



POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Population characteristics describe the diverse social, demographic, and economic features of the Nation's population. There were more than 158 million females in the United States in 2011, 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, as well as access to health care. Some of these characteristics include age, race and ethnicity, rural and urban residence, education, poverty, employment, household composition, and participation in Federal nutrition programs. The characteristics of women veterans are also reviewed and analyzed.

U.S. POPULATION

In 2011, the U.S. population was more than 311 million, with females comprising 50.8 percent of the total population. Females younger than 18 years accounted for nearly one-quarter of the 158 million U.S. females, while women aged 18–44 years accounted for 35.6 percent, those aged 45–64 years accounted for 26.8 percent, and women aged 65 years and older accounted for 14.8 percent.

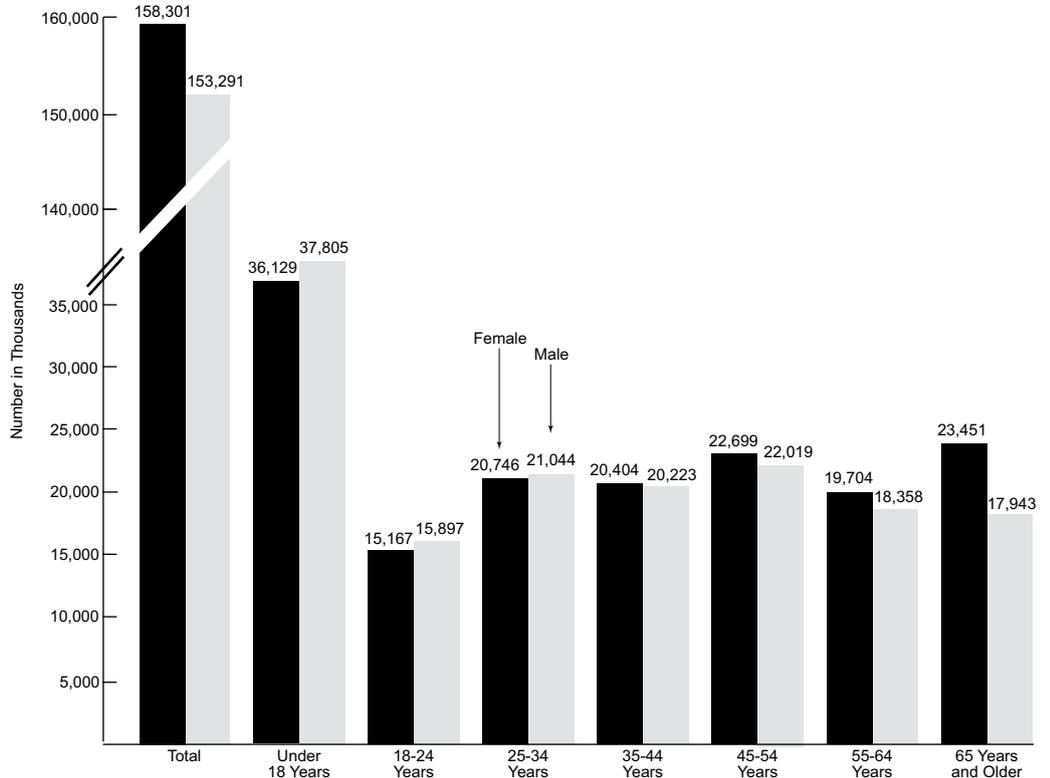
The distribution of the population by sex was fairly even across younger age groups; however because women have longer life expectancies, they represented a greater proportion of those

aged 65 years and older in 2011. Women accounted for 56.7 percent of all individuals aged 65 years and older, 60.5 percent of individuals

aged 75 years and older, and over two-thirds of individuals aged 85 years and older (67.0 percent; data not shown).

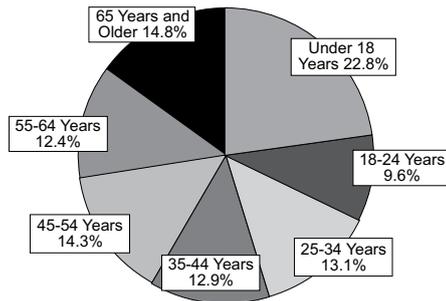
U.S. Population, by Age and Sex, 2011

Source I.1: U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population



U.S. Female Population,* by Age, 2011

Source I.1: U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population



*Estimates may not total to 100 due to rounding.

U.S. FEMALE POPULATION

In 2011, the majority of the total female population was non-Hispanic White (63.4 percent), while 16.2 percent were Hispanic, 12.7 percent were Black, and 5.0 percent were non-Hispanic Asian. Less than 1 percent of the female population was non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native or non-Hispanic Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, while 1.9 percent were non-Hispanic multiple race. Non-Hispanic White females are expected to no longer be the majority by 2045. By 2060, the proportion of females who are non-Hispanic White is expected to fall to 42.9 percent while the proportion who are Hispanic, non-Hispanic Asian, and non-Hispanic multiple race are expected to double or triple compared to the start of the millennium.

The increasing diversity of the U.S. population is a function of different fertility, mortality, and migration patterns according to race and ethnicity. The younger female population (under 18 years) is significantly more diverse than the older female population. In 2011, 53.0 percent of females under 18 years of age were non-Hispanic White, while 23.6 percent of that group were Hispanic. In contrast, among women aged 65 years and older, 78.9 percent were non-Hispanic White and only 7.3 percent were Hispanic (data not shown).¹

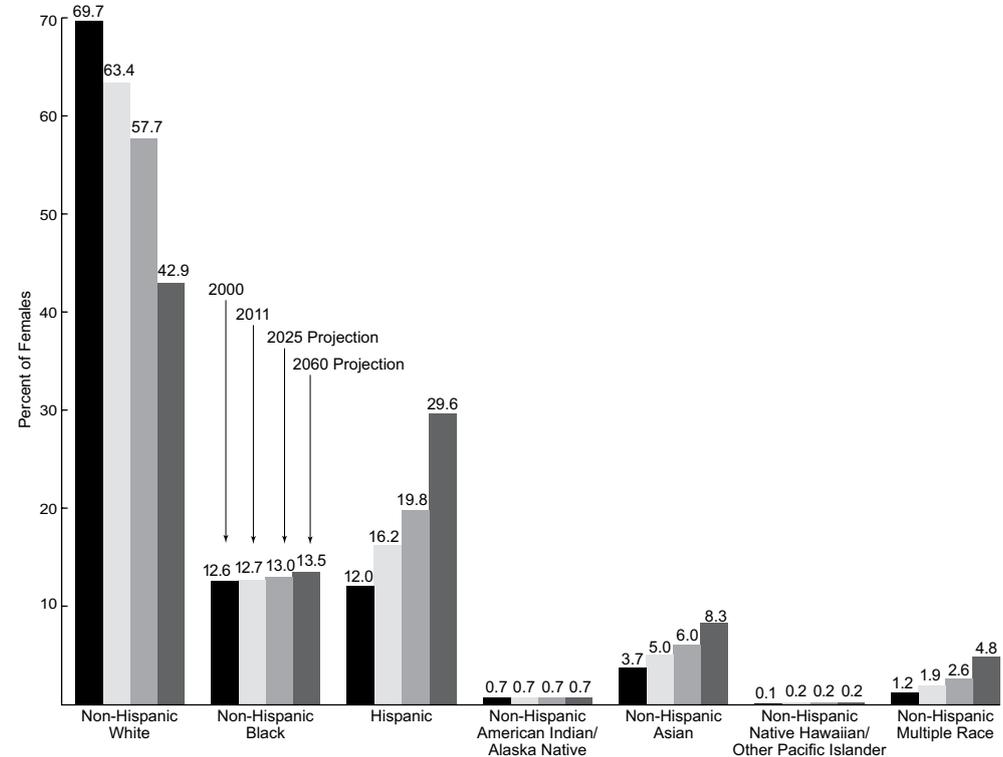
The increasing diversity of the U.S. popula-

tion underscores the importance of promoting racial and ethnic equity in health and health care. Significant racial and ethnic disparities persist in health status and access to health care which can be attributed to a variety of social,

behavioral, environmental, and biological determinants.² The future health of America will greatly depend on using a multifaceted approach to improving the health of racial and ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups.

U.S. Female Population (All Ages), by Race/Ethnicity, 2000–2060

Source I.2: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division



HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

In 2012, 50.3 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. About 13 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. 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. About 15 percent of women lived alone, 13.8 percent lived with relatives, and 7.9 percent lived with non-relatives.

Household composition varies significantly by

age. Young women aged 18–24 years were most likely to be living with relatives (58.7 percent) and with non-relatives (16.8 percent), while over 60 percent of women aged 35–44 and 45–64 were living with a spouse. Being a head of household with no spouse present was most common among women aged 25–44. Older women, aged 65 and above, were most likely to be living alone or with a spouse.

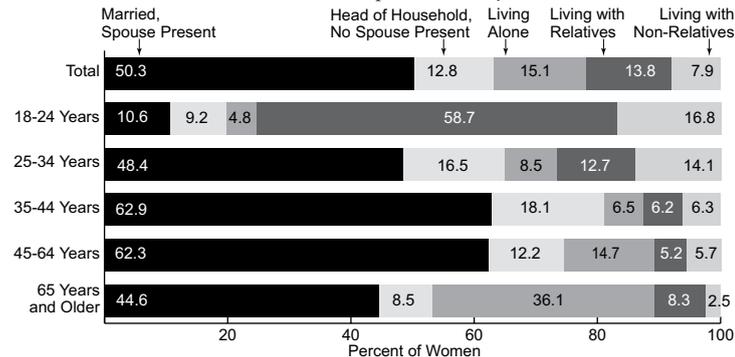
In 2012, non-Hispanic Black women were most likely to be single heads of households with family members present (27.5 percent), while non-Hispanic Asian and non-Hispanic White women were least likely (7.6 and 9.4 percent, respectively). Over 30 percent of single female heads of households with family members had

incomes below the poverty level (see *Women's Health USA, 2012*).

In 2011, same-sex couples comprised about 1 percent of all households, with female couples accounting for 53.0 percent of those households.³ Almost one-quarter of female same-sex couple households had children (23.2 percent) compared to 11.0 percent of male same-sex couple households and 40.7 percent of opposite-sex couple households.³ Householders within same-sex couples tend to have higher levels of educational attainment than those of opposite-sex couples. Over half of male same-sex couple householders had a college degree (52.3 percent), followed by 45.7 percent of female same-sex couple householders, and 35.8 percent of opposite-sex couple householders (data not shown).³

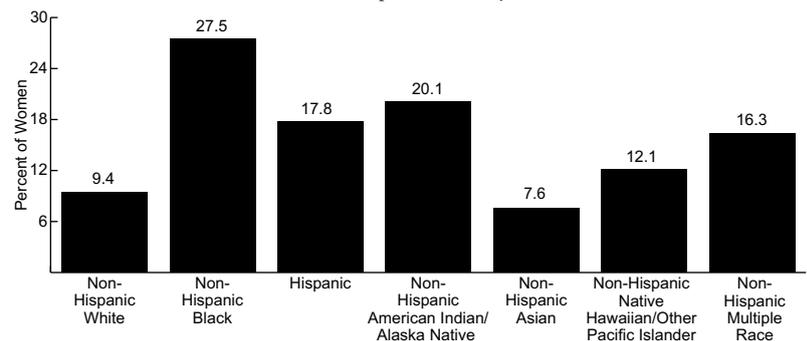
Women Aged 18 and Older,* by Age and Household Composition, 2012

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



Women Aged 18 and Older Who Are Heads of Households with Family Members,* by Race/Ethnicity, 2012

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



*Includes the civilian, non-institutionalized population; 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.

*Includes the civilian, non-institutionalized population. Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

WOMEN AND POVERTY

In 2011, more than 46 million people in the United States lived with incomes below the poverty level, representing 15.0 percent of the U.S. population.^{4,5} Approximately 17.7 million of those were women aged 18 and older, accounting for 14.6 percent of the adult female population. In comparison, 10.9 percent of adult men (or 12.4 million) lived in poverty (data not shown). With regard to race and ethnicity, non-Hispanic White women were least likely to experience poverty (10.6 percent), followed by non-Hispanic Asian women (11.9 percent). In contrast, about one-quarter 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 and 65 years and older were less likely to experience poverty than those aged 18–44. For instance, 29.2 percent of non-Hispanic Black women aged 18–44 were living in poverty in 2011, compared to 22.5 percent of those aged 45–64 years, and 20.5 percent of those aged 65 years and older.

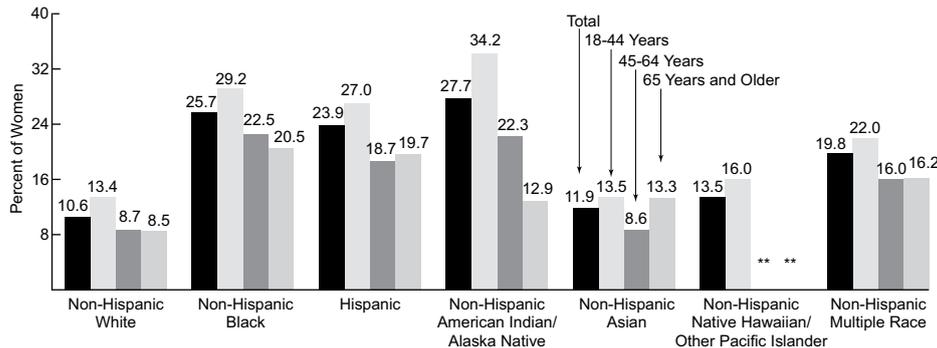
Poverty status also varies with educational attainment. Among women aged 25 years and older in 2011, nearly one-third (32.8 percent) of those without a high school diploma were living in poverty, compared to 16.0 percent of those

with a high school diploma or equivalent, 11.5 percent of those with some college education, and 4.9 percent of those with a Bachelor's degree or higher (data not shown).

In 2011, 11.8 percent of families—a group of at least two people related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together—were living in poverty. Married-couple families were least likely to be poor (6.2 percent). Among single-headed households with no spouse present, those headed by an adult female were twice as likely to be poor as those headed by an adult male (31.2 versus 16.1 percent, respectively). Overall, women in families were more likely than men to be poor (11.4 versus 8.0 percent, respectively; data not shown).

Women Aged 18 and Older Living Below the Poverty Level,* by Race/Ethnicity and Age, 2011

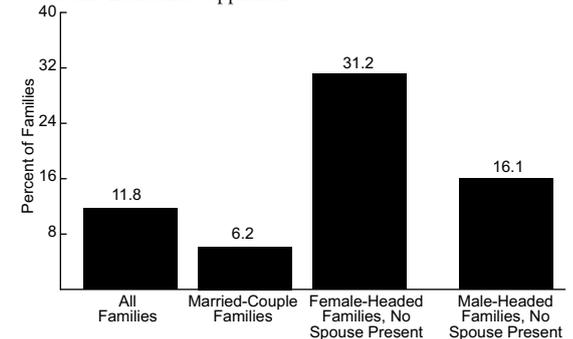
Source I.4: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement



*Poverty level, defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, was \$23,021 for a family of four in 2011. **Estimate does not meet the standard of reliability; numerator <20.

Families* Living Below the Poverty Level,** by Household Type, 2011

Source I.4: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement



*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 \$23,021 for a family of four in 2011.

FOOD SECURITY

Food security is defined as having access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security status is determined based on individuals' responses to questions about experiences and behaviors related to food insecurity, such as being unable to afford balanced meals, cutting the size of meals because of too little money for food, or being hungry because of too little money for food.⁶

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 but little if any reduced food intake, while very low food security indicates re-

duced food intake and disrupted eating patterns due to inadequate resources for food. Periods of low or very low food security are usually recurrent and episodic rather than chronic. Nonetheless, nutritional risk due to poor dietary quality can persist across periods of food insecurity, and may increase the risk of nutritional deficiencies and diet sensitive conditions like hypertension and diabetes.⁷

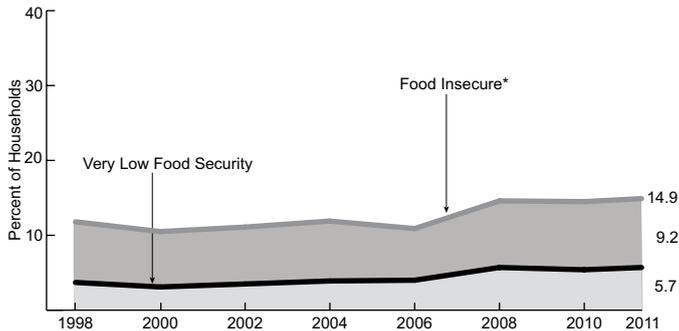
In 2011, an estimated 17.9 million or 14.9 percent of all households experienced food insecurity for one or more household members at some point in the past year; this rate did not change significantly from 2010. However, the prevalence of very low food security increased from 5.4 percent in 2010 to 5.7 percent in

2011, marking a return to levels seen in 2008 and 2009.

Food security status varies by household composition. While adult men and women living alone had similar rates of food insecurity in 2011 (15.5 and 15.6 percent, respectively), female-headed households with children and no spouse present were more likely than male-headed households with no spouse present to experience food insecurity (36.8 versus 24.9 percent, respectively). Female-headed households with children were also more likely than male-headed households with children to experience very low food security (11.5 versus 7.5 percent, respectively).

Household Food Insecurity, 1998–2011

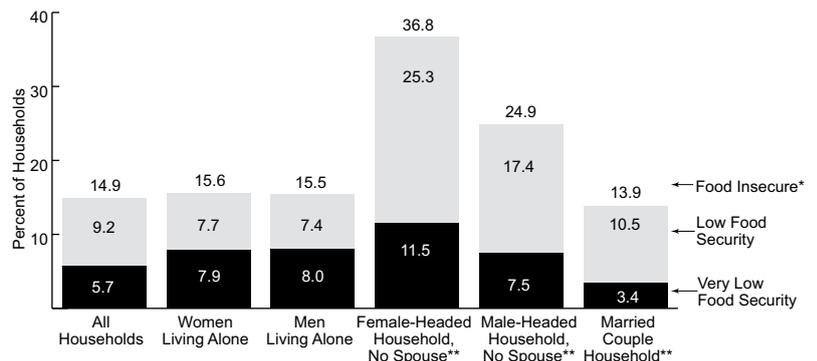
Source I.5: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Food Security Supplement



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

Food Security Status, by Household Composition, 2011

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. **With children less than 18 years old.

WOMEN AND FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Federal programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture provide essential help to low-income women and their families in obtaining food. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Federal Food Stamp Program, provides benefits for purchasing foods to individuals and families with incomes generally below 130 percent of the federal poverty level.⁸ In 2011, following an economic recession, the number of people served by SNAP hit a record high of 44.1 million per month, on average, or about 1 in 7 Americans. Of the 24.2 million adults served, over 15 million (62.5 percent) were women (data not shown).⁹ Between 1990 and 2011, the number of people served by SNAP tracked

strongly over time with the number of people in poverty, demonstrating the critical role of SNAP in responding to need. In 2011, 1.7 million children and 2.2 million adults, 62 percent of whom were women, were lifted above the poverty line after adding the value of SNAP benefits to household income.¹⁰

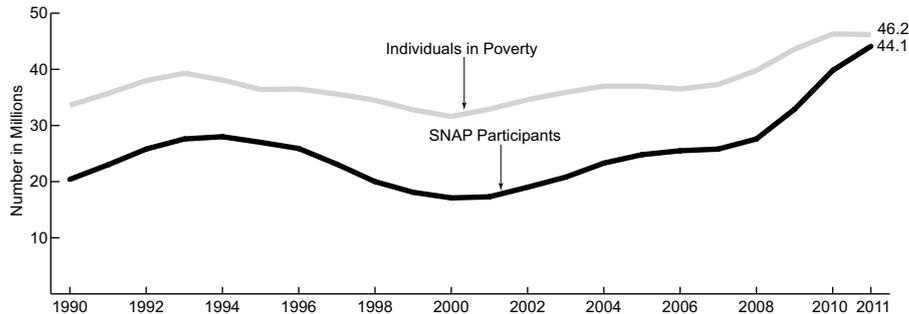
Among the households that relied on SNAP in 2011, 5.1 million (24.5 percent) were female-headed households with children, accounting for 52.1 percent of all SNAP households with children (data not shown).⁹

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) also plays an important role in serving low-income women and families by providing supplementary nutritious foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to health and other so-

cial services. WIC serves pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, as well as infants and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk and have household incomes generally at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level.¹¹ In 2012, more than three-quarters of the 8.9 million individuals receiving WIC benefits were infants and children (76.5 percent); however, the program also served nearly 2.1 million pregnant women and mothers, representing 23.5 percent of WIC participants. About 63 percent of those eligible for WIC participate in the program, though rates vary from about 85 percent among eligible infants to 70.8 percent for pregnant women and only 52.4 percent for eligible children.¹² SNAP participation rates are about 72 percent overall, ranging from 92 percent among eligible children to only 34 percent among the elderly.⁸

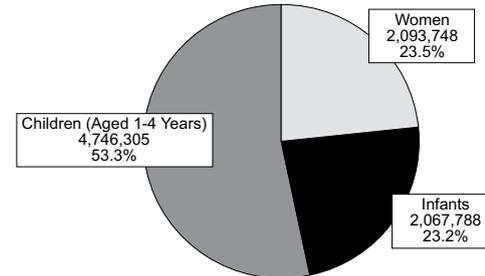
SNAP Participants and Individuals in Poverty, 1990–2011

Sources I.6: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Stamp Quality Control Sample; U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement



Participants in WIC, 2012*

Source I.7: U.S. Department of Agriculture, WIC Program Participation Data



*Based on Federal Fiscal Year (October to September)

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

In 2012, slightly more women than men aged 25–29 years had earned a high school or general equivalency degree (91.1 versus 88.4 percent, respectively; data not shown).¹³ Although there has not historically been a sex disparity in secondary education, a large disparity in postsecondary educational attainment has been eliminated or reversed over the last four decades. In 1969–1970, men earned a majority of every type of post-secondary degree, while in 2010–2011, women earned more than half of all associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral or first professional degrees, including degrees in medicine, dentistry, and law. The most significant increase has been in the proportion of doctoral or first professional degrees earned by women, which

rose from 9.6 percent in 1969–1970 to 51.4 percent in 2010–2011.

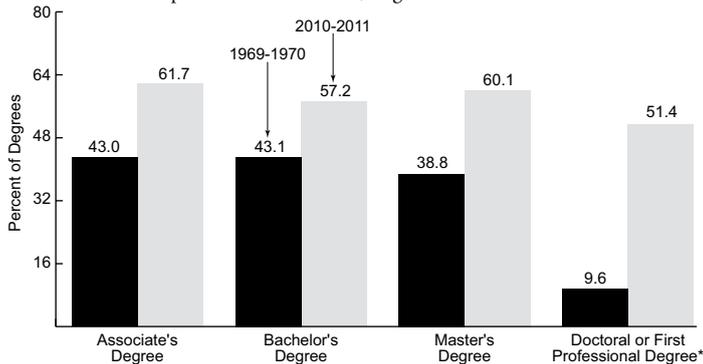
Despite the overall female advantage in postsecondary education, there are significant disparities by discipline. For example, in 2010–2011, women earned less than one in five bachelor’s degrees in computer sciences (17.6 percent) and engineering (17.2 percent). Conversely, women earned the overwhelming majority of bachelor’s degrees in education (79.6 percent) and health professions (85.0 percent). Within the health professions, women earned a smaller proportion but still a majority of doctoral degrees (57.8 percent); representation was higher in pharmacy (61.8 percent), physical therapy (68.5 percent), health care administration (72.6 percent), and public health (71.9 percent), but lower for den-

tristry (45.5 percent) and medicine (48.4 percent; data not shown). Approximately 90 percent of all registered nursing degrees were awarded to women in 2010–2011.¹³

There are also racial and ethnic disparities in educational attainment. Although 34.7 percent of all women aged 25–29 years had a college degree in 2009–2011, fewer than one in six non-Hispanic Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (10.4 percent), non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native (14.2 percent), and Hispanic women (15.5 percent) had a college degree, followed by 21.9 percent of non-Hispanic Black women. Non-Hispanic Asian and non-Hispanic White women were most likely to have a bachelor’s degree (62.7 and 41.4 percent, respectively; data not shown).¹⁴

Degrees Awarded to Women, by Type, 1969–1970 and 2010–2011

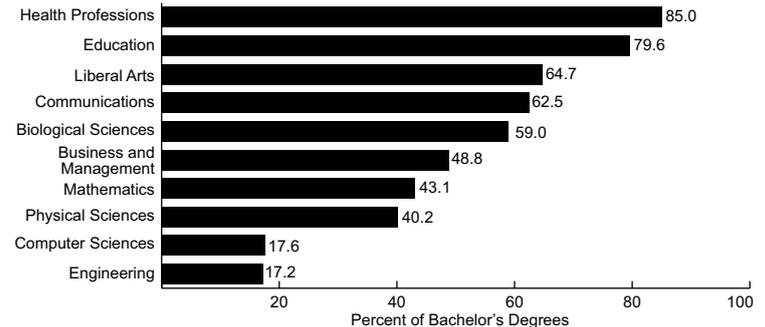
Source I.8: U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics



*Includes Ph.D., Ed.D., and comparable degrees at the doctoral level as well as degrees formerly classified as first-professional, such as M.D., D.D.S., and law degrees.

Bachelor's Degrees Awarded to Women, by Selected Discipline, 2010–2011

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



WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE

In 2011, 58.1 percent of women aged 16 and older were in the labor force (either employed or not employed and actively seeking employment) compared to 70.5 percent of men.¹⁵ Between 1970 and 2000, women's participation in the labor force increased from 43.3 to 59.9 percent and has remained relatively stable through 2011. Among women with children under 18 years of age, 70.9 percent were in the labor force in 2011, up from 47.4 percent in 1975 (data not shown). Labor force participation is higher among women with older children and those who have never been married or are divorced or separated. In 2011, labor force participation ranged from 59.8 percent among married

mothers with children under 3 years of age to 80.0 percent among unmarried or separated mothers with children aged 6–17 years.

Although the average annual rate of unemployment (not employed and actively seeking employment) for persons aged 16 and older was lower among women than men in 2011 (8.5 versus 9.4 percent, respectively; data not shown), the median weekly earnings of full-time workers aged 25 and older was \$168 more for men than women (\$886 versus \$718). Earnings rise dramatically with increasing education but the gender gap in earnings persists with female full-time workers earning 19 to 25 percent less than male full-time workers at every level of education. For example, while women with a high

school diploma or equivalent earned a weekly average of \$554 in 2011, their male counterparts earned an average of \$720. Only about half of the gender pay gap can be explained by differences in industry and occupation.¹⁶

Women were more likely than men to be among the working-poor, defined as those who were in the labor force for at least 27 weeks but lived below the official poverty level. In 2011, 7.6 percent of women aged 16 and older were working poor compared to 6.7 percent of men. Among women, the working-poor rate was highest among women aged 16–19 and 20–24 years (15.7 and 18.3 percent, respectively) and among Black and Hispanic women (14.5 and 13.8 percent, respectively; data not shown).

Labor Force Participation Among Mothers, by Marital Status and Age of Youngest Child, 2011

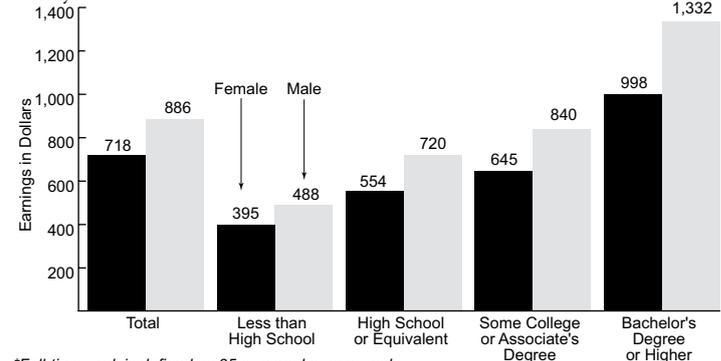
Source I.10: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey



*Includes never-married, divorced, separated, and widowed persons.

Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Workers* Aged 25 and Older, by Educational Attainment Level and Sex, 2011

Source I.10: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey



*Full-time work is defined as 35 or more hours a week.

RURAL AND URBAN WOMEN

Residents of rural areas tend to face greater socioeconomic disadvantage and live farther from health care resources than their urban counterparts. For example, rural areas have fewer physicians and dentists per capita than urban areas, and may lack certain specialists altogether.¹⁷ A variety of social, economic, and geographic factors are likely to contribute to higher rates of chronic disease, injury, and mortality observed in rural areas (see *Women's Health USA, 2012*).

A common definition of rural and urban relies on residence outside or inside metropolitan statistical areas—counties with an urbanized area of at least 50,000 people or adjacent commuting

counties. In 2011, over 19 million women aged 18 and older lived in non-metropolitan or rural areas, representing 16.7 percent of all women.

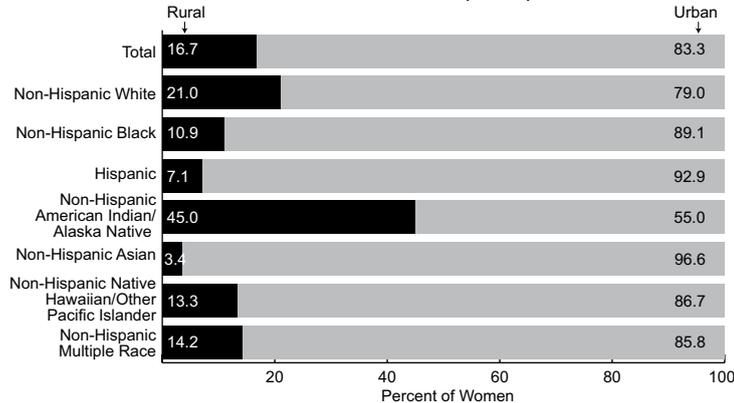
Rural women were more likely to be older and less racially and ethnically diverse than their urban counterparts. In 2011, the median age of rural women was 4 years older than for urban women (50 versus 46 years, respectively) and 23.0 percent of rural women were aged 65 years or older, compared to 18.3 percent of urban women (data not shown). Non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native women were the only racial and ethnic groups that were more likely to reside in rural areas than the total population of women. Nearly

half of non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native women (45.0 percent) resided in rural areas and 21.0 percent of non-Hispanic White women lived in rural areas compared with 16.7 percent of women overall and less than 15 percent of women of other racial and ethnic groups.

Women living in rural areas also had lower levels of educational attainment and higher levels of poverty than urban women. Among women aged 25 and older, 19.1 percent of rural women had a college degree or higher, compared to 30.8 percent of urban women. About 18 percent of rural women had household incomes below the poverty level, compared with 15 percent of urban women (data not shown).

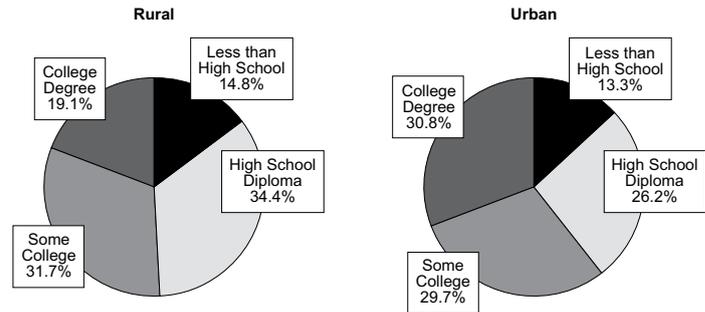
Rural and Urban* Women Aged 18 and Older, by Race/Ethnicity, 2011

Source I.11: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



Educational Attainment Among Women Aged 25 and Older, by Rural and Urban Residence,* 2011

Source I.11: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



*Defined as residence in non-metropolitan (rural) and metropolitan (urban) statistical areas; percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

*Defined as residence in non-metropolitan (rural) and metropolitan (urban) statistical areas.

WOMEN VETERANS

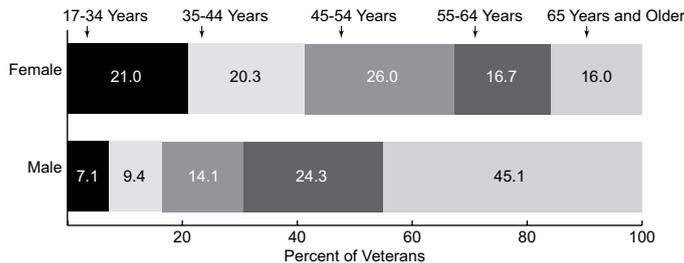
As of September 2013, women were estimated to comprise 2.5 million, or 10.3 percent, of all living veterans.¹⁸ By 2030, women are projected to make up 15 percent of all veterans—similar to the current proportion of active duty military personnel that are female.^{18,19} About half of living women veterans today are from the Gulf War Era and the most recent conflicts, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation New Dawn (OND).²⁰ The continually changing military roles of women, multiple deployments, and the blurring of combat and non-combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan suggest that the needs of these women veterans may differ greatly from the needs of women veterans from previous eras.

Due to the more recent increase in military enrollment and opportunities for women, female veterans are much younger than their male counterparts. In 2011, 21.0 percent of female veterans were aged 17–34 compared to only 7.1 percent of male veterans. Conversely, 45.1 percent of male veterans were aged 65 and older compared to only 16.0 percent of female veterans. Veteran women were slightly older than non-veteran women on average (49 versus 47 years, respectively; data not shown). While women veterans were less likely to be living in poverty than their non-veteran counterparts (10.0 versus 15.6 percent, respectively), their poverty rate was still higher than male veterans (6.6 percent).

Among OEF/OIF veterans using the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care in FY 2002–2007, 15.1 percent of women and 0.7 percent of men reported experiencing military sexual trauma—defined as sexual assault and/or severe and threatening sexual harassment that occurred during military service.²¹ Deployment to war zones, combat exposure, and military sexual trauma all raise the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and substance abuse. The VA is improving services to make sure women who are eligible for VA health care can access services tailored to their needs and has expanded research on the impacts of trauma and combat exposure for women, mental health outcomes of civilian reintegration, and overall health care needs of women veterans.

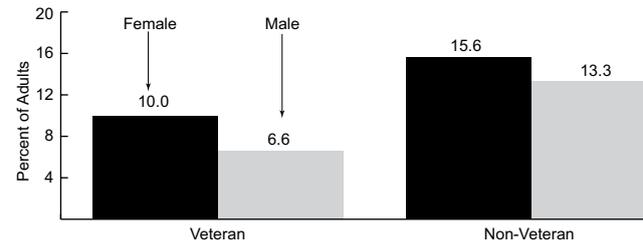
Veteran Population, by Sex and Age, 2011

Source I.12: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



Adults Aged 17 and Older Living Below the Poverty Level,* by Veteran Status and Sex, 2011

Source I.12: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



*Poverty level, defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, was \$23,021 for a family of four in 2011.