



## POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Population characteristics describe the diverse social, demographic, and economic features of the Nation's population. There were more than 154 million females in the United States in 2008, representing slightly more than half of the population.

Examining data by demographic factors such as sex, age, and race and ethnicity can serve a number of purposes for policymakers and program planners. For instance, these comparisons can be used to tailor the development and evaluation of policies and programs to better serve the needs of women at higher risk for certain conditions.

This section presents data on population characteristics that may affect women's physical, social, and mental health. Some of these characteristics include the age and racial and ethnic distribution of the population, household composition, education, income, labor force participation, and participation in Federal programs. The characteristics of women veterans and rural and urban women are also reviewed and analyzed.

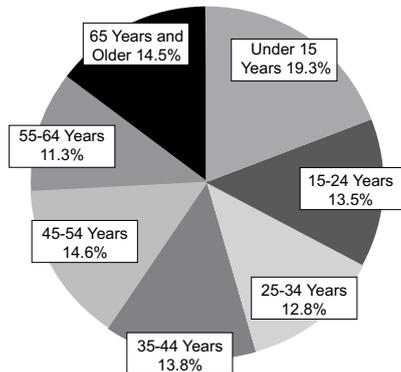
## U.S. POPULATION

In 2008, the U.S. population was more than 304 million, with females comprising 50.7 percent of that total. Females younger than 35 years of age accounted for 45.6 percent of the female population, those aged 35–64 years accounted for 39.7 percent, and females aged 65 years and older accounted for 14.5 percent.

The distribution of the population by sex was fairly even across younger age groups; however, women accounted for a greater percentage of the older population than men. Of those aged 65 years and older, 57.7 percent were women.

## U.S. Female Population,\* by Age, 2008

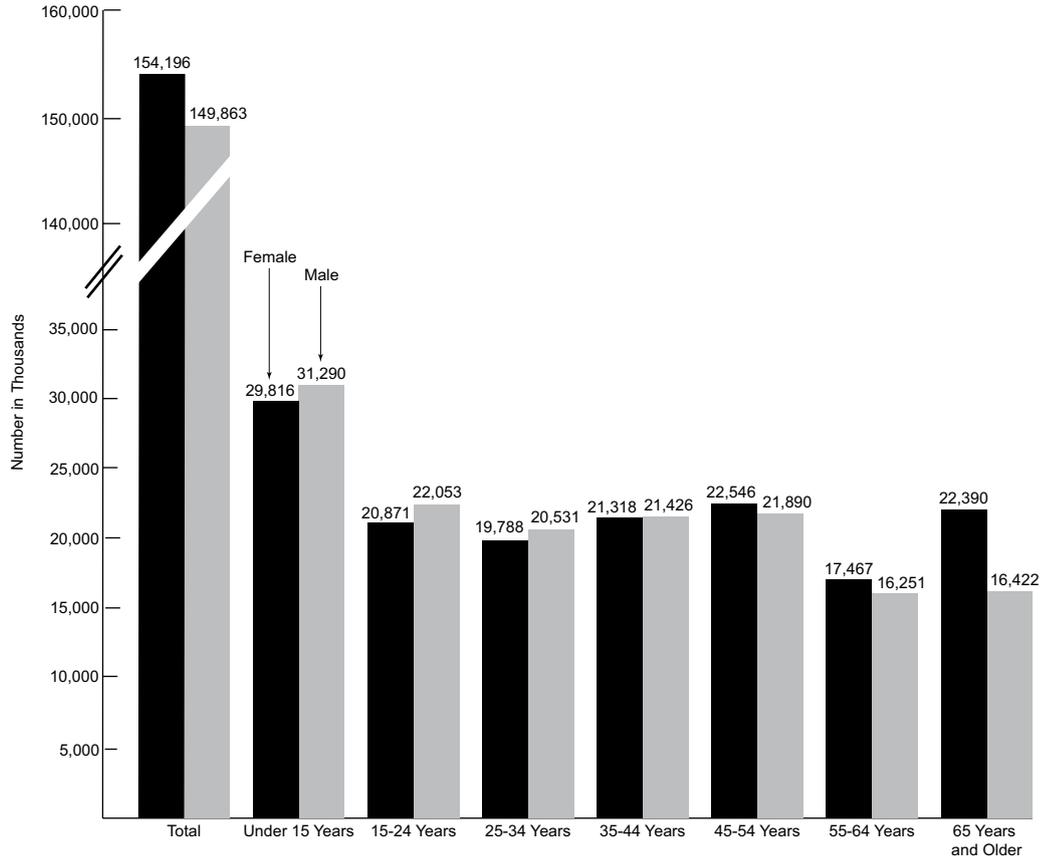
Source I.1: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



\*Includes only non-institutionalized population not living in group housing (e.g. dormitories, institutions). Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding.

## U.S. Population,\* by Age and Sex, 2008

Source I.1: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



\*Includes only non-institutionalized population not living in group housing (e.g. dormitories, institutions).

## U.S. FEMALE POPULATION

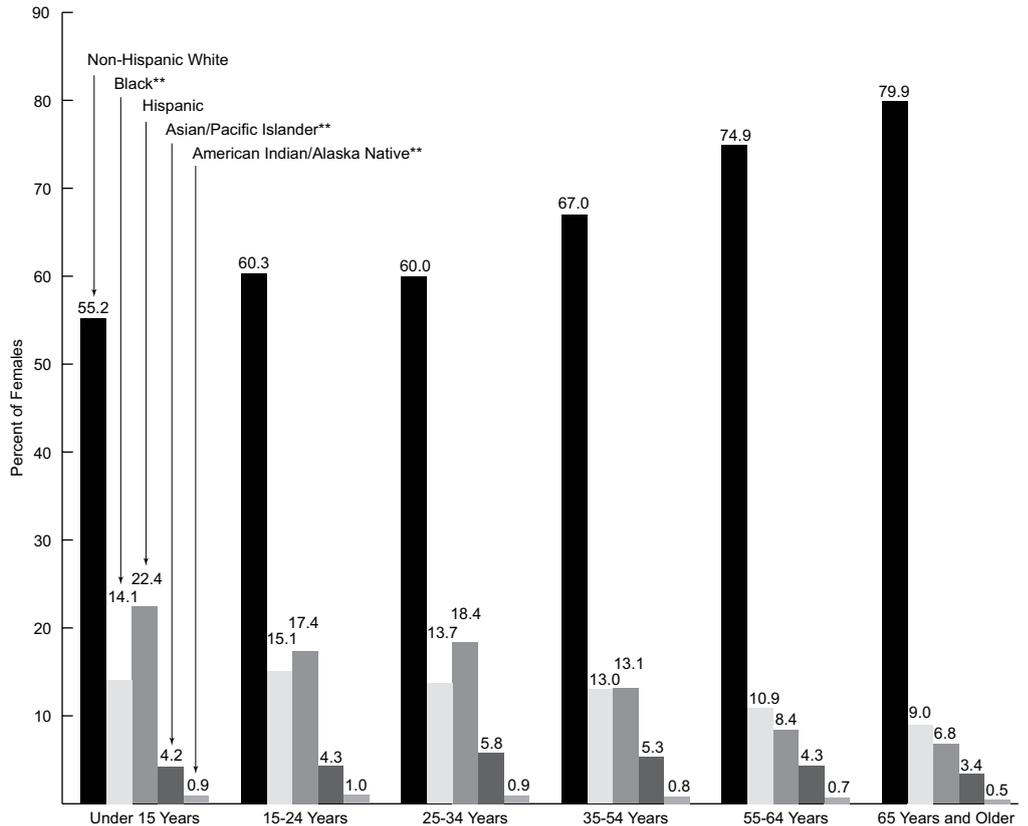
The growing diversity of the U.S. population is reflected in the racial and ethnic distribution of women across age groups. The younger female population (under 15 years) is significantly more diverse than the older female population. In 2008, 55.2 percent of females under 15 years of age were non-Hispanic White, while 22.4 percent of that group were Hispanic. In contrast, among women aged 65 years and older, 79.9 percent were non-Hispanic White and only 6.8 percent were Hispanic. The distribution of the Black population was more consistent across age groups, ranging from 14.1 percent of females under 15 years of age to 9.0 percent of women aged 65 years and older.

The racial distribution of females has shifted dramatically since 2000, when non-Hispanic Whites accounted for 60.2 percent of females under 15 years of age and 83.3 percent of those aged 65 years and older. Hispanic females accounted for 17.5 percent of those under 15 years and 4.9 percent of those aged 65 and older (data not shown).<sup>1</sup>

Evidence indicates that the prevalence of health conditions varies among women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. With the increasing diversity of the U.S. population, these health disparities make culturally-appropriate, community-driven programs critical to improving the health of the U.S. population.<sup>2</sup>

## U.S. Female Population,\* by Age and Race/Ethnicity, 2008

Source I.1: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



\*Includes only non-institutionalized population not living in group housing (e.g. dormitories, institutions). Percentages do not equal 100 because data are not shown for persons of other races or more than one race. \*\*May include Hispanics.

## HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

In 2008, 49.1 percent of women aged 18 years and older were married and living with a spouse; this includes married couples living with other people, such as parents. Nearly 12 percent of women over age 18 were the heads of their households, meaning that they have children or other family members, but no spouse, living with them in a housing unit that they own or rent. Housing units may include houses, apartments, groups of rooms, or a single room that is intended to be used as separate living quarters.

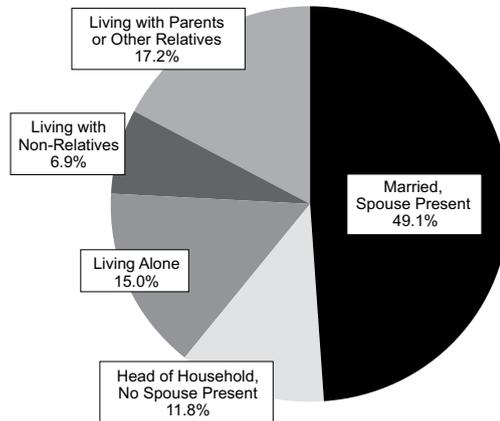
Women who are heads of households include single mothers, single women with a parent or other close relative living in their home, and women with other household compositions. More than 17 percent of women lived with parents or other relatives, 15.0 percent lived alone and 6.9 percent lived with non-relatives.

Women in families with no spouse present are more likely than women in married couple families to have incomes below poverty (see “Women and Poverty” on the next page). In 2008, non-Hispanic Black women were most

likely to be single heads of households with family members present (28.1 percent), while non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander and non-Hispanic White women were least likely (7.9 and 9.0 percent, respectively). Nearly 14 percent of non-Hispanic women of multiple races and 17.0 percent each of Hispanic and non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native women were single heads of households that included other family members.

### Women Aged 18 and Older,\* by Household Composition, 2008

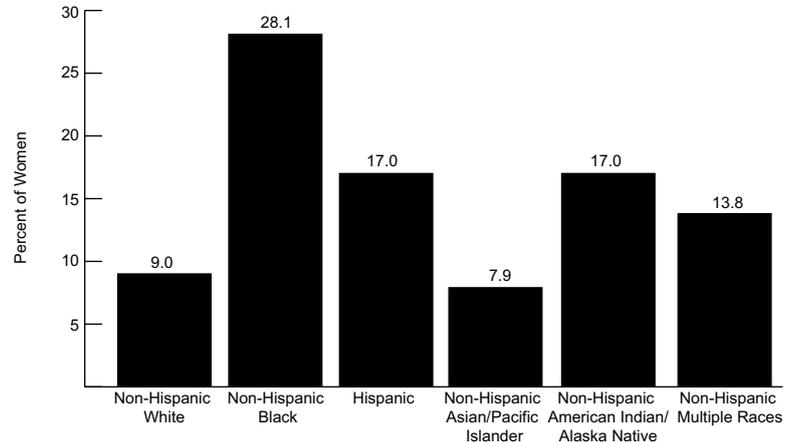
Source I.2: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



\*Includes only non-institutionalized population not living in group housing.

### Women Aged 18 and Older Who Are Heads of Households with Family Members,\* by Race/Ethnicity, 2008

Source I.3: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



\*Includes only non-institutionalized population not living in group housing; includes those who are heads of households and have children or other family members, but no spouse, living in a house that they own or rent.

## WOMEN AND POVERTY

In 2008, nearly 40 million people in the United States lived with incomes below the poverty level.<sup>3</sup> More than 15 million of those were women aged 18 and older, accounting for 13.0 percent of the adult female population. In comparison, 9.6 percent of adult men lived in poverty (data not shown). With regard to race and ethnicity, non-Hispanic White women were least likely to experience poverty (9.4 percent), followed by non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islanders (12.0 percent). In contrast, more than 22 percent of Hispanic, non-Hispanic Black, and non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native women lived in poverty.

Poverty status varies with age. Among women of each race and ethnicity, those aged 45–64 years were less likely to experience poverty than those aged 18–44 and 65 years and older. For instance, 18.0 percent of non-Hispanic Black women aged 45–64 were living in poverty in 2008, compared to 26.2 percent of non-Hispanic Black women aged 18–44 and 23.9 percent of those aged 65 years and older.

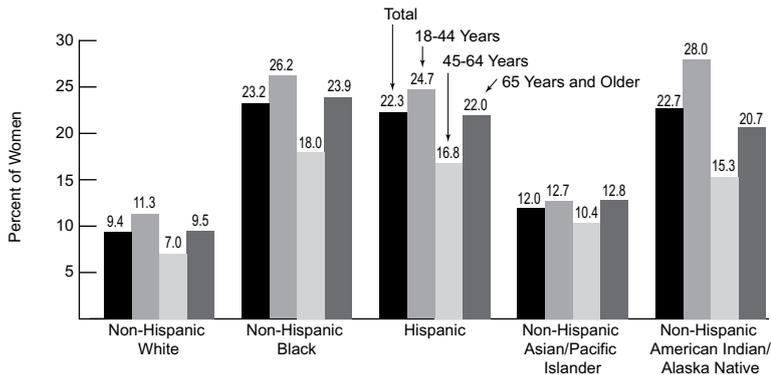
Poverty status also varies with educational attainment. Among women aged 25 years and older, 30.4 percent of those without a high school diploma were living in poverty, compared to 13.1 percent of those with a high school diploma or equivalent, 9.8 percent of those with

some college and 4.2 percent of those with a Bachelor's degree or higher (data not shown).

In 2008, women in families—a group of at least two people related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together—experienced higher rates of poverty than men in families (10.1 versus 6.9 percent, respectively). Men in families with no spouse present were considerably less likely to have household incomes below the poverty level than women in families with no spouse present (11.9 versus 25.7 percent, respectively).

### Women Aged 18 and Older Living Below the Poverty Level,\* by Race/Ethnicity and Age, 2008

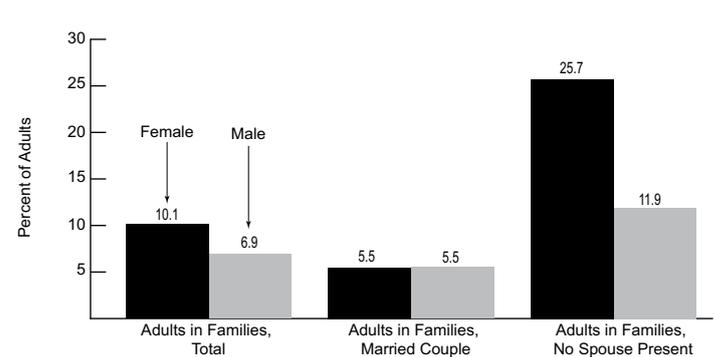
Source I.4: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



\*Poverty level, defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, was \$22,025 for a family of four in 2008.

### Adults in Families\* Living Below the Poverty Level,\*\* by Household Type and Sex, 2008

Source I.4: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



\*Families are groups of at least two people related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together.

\*\*Poverty level, defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, was \$22,025 for a family of four in 2008.

## FOOD SECURITY

Food security is defined as having access at all times to enough nutritionally adequate and safe foods to lead a healthy, active lifestyle.<sup>4</sup> Food security status is assessed through a series of survey questions such as whether people worried that food would run out before there would be money to buy more; whether an individual or his/her family cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food; and whether an individual or his/her family had ever gone a whole day without eating because there was not enough food.

In 2008, an estimated 49.1 million people lived in households that were classified as food-insecure.<sup>1</sup> Households or persons experiencing food insecurity may be categorized as

experiencing “low food security” or “very low food security”. Low food security generally indicates multiple food access issues, while very low food security indicates reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns due to inadequate resources for food. Periods of low or very low food security may be occasional or episodic, placing the members of a household at greater nutritional risk due to insufficient access to nutritionally adequate and safe foods.

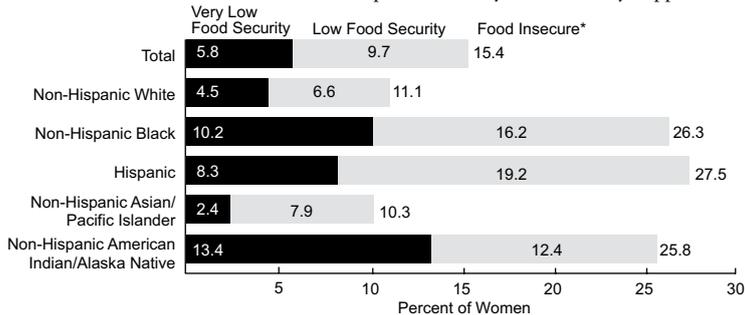
Overall, 15.4 percent of women experienced household food insecurity in 2008; this varies, however, by race and ethnicity. Non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander and non-Hispanic White women were least likely to be food insecure (10.3 and 11.1 percent, respectively), compared to more than one-quarter of Hispanic, non-

Hispanic Black, and non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native women. Non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native and non-Hispanic Black women were also more likely to have very low food security (13.4 and 10.2 percent, respectively).

Food security status also varies by household composition. While adult men and women living alone had similar rates of food insecurity in 2008, female-headed households with no spouse present were more likely than male-headed households with no spouse present to experience food insecurity (37.2 versus 27.6 percent, respectively). Among adults with no spouse present, females were also more likely than males to experience very low food security (13.3 versus 7.2 percent, respectively).

### Women Aged 18 and Older Experiencing Household Food Insecurity, by Race/Ethnicity, 2008

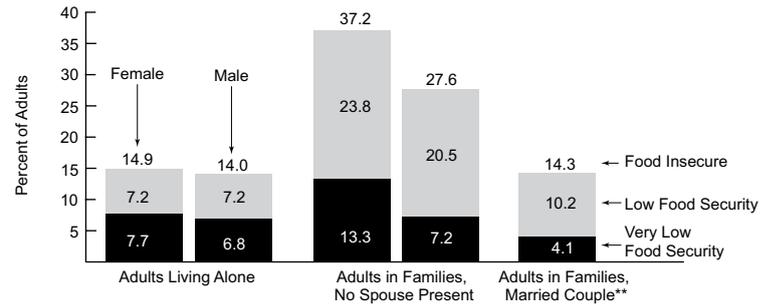
Source I.5: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Food Security Supplement



\*Food insecure includes very low and low food security. Percentages may not add to totals due to rounding.

### Food Security Status Among Adults Aged 18 and Older, by Household Composition and Sex, 2008

Source I.6: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service



\*Food insecure includes very low and low food security. Percentages may not add to totals due to rounding.

\*\*Data were reported for persons in married couples overall and not by sex.

## WOMEN AND FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Federal programs can provide essential help to low-income women and their families in obtaining food and income support. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Federal Food Stamp Program, helps low-income individuals and families purchase food. In 2008, nearly 14.3 million adults participated in SNAP; of these, more than 9.5 million (66.8 percent) were women. Among

participating women, 4.4 million (46.2 percent) were in the 18- to 35-year-old age group.

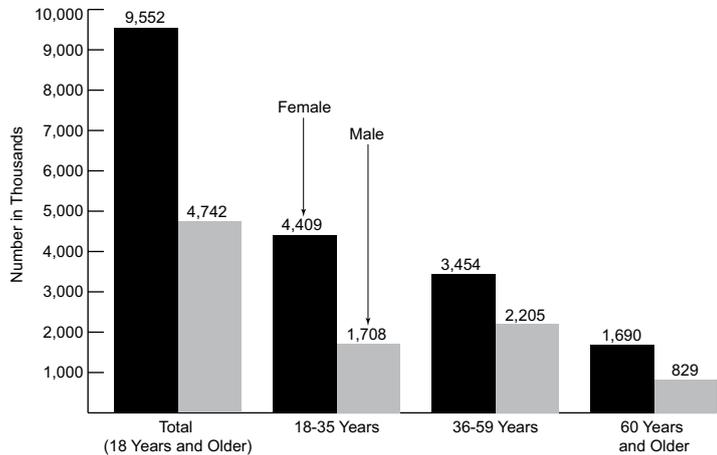
Female-headed households with children made up 29.4 percent of households that relied on food stamps, and represented 57.7 percent of food stamp households with children (data not shown).

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) also plays an important role in serving women and families by providing supplementary nu-

trition during pregnancy, the postpartum period, and while breastfeeding. In 2009, more than three-quarters of all individuals receiving WIC benefits were infants and children (76.1 percent); however, the program also served nearly 2.2 million pregnant women and mothers, representing 23.9 percent of WIC participants. During the years 1992–2009, the number of women participating in WIC increased by 77.9 percent.

### Adult Recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, \* by Age and Sex, 2008\*\*

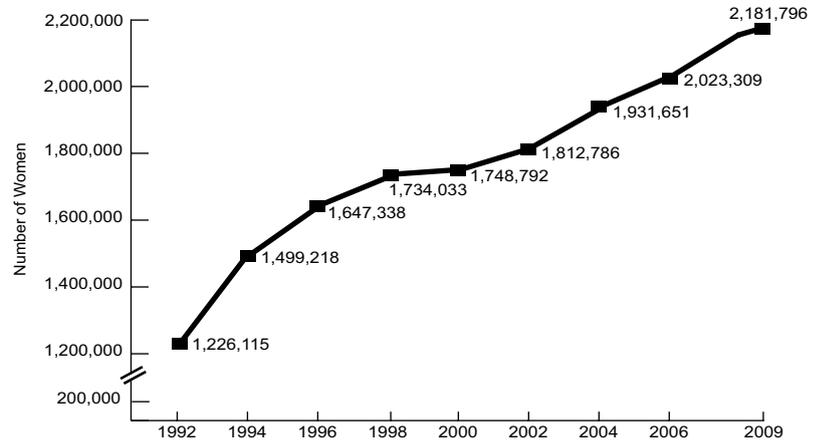
Source I.7: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Stamp Quality Control Sample



\*Formerly the Food Stamp Program. \*\*Based on Federal Fiscal Year (October-September).

### Women Participating in WIC, \* 1992–2009\*\*

Source I.8: U.S. Department of Agriculture, WIC Program Participation Data



\*Participants are classified as women, infants, or children based on nutritional-risk status; data reported include all pregnant women and mothers regardless of age. \*\*Based on Federal Fiscal Year (October-September); 2009 data are preliminary.

## EDUCATIONAL DEGREES AND HEALTH PROFESSION SCHOOLS

The number of post-secondary educational degrees awarded to women rose from slightly more than half a million in the 1969–1970 academic year to nearly 1.8 million in 2006–2007. Although the number of degrees earned by men has also increased, the rate of growth among women has been much faster; therefore, the proportion of degrees earned by women has risen dramatically. In 1969–1970, men earned a majority of every type of post-secondary degree, while in 2006–2007, women earned more than half of all associate's, bachelor's, master's, and

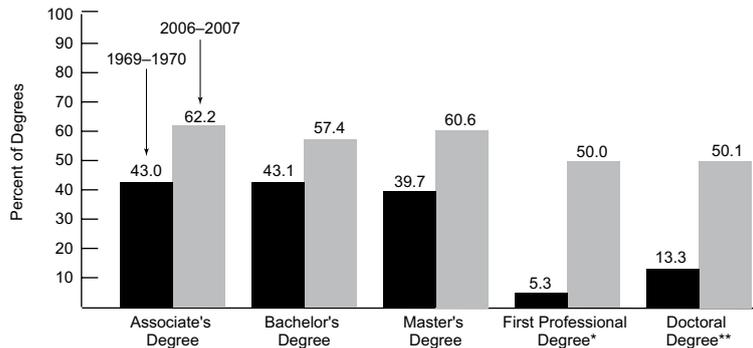
doctoral degrees, and half of all first professional degrees. The most significant increase has been in the proportion of first professional degree earners who are women, which jumped from 5.3 percent in 1969–1970 to 50.0 percent in 2006–2007. The total number of women earning their first professional degree in 2006–2007 (45,032) was 24 times greater than in 1969–1970 (1,841).

While the sex disparity in degrees awarded has disappeared or reversed, a racial and ethnic disparity remains among women enrolled in schools for health professions. Non-Hispanic White women accounted for more than half

of all women enrolled in schools of allopathic and osteopathic medicine, dentistry, optometry, pharmacy, and public health, while fewer than 10 percent of women enrolled in these schools were Hispanic. Non-Hispanic Black women were also underrepresented among female students enrolled in these schools. In comparison, non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander women were overrepresented relative to their representation within the population, accounting for 30.9 percent of female students of optometry, 28.4 percent of female students of dentistry, and 22.9 percent of female pharmacy students.

### Degrees Awarded to Women, by Type, 1969–1970 and 2006–2007

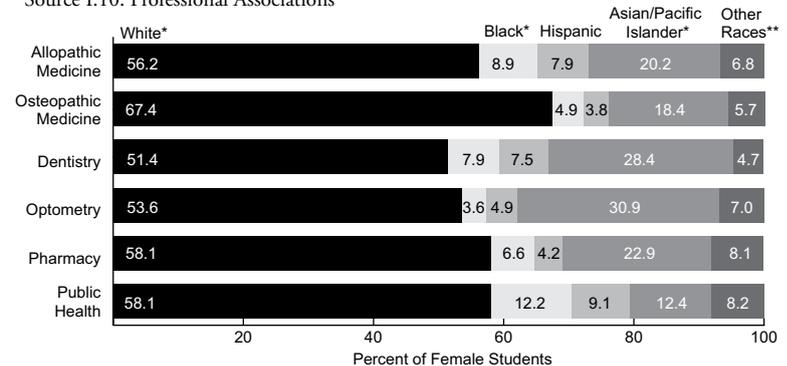
Source I.9: U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics



\*Includes fields of dentistry, medicine, optometry, osteopathic medicine, pharmacy, podiatry, veterinary medicine, chiropractic, public health, law, and theological professions. \*\*Includes Doctor of Philosophy degree and degrees awarded for fulfilling specialized requirements in professional fields such as education, musical arts, and engineering. Does not include first professional degrees.

### Women in Selected Schools for Health Professions, by Race/Ethnicity, 2008–2009

Source I.10: Professional Associations



\*Non-Hispanic. \*\*Includes non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Natives, students of other races, foreign students, and students whose race is unknown; data for allopathic medicine do not include foreign students.

### WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE

In 2008, 59.5 percent of women aged 16 and older were in the labor force (either employed or not employed and actively seeking employment). This represents a 28.5 percent increase over the 46.3 percent of women who were in the labor force in 1975. During the same period, the percentage of men in the labor force decreased slightly (from 77.9 percent to 73.0 percent).

Women and men aged 18 and older experience similar rates of unemployment (not employed and actively seeking employment). In 2008, 5.2 percent of women and 5.8 percent of men in the labor force were unemployed. Unemployment among both men and women de-

creases as age increases. Among women, those aged 18–24 years were most likely to experience unemployment (10.0 percent), followed by 25- to 34-year-olds (5.5 percent). Women aged 45–64 and 65 years and older had the lowest proportion of unemployed workers (3.8 and 3.9 percent, respectively).

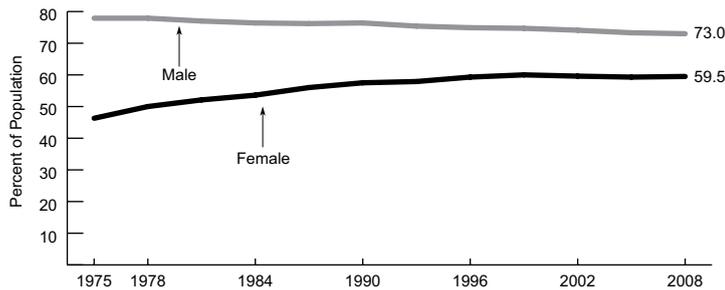
Labor force participation rates among mothers vary with the age of their child. Among women with at least one child under 6 years of age, 64.0 percent were in the labor force in 2008. In comparison, more than 77 percent of mothers of older children (aged 6–17 years) were in the labor force (data not shown).<sup>5</sup>

Labor force participation among mothers of children under age 18 also varies by race and

ethnicity. Among women with children under 6 years of age, non-Hispanic Black women were most likely to be in the labor force (72.7 percent), followed by non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native and non-Hispanic White women (67.3 and 66.3 percent, respectively). Hispanic mothers of children under age 6 were least likely to be in the labor force (52.3 percent), followed by non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islanders (62.8 percent). Similarly, nearly 80 percent of non-Hispanic Black and non-Hispanic White mothers of older children (aged 6–17 years) were in the labor force in 2008, compared to 70.0 percent of Hispanic and 71.2 percent of non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native women (data not shown).<sup>6</sup>

### Labor Force Participation\* Among Persons Aged 16 and Older, by Sex, 1975–2008\*\*

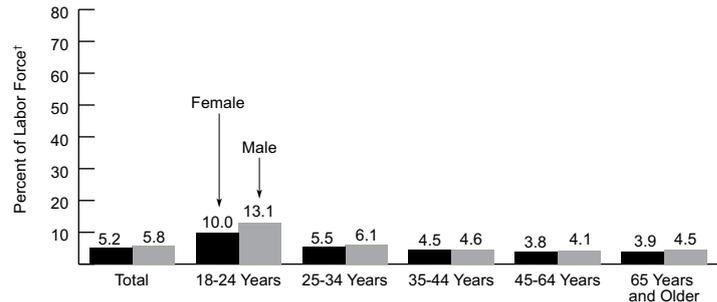
Source I.11: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



\*Includes persons employed or not employed and actively seeking employment. \*\*Due to changes in data collection methodology, estimates may not be strictly comparable over years.

### Unemployed\* Persons Aged 18 and Older, by Age and Sex, 2008\*\*

Source I.11: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



\*Includes persons not employed and actively seeking employment. \*\*Includes only non-institutionalized population not living in group housing; based on annual averages. †Includes persons employed or not employed and actively seeking employment.

## WOMEN VETERANS

As of September 2009, more than 1.8 million living women veterans had served in the U.S. military. This number is projected to rise to 1.9 million by 2016. The percentage of veterans who are female has increased by more than 25 percent in recent years. In 2000, 6.1 percent of all living veterans were women, while women accounted for 7.7 percent of living veterans in 2008. Women are expected to account for 9.0 percent of the veteran population by 2013.

Female veterans are eligible for the same Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits as male veterans. Comprehensive health services are available to all women veterans including

primary care, gynecology and maternity care, mental health care, and specialty health care services. Full-time Women Veterans Program Managers are available at all VA facilities to help women veterans seeking treatment and benefits. For more information, visit the VA Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards Web site ([www.publichealth.va.gov/womenshealth/](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/womenshealth/)).

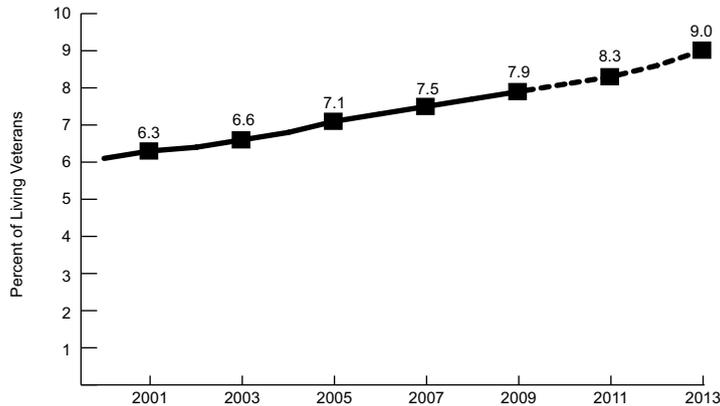
Of the 7.8 million veterans who are enrolled in the VA for health care, women account for more than 487,000 enrollees. The proportion of VA enrollees who are women is expected to increase to 1 in 7 over the next 10 years. The majority of new female veterans—from Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom (OEF/

OIF)—are more likely to obtain their health care from VA facilities than previous female veterans of previous eras.

Women are changing the landscape of care in the VA and not by their numbers alone. Women veterans of OEF/OIF are younger than women veterans of the past; more than three-quarters of OEF/OIF women veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are between 16 and 40 years of age, (i.e., of child-bearing age). These women are likely to be balancing work, motherhood, and transition to civilian life and will rely on the VA to provide high-quality, age-appropriate, and woman-specific care.

### Living Women Veteran Population, 2000–2013\*

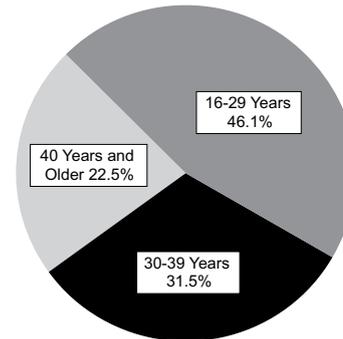
Source I.12: Department of Veteran Affairs, Office of Policy and Planning



\*Historical data from 2000–2008; projected for 2009–2013.

### Women Veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, by Age, 2002–2009\*

Source I.13: Han Kang et al. Department of Veteran Affairs, Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards



\*Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

## RURAL AND URBAN WOMEN

In 2008, an estimated 35.1 million women and girls, representing 22.7 percent of the female population, lived in rural areas. Residents of rural areas tend to have completed fewer years of education, have public insurance or no health insurance, and live farther from health care resources than their urban counterparts. Rural areas also have fewer physicians and dentists per capita than urban areas.<sup>7</sup>

In 2008, a greater proportion of urban females were aged 18–34 years than in rural areas, while the proportion of rural females was greater among 35- to 64-year-olds. More than

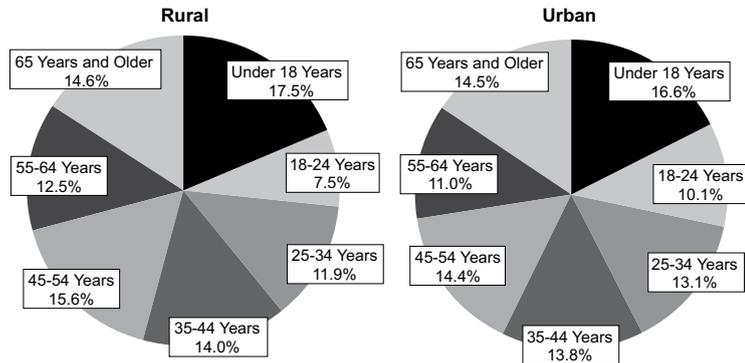
10 percent of females in urban areas were 18–24 years of age, compared to 7.5 percent of those in rural areas. Similarly, 13.1 percent of females in urban areas were 25–34 years of age, compared to 11.9 percent of females in rural areas. Among females in rural areas, 12.5 percent were 55–64 years of age and 15.6 percent were aged 45–54 years; this was slightly higher than in urban areas where 11.0 percent of females were 55–64 years and 14.4 percent were 45–54 years of age.

The percentage of women living with household incomes below 100 percent of poverty varies by rural/urban residence and age. Women

in urban areas were more likely to be living in poverty than their rural counterparts (13.9 versus 11.5 percent, respectively); this was true for most age groups. Among women in both urban and rural areas, those aged 18–34 years were most likely to have incomes below 100 percent of poverty: 20.7 percent of women aged 18–34 years in urban areas and 16.3 percent of those in rural areas did so. Women aged 45–64 years in both urban and rural areas were least likely to be living below the poverty level (9.8 and 8.6 percent, respectively).

## U.S. Female Population, by Rural/Urban Residence\* and Age, 2008

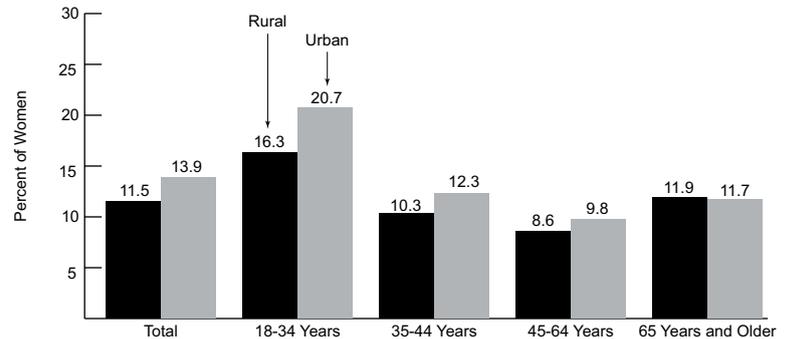
Source I.1: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



\*U.S. Census Bureau defines urban as all territory, population, and housing units located within an urbanized area or urban cluster which encompass core census blocks/block groups with at least 1,000 people per square mile, and surrounding census blocks with at least 500 people per square mile; all other areas are categorized as rural.

## Women Aged 18 and Older Living Below the Poverty Level,\* by Age and Rural/Urban Residence,\*\* 2008

Source I.1: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



\*Poverty level, defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, was \$22,025 for a family of four in 2008. \*\*U.S. Census Bureau defines urban as all territory, population, and housing units located within an urbanized area or urban cluster which encompass core census blocks/block groups with at least 1,000 people per square mile, and surrounding census blocks with at least 500 people per square mile; all other areas are categorized as rural.