

in usual part-time schedules. Most demographic groups shared in the year's gains, but black men continued to report very serious unemployment problems. □

—FOOTNOTES—

¹See Richard M. Devens, Jr., Carol Boyd Leon, and Debbie L. Sprinkle, "Employment and unemployment in 1984: a second year of strong growth in jobs," *Monthly Labor Review*, February 1985, pp. 3-15.

²During 1984, the proportion of whites with some employment during the year rose to within half a percentage point of the level registered in 1979. The proportion of blacks with jobs during all or part of the year was a full percentage point below, and for Hispanics, 2.3 percentage points below the figure reported in 1979.

³In reality, the population weights and estimates, and age references from the March survey correspond with survivors to that month, rather than all persons alive during the previous year. Thus, year-to-year population growth is measured from March 1984 to March 1985.

Rise in mothers' labor force activity includes those with infants

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The notion that mothers of preschool-aged children, especially infants, usually stay out of the labor force at least until their youngest child has entered elementary school has changed rapidly during the 1980's. At mid-decade, nearly half of the mothers are either entering or reentering the work force soon after giving birth. By the time their youngest child is 4 years of age, 60 percent are in the work force. This report introduces a newly expanded series of statistics that traces some of the profound changes that have occurred in the labor force participation rates of the mothers of young children.¹

Married mothers

In March 1985, nearly half of all wives (husband present) with infant children 1 year old or under were in the labor force, compared with only 31 percent in 1975. The proportion rises significantly until the youngest child reaches school age. Fifty-four percent of the mothers of 2-year-olds were working or looking for work in March, as were 62 percent of those with 5-year-olds. For mothers of school-age children the proportion ranged between 64 and 71 percent.² (See table 1.)

Altogether, about 25 million children—over half in married-couple families—are in families where the mother is absent from the home for part of the workday on a regular basis; almost all of these children have a working father (91 percent).³ This latter fact, when linked to information on the

full- or part-time employment status of wives, helps provide some insight into the extent and nature of the demand for child care. In 1985, 65 percent of the employed mothers with children under age 3 worked full time, as did 67 percent of those with children 3 to 5 years old (none younger) and 70 percent of those whose youngest child was 6 to 17.⁴

Race. The labor force participation rates of black married mothers were considerably higher than those of white married mothers, especially when the youngest child was a preschooler. At 64 percent, the participation rate for black mothers with infant children (1 year or under) was 15 percentage points higher than the rate for whites. For the most part, this difference showed few signs of narrowing until the youngest child was 7 years or older. Even among mothers of older children, blacks maintained higher labor force participation rates.

Reasons underlying the higher participation rates of black mothers with very young children are both historical and economic. Black wives have a long history of participating in the labor market to a much greater extent than their white counterparts, impelled in part by the relatively greater labor force difficulties of black than white husbands. In March 1985, for instance, the unemployment rate for black fathers with preschool children was 10.2 percent, compared with 5 percent for the white fathers; for those whose youngest child was of school age, the unemployment rates were 6.3 percent for black fathers and 4.2 percent for white fathers. In addition, median usual weekly earnings of black husbands who were full-time wage and salary earners in the third quarter of 1985 were \$353, or 77 percent of the \$459 for white husbands.⁵

Along with their generally higher labor force participation rates, employed black mothers usually work more weeks each year than white mothers, and a substantially larger proportion work all year at full-time jobs. This is true for mothers of preschoolers as well as school-age children; among those with children under age 3, 47 percent of the blacks worked year round, full time in 1984, compared with 31 percent of the whites. The proportions were 65 percent (for blacks) and 35 percent (for whites) for those with 3- to 5-year-olds. As a consequence of these marked differences, median earnings of black wives with preschoolers were \$10,480 overall in 1984, compared with \$7,020 for whites; for wives with school-age children, the earnings were \$12,010 (for blacks) and \$8,800 (for whites).⁶

However, the higher earnings of black mothers do not translate into higher total *family* income because of the significant difference between the earnings of black husbands and white husbands. The 1984 median income of black married-couple families with preschool children was \$22,480, compared with \$27,800 for whites.⁷

Single-parent mothers

Because single-parent mothers are often the sole support of themselves and their children, they are far more likely to

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be in the labor force than married mothers. But, when labor force participation rates are disaggregated by year of age of youngest child, there is not much difference between the

participation rates of the single parents and married mothers when their youngest child is 4 years of age or under, except among those with infants. (See table 2.) However, the dif-

Table 1. Labor force status of wives, husband present, by presence and single year of age of youngest child and race, March 1985

Presence and age of child	Civilian noninstitutional population (in thousands)			Civilian labor force (in thousands)			Labor force participation rate		
	Total	White	Black	Total	White	Black	Total	White	Black
Wives, total	50,395	45,668	3,487	27,386	24,402	2,239	54.3	53.4	64.2
No children under 18	26,170	24,097	1,655	12,620	11,452	928	48.2	47.5	56.1
With children under 18	24,225	21,571	1,831	14,766	12,950	1,310	61.0	60.0	71.5
Under 6 years, total	11,728	10,408	892	6,298	5,445	618	53.7	52.3	69.3
Under 3 years, total	7,306	6,549	492	3,707	3,259	323	50.7	49.8	65.7
1 year or under	5,185	4,652	339	2,562	2,260	216	49.4	48.6	63.7
2 years	2,121	1,897	153	1,145	999	107	54.0	52.7	69.9
3 to 5 years, total	4,422	3,859	400	2,591	2,186	295	58.6	56.6	73.8
3 years	1,728	1,496	159	952	789	115	55.1	52.7	72.3
4 years	1,433	1,260	126	856	736	89	59.7	58.4	70.6
5 years	1,261	1,103	115	783	661	91	62.1	59.9	79.1
6 to 17 years, total	12,498	11,164	939	8,469	7,505	692	67.8	67.2	73.7
6 to 13 years, total	8,387	7,439	649	5,713	5,034	477	68.1	67.7	73.5
6 years	1,165	1,024	97	751	648	77	64.5	63.3	79.4
7 years	1,147	997	105	772	663	78	67.3	66.5	74.3
8 years	995	891	73	689	609	60	69.2	68.4	(1)
9 years	1,003	912	63	664	601	47	66.2	65.9	(1)
10 years	1,008	886	79	687	605	56	68.2	68.3	70.9
11 years	959	872	62	664	608	39	69.2	69.7	(1)
12 years	1,031	906	86	736	636	69	71.4	70.2	80.2
13 years	1,079	951	84	750	664	51	69.5	69.8	60.7
14 to 17 years, total	4,111	3,725	290	2,756	2,471	215	67.0	66.3	74.1
14 years	1,137	1,025	79	799	709	63	70.3	69.2	79.7
15 years	1,115	1,014	77	757	691	49	67.9	68.1	63.6
16 years	949	865	65	609	541	52	64.2	62.5	(1)
17 years	910	821	69	591	530	51	64.9	64.6	(1)

¹ Rate not shown where base is less than 75,000.

NOTE: Due to rounding, sums of individual items may not equal totals. Children are defined as "own" children of householder and include never-married sons, daughters, stepchild-

ren, and adopted children. Excluded are other related children such as nieces, nephews, or grandchildren, and unrelated children.

Table 2. Labor force status of women maintaining families, by presence and single year of age of youngest child and race, March 1985

Presence and age of child	Civilian noninstitutional population (in thousands)			Civilian labor force (in thousands)			Labor force participation rate		
	Total	White	Black	Total	White	Black	Total	White	Black
Women maintaining families, total	10,524	7,257	3,029	6,419	4,574	1,705	61.0	63.0	56.3
No children under 18	4,179	3,067	1,027	2,117	1,592	479	50.7	51.9	46.6
With children under 18	6,345	4,190	2,002	4,302	2,982	1,226	67.8	71.2	61.2
Under 6 years, total	2,390	1,457	887	1,271	809	444	53.2	55.5	50.1
Under 3 years, total	1,146	698	423	510	319	184	44.5	45.7	43.5
1 year or under	728	426	284	277	167	109	38.0	39.2	38.4
2 years	418	272	139	233	152	75	55.7	55.9	54.0
3 to 5 years, total	1,244	759	464	761	490	260	61.2	64.6	56.0
3 years	423	247	171	232	136	94	54.8	55.1	55.0
4 years	380	236	138	235	156	74	61.8	66.1	53.6
5 years	441	276	155	294	198	92	66.7	71.7	59.4
6 to 17 years, total	3,955	2,733	1,116	3,031	2,173	783	76.6	79.5	70.2
6 to 13 years, total	2,609	1,756	784	1,975	1,371	556	75.7	78.1	70.9
6 years	358	232	123	272	178	90	76.0	76.7	73.2
7 years	339	226	103	256	167	81	75.5	73.9	78.6
8 years	295	201	89	206	148	57	69.8	73.6	64.0
9 years	312	215	86	246	177	61	78.8	82.3	70.9
10 years	328	223	102	261	184	75	79.6	82.5	73.5
11 years	303	204	82	221	157	52	72.9	77.0	63.4
12 years	351	232	108	265	184	71	75.5	79.3	65.7
13 years	323	223	91	248	176	69	76.8	78.9	75.8
14 to 17 years, total	1,346	977	332	1,056	802	227	78.5	82.1	68.4
14 years	374	264	100	294	221	68	78.6	83.7	68.0
15 years	328	231	84	241	174	55	73.5	75.3	65.5
16 years	302	226	72	245	196	48	81.1	86.7	(1)
17 years	342	256	76	276	211	56	80.7	82.4	73.7

¹ Rate not shown where base is less than 75,000.

NOTE: Due to rounding, sums of individual items may not equal totals. Children are defined as "own" children of householder and include never-married sons, daughters, stepchild-

ren, and adopted children. Excluded are other related children such as nieces, nephews, or grandchildren, and unrelated children.

ferences begin to widen when the youngest child is 5 years old, and for the most part, remain large among mothers of older children.

In addition to having higher labor force participation rates than married mothers, single-parent mothers are also more likely to be full-time workers. About 82 percent of employed single-parent mothers worked 35 hours or more a week in March 1985, compared with 68 percent of married mothers. Proportions of single-parent mothers working full time ranged from 79 percent of those with children under 3 years, to 84 percent of those whose youngest child was age 6 to 17.

The relationship between the participation rates of whites and blacks among single-parent mothers is the reverse of that among married mothers. That is, white single parents are somewhat more likely than their black counterparts to be working or looking for work. However, until the youngest child enters his or her teens, the difference between participation rates for white single parents and black single parents is not nearly as great as among married mothers.

Trends since 1970

As table 3 shows, labor force participation rates of all wives by single year of age of youngest child increased between 1970 and 1985 whatever the child's age, though to differing degrees. Overall, labor force participation rates of married mothers grew faster during 1975 to 1980 than in either the 1970-75 or 1980-85 periods.

The most rapid increase from 1970 to 1985 was among mothers of very young children. Participation rates of mothers of infants age 1 year or under about doubled, followed

by a 77-percent jump for those with 2-year-olds and a 60-percent rise for mothers of 3-year-olds. In contrast, the already high participation rates of mothers of older children grew less rapidly. For instance, the rates for mothers of 6- to 13-year-olds rose by 45 percent with the more rapid growth (increases in the 50-percent-plus range) occurring among mothers of 6-, 7-, and 8-year-olds. Mothers of 14- to 17-year-olds showed the least gain in participation rates—about one-fifth.

The result of these differing rates of change has been a convergence of participation rates and a blurring of the correlation between mothers' labor force activity and age of youngest child. For instance, in 1970, the highest participation rate (57 percent for mothers of 14-year-olds) was more than twice the lowest rate (24 percent for those with infants). By 1985, the highest rate (71 percent for mothers of 12-year-olds) was less than half again larger than the lowest rate (49 percent for mothers of infants).

THESE STATISTICS point to some of the striking changes in the economic role of mothers over the last decade and a half. Families have increasingly become solely or partly dependent on a mother's earnings. Using this newly expanded data series by single year of age of children, researchers will be better able to monitor changing labor force trends and thus provide important insights regarding family economic structure and the demand for family services such as child care. □

FOOTNOTES

¹ Labor force participation rates were previously disaggregated by the age group of the youngest child of the working mother; however, now they are also disaggregated by the single year of age of the youngest child.

The data in this research summary are derived from information collected each March in the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS is a monthly household survey (presently including 59,500 households) conducted for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the Bureau of the Census. Information obtained from this survey relates to the employment status of the noninstitutional population 16 years old and over.

Because it is a sample survey, estimates derived from the CPS may differ from the actual counts that could be obtained from a complete census. Therefore, small estimates or small differences between estimates should be interpreted with caution. For a more detailed explanation, see the Explanatory Note in *Families at Work: The Jobs and the Pay*, Bulletin 2209 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1984), pp. 30-34.

² Labor force statistics on mothers of school-age children may partly reflect the fact that they are collected in March when school is in session. However, participation rates based on March data are not substantially higher than those based on information collected in the summer. For example, the June to August 1985 average participation rate for married mothers with school-age children was 65 percent; in March 1985, the rate was 68 percent. Thus, the opening of school does not appear to provide a major incentive for mothers to participate in the labor force.

³ See News Release, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, USDL 85-38, "Labor force activity of mothers of young children continues at record pace," table 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, table 1.

⁵ For further discussion of black-white male differences in labor force participation see Howard Hayghe, "Married couples: work and income patterns," *Monthly Labor Review*, December 1983, pp. 11 and 12.

⁶ Unpublished data, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Table 3. Labor force participation rates of wives, husband present, by age of youngest child, March of selected years, 1970-85

Presence and age of child	1970	1975	1980	1985
Wives, total	40.8	44.5	50.2	54.3
No children under 18	42.2	44.0	46.0	48.2
With children under 18	39.8	44.9	54.3	61.0
Under 6 years, total	30.3	36.8	45.3	53.7
Under 3 years, total	25.8	32.6	41.5	50.7
1 year or under	24.0	30.8	39.0	49.4
2 years	30.5	37.1	48.1	54.0
3 to 5 years, total	36.9	42.2	51.7	58.6
3 years	34.5	41.2	51.5	55.1
4 years	39.4	41.2	51.4	59.7
5 years	36.9	44.4	52.4	62.1
6 to 17 years, total	49.2	52.4	62.0	67.8
6 to 13, years, total	47.0	51.8	62.6	68.1
6 years	44.0	46.7	58.5	64.5
7 years	44.7	51.1	61.7	67.3
8 years	44.6	51.5	62.3	69.2
9 years	48.5	52.4	60.8	66.2
10 years	48.7	56.6	65.1	68.2
11 years	47.6	52.8	65.1	69.2
12 years	51.8	50.0	65.7	71.4
13 years	51.8	54.0	64.6	69.5
14 to 17 years, total	54.8	53.8	60.5	67.0
14 years	56.9	52.4	62.6	70.3
15 years	52.8	54.7	60.8	67.9
16 years	54.3	55.0	62.3	64.2
17 years	55.1	52.7	55.6	64.9

NOTE: Children are defined as "own" children of householder and include never-married sons, daughters, stepchildren, and adopted children. Excluded are other related children such as nieces, nephews, or grandchildren, and unrelated children.