

Dramatic growth of black

female-headed families seen over last decade

WASHINGTON—During the last decade, the growth of female-headed families has been especially dramatic among blacks. In 1975, there were 2 million black families supported by women without a spouse and 3 million in 1984, an increase of over 50 percent. In 1984, 44 percent of all black families were headed by women, compared with 23.2 percent of Hispanic families and 13 percent of white families, according to a U.S. Labor Department report.

The report, "The United Nations Decade for Women, 1976-1985: Employment in the United States," also notes that as of 1984, about 29 percent of the women maintaining families were black, 69 percent were white, and fewer than 10 percent were of Hispanic origin.

On average, black women had more children under age 18 and less education than the white women. Black and Hispanic women maintaining families had lower median earnings, lower median ages, lower labor force participation rates and higher unemployment rates than the white women. Also, their families were less likely than similar white families to have more than one earner.

The report notes that women who maintain their own families are considerably more likely to work or look for work today than in the past. But their historical pattern of marginal earnings and high unemployment persists, keeping

the economic status of their families well below that of the majority of American families. A continuation of multiple problems hinder many women who support families from being more competitive in the market place. Prominent among these problems are lower average educational attainment and relatively higher proportions with children to raise.

In March 1984, 10.3 million families had as their principal support women who were divorced, separated, widowed, or never married. These families accounted for over 16 percent of all families in the United States, up 3 percentage points from 1975. Sixty-one percent of women maintaining families were labor force participants, compared with 54 percent in 1975.

Most employed women maintaining families worked at full-time jobs in 1984—82 percent. Those ages 25 to 54 were more likely to be working full time (85 percent) than either younger (72 percent) or older women (75 percent). Despite some movement into professional and managerial jobs, particularly by divorcees who are generally younger and have more education, most employed women maintaining families have tended to remain in the generally low paying or less skilled jobs. Like most employed women, the largest proportion of those maintaining families were in administrative support jobs, including clerical work.

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