

Stay-at-home mothers through the years

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For decades, the number of stay-at-home moms had been declining, but a recent report by the Pew Research Center shows that the number of stay-at-home mothers has risen in recent years. In the report, titled [“After decades of decline, a rise in stay-at-home mothers”](#) (Pew Research Social and Demographic Trends, April 7, 2014), researchers D’Vera Cohn, Gretchen Livingston, and Wendy Wang analyze data from the Current Population Survey, the American Time Use Survey, and Pew’s public opinion polls to show how the proportions of employed and stay-at-home mothers have changed over the years.

In 1967, 49 percent of mothers were stay-at-home mothers. That proportion steadily dropped through the decades until 1999, when only 23 percent of moms stayed at home. Since 1999, the percentage of mothers who stayed at home began to increase again, rising by 6 points to 29 percent in 2012. The researchers note that recent declines in the labor force participation rate and rising immigration were likely factors in the increase of the stay-at-home rate. They also indicate that the rise in the proportion of mothers who stayed at home will not likely continue because most mothers surveyed would like to work part-time or full-time.

The researchers use demographic data to observe differences between mothers who stay at home and those who have paid employment. Mothers at home tend to be younger than working mothers: 42 percent of stay-at-home moms in 2012 were under age 35 compared with 35 percent of working moms, and stay-at-home mothers are more likely to have children under age 5. In addition, stay-at-home mothers have lower levels of educational attainment and are more likely than working mothers to be living in poverty. Nearly half of the stay-at-home mothers have a high school diploma or less, compared with 30 percent of working mothers, and 34 percent of stay-at-home moms are living in poverty, compared with 12 percent of working mothers.

In 2012, approximately 28 percent of American children—a total of 12.2 million children—were being raised by stay-at-home mothers. On average, mothers at home spend 18 hours a week caring for their children compared with 11 hours for employed mothers. The researchers’ analysis of time-use data also shows disparities in how stay-at-home moms and working moms spend their time. Stay-at-home mothers spend more time on child care, housework, leisure, and sleep than do their employed counterparts, including spending an extra 7 hours each week on childcare.