

September 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.

In 1984 the Commission on the Economic Status of Women published **Women in Minnesota**, a detailed statistical profile of women in the state. Information was from the 1980 census. An update of that report will be published when data from the 1990 census become available.

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 20 years.
- Women are over two-fifths of the labor force and over half of women are 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 tripled between 1940 and 1980.
- The number of female-headed households and families has increased.
- There was a decrease in the income of female-headed families compared to the income of married-couple families.
- The fastest growing age group is women age 85 and over, reflecting an increased life expectancy. Women continue to outlive men and the gap between them has increased over time.

# Women and Marriage

During this century, the percentages of married, single (never-married), widowed or 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 1980**

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 on the next page shows the changes in those percentages between 1900 and 1980.

In 1900, one-third of the female population in Minnesota was single. By 1980, that figure was down to 25 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 eight percent 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 gradually during this century, from less than one percent at the beginning of the century to over five percent in 1980.

## **Marriages and Divorces 1900 to 1980**

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

cally in Minnesota since 1900. Chart 2 on the next page shows the change in the number of marriages and divorces between 1930 and 1980. Data from 1900 are not included since data are not available for 1910 and 1920.

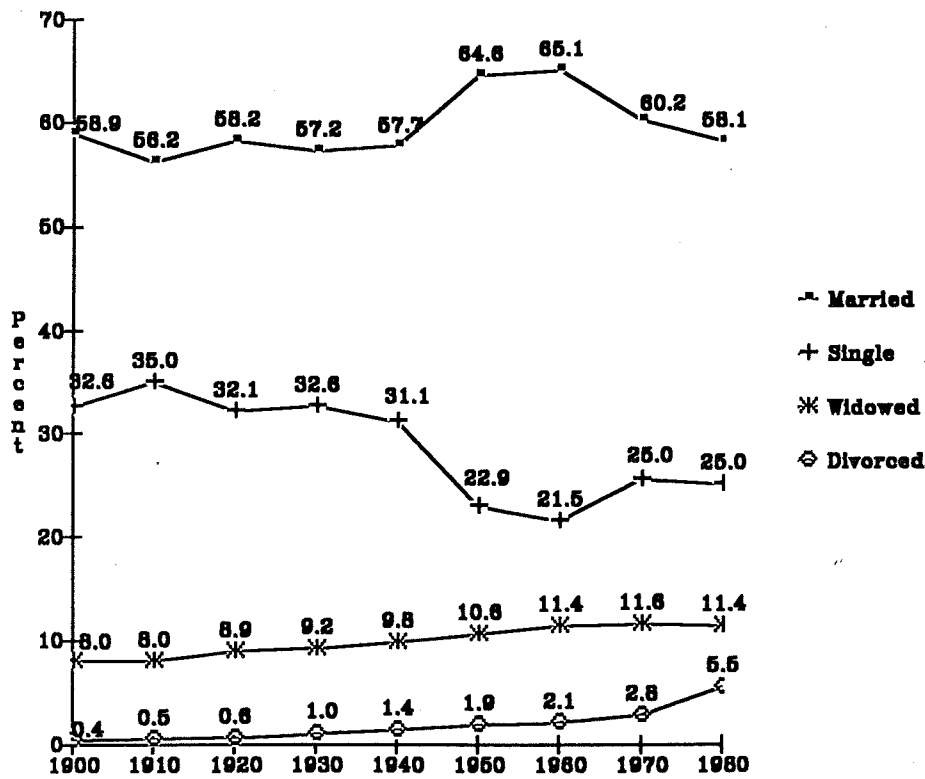
As the *percentage* of married women increased after World War II, the *number* of marriages also increased. However, the number of marriages declined in 1960, just as the percentage of married women was at its peak. The number of marriages increased again in 1970 and reached its highest level in 1980. 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 have been in the last 20 years. The number nearly doubled from 1960 to 1970 and almost doubled again between 1970 and 1980, from just over 4,000 to just over 15,000 in the last two decades.

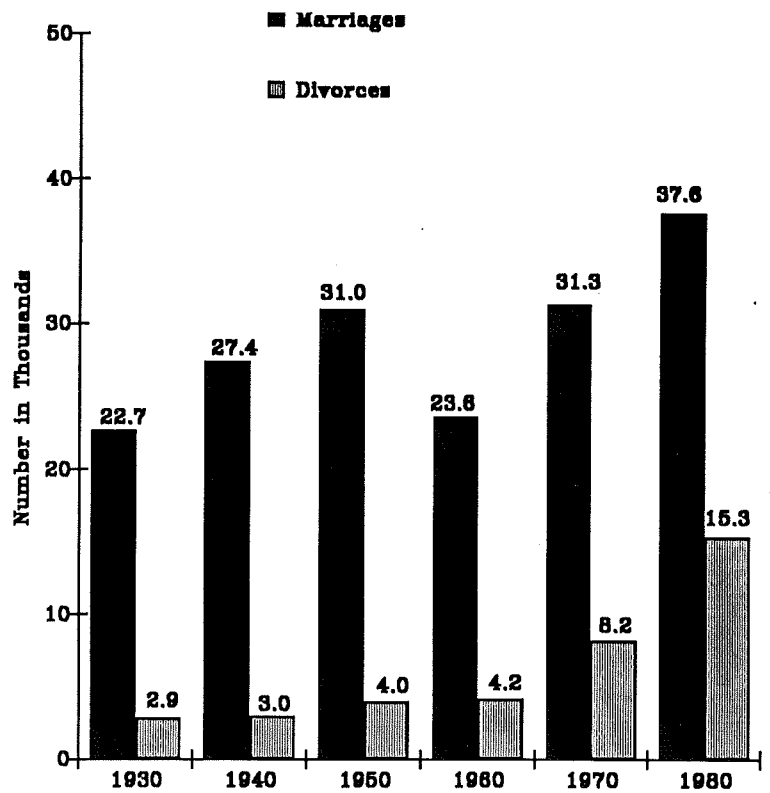
The ratio of divorces to marriages has increased substantially in Minnesota over the years. In 1950, there was one divorce for every 7.7 marriages. By 1980, the ratio was one divorce for every 2.5 marriages.

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.



**Chart 1:**  
 Marital Status of  
 Minnesota Women  
 1900 to 1980

**Chart 2:**  
 Marriages and Divorces  
 in Minnesota  
 1930 to 1980



# 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 1980**

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 1980 that percentage had risen to almost 43. Chart 3 on the next page 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.

By 1980, Minnesota's labor force included more than half of the women in the state. Minnesota women participate in the labor force at a higher rate than the national average.

Chart 4 on the following page shows the increase in the percentage of Minnesota women in the labor force between 1900 and 1980.

## **Labor Force Participation by Age 1960 to 1980**

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 1980, 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 64 percent. Chart 5 on page 6 shows the change in the percentage of Minnesota women in the labor force by age between 1960 and 1980.

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. Now they participate at the highest rate of all ages.

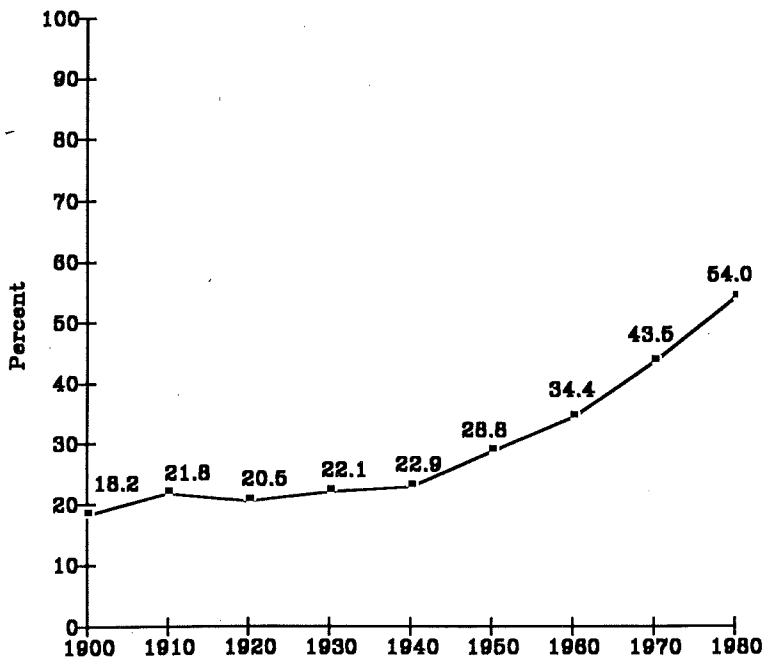
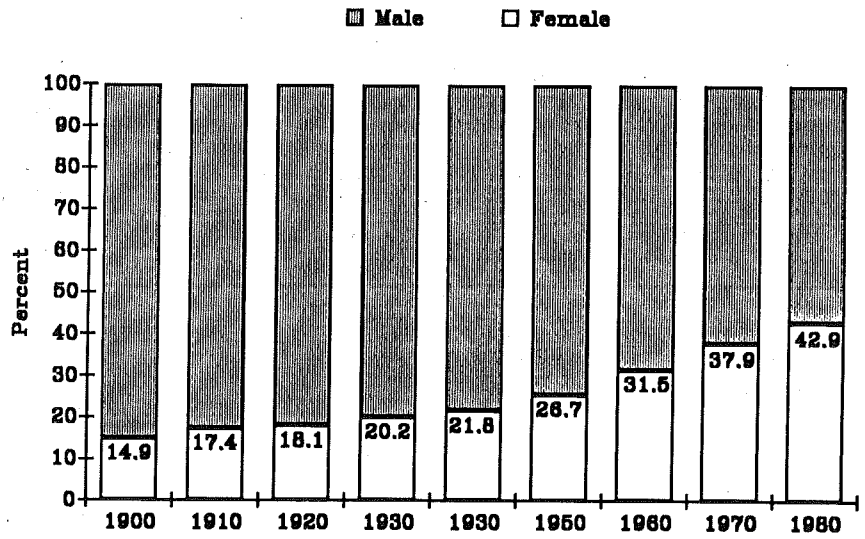
This change in the participation rate of these younger women has contributed to another major social change. There has been an increase in the number of mothers of young children in the labor force.

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.

## **Education Levels for Women 1940 to 1980**

Between 1940 and 1980, 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 1980 than in the prior years. Chart 6 on page 7 shows the educational attainment of women age 25 and over from 1940 to 1980.

**Chart 3:**  
**Labor Force Participation**  
**in Minnesota by Sex**  
**1900 to 1980**



**Chart 4:**  
**Labor Force Participation**  
**of Minnesota Women**  
**1900 to 1980**

In 1940 nearly three-fourths of women 25 and over had less than a high school education. By 1980 that had fallen to one-quarter. Over those 40 years the percentage of females whose highest educational level was the completion of high school rose from 17 to 42.

Women's attendance at and graduation from college has also steadily increased since 1940. At that time, only about eight percent of women 25 and over had attended college and only four percent had a college degree. In 1980, the percentage of women who had attended college increased to 18 percent and the number who had graduated increased to 14 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 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.

## Education and the Earnings Gap 1980

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 just over one-half to two-thirds of what men at comparable levels of education earn. Chart 7 on the opposite page shows earnings by education level.

In 1980 women college graduates had earnings of only around 62 percent of those of their male counterparts. The average earnings of women with college degrees were equivalent to those of men with an eighth grade education.

The earnings gap for women with one to three years of college was similar to that of women who had completed college. Earnings for women with some college were at about 60 percent of levels for similarly educated men.

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.

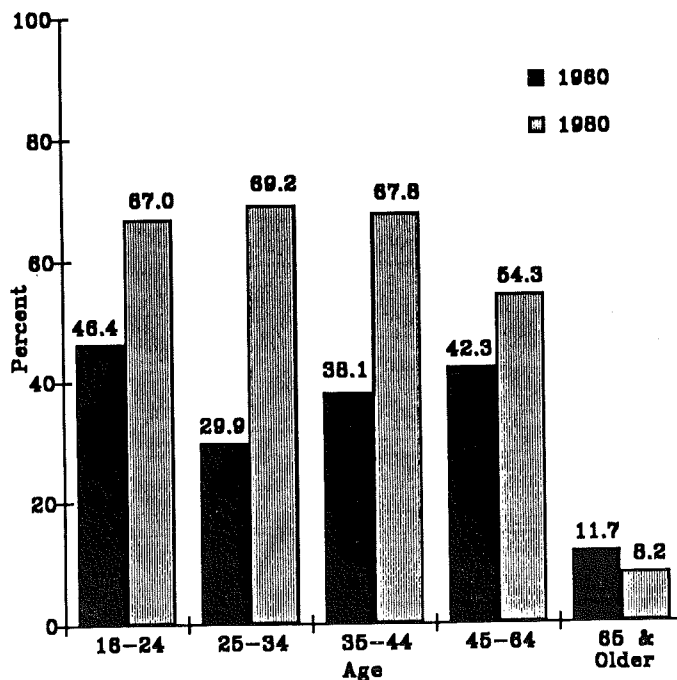
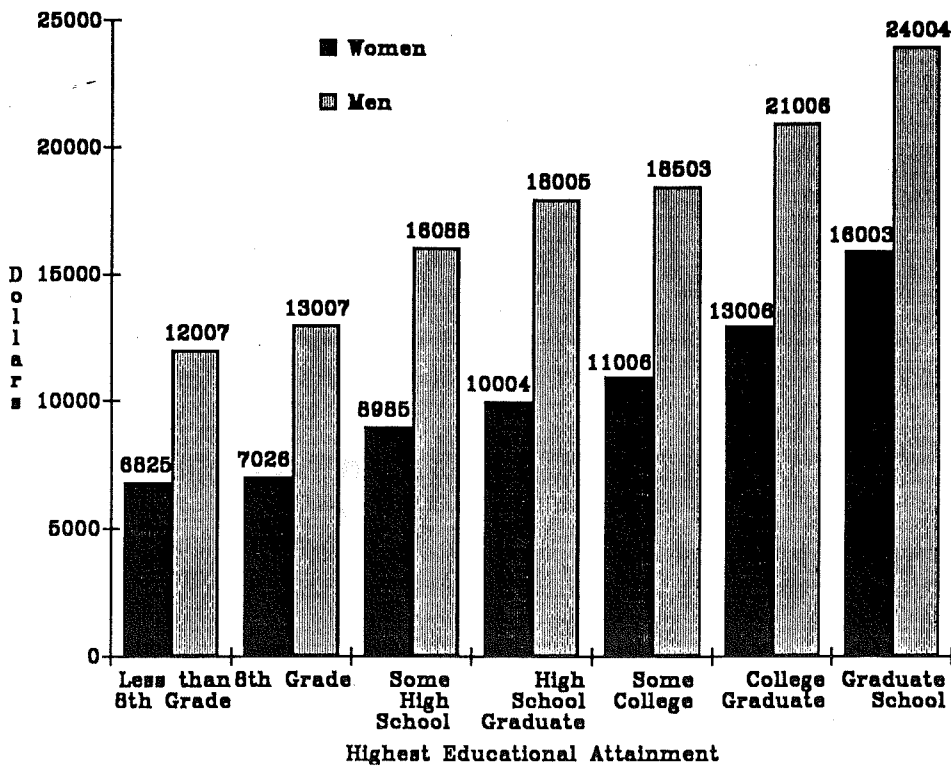
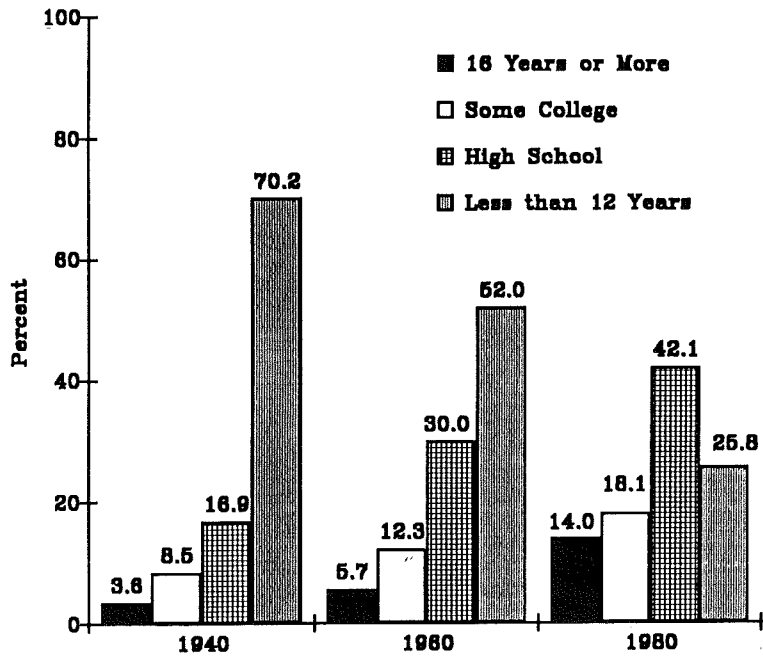


Chart 5:  
Labor Force Participation  
of Minnesota Women by Age  
1960 and 1980



**Chart 6:**  
Educational Attainment  
of Minnesota Women  
Age 25 and Over  
1940 to 1980



**Chart 7:**  
Median Earnings of  
Minnesota Workers by  
Educational Attainment  
of Full-Time Year-Round  
Employed Persons  
Age 25 and Over  
1980

# Women, Families and Poverty

The percentage of female-headed households and families has increased in the past 40 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 1980**

The percentage of female-headed households increased greatly between 1940 and 1980. (A person or persons occupying a housing unit are considered a household. Households are either family or non-family households and are classified as married-couple, female-headed or male-headed.) Female-headed households were under 14 percent of all households in 1940. By 1980 they had increased to almost 24 percent. Chart 8 on the following page shows the distribution of households over the last two decades.

## **Female-Headed Families 1960 to 1980**

Female-headed families grew from over 7 to 10 percent of all families between 1960 and 1980. The percentage of male-headed families remained at the same level, three percent of all families, during this period. (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.) Chart 9 on the following page shows family composition over the last 20 years.

The percentage of female-headed families with children more than doubled between 1960 and 1980. These families accounted for only five percent of families with children in 1960, but were over 11 percent by 1980. Chart 10 on page 10 shows the change in families with children by type of family during the past two decades.

Most single-parent families are still headed by women. A woman was the head of the family in

about 85 percent of all single-parent families in 1960, 1970 and 1980.

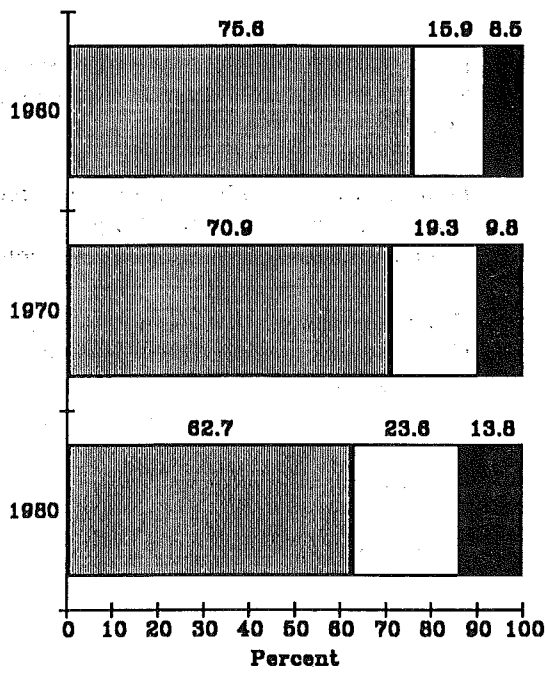
## **Family Income 1960 to 1980**

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. Female-headed families have had the lowest median income and the income of these families declined from 62 to 50 percent of the income of husband-wife families over these years. Chart 11 on page 11 shows the changes in the incomes of male-headed and female-headed families compared to husband-wife families.

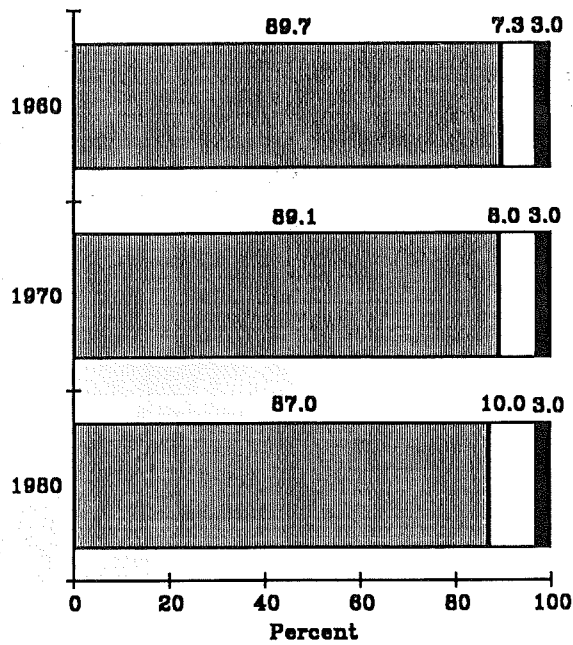
In families where there are children, those headed by a married couple also have the highest income. The incomes of both male-headed and female-headed families with children declined between 1960 and 1980. Male-headed families with children had an income of 86 percent of husband-wife families in 1960. 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.

## **Poverty Levels 1970 and 1980**

In the decade between 1970 and 1980, the overall percentage of Minnesotans in poverty declined slightly from 10.7 to 9.5 percent. In 1980 women and children accounted for seven of ten persons in poverty.



**Chart 8:**  
Minnesota Households by Type  
1960 to 1980



**Chart 9:**  
Minnesota Families by Type  
1960 to 1980

The poverty rate for families in Minnesota was about seven percent in 1980, down slightly from just over eight percent in 1970. The percentage of families without children in poverty declined from just under nine percent to just under five percent. Families with children experienced a slight increase in poverty status, from just under eight percent to just under nine percent.

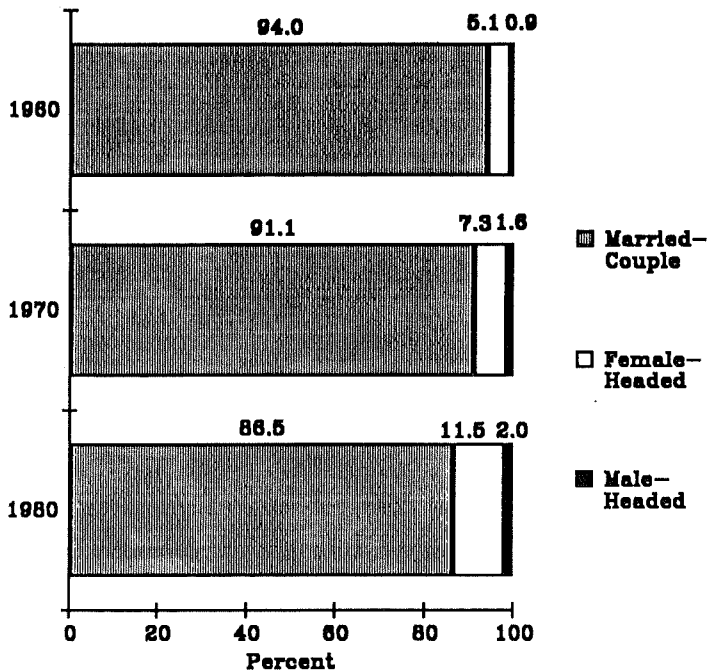
Families headed by females have the highest poverty rates of the three family types. Chart 12 on the next page shows the poverty rates of female-headed families. The poverty rate of all female-headed families was just under 23 percent in 1980, down only one percentage point from 1970. In 1980 these families were almost three times as likely as male-headed families to live in

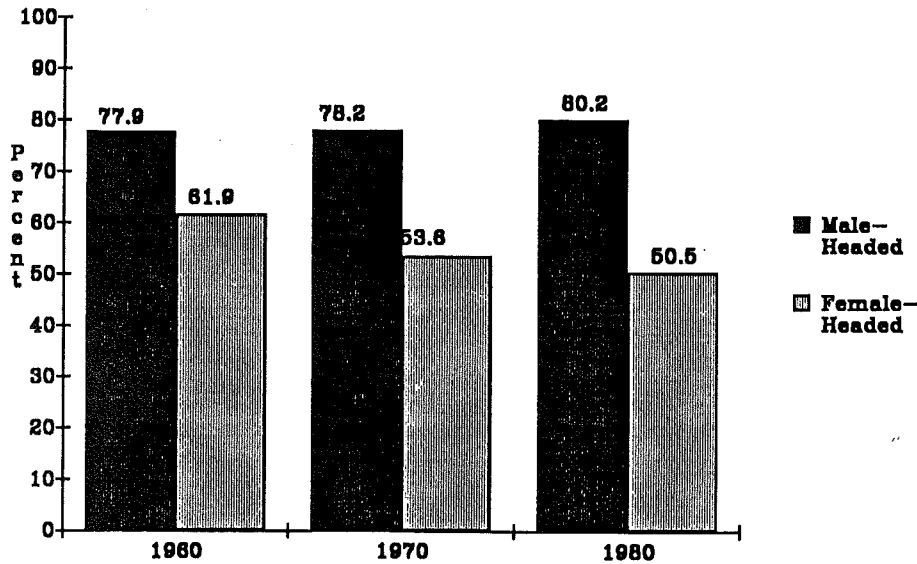
poverty. For families headed by a women over age 65, their poverty rate was just over 16 percent in 1980.

Female-headed families without children experienced a decrease in their poverty rate, from just under 11 percent to just under 8 percent.

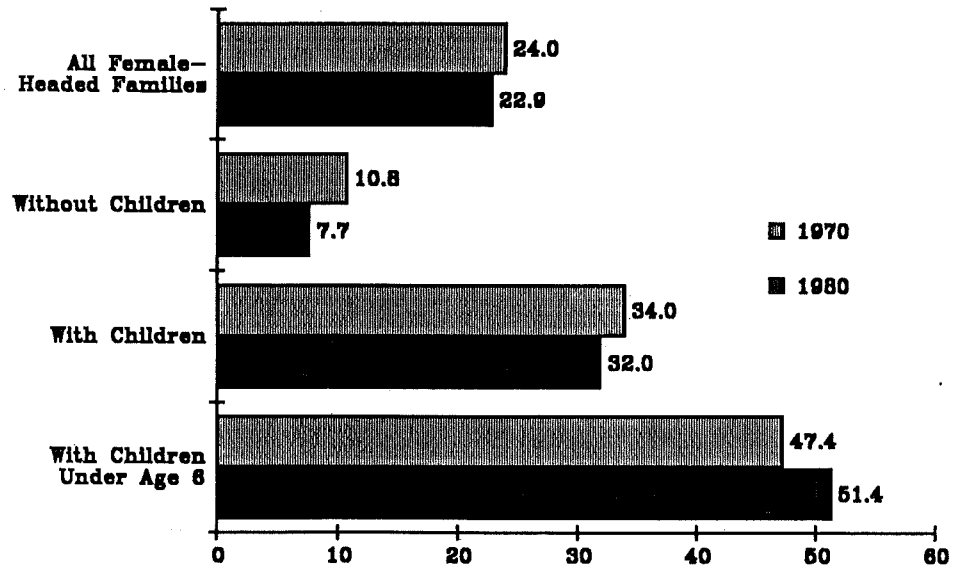
Female-headed families with children have the highest poverty rates. In 1980, 32 percent of these families were in poverty, down slightly from 34 percent in 1970. When these families have children under age six, their poverty rate rises dramatically. In 1970 over 47 percent of these families were in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

**Chart 10:**  
Minnesota Families  
with Children  
1960 to 1980





**Chart 12:**  
Percentage of Female-Headed Families in Poverty in Minnesota 1970 and 1980



## 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 1980 for all groups of people. The median age of women has increased and surpassed that of men during this century.

### **Median Age 1900 to 1980**

The median age of women has risen since the turn of the century. Chart 13 on the opposite page shows this change. In 1900 it was 20.6 years. In 1980 it had reached 30.2 years. 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 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 1980**

Life expectancy for both women and men increased in Minnesota between 1950 and 1980, the only years for which state life expectancy figures are available. The increase was greater for women than for men.

Chart 13 on the opposite page shows the increase in life expectancies for Minnesota women and men from 1950 to 1980. Life expectancy 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.

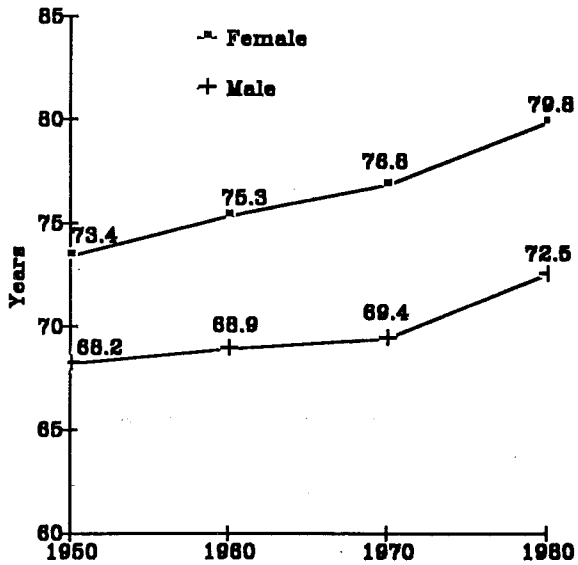
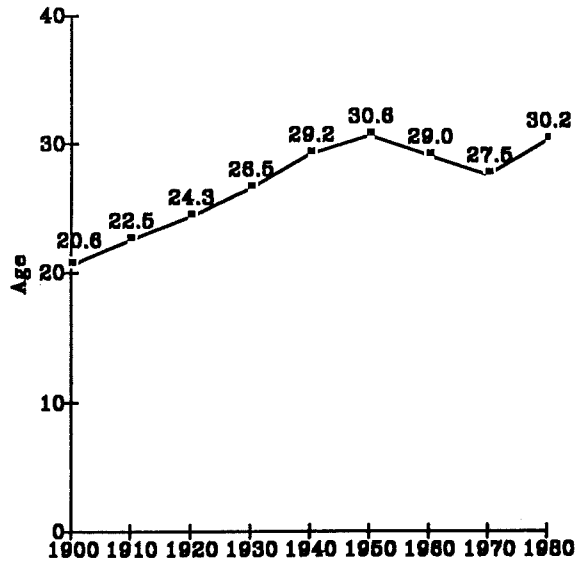
### **Women Age 65 and Above 1900 to 1980**

The percentage of the female population age 65 and over has increased steadily in Minnesota since 1900, almost doubling between 1940 and 1980. Chart 14 on the opposite page shows that increase over time.

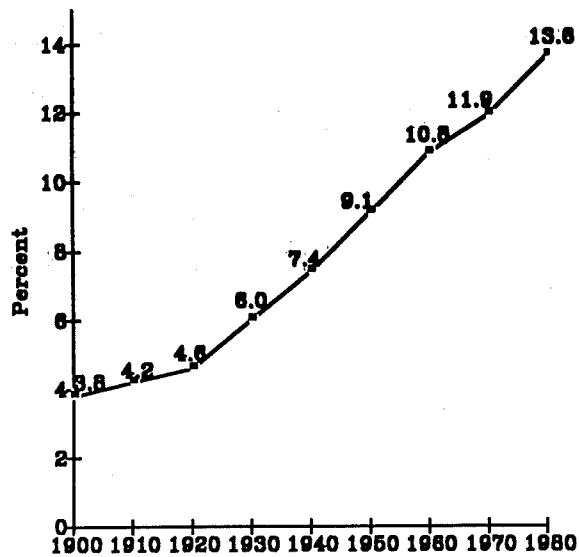
In 1900, women 65 and older made up slightly less than 4 percent of the total female population. By 1940 that figure was over 7 percent. In 1980, almost 14 percent of all women were in this age group. This increase corresponds to increased life expectancies during these years (see Chart 12). Men 65 and older accounted for just under 10 percent of all males in 1980.

At the beginning of this century women were less than half (46.3 percent) of those 65 and over. By 1980 they were nearly three-fifths (58.9 percent) of that population, reflecting the increased life expectancy of women.

**Chart 13:**  
**Median Age of**  
**Minnesota Women**  
**1900 to 1980**



**Chart 14:**  
**Life Expectancy for Minnesota**  
**Women and Men**  
**1950 to 1980**



**Chart 15:**  
**Percentage of Minnesota**  
**Women Age 65 & Above**  
**1900 to 1980.**

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## **ABOUT THE COMMISSION**

The **Commission on the Economic Status of Women** is a legislative advisory commission established by the Minnesota Legislature in 1976. Commission members include state senators and representatives. The Commission studies all matters relating to the economic status of women in Minnesota and publishes reports and recommendations to the legislature and to the Governor.

### **Commission members are:**

Senator Linda Berglin  
Senator Gary DeCramer  
Senator Pat Piper, chair  
Senator James Ramstad  
Senator Ember Reichgott  
Representative Karen Clark  
Representative Connie Morrison  
Representative Katy Olson, vice chair  
Representative Howard Orenstein  
Representative Gloria Segal

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