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Minnesota Women in the Twentieth Century 1900-1990

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Introduction

This report provides a statistical overview of the status of women in Minnesota during the 20th century. The data show some aspects of the changing role of women over the years. Included are data on marital and family status, educational attainment, labor force participation and other demographic topics.

Most information has been compiled from data from the United States census, which is conducted every ten years. Other data have been compiled from the Minnesota Department of Health. Historical data are provided when available. There is less information for the early years of this century.

Highlights of this report include:

- Current marital status patterns resemble those in the state in the first part of the century. The number of divorces tripled in the past 30 years.
- Women are almost half of the paid labor force, and almost two-thirds of women participate in the paid labor force.
- The educational attainment of women has increased. The percent of women age 25 and over with at least a college degree increased more than fivefold between 1940 and 1990.
- The number of female-headed households and families has increased.
- There has been a progressive decrease in the income of female-headed families as a percentage of the income of married-couple families between 1960 and 1990.
- The age group with the highest percent increase in number of women between 1980 and 1990 was women age 40 to 44, reflecting the aging of the baby boom generation.
- Women continue to outlive men and the gap between them has increased over time.

The Commission on the Economic Status of Women has developed statistical tables from the 1990 census Summary Tape File (STF) 4 on employment, poverty and household and marital status. A packet of tables with information by county is also available. More detailed tables from STF 4 are available on the following: age; educational; marital status; labor force participation; full-time employment status; number of workers by family type; age of children by employment status and hours worked of parents; class of worker occupation; family type by presence and age of children; family income by family type and age of householder, presence and age of children, and number of workers; incomes of full-time year-round workers; and persons in poverty. These are also available by race.

Women and Marriage

During this century, the percentages of married, single (never-married), widowed and divorced women have varied. There have also been changes in the numbers of marriages and divorces. While marriage remains the dominant marital status, there is an increasing tendency among younger persons to remain single or to marry at later ages. In addition, the number of divorces has risen sharply.

Marital Status of Women 1900 to 1990

The proportion of Minnesota women who are single, married, widowed or divorced has changed during this century. In 1950 and 1960 there was an increase in married women and a decrease in single women. Chart 1 shows the changes in those percentages between 1900 and 1990.

In 1900, one-third of the female population in Minnesota was single. By 1990, that figure was down to 24 percent. The percentage of single women reached its lowest levels in 1950 and 1960 when the percentage of married women was at its highest.

During this century the percentage of married women has remained at or just under three-fifths except for 1950 and 1960. In those years, the percentage of married women peaked at nearly two-thirds.

The percentage of women who are widowed has increased gradually since 1900, from 8 to over 11 percent of all women. This is due in great part to the increased life expectancy of women, which has been consistently greater than that for men. Women are also more likely to lose a spouse through death than men.

The percentage of women who are divorced also increased during this century, from less than 1 percent at the beginning of the century to just over 8 percent in 1990.

Marriages and Divorces 1900 to 1990

The number of marriages, the number of divorces, and the ratio between them has

changed dramatically in Minnesota since 1900. Chart 2 shows the change in the number of marriages and divorces between 1930 and 1990. Data from 1900 are not included since data are not available for 1910 and 1920.

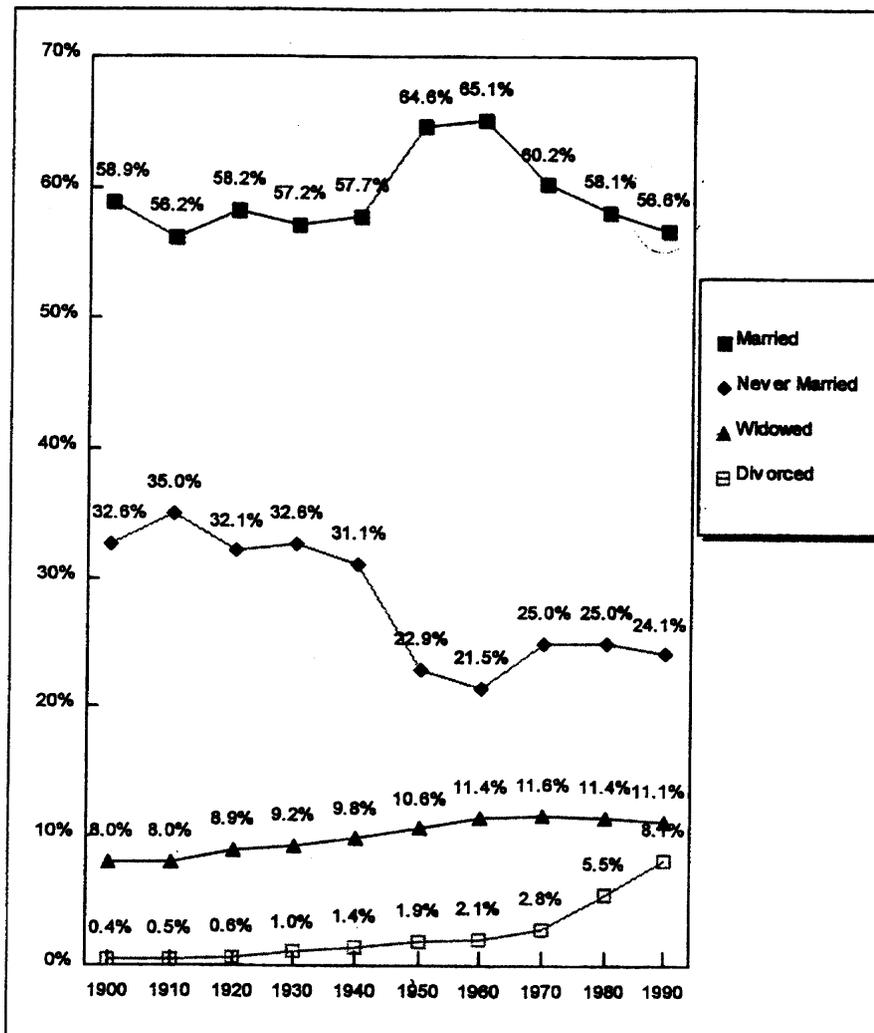
As the *percentage* of married women increased after World War II, the *number* of marriages also increased. However, the number of marriages declined in 1960, just as the percentage of married women was at its peak. The number of marriages increased again in 1970 and reached its highest level in 1980 before dropping again in 1990. This reflects an increase in the number of women of marriageable age, a result of the increased number of births in the years after World War II.

The actual marriage rate - the number of marriages per 1,000 population - has showed a marked variation in this century. It was at its highest in 1950 and at its lowest in 1960.

While the number of divorces increased each decade since 1900, the greatest increases were between 1960 and 1980. The number nearly doubled from 1960 to 1970 and almost doubled again between 1970 and 1980, from just over 4,000 to over 15,000 in 20 years. There was only a small increase from 1980 to 1990.

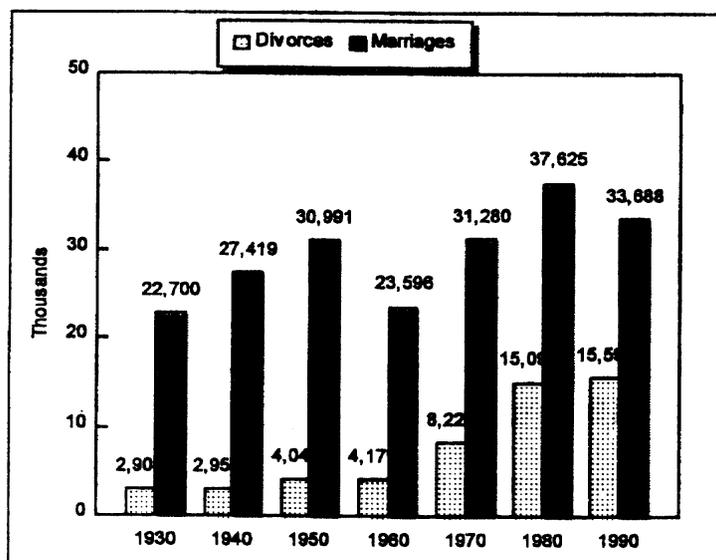
The ratio of divorces to marriages has increased substantially in Minnesota over the years. In 1950, there was one divorce for every 7.7 marriages. By 1990, the ratio was one divorce for every 2.2 marriages.

The actual divorce rate - the number of divorces per 1,000 population - increased very slowly in the first half of this century. Between 1960 and 1980 the rate more than tripled - from 1.1 to 3.7 - before dropping slightly in 1990.



**Chart 1:
Marital Status of
Minnesota Women
1900 to 1990**

**Chart 2:
Marriages and
Divorces
in Minnesota
1930 to 1990**



Women, Work and Education

In this century there have been changes in the working patterns and educational levels of women. A greater percentage of women now participate in the labor force. Also, women are far better educated than in prior years. Despite these advances, women are still paid lower wages than their male counterparts.

Women in the Labor Force 1900 to 1990

One of the most significant social changes of this century occurred when women began to enter the labor force in large numbers. Women accounted for only 15 percent of the labor force in 1900. By 1990 that percentage had risen to over 46 percent. Chart 3 shows the representation of women in the labor force in this century.

At the turn of the century, just under one-fifth of all women were in the paid workforce. In the next four decades the percentage rose slightly and by 1940 had increased to almost 23 percent.

Women began entering the labor force in greater numbers when they replaced men entering military service during World War II. Increases in their participation in the labor force continued in the decades following that war.

Large increases have occurred in every decade since 1960. During this time women's participation increased from just over one-third in 1960 to more than three-fifths of women in the state in 1990. Minnesota women participate in the labor force at a higher rate than the national average.

Chart 4 shows the increase in the percentage of Minnesota women in the labor force between 1900 and 1990.

Labor Force Participation by Age 1960 to 1990

Middle-aged women were largely responsible for the increase of women in the labor force prior to 1960. Since then the largest gains have been made by younger women.

Between 1960 and 1990, the percentage of women in the labor force increased for all age groups of women, except for those age 65 and older. For women of usual working age (16-64) participation rates rose from 40 to 77 percent. Chart 5 shows the change in the percentage of Minnesota women in the labor force by age between 1960 and 1990.

The largest increase occurred for the group of women age 25 to 34. In the past, women in this age group participated in the workforce at lower rates than did other women of usual working age. Their rate has increased the greatest, rising from 3 out of 10 women in 1960 to over 8 out of 10 in 1990.

This change in the participation of these younger women has contributed to another major social change. There has been an increase in the number of mothers of young children in the labor force.

Historical data are available for married women with children under age 6. In 1960 their labor force participation rate was just over 17 percent. Ten years later it had risen to just under 30 percent and by 1980 was at 50 percent. In 1990 it was up to 72 percent.

Chart 3:
Labor Force Participation in Minnesota by Sex 1900 to 1990

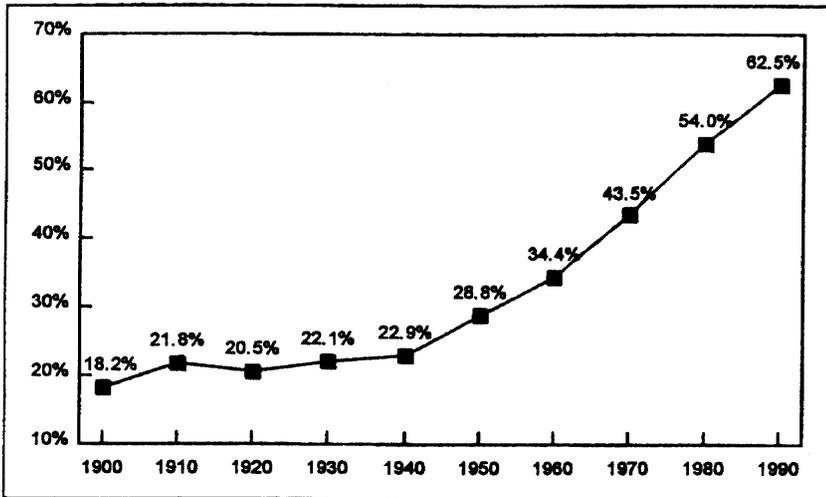
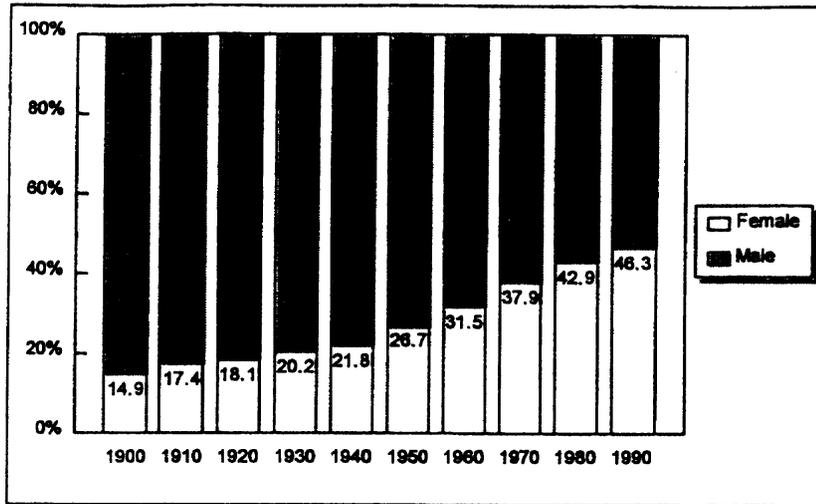
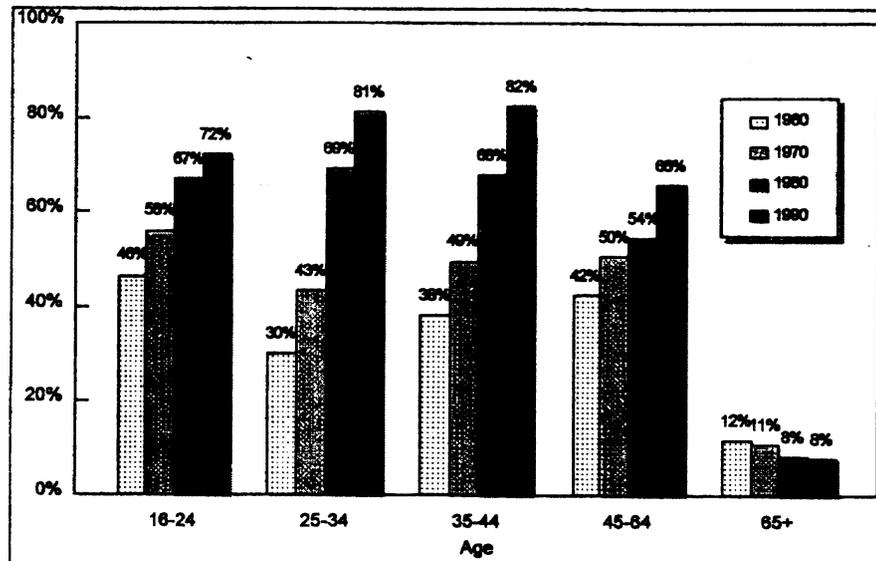


Chart 4:
Labor Force Participation of Minnesota Women 1900 to 1990

Chart 5:
Labor Force Participation of Minnesota Women by Age 1960 to 1990



Education Levels for Women 1940 to 1990

Between 1940 and 1990, the education levels of Minnesota women increased steadily. A higher percentage of women age 25 and over had completed high school, attended college or earned college or advanced degrees in 1990 than in the prior years. Chart 6 shows the educational attainment of women age 25 and over from 1940 to 1990.

In 1940 nearly three-fourths of women 25 and over had less than a high school education. By 1990 this had fallen to less than one-fifth. Over those 50 years the percentage of females whose highest educational level was the completion of high school rose from 17 percent to 42 percent before dropping to 35 percent in 1990. This drop reflects the increases of women in education beyond high school.

Women's attendance at and graduation from college has also steadily increased since 1940. At that time, only about 8 percent of women 25 and over had attended college and only 4 percent had a college degree. In 1990, the percentage of women who had attended college increased to 29 percent and the number who had completed a bachelor's degree or higher increased to over 19 percent.

The level of education for women in Minnesota is higher than the national average. In 1940 Minnesota women had an average of 8.8 years of education. This rose to 12.3 in 1970. In 1980 U.S. women age 25 and over had an average of 12.4 years of education. State data are not available by sex for that year but women and men in Minnesota had a median educational attainment of 12.6 years. In 1990 U.S. women had an average of 12.7 years of education.

Education and the Earnings Gap 1980 to 1990

Despite the increase in women's education levels, there is a gap between men's and women's earnings. Women working full-time, year-round earn between 64 percent to 71 percent of what men at comparable levels of education earn. However, from 1980 to 1990 the wage gap between men and women decreased at all education levels. Chart 7 shows earnings by education level in 1990.

In 1980 women college graduates had earnings of only around 62 percent of those of their male counterparts. By 1990, this had risen to 69 percent. The average earnings of women with college degrees were roughly equivalent to those of men with a high school diploma.

The earnings gap for women with one to three years of college was similar to that of women who had completed college. In 1990, earnings for women with some college were at about 67 percent of levels for similarly educated men. Women with graduate degrees had the smallest income gap, as they made 71 percent of what their male counterparts earned.

In 1980, women with a high school education or less fared slightly worse than better-educated women. They earned just over 55 percent of the average salary of males with the same level of education. But by 1990, women with some high school education earned 68 percent of what their male counterparts earn.

Chart 6:
Educational Attainment
of Minnesota Women
Age 25 and Over
1940 to 1990

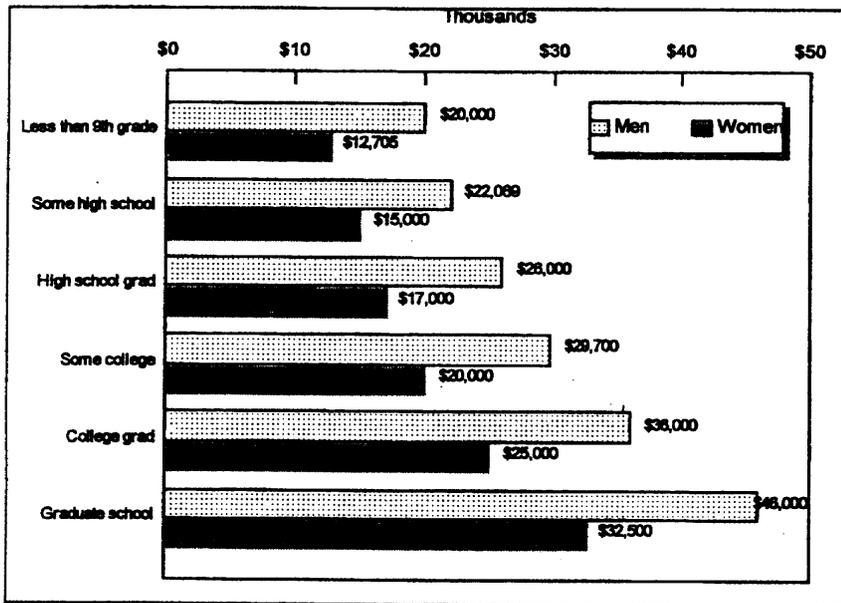
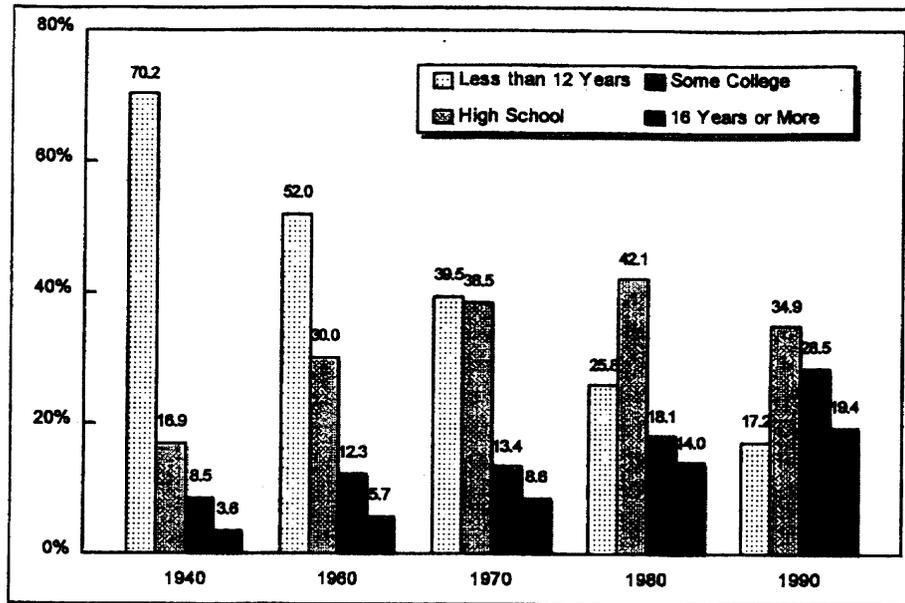


Chart 7:
Median Earnings of
Minnesota Workers by
Educational Attainment
of Full-Time Year-Round
Employed Persons
Age 25 and Over
1990

Women, Families and Poverty

The percentage of female-headed households and families has increased in the past 50 years. However, husband-wife families continue to be the dominant family type. While women are paid less than men, an increasing number of women have sole financial responsibility for themselves or their families. Many female-headed households have incomes below the poverty line. In fact, people living in households headed by women are the poorest people in the state. Households with older women and families headed by younger women with children are most likely to live in poverty.

Female-Headed Households 1940 to 1990

The percentage of female-headed households increased greatly between 1940 and 1990. Female-headed households were under 14 percent of all households in 1940. By 1990 they had increased to over 26 percent. Chart 8 shows the distribution of households over the last four decades. (A person or persons occupying a housing unit are considered a household. *Households* are classified as family or non-family. Non-family households are either female- or male-headed, and family households are either married-couple, female-headed or male-headed.)

Female-Headed Families 1960 to 1990

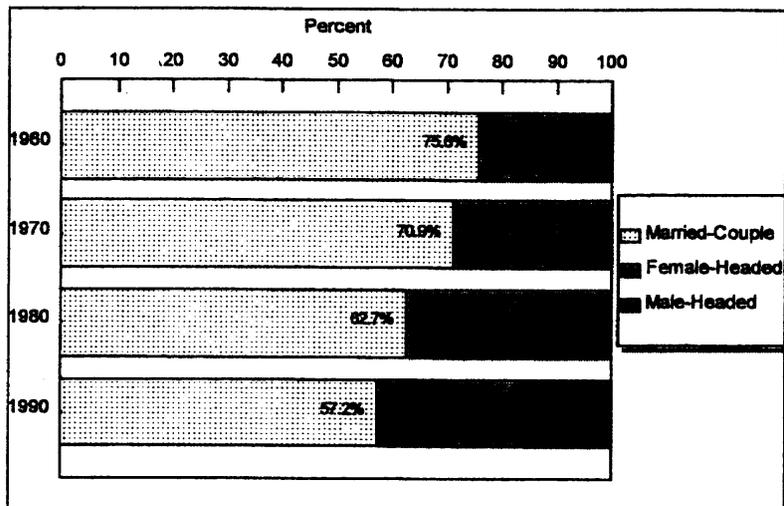
Female-headed families grew from over 7 to over 12 percent of all families between 1960

and 1990. The percentage of male-headed families remained at 3 percent of all families until 1990 when it rose to 4.1 percent. Chart 9 shows family composition over the last 30 years. (A *family* includes two or more persons related by blood, marriage or adoption and may or may not include children. Families are classified as husband-wife, female-headed or male-headed.)

The percentage of families with children that are female-headed has more than tripled between 1960 and 1990. These families accounted for only 5 percent of families with children in 1960, but were almost 16 percent by 1990. Chart 10 shows the change in families with children by type of family during the past three decades.

Most single-parent families are still headed by women. A woman was the head of family in about 85 percent of all single-parent families in 1960, 1970 and 1980, and 82 percent in 1990.

Chart 8:
Minnesota Households
By Type
1960 to 1990



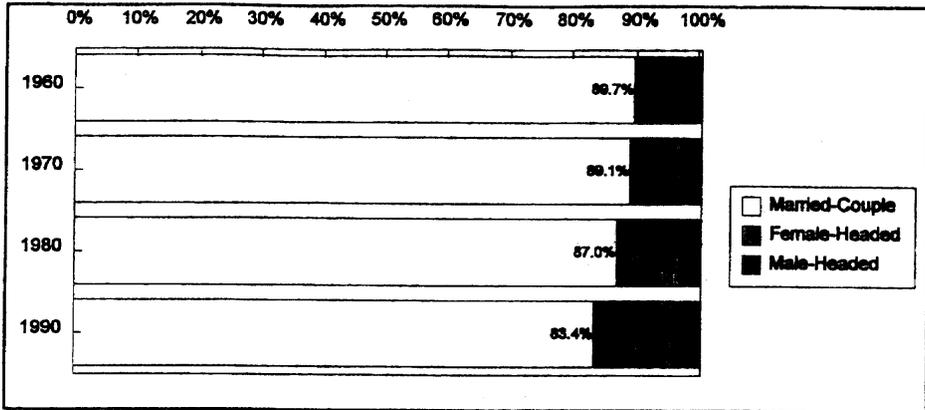
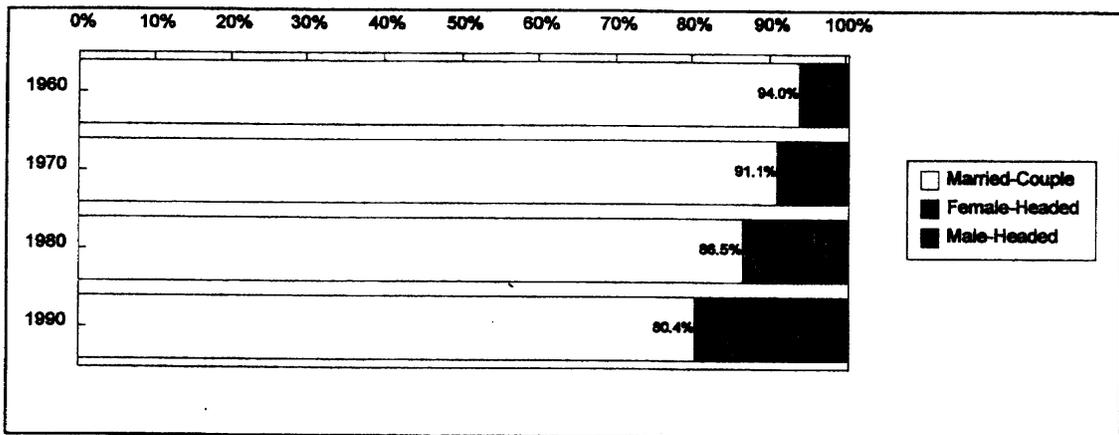


Chart 9:
Minnesota Families
By Type
1960 to 1990

Chart 10:
Minnesota Families
With Children
1960 to 1990



Family Income 1960 to 1990

Husband-wife families have had the highest median income of the three family types. In 1960 male-headed families had an average income that was 78 percent of that of husband-wife families. In the next 20 years that rose only slightly and reached 80 percent in 1980, before dropping to under 69 percent in 1990. Female-headed families have had the lowest median income, and the income of these families declined steadily from 62 to 45 percent of the income of husband-wife families over these years. Chart 11 shows the changes in the incomes of male-headed and female-headed families compared to husband-wife families.

In families where there are children, those headed by a married couple also have the highest income. The incomes of male-headed families with children had an income of 86 percent of husband-wife families in 1960. By 1980 that percentage had declined to 73. The income of female-headed families with children declined from 46 percent of husband-wife families to only 39 percent over this time period. By 1990, the income of male-headed families with children had dropped to 53 percent of married-couple families' income and female-headed families' income had dropped to 32 percent.

Poverty Levels 1970 to 1990

In the decade between 1970 and 1980, the overall percentage of Minnesotans in poverty declined slightly from 10.7 to 9.5 percent. By

1990 it rose to 10.2 percent. In 1990 women and children accounted for almost eight of 10 persons in poverty.

The poverty rate for families in Minnesota remained the same from 1980 to 1990, at about 7 percent. The percentage of families without children in poverty declined slightly from just under five percent to just under 4 percent. Families with children experienced an increase in poverty status, from just under 9 percent to just under 11 percent.

Families headed by females have the highest poverty rates of the three family types. Chart 12 shows the poverty rates of female-headed families. The poverty rate of all female-headed families was just under 23 percent in 1980, down only one percentage point from 1970. By 1990 it had jumped to over 29 percent. In 1990 these families were almost two and a half times as likely as male-headed families to live in poverty.

Female-headed families without children experienced a decrease in their poverty rate, from just under 11 percent in 1970 to just under 7 percent in 1990.

Female-headed families with children have the highest poverty rates. In 1980, 32 percent of these families were in poverty, down slightly from 34 percent in 1970. This jumped to 40 percent in 1990. When these families have children under age six, their poverty rate rises dramatically. In 1970 over 47 percent of these families were in poverty. By 1980 this had risen to over 51 percent, and by 1990 was almost 56 percent.

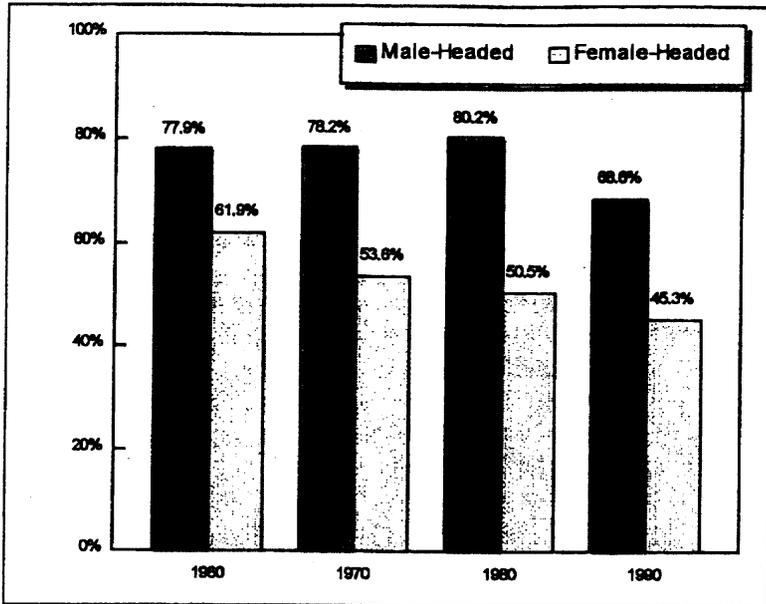
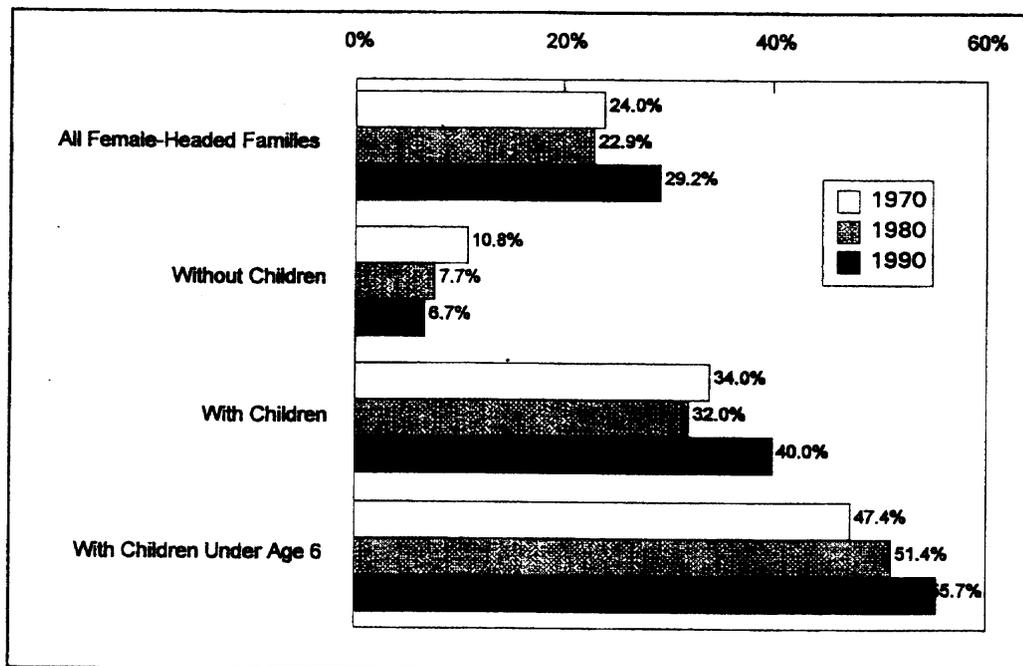


Chart 11:
Incomes of Female-headed and
Male-headed Families as a
Percentage of the Income of
Husband-Wife Families in Minnesota
1960 to 1990

Chart 12:
Percentage of
Female-Headed
Families in
Poverty
in Minnesota
1970 to 1990



Women and Aging

The population of Minnesota, like the population of the United States as a whole, is growing older. The percentage of women age 65 and older is increasing as life expectancies increase and birth rates decrease. Life expectancies increased substantially between 1950 and 1990 for all groups of people. The median age of women has increased and surpassed that of men during this century. The age group with the highest percent increase in number of women between 1980 and 1990 was women age 40 to 44, reflecting the aging of the baby boom generation (those born between 1946 and 1964).

Median Age 1900 to 1990

The median age of women has risen since the turn of the century. Chart 13 shows this change. In 1900 women's median age was 20.6 years. In 1990 it had reached 33.4 years. Prior to 1990, the median age of women was at its highest in 1950 at 30.6 years. Median age of a population is affected by the number of people in each age group. Birth and death rates contribute to changes in the median age. Median age decreased after World War II as a result of the increase in the number of births.

At the beginning of the century the median age of men was greater than that of women, 23.4 years compared to 20.6. The median age of men continued to be higher than that of women until 1950. In that year the median ages of women and men were the same. Since then the median age of women has been greater than that of men.

Life Expectancy 1950 to 1990

Life expectancy for both women and men increased in Minnesota between 1950 and 1990. The increase was greater for women than for men.

Chart 14 shows the increase in life expectancies for Minnesota women and men from 1950 to 1990. Life expectancy at birth is derived from life tables which show what would happen if a constant number of people were born each year and mortality rates by age also remained constant at current levels.

Population Growth 1960 to 1990

The aging of the baby boom generation is reflected in population growth patterns. From 1960 to 1970, when the oldest baby boomers reached age 24, the number of women age 20 to 24 grew significantly. The number of women age 20 to 24 in 1970 was 49 percent higher than the number of 20- to 24-year-old women in 1960. Between 1970 and 1980, the number of women in the 30- to 34-year-old category grew by 51 percent. A decade later, between 1980 and 1990, the number of women age 40 to 44 grew by 50 percent.

Women Age 65 and Above 1900 to 1990

The percentage of the female population age 65 and over has increased steadily in Minnesota since 1900, almost doubling between 1940 and 1990. Chart 15 shows that increase over time.

In 1900 women 65 and older made up slightly less than 4 percent of the total female population. By 1940 that figure was over 7 percent. In 1990, almost 15 percent of all women were in this age group. This increase corresponds to increased life expectancies during these years (see chart 13). Men 65 and older accounted for just over 10 percent of all males in 1990.

At the beginning of this century women were less than half (46 percent) of those 65 and over. By 1990 they were nearly three-fifths (60 percent) of that population, reflecting the increased life expectancy of women.

Chart 13:
Median Age of
Minnesota Women
1900 to 1990

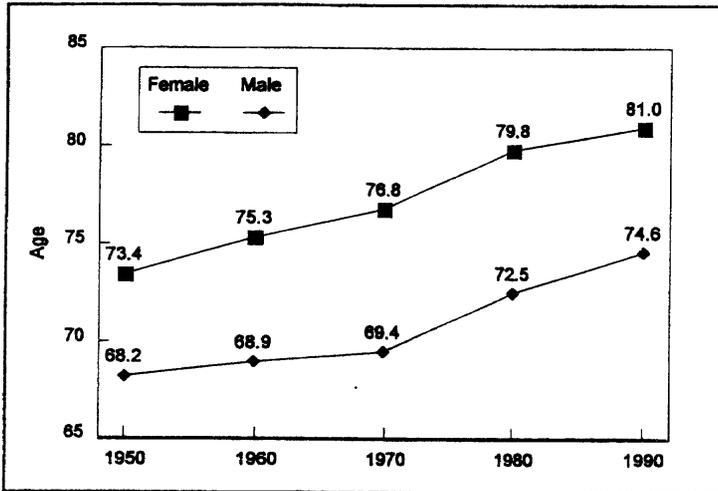
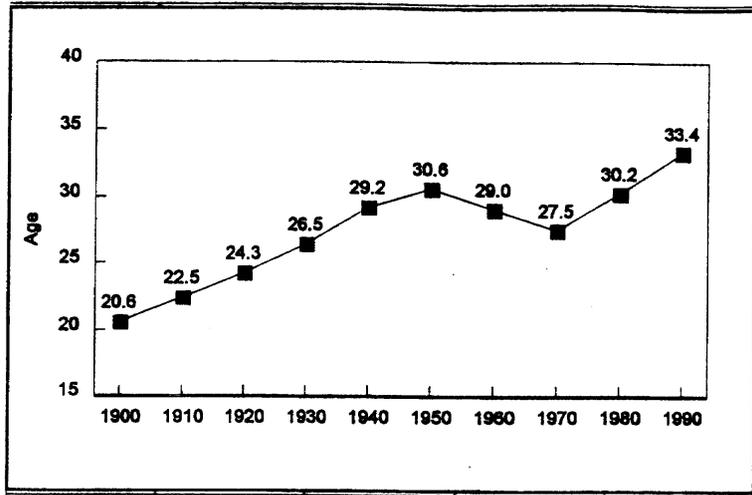


Chart 14:
Life Expectancy for Minnesota
Women and Men
1950 to 1990

Chart 15:
Percentage of Minnesota
Women Age 65 & Above
1900 to 1990

