

The labor force experience of women from 'Generation X'

Women aged 25 to 34 years in 2000 participated in the labor force in greater proportions, were more educated, earned more, and generally enjoyed more labor market benefits than their counterparts 25 years earlier; moreover, the “earnings gap” between young women and men narrowed substantially over the period

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During the 1960s and 1970s, legislation and changing social mores dramatically altered the choices young women had about their futures. Girls growing up during this period were influenced both by the conventions of their parents' generation and by the new opportunities that were becoming available to them. In contrast, girls born in later years grew up in an era in which women often were expected to combine market work¹ with family responsibilities. Consequently, women who were aged 25 to 34 years in 2000 had a markedly different relationship to the labor market than did their counterparts in 1975.

The first part of this article focuses on the major demographic and labor market indicators that are used to describe young women. These indicators will be used to see how the group and its relationship to the labor market has changed over the past quarter century. The second part focuses on issues facing young women in the labor market today.²

The highlights include the following:

- About three-quarters of women aged 25 to 34 years participated in the labor force in the year 2000, compared with a little more than half in 1975.
- Young women today are more highly educated than were their counterparts in 1975; in 2000, 30 percent of women aged 25 to 34

years had completed 4 or more years of college, compared with 18 percent 25 years earlier.

- Young women have substantially closed the “earnings gap” with their male counterparts since 1979 (the first year for which comparable earnings data are available from the CPS). They earned 82 percent as much as young men in 2000 for full-time work, compared with 68 percent in 1979.
- Married women aged 25 to 34 years—particularly those who had children—were far more likely to be in the labor force in 2000 than 25 years earlier.
- Young women were working more hours and more weeks out of the year in 1999 than were their counterparts 25 years ago; black women were more likely than either white or Hispanic women to work full time and year round.
- Nearly one million women aged 25 to 34 were displaced from a job between January 1997 and December 1999; when surveyed in February 2000, displaced young women were more than 4 times as likely as their male counterparts to have left the labor force.
- The vast majority (83 percent) of employed women aged 25 to 34 had health insurance cov-

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Table 1. Selected characteristics of women and men aged 25 to 34, March 1975 and 2000

Characteristic	Women		Men	
	1975	2000	1975	2000
Civilian noninstitutional population, aged 25 to 34, total (in thousands)	15,316	19,188	14,366	18,310
Race and Hispanic origin¹				
White	86.6	79.0	88.7	81.6
Black	11.3	14.9	9.3	12.4
Hispanic origin	5.4	14.6	5.1	15.4
Education²				
Less than four years of high school or less than a high school diploma	20.2	10.9	17.9	13.0
Four years of high school, no college or high school diploma, no college	45.9	28.9	36.9	32.4
1 to 3 years of college or some college or associates degree	16.3	30.3	19.6	25.9
4 or more years of college or college degree	17.6	29.9	25.6	28.7
Marital status³				
Married, spouse present	76.3	57.0	74.6	49.5
Unmarried, total	23.7	43.0	25.4	50.5
Never married	10.8	30.2	17.1	41.0
Other marital status	12.9	12.8	8.2	9.5
Divorced	6.8	7.7	4.6	5.7
Separated	5.5	4.7	3.5	3.6
Widowed7	.4	.1	.1
Presence and age of children				
With children under age 18	76.0	59.8	-	38.8
With children ages 6 to 17, none younger	23.3	18.2	-	7.8
With children under age 6	52.6	41.7	-	31.0
Under age 3	27.6	25.1	-	21.1
With no children under age 18	24.0	40.2	-	61.2

¹ Detail for race and Hispanic-origin groups will not sum to totals because data for the "other races" group are not presented and Hispanics may be included in either the white or black population groups.

² Since 1992, data on educational attainment have been based on the "highest diploma or degree received" rather than the "number of years of school completed."

³ Marital status data for men in 1975 is for the total population and includes members of the Armed Forces.

NOTE: Data from 1994 forward are not directly comparable with data for 1993 and earlier years due to the CPS redesign. Dashes indicate data not available.

erage in February 2001; about 60 percent of women in this age group received coverage through their employers.

Indicators of change

As a group, women who were aged 25 to 34 years in 2000 differed in a number of their demographic and labor force characteristics from their counterparts 25 years earlier. The subsections that follow describe some of these differences.

Educational attainment. The level of education among women aged 25 to 34 improved dramatically between 1975 and

2000. In those 25 years, the share of women in this age group who had completed at least 4 years of college rose from 18 to 30 percent. At the same time, the share of men with that level of education only edged up 3 percentage points to 29 percent. Over the same period, the proportion of young women who had dropped out of high school fell from 20 percent to 11 percent. (See table 1.)

While white women continued to have the most schooling among the three major race-ethnic groups in 2000, black women made large strides in educational attainment over this period. In 1975, 32 percent of black women aged 25 to 34 had completed fewer than 4 years of high school, and just 10 percent had completed 4 or more years of college. In 2000, by

Table 2. Labor force participation of women and men aged 25 to 34 by selected demographic characteristics, March 1975 and 2000

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Women				Men			
	Number		Participation rate		Number		Participation rate	
	1975	2000	1975	2000	1975	2000	1975	2000
Civilian labor force, aged 25 to 34	8,304	14,787	54.2	77.1	13,692	17,091	95.3	93.3
Race and Hispanic origin¹								
White	7,054	11,622	53.2	76.7	12,219	14,097	95.9	94.4
Black	1,083	2,298	62.8	80.6	1,216	1,984	91.2	87.7
Hispanic origin	384	1,784	46.6	63.6	686	2,658	94.1	94.1
Education²								
Less than 4 years of high school or less than a high school diploma	1,260	1,141	40.8	54.7	2,371	2,053	92.3	86.0
4 years of high school, no college or high school diploma, no college	3,753	4,124	53.3	74.3	5,155	5,559	97.2	93.7
1 to 3 years of college or some college or associates degree	1,434	4,592	57.5	79.0	2,638	4,474	93.8	94.3
4 or more years of college or college degree	1,858	4,930	68.9	85.9	3,528	5,005	96.0	95.4
Marital status								
Married, spouse present	5,648	7,788	48.3	71.2	10,365	8,765	97.3	96.7
Unmarried, total	2,656	6,999	73.3	84.9	3,327	8,326	89.7	90.0
Never married	1,325	4,918	80.4	84.9	2,213	6,704	88.2	89.3
Other marital status	1,331	2,080	67.4	84.7	1,114	1,623	92.7	93.4
Divorced	796	1,295	76.8	87.7	626	991	92.7	94.4
Separated	486	734	57.9	81.7	471	612	92.8	92.2
Widowed	49	51	48.5	63.7	18	20	91.2	84.3
Presence and age of children								
With children under age 18	5,281	8,054	45.4	70.1	-	6,855	-	96.5
With children aged 6 to 17, none younger	2,147	2,739	60.0	78.4	-	1,352	-	94.6
With children under age 6	3,134	5,315	38.9	66.5	-	5,504	-	96.9
Under age 3	1,402	3,024	33.2	62.7	-	3,752	-	97.2
With no children under age 18	3,023	6,733	82.2	87.4	-	10,236	-	91.4

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² Since 1992, data on educational attainment have been based on the "highest diploma or degree received," rather than the "number of years of

school completed."

NOTE: Data from 1994 forward are not directly comparable with data for 1993 and earlier years due to the CPS redesign. Labor force and participation rates are for the civilian population. Dashes indicate data not available.

contrast, just 13 percent of black women in this age group did not have a high school diploma, and 17 percent had college degrees. Among young Hispanic women in 2000, however, a relatively high proportion (36 percent) had not completed high school. (This compares with about half in 1975.) About 11 percent had college degrees. More than half (55 percent) of the young Hispanic women living in the United States in 2000 were foreign born, and these immigrants typically have less education than their U.S.-born counterparts. In fact, half the foreign-born Hispanic women of this age group had not completed high school (compared with 19 percent of those born in the United States), and only 9 percent had a Bachelor's degree or more (compared with 17 percent of those born in

the United States).

The advances in educational attainment among young women during the 25-year period were much sharper than those of their male counterparts. In 1975, the proportion of men with a college education exceeded that of women by a considerable margin. By 2000 however, the proportions with college degrees were about equal, and, in the case of whites and Hispanics, the women were somewhat more likely to be college graduates than were the men.

Marital status and motherhood. Over the 1975–2000 period, trends in marriage and family formation changed considerably.³ For example, women aged 25 to 34 years in 2000 were

less likely to be married than their counterparts 25 years earlier and less likely to be mothers. In 1975, more than 3 out of 4 women in this age group were married; by 2000, the proportion had dropped to 3 out of 5. Additionally, in 1975, just 11 percent had never married; this proportion had nearly tripled to 30 percent in 2000.

The changing marital status of women also impacted family formation. In 1975, 76 percent of women in the 25- to 34-year age group had children; this figure had declined to 60 percent by 2000. Also, as the average age of childbearing rose, women aged 25 to 34 were far less likely to have older children, but they were nearly as likely to have children under age 3 as were their counterparts a generation earlier.

Labor force characteristics. Since 1975, the labor force participation rate—the proportion of the population that is either working or actively looking for work—of women aged 25 to 34 years has increased by about 20 percentage points. White women had the largest increase in participation, although black and Hispanic women also showed large gains. In contrast, the labor force participation rate for men in the same age group drifted down, from 95 to 93 percent, with the decline far larger for black men than for whites. (See table 2.) The growing labor force participation rate of women is related to a number of factors, but perhaps the two that have had the greatest impact are the increasing rates of educational attainment among women and the lower propensity to marry among women aged 25 to 34. In 1975, the median age at first marriage for women was 21.1 years; in 1998, it was 25.0 years.⁴

Women's labor force participation rates are strongly correlated with levels of educational attainment. In 2000, 86 percent of women in the 25- to 34-year age group with college degrees were in the labor force, compared with only 55 percent of those with less than a high school diploma, a difference of about 31 percentage points. Men's participation rates also were closely

correlated with education levels, but the difference between those with a college degree and those with less than a high school diploma was less pronounced—about 95 percent of young adult men with college degrees were in the labor force, compared with 86 percent of those with less than a high school education, a difference of only 9 percentage points.

Occupations. Women aged 25 to 34 work in virtually every occupation, but they are more heavily represented in some occupations than others. (See table 3.) Due to a change in the way occupations were classified in the CPS, comparable data are available only to 1983. It is still useful to examine them to look for any trends that may have emerged over the past couple decades.

Since 1983, women have made headway into the higher-paying executive, administrative, and managerial occupations, and professional specialty occupations. They also have become more likely to work in sales and service occupations. While the latter tend to be lower-paying jobs, men aged 25 to 34 years also are increasingly likely to work in these occupations.

Women made up 46 percent of all employed 25- to 34-year-olds in 2000 and 44 percent in 1983. They made up about 80 percent of all workers in this age group in administrative support (clerical) jobs in both years. Women also were more concentrated in service occupations in 2000 than they were in 1983. They accounted for about 65 percent of the total in service occupations in 2000 and 59 percent in 1983. (See table 4.) In contrast, women continued to represent a smaller portion of employed 25- to 34-year-olds in manufacturing-related occupations such as precision production, craft and repair, where they made up only about 8 percent of workers in both years.

Among young workers in executive/managerial, professional, and technical occupations overall, about half were women in 2000. While the proportions of young women in professional specialty and technical occupations were about

Table 3. Employed women and men aged 25 to 34 years by major occupation, annual averages, 1983 and 2000

Occupation	Women		Men	
	1983	2000	1983	2000
Total employed				
Number (in thousands)	12,540	14,006	16,216	16,494
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Executives, administrators, and managers	9.2	15.5	11.4	12.8
Professional specialty workers	18.5	20.5	13.0	14.7
Technicians and related support workers	4.7	4.4	3.9	3.5
Sales workers	9.9	11.5	10.5	10.8
Administrative support, including clerical workers	30.2	22.6	5.9	5.8
Service workers	14.9	16.3	8.0	9.9
Precision production, craft, and repair workers	2.5	2.0	22.2	19.6
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	9.1	6.4	20.7	19.7
Farming, forestry, and fishing workers	1.0	0.8	4.3	3.2

Table 4. Employed persons aged 25 to 34 by major occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic origin, 2000 annual averages

(Numbers are in thousands)

Occupation	Total employed	Percent women			
		Total	White	Black	Hispanic
Total, aged 25 to 34	30,501	45.9	36.2	7.1	5.6
Executive, administrative, and managerial occupations	4,281	50.6	41.9	5.7	4.1
Professional specialty occupations	5,300	54.2	44.0	5.9	3.3
Technicians and related support occupations	1,196	51.8	41.6	7.4	5.2
Sales occupations	3,386	47.4	38.4	6.4	5.3
Administrative support occupations, including clerical	4,129	76.8	60.0	13.5	10.0
Private household occupations	118	94.1	80.5	11.0	42.4
Protective service occupations	632	16.6	10.1	6.0	1.3
Service occupations, excluding protective and household	3,157	65.3	48.4	13.9	10.8
Precision production, craft and repair occupations	3,514	8.1	6.3	1.1	1.6
Machine operators, assemblers and inspectors	1,743	34.0	24.7	6.0	9.2
Transportation and material moving occupations	1,235	8.9	5.3	3.3	1.0
Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, laborers	1,176	16.8	11.7	4.4	4.2
Farming, forestry and fishing occupations	634	17.4	16.6	0.5	5.5

NOTE: Detail for the race and Hispanic-origin groups will not sum to totals because data for the "other races" group are not presented and Hispanics are

included in both the white and black population groups.

the same in 1983, there was a considerable movement of women into executive, administrative, and managerial occupations over the period. Young women made up only about 38 percent of total employment in this age group and occupation in 1983. By 2000, the percentage had increased to 51 percent.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that, within these broad groups, women continued to be concentrated in some fairly traditional "women's" occupations. For instance, in 2000, women 16 years and older made up about 99 percent of kindergarten and preschool teachers, 85 percent of librarians, and 84 percent of legal assistants. These proportions were roughly the same in 1983. In contrast, women overall are still underrepresented in some professional occupations, although they have made substantial inroads. For example, women have about doubled their proportions among lawyers and engineers since 1983—to about 30 and 10 percent, respectively—and those proportions are even higher among younger cohorts.

While women made up more than half of the 25- to 34-year-olds employed in managerial and professional specialty occupations in 2000, relatively small proportions of young black and Hispanic women were represented in these occupations. Black women made up about 6 percent of total employment in both executive, administrative, and managerial occupations and professional specialty occupations, while Hispanic women represented just 4 percent of executive and managerial jobs, and only 3 percent of professional jobs. In 1983, however, the corresponding figures for black and Hispanic women were even lower.

Earnings. In 1979 (the first year for which comparable data were available), median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers aged 25 to 34 were \$440 for women and

\$653 for men (in 2000 inflation-adjusted dollars). During the 1980s and early 1990s, inflation-adjusted earnings of women in this group increased slowly, while those of their male counterparts decreased relatively rapidly. (See chart 1.) Since about 1993 however, changes in the earnings of men and women have generally been of similar size and in the same direction. Despite the upturn in earnings that occurred for both men and women during the 1990s, men's earnings (\$603 in 2000) remained below their inflation-adjusted 1979 level, while women's earnings (\$493) rose. As a result of these movements, young women in 2000 earned approximately 82 percent as much as their male counterparts, compared with 67 percent in 1979.

The shrinking earnings gap has many causes, including young women moving into higher-paying occupations, their shift toward year-round work, their increasing educational attainment, and reduced incidences of gaps in their labor force participation. These factors likely led to a rise in the real earnings of young women at the same time that young men were experiencing declines.

Marital status and motherhood. Never-married women and divorced women had the highest labor force participation rates among 25- to 34-year-old women in both 1975 and 2000. Since 1975, however, the gap between these nonmarried women's participation rates and those for married women has narrowed substantially. During that period, the rate for never-married women changed little and that for divorced women grew by about 11 percentage points. In contrast, the participation rate for married women (spouse present) jumped by about 23 percentage points. (See table 2.)

In both 1975 and 2000, women aged 25 to 34 who had no

Definition of contingent workers and alternative work arrangements

Contingent workers

These workers were defined as those who do not have an explicit or implicit contract for long-term employment. To assess the impact of altering some of the defining factors on the estimated size of the contingent workforce, three measures of contingent employment were developed as follows:

Estimate 1. This is the narrowest, measures contingent workers as wage and salary workers who indicated that they expected to work in their current job for 1 year or less and who had worked for their current employer for 1 year or less. Self-employed workers, both incorporated and unincorporated, and independent contractors are excluded from the count of contingent workers under estimate 1; the rationale was that people who work for themselves, by definition, have ongoing employment arrangements, although they may face financial risks. Individuals who worked for temporary help agencies or contract companies are considered contingent under estimate 1 only if they expect their employment arrangement with the temporary help or contract company to last for 1 year or less and they had worked for that company for 1 year or less.

Estimate 2. This estimate expands the measure of the contingent work force by including the self employed—both the incorporated and unincorporated—and independent contractors who expect to be, and had been, in such employment arrangements for 1 year or less. In addition, temporary help and contract company workers are classified as contingent under estimate 2 if they had worked and expected to work for the customers to whom they were assigned for 1 year or less. For example, a “temp” secretary who is sent to a different customer each week but has worked for the same temporary help firm for more than 1 year and expects to be able to continue with that firm indefi-

nately is contingent under estimate 2, but not under estimate 1. In contrast, a “temp” who is assigned to a single client for more than a year and expects to be able to stay with that client for more than a year is not counted as contingent under either estimate.

Estimate 3. This estimate expands the count of contingency by removing the 1-year requirement on both expected duration of the job and current tenure for wage and salary workers. Thus, the estimate effectively includes all the wage and salary workers who do not expect their employment to last, except for those who, for personal reasons, expect to leave jobs that they would otherwise be able to keep. Thus, a worker who had held a job for 5 years could be considered contingent if he or she now viewed the job as temporary. These conditions on expected and current tenure are not relaxed for the self employed and independent contractors, because they were asked different set of questions from wage and salary workers.

Alternative work arrangement.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics defines four types of alternative work arrangements:

Independent contractors: These include consultants, freelance workers, and independent contractors, regardless of whether or not they are wage and salary workers or self employed.

On-call workers: These include persons who are called into work only when they are needed.

Temporary help agency workers: These include workers who are paid by a temporary help agency but work temporarily at a client site.

Contract company workers: These workers are employees of a contract company who usually work for only one customer and at that customer’s work site.

children under 18 were considerably more likely to be in the labor force than those who were mothers. However, while the participation rate for childless women changed little over this period, the rate for those with children under age 18 grew by about 25 percentage points to 70 percent in 2000. In fact, the labor force participation rate for those with children under three years almost doubled over the period, growing from 33 percent in 1975 to 63 percent in 2000.

While women with children were less likely to be labor force participants than those without children, the reverse was true for men—those with children were somewhat more likely to be in the labor force than those without. Although labor force participation rates for women with children grew rapidly between 1975 and 2000, they still remain well below those of men with children, suggesting that raising children continues to have a greater impact on the working lives of mothers than on those of fathers.

Table 5. Women aged 25 to 34 with work experience in 1975 and 1999 by race, Hispanic origin, and marital status, March 2000 status, March 2000 CPS

Race, Hispanic origin, and marital status	1975					1999				
	Total with work experience (in thousands)	Percent with work experience				Total with work experience (in thousands)	Percent with work experience			
		Usually worked full time			Usually worked part time		Usually worked full time			Usually worked part time
		As percent of population	Total ¹	50-52 weeks			As percent of population	Total ¹	50-52 weeks	
Total, all races	10,141	63.9	74.3	45.5	25.7	15,517	80.9	80.3	62.9	19.7
Married, spouse present	6,936	58.4	68.8	38.3	31.2	8,372	76.5	75.7	57.6	24.3
Unmarried, total	3,205	80.2	86.3	61.2	13.7	7,146	86.6	85.7	69.2	14.3
Married spouse absent	91	73.4	79.1	44.0	20.9	220	82.1	85.0	60.0	15.0
Widowed	65	59.1	84.6	46.2	15.4	51	63.0	76.5	60.8	23.5
Divorced	1,013	81.5	87.0	59.3	12.9	1,319	89.3	86.2	70.4	13.8
Separated	483	66.9	79.1	55.1	20.7	512	81.3	86.6	65.4	13.3
Never married	1,553	86.4	88.6	68.8	11.5	5,044	87.1	85.7	69.7	14.3
White, total	8,634	62.9	72.3	44.2	27.7	12,234	80.8	78.9	61.9	21.1
Married, spouse present	6,170	57.3	66.8	37.0	33.3	7,188	76.5	74.1	56.2	25.9
Unmarried, total	2,463	83.2	86.4	62.3	13.6	5,046	87.7	85.7	69.9	14.3
Married spouse absent	67	72.0	77.6	41.8	22.4	156	83.9	82.7	57.7	17.3
Widowed	46	59.7	89.1	54.3	10.9	33	57.9	69.7	57.6	30.3
Divorced	849	81.6	87.3	58.5	12.7	1,086	89.2	86.1	71.4	13.9
Separated	296	70.3	77.0	43.2	23.0	342	79.4	86.5	63.7	13.5
Never married	1,205	90.5	88.4	71.1	11.6	3,429	88.8	85.7	70.7	14.3
Black, total	1,267	70.4	85.6	53.0	14.4	2,387	83.8	86.9	70.0	13.1
Married, spouse present	615	71.6	86.2	50.4	13.8	725	82.7	86.6	73.0	13.1
Unmarried, total	652	69.4	85.0	55.4	15.0	1,662	84.3	87.0	68.7	13.0
Married spouse absent	22	78.6	86.4	50.0	13.6	37	75.5	91.7	59.5	10.8
Widowed	17	56.7	70.6	23.5	29.4	18	78.3	88.9	66.7	11.1
Divorced	149	79.3	85.9	61.7	14.1	181	88.3	87.8	66.9	12.2
Separated	179	60.9	74.4	46.2	15.6	153	86.0	89.5	71.9	10.5
Never married	285	71.3	86.7	56.8	13.3	1,273	83.9	86.5	68.9	13.5
Hispanic origin, total	-	-	-	-	-	1,844	65.7	82.2	60.0	17.8
Married, spouse present	-	-	-	-	-	1,038	60.2	80.3	55.4	19.7
Unmarried, total	-	-	-	-	-	806	74.5	84.6	66.0	15.3
Married spouse absent	-	-	-	-	-	43	71.7	83.7	67.4	16.3
Widowed	-	-	-	-	-	11	64.7	90.9	54.5	9.1
Divorced	-	-	-	-	-	109	77.9	87.2	62.4	12.8
Separated	-	-	-	-	-	94	65.3	86.2	59.6	12.8
Never married	-	-	-	-	-	549	76.1	83.7	67.9	16.2

¹Percents may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

and Hispanics are included in both the white and black population groups.

NOTE: Detail for the above race and Hispanic-origin groups will not sum to totals because data for the "other races" group are not presented

Dashes indicate data not available

Table 6. Multiple jobholders by age and sex, May 1975 and May 2001

Age and sex	May 1975			May 2001		
	Multiple jobholders			Multiple jobholders		
	Total employed	Number	Percent of employed	Total employed	Number	Percent of employed
Women 25 to 34 years	7,574	248	3.3	13,680	781	5.7
Men 25 to 34 years	12,798	850	6.6	16,215	901	5.6

Unemployment. In 2000, the unemployment rate for women aged 25 to 34 was little different from that of men, 4.0 percent compared with 3.4 percent; both rates were at their lowest points in 25 years. (See chart 2.) A quarter of a century earlier, however, the women's rate exceeded the men's by a little more than 2 percentage points. The gap virtually disappeared in 1980 when the men's rate shot up in response to a short but sharp recession, while the women's rate increased less rapidly. The gap has remained quite narrow ever since, although the rate for men tends to increase more sharply during recessionary periods than the rate for women.

In terms of employment, economic downturns typically have a greater impact on men than women because men are more likely to work in industries such as manufacturing and construction that are highly sensitive to changes in the business cycle. Women, on the other hand, tend to work in industries such as services and government, which are less responsive to business cycles. Consequently, the swings that are evident in the unemployment rate for men are more muted in the rate for women.

Work schedules. Young women worked more throughout the year in 1999 than in 1975.⁵ Table 5 shows that 81 percent of women aged 25 to 34 worked at some time during 1999, compared with 64 percent in 1975. Moreover, of those with such work experience, about 63 percent worked full time and year round⁶ in 1999, compared with less than half (46 percent) in 1975.

Average weekly hours for young women working in nonagricultural industries increased by 2.5 hours over the period, rising from 35.4 in 1976 to 37.9 in 2000, while men's average weekly hours grew only slightly, from 43.2 hours in 1976 to 43.9 hours in 2000. The increase in average hours worked by young women resulted not only from an increase in the number working full time, but also from a decrease in the proportion with short workweeks and an increase in the proportion with very long workweeks. In 1976, only about 7 percent of young women worked 49 hours or more per week, and 21 percent worked fewer than 30 hours. By 2000, the proportion working very long workweeks had nearly doubled to 13 percent,

while the proportion working less than 30 hours per week decreased to 17 percent.

Among the race-ethnic groups, black women were more likely to work full time and year round than were white women: about 70 percent of the young black women with work experience in 1999 worked year round, full time, compared with 62 percent for their white counterparts. The comparable proportion for Hispanic women was 60 percent. In 1975, the proportions were 53 percent for black women and 44 percent for white women.

Multiple jobholding. Women aged 25 to 34 years were more likely to hold two or more jobs in 2001 than in 1975. About 6 percent of all employed women in May 2001 held more than one job, compared with 3 percent 25 years earlier. (See table 6.) Interestingly, the multiple jobholding rate for men in the same age group was lower in 2001 than in 1975. As a result, although men were twice as likely as women to hold more than one job in 1975, there was little difference in their proportions in 2000.

Current labor market issues

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, additional measures of such labor force concepts as contingent and alternative work arrangements, worker displacement, and pension and health insurance coverage were developed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Although these measures did not exist in 1975, we include a discussion of them here in order to gain a broader picture of the labor market in which young women participate today.

Alternative work arrangements and contingent workers In recent years, contingent workers and those working in alternative arrangements have become the focus of debate. (See the box on page 8 for BLS definitions of alternative work arrangements and contingent workers.) Critics of these arrangements raise concern about these jobs because often they provide lower pay and lower rates of employer-provided pension and health care coverage than more traditional arrangements.⁷ Other researchers point out that these kinds of jobs may pro-

Chart 1. Real median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers aged 25 to 34 years by sex, 1979–2000

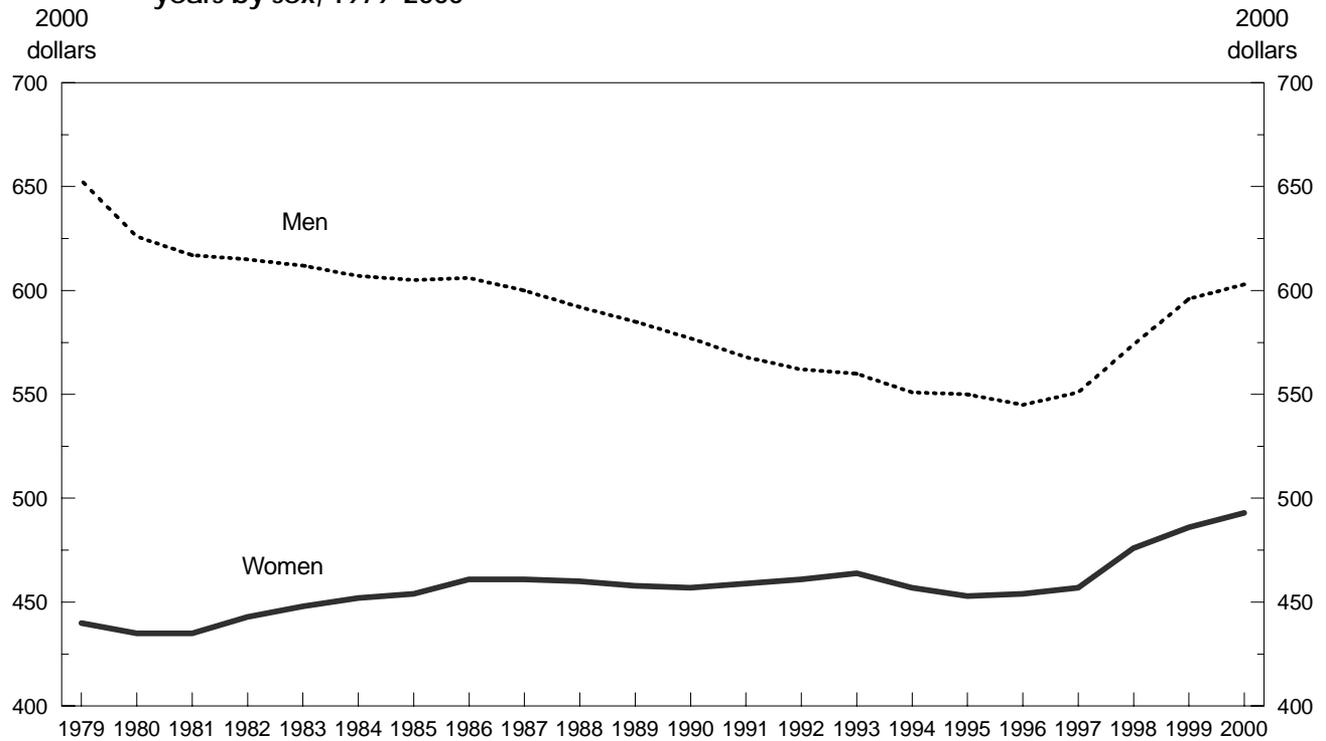


Chart 2. Unemployment rates for women and men aged 25 to 34 years, 1975–2000



vide women with flexibility and convenience that may not be available with traditional work arrangements. Also, there is some evidence that these arrangements may provide jobs to persons who would otherwise be unemployed.⁸ In addition, as pointed out in recent BLS analyses,⁹ while nearly half of on-call workers and temporary help agency workers say they would prefer regular employment, most consultants and independent contractors seem to prefer their current arrangements. Moreover, pay, benefits, and other aspects of these kinds of jobs differ greatly among the various alternative arrangements.

In 1995, BLS began collecting data on the prevalence of alternative work arrangements through a supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS).¹⁰ Data from the supplement clearly indicate that the incidence of such work arrangements is not very widespread. Only about 6 percent of women aged 25 to 34 are employed in the four BLS-defined alternative work arrangements, the most common being independent contracting. (See table 7.) In fact, since 1995, the proportion of women aged 25 to 34 with alternative arrangements has edged down.¹¹

Among the alternative work arrangements, perhaps the one that has received the most attention is the temporary help arrangement. Data from the supplement show that workers in these jobs have the lowest median weekly earnings among all of the arrangements, as well as the lowest rates of health and pension benefit coverage.¹² And while only a very small proportion of all employed 25- to 34-year-old women were temporary help agency workers, young black and Hispanic women were somewhat more likely than white women to be employed in this type of arrangement; at the same time, they were somewhat less likely than white women to work as independent contractors.

One interesting fact about independent contractors is that

men in the arrangement earn, on average, more than men in traditional work arrangements. Female independent contractors, on the other hand, earn less, on average, than their counterparts in traditional arrangements—most likely due to the high percentage of female independent contractors who work part time.

As seen in the box, BLS defines *contingent* workers as those who do not have an explicit or implicit contract for long-term employment. Within that group, three progressively broader measures of contingent employment are defined, known as *estimates 1–3*. The broadest measure, estimate 3, is the one most often cited, and the statements made in this article about contingent workers are all based on this third definition.

As with alternative work arrangements, the proportion of 25- to 34-year-old women who are contingent workers is quite small and has been falling since the survey was first conducted in 1995. About 4 percent of both white and black women in this age group were contingent workers, while the comparable figure for Hispanic women was 6.5 percent. On average, contingent workers have lower pay and benefit coverage than persons in traditional arrangements. In addition, because they view their jobs as short term, they may have little attachment to their employers.

Work at home and flexible schedules. Women frequently cope with the challenge of meeting their job and family responsibilities by selecting jobs that allow them the freedom to change their work schedules or work locations. The tabulation that follows shows some of the results of a May 1997 CPS supplement, about 3 million women aged 25 to 34 who worked full time held jobs that allowed flexibility in their work schedules (numbers in thousands):¹³

Table 7. Employed women aged 25–34 in alternative and traditional work arrangements and in contingent and noncontingent arrangements by race and Hispanic origin, as a percentage of all employed women aged 25 to 34, February 2001

Arrangement	Women			
	Total	White	Black	Hispanic
Total employed ¹	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Contingent workers ²	4.0	4.0	4.1	6.5
Noncontingent workers	96.0	96.0	95.9	93.4
Workers with alternative arrangements				
Independent contractors	3.9	4.2	1.6	2.7
On-call workers	0.8	0.8	0.7	1.0
Temporary help agency workers	1.3	0.9	3.7	2.3
Workers provided by contract firms	0.2	0.3	–	0.2
Workers with traditional arrangements	93.7	93.8	94.0	93.3

¹ Detail may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

² Data on contingent workers refers to those who fall under estimate 3 of contingency. Estimate 3 is the broadest measure of contingency and includes

anyone who does not expect his/her job to last.

NOTE: Dash indicates data not available.

With flexible schedules

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Women, 25 to 34 years	10,486	2,931	28.0
Men, 25 to 34 years	14,721	4,231	28.7

Interestingly, roughly equal proportions of young women and men in this age group work flexible schedules. In addition, 25- to 34-year-old women were more likely than women of other ages to have this kind of flexibility in their jobs.¹⁴

Data from the same 1997 CPS supplement show that about 18 percent of 25- to 34-year-old women did at least some work at home, although less than a third of those who worked at home did so for pay—that is, in addition to their normal wages. Women in this age group were more likely than their male counterparts to work at home, and they also were more likely than men to get paid for their at-home work. The vast majority of 25- to 34-year-old women worked only partly at home, with just 4 percent reporting that they had worked exclusively from home. Finally, among the racial and ethnic groups, 20 percent of white women worked at home, compared with 11 percent of Hispanic women and 8 percent of black women. (See table 8.)

Worker displacement. Nearly a million women aged 25 to 34 lost or left their jobs from January 1997 to December 1999 because their plant or company closed or moved, there was insufficient work to do, or their positions or shifts were abolished. (See table 9.) In the latest CPS supplement on displaced workers conducted in February 2000, workers who were displaced during the January 1997–December 1999 period were asked questions about their employment status in February 2000.

About 86 percent of women aged 25 to 34 who were displaced were in the labor force in February 2000. This compares with about 97 percent of their male counterparts. Women in this age group were the most likely among all displaced female workers to be re-employed. Moreover, of all displaced female workers in the prime working-age group (25 to 54 years), 25- to 34-year-olds were the least likely to be unemployed when surveyed in February 2000. White women in this age group who were displaced were more likely to be re-employed in February 2000 and less likely to be unemployed or not in the labor force than either their black or Hispanic counterparts.

The fact that young women were more likely than young men to have left the labor force after being displaced may suggest that some women take the opportunity to begin a family or to pursue personal goals that do not involve work for pay during these primary child-bearing years. The movement out of the labor market, however, comes with a price. Research has shown that when women leave the labor force for extended periods to pursue family responsibilities, they return to work facing lower wages than those who remained in the labor force, and they never quite catch up.¹⁵

Table 8. Persons aged 25 to 34 working on primary job in nonagricultural industries by prevalence of work at home, sex, and race, May 1997

Work at home	Women		Men	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total, at work	13,792	100.0	16,414	100.0
Reporting work at home ..	2,498	18.2	2,358	14.5
Primary job partly at home	1,949	14.2	2,172	13.2
Primary job entirely at home	549	4.0	186	1.1
White, at work	11,165	100.0	13,703	100.0
Reporting work at home	2,230	20.0	2,122	15.5
Black, at work	1,850	100.0	1,735	100.0
Reporting work at home	151	8.2	108	6.2
Hispanic origin, at work	1,434	100.0	2,280	100.0
Reporting work at home ..	158	11.0	133	5.8

NOTE: Percentages are based on unpublished figures of the number of persons who responded to the question on work at home.

Working poor. For many women, economic gains over the past 25 years have narrowed the gap in earnings with men and have led to more economic and financial independence. Nonetheless, nearly 1 million young women (25 to 34 years) were classified among the working poor in 1999. (See table 10.) These are women who were in the labor force (working or looking for work) for at least 27 weeks during the year, but whose income fell below the official poverty threshold.¹⁶ Women in this age group were somewhat more likely than their male counterparts to be among the working poor in 1999 (7 percent versus 5 percent).

Black women of this age were far more likely to be among the working poor than were either white or Hispanic women. Nearly 16 percent of the young black women who had been in the labor force for at least 27 weeks in 1999 were considered to be below the poverty level—nearly three times the rate of their white counterparts. A little more than 10 percent of young Hispanic women were among the working poor.

In contrast to young black women, black men in this age group were no more likely to be among the working poor than white men (5 percent). Hispanic men, however, were more than twice as likely to be among the working poor as either their white or black counterparts.

Health insurance and pension plan coverage. Monetary earnings are only part of a worker's compensation—health insurance, pensions, and other benefits are important components as well. The rising costs of health care and prescription drugs in the United States have made health insurance a vital

Table 9. Displaced workers aged 25 to 34 who lost jobs between January 1997 and December 1999 by sex, race, Hispanic origin, and employment status in February 2000

(Numbers in thousands)

Sex and race	Number (in thousands)	Percent distribution by employment status in February 2000			
		Total	Employed	Unemployed	Not in the labor force
Women, total	917	100.0	75.9	9.6	14.5
White	715	100.0	78.0	9.0	13.0
Black	165	100.0	70.9	9.7	19.4
Hispanic	122	100.0	63.8	16.0	20.2
Men, total	1,002	100.0	84.8	11.7	3.5
White	822	100.0	84.4	12.3	3.3
Black	151	100.0	89.4	10.2	0.4
Hispanic	159	100.0	82.2	13.6	4.2

NOTE: Detail for the above race and Hispanic-origin groups will not sum to totals because data for the "other races" group are not presented and Hispanics are included in both the white and black population groups.

Table 10. Persons aged 25 to 34 in the labor force for 27 weeks or more: Poverty status by age, sex, race, and who were Hispanic origin, 1999

(Numbers in thousands)

Age and sex	Total	White	Black	Hispanic origin	Below poverty level				Poverty rate ¹			
					Total	White	Black	Hispanic origin	Total	White	Black	Hispanic origin
Total, 25 to 34 years ...	30,695	24,839	4,096	4,178	1,835	1,290	433	486	6.0	5.2	10.6	11.6
Men, 25 to 34 years	16,728	13,865	1,899	2,558	852	707	93	315	5.1	5.1	4.9	12.3
Women, 25 to 34 years	13,967	10,975	2,197	1,620	983	582	340	172	7.0	5.3	15.5	10.6

¹Number below the poverty level as a percent of the total in the labor force for 27 weeks or more.

because data for the "other races" group are not presented and Hispanics are included in both the white and black population groups.

NOTE: Detail for the race and Hispanic-origin groups will not sum to totals

necessity for most people. The vast majority (83 percent) of women aged 25 to 34 have health insurance from some source.¹⁷ White women had higher rates of coverage than either black or Hispanic women, although the rates for whites and blacks were quite close. (See table 11.)

About 60 percent of female wage and salary workers in the 25- to 34-year age group received health insurance on their primary job.¹⁸ Black women were the most likely to receive health insurance through their employer, followed by white and Hispanic women. Less than half of all young Hispanic women received health insurance through their main job.

Pension plans, either in the form of an employer-provided retirement plan, Individual Retirement Account (IRA), or Keogh Plan, are essential for future financial security. About half of all female wage and salary workers aged 25 to 34 years had a pension plan in February 2001. As with health insurance, the rates for white and black women were quite similar, at 50 percent and 48

percent, respectively, while only 38 percent of Hispanic women reported having a pension plan through their employer.

YOUNG WOMEN TODAY face many of the same career choices and challenges as did their peers 25 years earlier. While decisions about school, family, marriage, and careers often factor into one another, it is clear that today's young women are making somewhat different choices. In particular, they are spending more time at market work than their predecessors. As a result, more women today are having to balance their roles as wives and mothers with their jobs.

As the statistics described throughout this article indicate, 25- to 34-year-old women today are much more likely to participate in the labor force. They also are more likely to have gone to college, to work more, and to pursue careers in higher paying occupations. These decisions and opportunities, while rendering them better off financially than they were 25 years ago, also

Table 11. Female wage and salary workers aged 25 to 34 by health insurance coverage and pension coverage, February 2001

Characteristic	Total	White	Black	Hispanic
Total wage and salary workers	12,964	10,209	2,029	1,690
With health insurance coverage	10,775	8,555	1,622	1,160
Percent of total wage and salary workers	83.1	83.8	79.9	68.6
With coverage through main job	7,766	6,068	1,233	802
Percent of total wage and salary workers	59.9	59.4	60.8	47.5
With pension coverage	6,423	5,116	964	639
Percent of total wage and salary workers	49.5	50.1	47.5	37.8

present them with the difficult problems involved in deciding how to prioritize their lives among work, marriage, and children.

Although women aged 25 to 34 tend to earn more—in real terms—than they did in 1975, black and Hispanic women still

do not have parity with white women in terms of earnings and benefits. While these minority women have closed the gap significantly over the past decade and a half, there is still much progress to be made. □

Notes

¹ In this article, the term "market work" refers to jobs outside the home, whether paid or unpaid.

² Most of the data in this chapter were derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly sample survey of households conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. For more information regarding the Current Population Survey, see *Current Population Survey: Design and Methodology*, Bureau of Labor Statistics Technical Paper 63, March 2000. Where the CPS did not provide complete information, other sources were used.

³ See *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2000* (Bureau of the Census, 2000), pp. 51–54; see also comparable tables in earlier editions.

⁴ Lugaila, Terry A., "Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1998 (Update)," *Current Population Reports*, Series P20–514 (Bureau of the Census, December 1998).

⁵ Data on work experience come from the March supplement to the CPS in which respondents are asked questions about their work experience in the prior year.

⁶ Full-time, year-round workers are those who worked at least 50 weeks out of the calendar year and worked full time (35 hours or more) for the majority of weeks that they worked.

⁷ See, for example, Helene J. Jorgensen, *When Good Jobs Go Bad* (Washington, DC, 2030 Center, 1999.)

⁸ See, for example, Anne E. Polivka, "Into contingent and alternative employment: by choice?" *Monthly Labor Review*, October 1996, pp. 55–74 and Marisa DiNatale, "Characteristics of and preference for alternative work arrangements, 1999" *Monthly Labor Review*, March 2001, pp. 47–49.

⁹ *Contingent and Alternative Employment Arrangements, February 2001*, USDL 01–153, (U.S. Department of Labor) May 24, 2001.

¹⁰ The first supplement on Contingent and Alternative Work Arrangements was conducted in February 1995. Subsequent supplements were conducted in February of 1997, 1999, and 2001.

¹¹ In the February 1995 and 1997 Contingent and Alternative Work

Arrangements supplements to the CPS, 7.5 percent of employed young women were working in one of the four alternative arrangements. In February 1999 and in February 2001, the percentage edged down to 6.3 percent.

¹² In the February 1999 supplement, full-time female temporary help agency workers age 16 and over earned a median weekly salary of \$331 compared with \$474 for women in traditional arrangements. Earnings data for workers with traditional arrangements were not collected in the February 2001 supplement.

¹³ The discussion that follows on workers with flexible schedules is limited to those who usually work full time, because altering the beginning and ending hours of work often is a requirement in part-time jobs.

¹⁴ See Lonnie Golden, "Flexible work schedules: what are we trading off to get them?" *Monthly Labor Review*, March 2001, pp. 52–53.

¹⁵ See Lori G. Kletzer and Robert W. Fairlie "The Long-Term Costs of Job Displacement for Young Adult Workers," unpublished manuscript, Department of Economics, University of California at Santa Cruz. See also Joyce P. Jacobsen and Laurence M. Levin, "Effects of intermittent labor force attachment on women's earnings," *Monthly Labor Review*, September 1995, pp. 14–19.

¹⁶ For information about how poverty is determined, see *Poverty in the United States: 1999—Current Population Report* series P–60, no. 210 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, September 2000). For persons living with family members, the earnings thresholds used to define poverty status are defined in terms of total family income, including the earnings of other family members, as well as income from other sources. For persons living alone or with nonrelatives, the earnings thresholds are based solely on their personal income.

¹⁷ Data on health insurance and pension coverage are from a CPS supplement conducted in February 2001.

¹⁸ Note that others might have been offered health insurance by their employers, but declined coverage because they were covered by a spouse's policy or for other reasons.