25.9	21.0	27,081	487	2,079	34.7	22.8
Division										
New England	102	35	(B)	(B)	(B)	1,579	136	2,065	34.8	23.6
Mid Atlantic	361	66	2,189	27.9	21.2	4,569	229	2,089	34.2	23.0
East North Central	438	72	2,447	26.6	20.6	5,980	260	2,136	33.7	22.2
West North Central	195	48	(B)	(B)	(B)	2,391	167	2,242	34.4	22.5
South Atlantic	400	69	1,980	25.6	19.8	5,911	258	2,072	34.2	22.1
East South Central	162	44	(B)	(B)	(B)	2,035	155	2,063	34.1	21.1
West South Central	312	61	2,320	25.8	20.0	3,570	203	2,266	34.2	21.7
Mountain	113	37	(B)	(B)	(B)	1,640	139	2,401	34.4	22.2
Pacific	351	65	2,367	26.0	20.2	5,671	253	2,266	33.7	22.4
Metropolitan Residence										
Metropolitan	1,715	142	2,250	26.4	20.4	25,843	480	2,149	34.1	22.5
In central cities	1,008	109	2,346	26.6	20.1	9,798	326	2,226	33.4	21.7
Suburbs	707	92	2,113	26.1	20.3	16,046	402	2,102	34.5	23.0
Nonmetropolitan	717	92	2,177	26.3	20.3	7,500	288	2,229	34.1	21.5
Place of Birth										
Native born	2,095	157	2,184	25.9	20.1	29,438	500	2,139	34.1	22.2
Foreign born	338	64	2,499	29.2	22.1	3,905	212	2,382	34.1	22.9

(B) Base too small to show derived measure. ¹Represents the 90-percent confidence interval (1.6 standard errors) of the estimated population. ²Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. ³Includes separated women. ⁴Excludes those who did not report income.