

**Women “At Risk” in Oklahoma:
Statistical Dimensions**

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to use census of population and other data sources to explore the contemporary conditions of Oklahoma women in need of assistance or “at risk.” By “at risk” is meant some condition or setting which, if improved through the provision of assistance or the creation of an improved environment, would result in a more desirable life situation for women.

After a brief overview of the characteristics of the state’s female population, the report reviews selected data for twelve categories applicable to the identification of women at risk and the formulation of policies for improvement.

General Oklahoma Population Characteristics

- There were 1.8 million women and girls in Oklahoma in 2000. Three quarters were White, with another 15 percent split equally between Blacks and Native Americans. The balance were largely Asian and multiracial. Nearly 5 percent were Hispanic—largely of the White race.
- Median age (half above and half below) for Oklahoma’s women in 2000 was 36.9 years—three whole years greater than for males.
- Three out of five Oklahoma females lived in the state’s metropolitan areas; the rest lived in more rural settings.

Aged

- Because of their especially long life spans, the state has a concentration of White women 65 and over.
- Perhaps the greatest emerging challenge for policies toward Oklahoma women at risk over the next several decades will result from the dramatic growth of the population of elderly women as the “baby boomers” reach their senior years.

A Single Parent

- In 1999, 11.2 percent of Oklahoma families had incomes below the federally designated poverty level; the share in poverty for female-headed families was three times as great.
- For most minority groups, roughly half the female-headed households were classified as below the poverty level.
- Children from poor single-parent families often fail to reach the same physical, mental, and socioeconomic attainment as children from two-parent families with higher incomes.

Access to Child Care

- Most working-age women in Oklahoma hold jobs. If they have children, they need access to child care.

- Since the national welfare reform measures of 1996, Oklahoma's state government has become more involved in the funding and assessment of child care facilities.

Education

- Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with higher levels of earnings.
- Oklahoma women were less well-educated than their national counterparts in 2000.
- Most of the state's minority women are particularly behind norms in levels of educational attainment.

Minority Status

- Except for Asians, most socioeconomic variables take on less favorable values for Oklahoma's minority women in comparison with Whites.
- Policies targeting various minority groups in Oklahoma must recognize varying historical, cultural, and geographic attributes.

Disability

- In the 2000 census of population, one out of five Oklahoma women five years old and over was classified as having one or more types of disability.
- The incidence of disability increases with age and is also greater in families with incomes below the poverty level.

Women's Health

- The health status of Oklahomans of both genders is below national norms.
- Inadequate health insurance coverage is an especially great problem in Oklahoma.
- Oklahoma has a relatively high teenage birth rate in comparison with the nation, but a low rate of abortions for females in general.

Mental Illness and Substance Abuse

- Leading causes for Oklahoma women to come into contact with the state's mental health agencies include depression, bi-polar disorder, abusive situations, and substance abuse.
- Data on domestic abuse and sexual violence against women are likely to underreport actual conditions.

Unemployment, Underemployment, and Low Wage Jobs

- In 2000, the unemployment rate for White Oklahoma women was 4.4 percent; the rates for Black and Hispanic women were twice as great.

- In 2000, only 29 percent of Oklahoma families with children fit the classic image of a two-parent household in which the wife stays home to care for the children; this is because most women work, and because of a significant number of single-parent families.
- Women tend to have jobs that are concentrated in low wage occupations and industrial sectors.

Receipt of Public Assistance Payments

- There have been major reductions in the number of women with children receiving public assistance payments since the national welfare reform measures of 1996. A great many of these women have now obtained jobs.
- Except for the receipt of food stamps (and Social Security/Medicare for older women) poor Oklahoma women who do not have children 18 and under do not receive cash or in-kind benefits from government; assistance must be obtained from private charities.

Incarceration and Criminal Record

- Oklahoma has by far the highest rate of female prison incarceration of any state in the nation.
- Women who end up in prison often have faced multiple “at risk” factors such as poor education, abusive relationships, and being a single parent.

Political Participation

- In 1998 and 2000, Oklahoma women were more likely to be registered to vote, but less likely to vote than their national counterparts.
- While Oklahoma women are currently well represented in terms of holding state-wide elected offices, they are less well represented in the Oklahoma Legislature than is the case in many other states. Only one woman has ever served the state in the U.S. Congress—and that was in the 1920s.

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1. Introduction

Some of the problems and challenges faced by Oklahoma women are uniquely related to situations associated with gender. Some are also of a more general nature and are encountered by the entire population. The purpose of this report is to use census of population data and other data sources to explore the contemporary conditions of Oklahoma women in need of assistance.

Women at risk--Because numbers never “speak for themselves” it is important to use a central organizing theme to explore the problem. The basic question is “What sort of women are at risk in Oklahoma?” By “at risk” is meant some condition or setting which, if improved through the provision of assistance or through the creation of an improved environment, would result in a more desirable life situation for women. The analyses of statistical information will be based on the following set of propositions about Oklahoma women at risk. Women are more likely to be at risk if they are:

- Aged
- A single parent
- With inadequate access to child care
- Poorly educated
- A member of a minority group
- Disabled
- With serious health problems
- With mental health problems including substance abuse
- Unemployed, underemployed, and with low-wage jobs
- Receiving public assistance, food stamps, etc.
- Incarcerated or with a criminal record
- Inadequately represented in political processes

Most of these characteristics are not mutually exclusive. No doubt the larger the number of these features in which a woman finds herself, the more difficult life becomes, and the greater the need for help.

Studies of the status of women—The following analyses are not intended to present a comprehensive picture of the status of women in Oklahoma in comparison with women in other states. In a few instances, it is particularly helpful to make national comparisons, or to view conditions in surrounding states. However, the focus is within Oklahoma, and the emphasis is on women generally finding themselves at the lower end of the state's socioeconomic systems.

A recent major comparative study of the status of women in the 50 states and the District of Columbia suggests that Oklahoma may be particularly challenged in assisting women at risk. In this study, entitled *The Status of Women in the States* (4th edition, 2002-03), the Institute for Women's Policy Research developed a comprehensive index of the status of women in each state. [<http://www.iwpr.org>] Variables were viewed in five areas: politics, economics, health, rights, and demographics. In a composite assessment, the report concludes that Oklahoma ranked as the 48th worst state (including DC) for women in 2002—better than only Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi. To be at the bottom of the bottom implies a substantial range for improvement in Oklahoma women at risk.

2. General Oklahoma Population Characteristics

Race, ethnicity, age, and geography are fundamental features affecting the condition and needs of women and girls in Oklahoma. This introductory section presents selected general information on race, Hispanic/non-Hispanic status, age, and residence in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

Race--Viewing the racial composition of Oklahoma's population as reported in the 2000 Census of Population requires an understanding of the Census Bureau's approach to surveying the population. For the 1990 Census, individuals were asked to identify whether they fell into one of five categories: White; Black; American Indian Eskimo or Aleut; Asian or Pacific Islander, and other race. Persons filling out the 2000 Census forms were permitted, if they so desired, to indicate either a single race alone or more than one race. For Oklahoma, this meant that 155,985 persons or 4.5 percent of the state total chose to indicate more than one race (Table 2-1, Figure 2-1). Of those choosing more than one race, only 4 percent opted for more than two races. The bulk (69.5 percent) of the Oklahomans reporting two races chose a combination of White and American Indian.

Oklahoma's women are characterized by strong multicultural dimensions. In 2000, nearly one-quarter of Oklahoma's women could be categorized as belonging to a minority group, i.e. a classification in Table 2-1 other than "White alone." (Although in some contexts they are classified as a minority race, Arabs and other Middle Easterners are treated by the Census Bureau as White.) The most numerous minority populations of Oklahoma women were "Black alone" with 7.5 percent and American Indians alone with 7.9 percent. The 2.1 percent of women in the "Other race alone" category could include

almost anything someone specified as race, (e.g. “Creole,” “Half-Breed,” “Mulatto”) but likely includes a significant number of persons from Latin America and the Indian sub-continent.

There is a rough balance between numbers of males and females for the races reported in the significant categories of Table 2-1, except for the “Other race alone” group where the female share of the total is only 44.5 percent. Like the Hispanic category discussed below, this may reflect differential migration of men from other parts of the world to the U.S for economic reasons and also the generally lower status of women within those originating areas.

Hispanic Women—Occasionally, a racial breakout of population characteristics is encountered which treats Hispanic (Spanish, Latino) as a separate race. That is incorrect. Hispanic is not a racial category and can include persons from various races—though the great bulk of Oklahoma’s Hispanics are of the White race. Hispanic also represents strong association with Latin America; three quarters of Oklahoma’s total Hispanic population are from Mexico. Almost one out of twenty Oklahoma females was reported as Hispanic in 2000 (Table 2-1). In 2000, Hispanic men outnumbered Hispanic women by 96,830 to 82,474—again probably reflecting differential migration to the U.S. in response to economic opportunity.

Age, Race, and Hispanic Classification—Table 2-2 and Figure 2-2 provide an overview of the age distribution of Oklahoma women for the various racial categories and for Hispanics. This table reports median age in 2000 and indicates striking differences. Median age is a measure of central tendency in which half the persons are older and half are younger than the median. Among the age and sex categories in Table

2-2, the highest is the median age of women classed as White alone, not Hispanic. Half of the women in this group were over 40.1 years. All of the other groups except the Asian alone category had relatively young female populations whose medians were less than 30 years. The median for Asians (31.6) was still well below the White figure. Some of the forces associated with age which affect the well-being of women are different for White as opposed to minority women.

Metropolitan/non-metropolitan residence—In 2000, 54.9 percent of Oklahoma women lived in the eleven counties comprising the state’s two big Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) of Oklahoma City and Tulsa (Table 2-3). Another 6.0 percent lived in three additional counties also classed as MSAs. An MSA is an area of one or more counties designated by the federal government based originally on having a labor market area of at least 50,000 people. Oklahoma’s MSAs and their associated counties are:

- *Oklahoma City*: Canadian, Cleveland, Logan, McClain, Oklahoma, and Pottawatomie Counties
- *Tulsa*: Creek, Osage, Rogers, Tulsa, and Wagoner Counties
- *Lawton*: Comanche County
- *Enid*: Garfield County
- *Ft. Smith*: Sequoyah County, Oklahoma plus two counties in Arkansas

Another 15.8 percent (276,991) of the state’s women lived in eleven more non-MSA counties, each of which had more than 20,000 female population in 2000. These counties and the principal city in each are Carter (Ardmore), Cherokee (Talequah), Grady (Chickasha), Kay (Ponca City), LeFlore (Poteau), Muskogee (Muskogee), Okmulgee

(Okmulgee), Payne (Stillwater), Pittsburg (McAlester), Stephens (Duncan), and Washington (Bartlesville). The remaining 55 counties accounted for 408,818 females-- 23.3 percent of the total and an average of 7,433 per county.

Table 2-1 Population by Race, Gender, and Hispanic Class, Oklahoma, 2000

Race/Hispanic classes	Total	Male	Female	Percent female	Percent of females by race and Hispanic status
All persons	3,450,654	1,695,895	1,754,759	50.9	100.0
White alone	2,628,434	1,286,482	1,341,952	51.1	76.5
Black alone	260,968	128,934	132,034	50.6	7.5
American Indian alone	273,230	133,978	139,252	51.0	7.9
Asian Alone	46,767	22,460	24,307	52.0	1.4
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander alone	2,372	1,252	1,120	47.2	0.1
Other race alone	82,898	46,031	36,867	44.5	2.1
Two or more races	155,985	76,758	79,227	50.8	4.5
Hispanic	179,304	96,830	82,474	46.0	4.7
White alone, not Hispanic	2,556,368	1,248,024	1,308,344	51.2	74.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Table PC12.

Table 2-2 Median Age by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Characteristic, Oklahoma, 2000

Population characteristic	Both sexes	Male	Female
Total population	35.5	33.9	36.9
Racial characteristic			
White alone	38.3	36.9	39.6
Black alone	28.1	26.9	29.4
American Indian alone	26.7	25.4	27.9
Asian alone	29.6	28	31.6
Pacific islander alone	26.2	26	26.3
Some other race alone	23.3	23.8	22.4
Two or more races	23.5	22.4	24.7
Hispanic characteristic			
Hispanic	22.7	23.1	22.1
White alone, not Hispanic	38.7	37.4	40.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Tables P13A-I

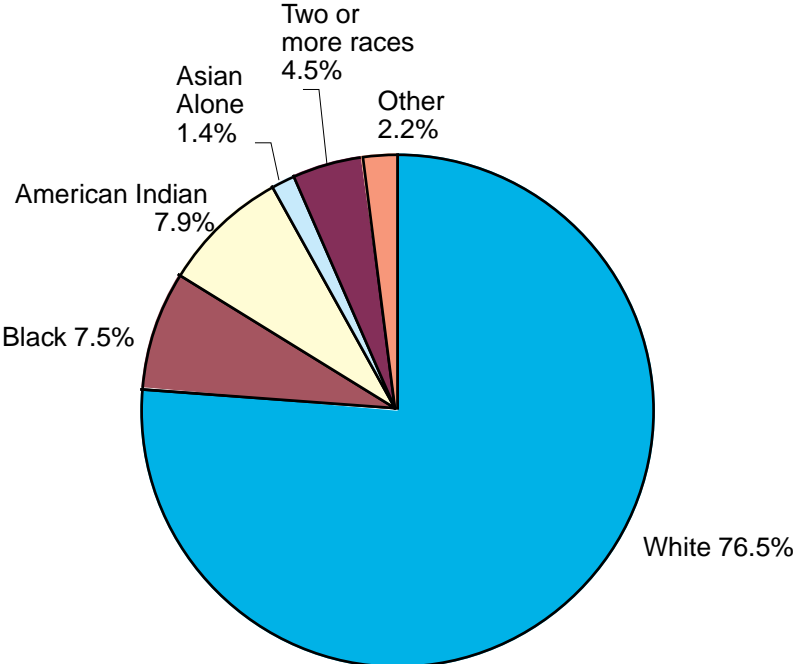
Table 2-3 Population by Metropolitan Residence and Sex, Oklahoma, 2000

State and Metropolitan Statistical Area	Total	Male	Female	Percent of Females by MSA
Oklahoma total	3,450,654	1,695,895	1,754,759	100.0
Enid MSA	57,813	27,973	29,840	1.7
Ft. Smith MSA	38,972	19,221	19,751	1.1
Lawton MSA	114,996	59,625	55,371	3.2
Oklahoma City MSA	1,083,346	530,750	552,596	31.5
Tulsa MSA	803,235	391,843	411,392	23.4
Rest of state	1,352,292	666,483	685,809	39.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Table DP-1.

Figure 2-1

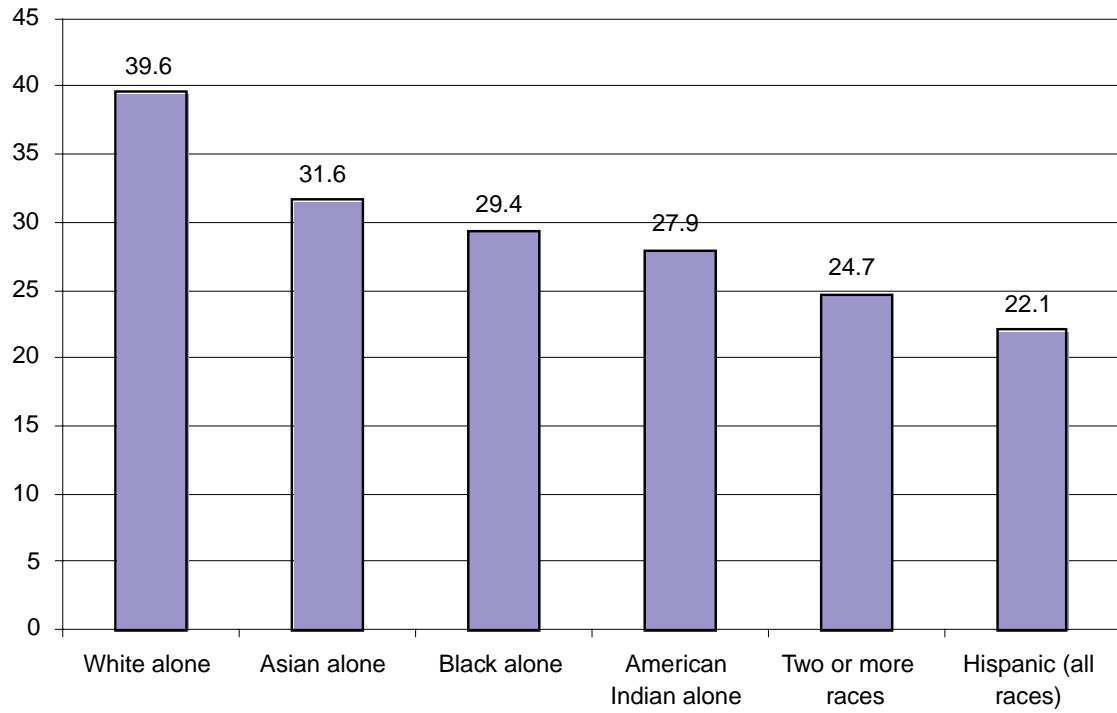
**Female Population by Race
Oklahoma
2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Table PCT 12.

Figure 2-2

**Median Age of Female Population
by Race and Hispanic Characteristic
Oklahoma
2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Tables P13 A-I.

3. Aged

The probability of encountering several of the features which increase the chances that women are at risk in Oklahoma tends to increase with age--certainly beyond the mid-60s if not earlier. Focus on the age of Oklahoma women requires an overall examination of the age distribution of women by race and by Hispanic classification. Table 2-2 indicated striking differences among groups using median age only. Tables 3-1 and 3-2 provide more detail by presenting the number and percent distribution of Oklahoma women in 2000.

By far the greatest concentration of women 65 and over is found in the White alone, not Hispanic group. While this group as a whole accounted for 74.6 percent of all Oklahoma women, those in this group 65 and over accounted for 87.4 percent of all women 65 and over. Nearly nine out of ten Oklahoma women 65 and over were White alone non-Hispanic. The relatively small shares of older women among Blacks and Native Americans probably reflects higher death rates and higher birth rates, while low shares for Asians and Hispanics reflect the recent history of in-migration by generally younger populations.

The future pattern of aging among Oklahoma women is indicated by Table 3-3 which reports the age distributions for the state in 1990 and 2000, along with the change in each age group (Figure 3-1). The most remarkable feature of Table 3-3 involves the pattern observed for the 45 to 54 age group. In 1990, that cohort accounted for 10.3 percent of all Oklahoma women, but it was responsible for 46.5 percent of the *increase* in the state's female population between 1990. This, of course, reflects the leading edge of the "baby boom" generation. Over the next couple of decades, the host of problems

faced by older women will become a much more pervasive feature of Oklahoma society. This challenge is reinforced by noting that the number of women in the next older age group, i.e. those 55 to 64, grew by 17,475 during the decade—an amount in excess of the growth of the entire cohort 65 and over.

The challenge of providing health and other services to older women is especially great in Oklahoma's rural or non-metropolitan areas. While 39.1 percent of Oklahoma's females lived outside the states metropolitan areas (MSAs), the rural areas contained 46.0 percent of women 65 and over in 2000 (Table 3-4). Moreover, the share of older female cohorts living in rural areas was generally greater as age increased. While 44.9 percent of women 65-69 lived in rural areas, the share rose to 48.6 percent for women 85 and over. Given the concentration of medical and other services in metropolitan areas, the relative concentration of older women in rural areas suggests the need to examine ways to improve rural services for the elderly.

While Oklahoma will continue to face many problems in fields such as education and infrastructure, it is a near certainty that within about ten years the problems of dealing with a much older population will dominate the state's agenda. The cost of Medicaid long-term care for older women could be among the most important single developments in the field of governmental finance. In 2000, the Oklahoma Health Care Authority reports that there were 16,888 women receiving nursing facility care paid by Medicaid (compared with 6,344 men). Within a few years after 2010, there could easily be 25,000 such women supported by Medicaid. Moreover, there is a concentration of women in the very high age brackets receiving benefits. In 2000, 10,676 of the 23,232 total nursing facility Medicaid residents of both sexes were 85 and over—often requiring

the most intensive care. Given the age/survivor pattern, the great bulk of these were women. How will Oklahoma and the federal government pay for this exploding nursing home population?

Table 3-1 Population of Women by Age, Race, Hispanic Classification, Oklahoma, 2000

Age group	Total	White alone	Black alone	Native American alone	Asian alone	Hispanic	White alone, not Hispanic
Total women	1,754,759	1,341,952	132,034	139,252	24,307	82,474	1,308,344
Children and youth							
Under 5 years	114,748	75,103	10,819	12,731	1,574	11,161	70,942
5 to 9	119,395	79,657	12,057	13,432	1,405	9,462	75,979
10 to 14	123,180	84,610	11,669	13,444	1,455	8,444	81,360
15 to 17	77,409	53,963	6,757	8,475	1,039	4,941	52,106
Subtotal	434,732	293,333	41,302	48,082	5,473	34,008	280,387
College age and just out, mothers							
18 to 24	172,210	122,303	16,304	15,837	3,305	12,120	117,661
Working age adults, mothers							
25 to 54	715,706	553,095	53,794	54,799	12,348	30,509	540,267
Early retirement age							
55 to 64	164,272	137,676	8,618	9,446	1,778	3,039	136,068
Older women							
65 to 69	69,270	59,392	3,430	3,498	595	983	58,865
70 to 74	63,136	55,207	2,821	2,704	397	762	54,768
75 to 79	54,785	48,563	2,278	2,186	220	540	48,246
80 to 84	39,379	35,236	1,633	1,426	99	257	35,092
85 and over	41,269	37,147	1,854	1,274	92	256	36,990
Subtotal	267,839	235,545	12,016	11,088	1,403	2,798	233,961

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Table P12.

Table 3-2 Population of Women by Percent Age, Race, Hispanic Classification, Oklahoma, 2000

Age group	Total	White alone	Black alone	Native American alone	Asian alone	Two or more races	Hispanic	White alone, not Hispanic
Total women	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Children and youth, under 18	24.8	21.9	31.3	34.5	22.5	39.6	41.2	21.4
College age and just out, mothers, 18 to 24	9.8	9.1	12.4	11.4	13.6	10.8	14.7	9.0
Working age adults, mothers, 25 to 54	40.8	41.2	40.7	39.4	50.8	34.0	37.0	41.3
Early retirement age, 55 to 64	9.4	10.3	6.5	6.8	7.3	7.0	3.7	10.4
Older women, 65 to 74	7.6	8.5	4.7	4.5	4.1	4.7	2.1	8.7
Older women, 75 and over	7.7	9.0	4.4	3.5	1.7	3.9	1.3	9.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Table P12.

**Table 3-3 Female Population Change,
Oklahoma, 1990-2000**

Age group	1,990	2,000	Change
Total women	1,614,766	1,754,759	139,993
Children and youth			
Under 5 years	110,734	114,748	4,014
5 to 9	119,095	119,395	300
10 to 14	112,367	123,180	10,813
15 to 17	65,041	77,409	12,368
Subtotal	407,237	434,732	27,495
College age and just out, mothers			
18 to 24	156,951	172,210	15,259
Working age adults, mothers			
25 to 44	484,132	484,974	842
45 to 54	165,676	230,732	65,056
Subtotal	649,808	715,706	65,898
Early retirement age			
55 to 64	146,797	164,272	17,475
Older women			
65 to 69	71,511	69,270	-2,241
70 to 74	59,073	63,136	4,063
75 to 79	52,298	54,785	2,487
80 to 84	38,130	39,379	1,249
85 and over	32,961	41,269	8,308
Subtotal	253,973	267,839	13,866

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 and 1990, Summary File 1, Table P12.

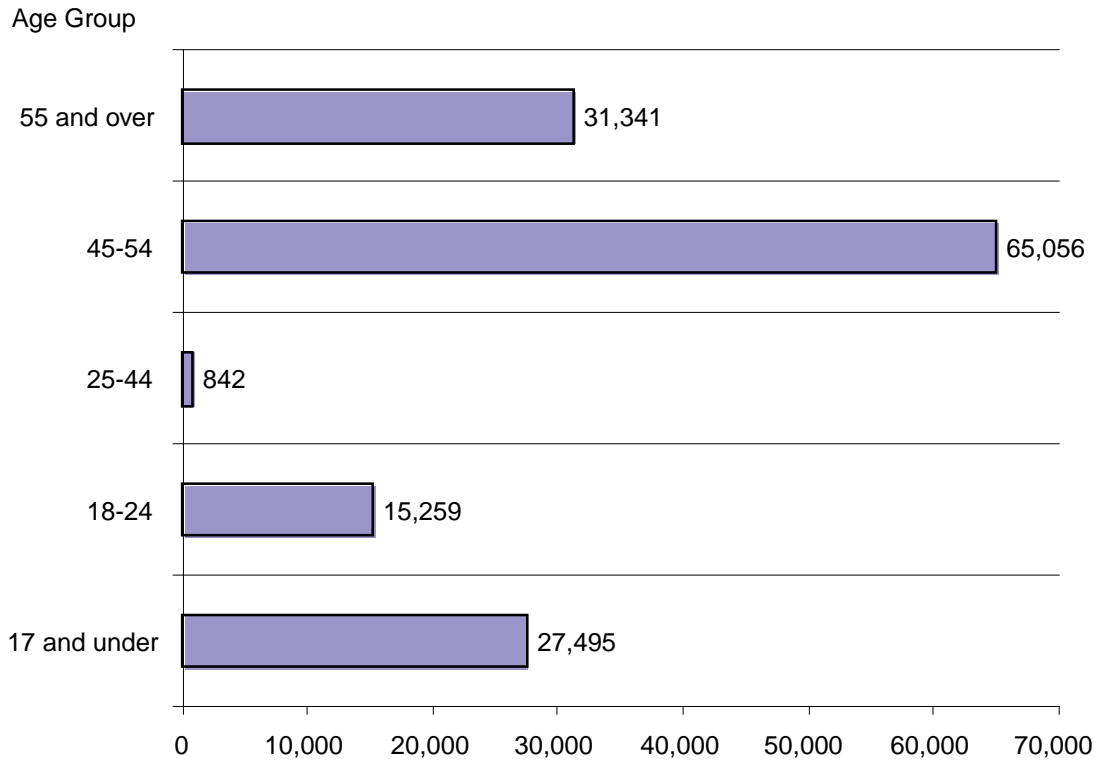
**Table 3-4 Age by Metropolitan Residence, Older Females,
Oklahoma, 2000**

Age	Oklahoma total	MSA total	Non-MSA	Percent MSA	Percent Non-MSA
65 to 69	69,600	38,375	31,225	55.1	44.9
70 to 74	63,236	35,178	28,058	55.6	44.4
75 to 79	54,610	29,337	25,273	53.7	46.3
80 to 84	40,139	20,984	19,155	52.3	47.7
85 and over	40,258	20,688	19,570	51.4	48.6
65 and over	267,843	144,562	123,281	54.0	46.0
All women	1,754,759	1,068,950	685,809	60.9	39.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table P8

Figure 3-1

**Growth of Female Population by Selected Age Groups
Oklahoma
1990-2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 and 1990, Summary File 1, Table P 12.

4. A Single Parent

Table 4-1 and Figure 4-1 introduce what some have called “the feminization of poverty.” In 1999, 11.2 percent of all Oklahoma families had incomes that were below the federally defined poverty level. That means, for example, that a family of three (e.g. a mother and two children) would need have had an annual income of \$13,290 or less in order to be counted as below the poverty threshold.

While 11.2 percent of all Oklahoma families were classed as below the poverty threshold, the proportion for female headed families with no husband present was 32.0 percent. These female headed families were three times as likely to be poor as all Oklahoma families.

The incidence of poverty became even greater for such families if they had children. Two-fifths (39.8 percent) of the female headed families with no husband present who had children under 18 were poor. Half were in poverty if they had children under five.

The pattern of poverty of female headed families is more severe for non-White and Hispanic categories (except for Asians). Around half the Black, Native American, and Hispanic female-headed families with children under 18 had incomes below the poverty line in 1999. The most serious problems appear to be encountered with Black families because female-headed households are a much larger share of total Black families. Two-fifths of all Black alone Oklahoma families (43.1 percent) were headed by females with no husband present, while the share for all families was only 15.8 percent. The contrast with White families is substantial. The data in Table 4-1 indicate that 25,285 white families out of a total of 738,386 had female heads and were below the

poverty level; for Blacks, 11,653 out of 61,956 families fell into this poverty category. Among Black families, the frequency of female-headed units with no husband present in poverty was more than five times that of white families.

While Hispanic families appear to remain intact as two parent households at nearly the same rate as the state average, the female headed Hispanic families were more likely to be poor than other families. The share of female headed Hispanic families with no husband and children under 5 who were in poverty was a remarkably high 62.4 percent.

American Indian families also had a significantly higher likelihood of being headed by a female, while, arguably the best performance in family cohesiveness is by the Asian cohort.

Any review of family status by race and Hispanic categories should be undertaken with an awareness of differences in family size. By combining several components of the 2000 census reports it is possible to identify the number of children under 18 and the number of families in each category. The average number of children per family was 1.7 for Whites, 2.0 for Blacks, and 2.5 for American Indians and Hispanics.

The percent in poverty figures for Oklahoma tend to be above their national counterparts. However, 15.8 percent of Oklahoma families are headed by a female without a husband present, while the proportion nationwide is 17.3 percent. This is surprising in light of Oklahoma's relatively high divorce rate. In 1998, for example, Oklahoma's divorce rate was 6.5 per 1,000 population, while the national average was 4.3.

The above remarks have focused on poverty and female-headed households without a husband present. Included in the Oklahoma families below the poverty level (Table 4-1) were 9,456 families headed by a man with no wife present, and 47,320 married couple families, 63 percent of which had children under 18. Many of the poverty-related problems faced by mothers running a household without a husband present are also faced by male head only and husband-wife families with very low incomes.

There are a host of possible areas of policy emphasis which are implied by these data. Family structure with more frequent presence of a husband is clearly desirable, though it is less clear is how to increase the incidence of viable marriage. This has been a major initiative of Governor Frank Keating. In 2001, researchers at Oklahoma State University undertook an extensive survey of Oklahomans with respect to marriage and divorce. [www.okmarriage.org/pdf/survey] One of the most interesting findings of the survey relates to the fact that not only is Oklahoma a state with a high propensity to divorce, it is also a state with a high propensity to marry.

It is often the children who are placed at the greatest risk as a result of living in a single-parent, low-income family. The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy's *Kids Count Factbook 2002* contains extensive data on the status of children in Oklahoma with emphasis on variables such as conditions of birth, teen births, child abuse and neglect, child mortality, high school dropouts, and juvenile crime. [<http://www.oica.org>]

No doubt many of the poor women in the state's low-income families have some sort of job with very low earnings and very uneven workforce attachment. Involving such women in further education may be one of the only routes to higher income. How to

accomplish this without adequate day care for children? Finally, many of these families have been relying on public assistance (Temporary Aid for Needy Families). What is happening as they get off the welfare rolls and as they reach the five-year maximum lifetime limit for such aid implemented through 1996 welfare reform? More information on this will be presented in Section 13 which focuses on public welfare.

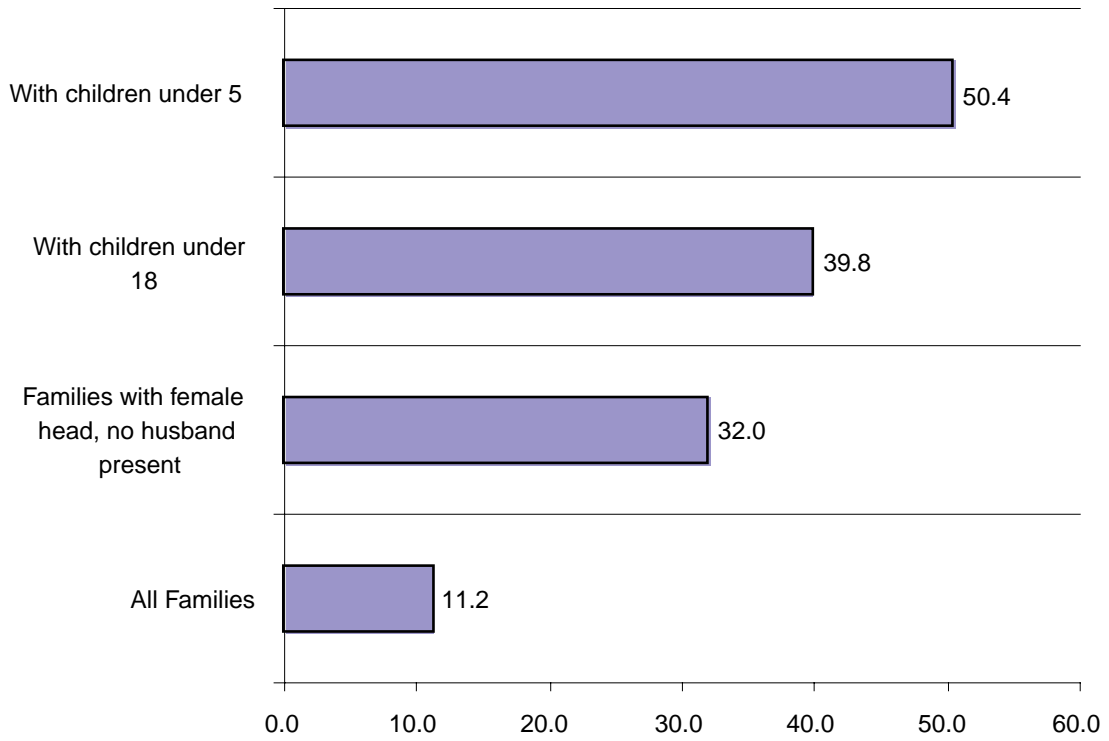
Table 4-1 Poverty Status for Families with Female Head of Household, No Husband Present, Oklahoma, 1999

	Total	White alone	Black alone	American Indian alone	Asian alone	Other races alone	Two or more races	Hispanic
Total number of families	927,703	738,386	61,956	63,382	9,647	18,303	35,696	37,005
Families below the poverty level	103,757	64,477	15,867	12,107	1,184	4,472	5,612	8,790
Percent of total families below the poverty level	11.2	8.7	25.6	19.1	12.3	24.4	15.7	23.8
Families with female head of household, no husband present	146,795	94,850	26,679	14,344	1,185	2,679	7,040	5,685
Percent of total families with female head, no husband present	15.8	12.8	43.1	22.6	12.3	14.6	19.7	15.4
Families with female head of household, no husband present, below poverty level (thousands)	46,981	25,285	11,653	5,702	326	1,285	2,721	2,698
Percent of families with female head below poverty level	32.0	26.7	43.7	39.8	27.5	48.0	38.7	47.5
Families with female head of household, no husband present and children under 5	19,565	11,668	4,097	1,997	135	419	1,246	962
Percent below poverty level	50.4	46.0	59.2	52.5	40.0	56.3	57.8	62.4
Families with female head of household, no husband present, and children under 18	105,226	64,597	21,643	10,694	722	2,162	5,399	4,628
Percent below poverty level	39.8	34.5	49.7	47.3	30.3	53.3	45.2	53.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3, Table P90/P160A-I.

Figure 4-1

**Percent o Families with Income Below Poverty Level
Selected Family types
Oklahoma
1999**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table P90.

5. Access to Child Care

A very rough indication of the need for child care in Oklahoma is based on two demographic features: the number of children potentially in need of care, and the share of women holding jobs. In 2000, there were 236,353 children in the state under 5 years of age, and another 244,525 between 5 and 9. About half the women in the 16-24 age bracket were employed, and nearly 70 percent of those 25-54 held jobs (Table 5-1). Nearly one quarter of women 55 and over were working—an indication of limited ability of grandmothers to provide child care. With nearly half a million children under 10 and such large shares of women working, a substantial number of Oklahoma children need care of some sort—full days for the pre-schoolers, and after-school help for older children.

Table 5-1 also contains comparative data with the U.S. that illustrates a tension between the need for child care and the need for income. When the Oklahoma share of women 16 and over who were employed (52.1 percent) is compared with the share for the nation (54.0 percent), it appears that the state's women are less likely to need assistance for child care because they are significantly less likely to be employed than their national counterparts. However, this lower share employed also means lower family incomes and is one of the features associated with the state's overall low level of per capita personal income and high rate of poverty.

There are, of course, many informal arrangements for child care through family and friends. However, the need for organized services is obvious. The main thrust of the nation's 1996 welfare reform law was to provide incentives for women to exit from systems of public assistance and become employed. Work requirements were instituted

for those receiving assistance, and federal funds were provided to states to assist in financing child care services.

In Oklahoma, the state's Department of Human Services (DHS) licenses child care facilities and provides direct subsidies to the facilities for child care for poor families. The subsidies are greater for families with lower income. Between 1998 and 2002, the number of licensed facilities grew 9 percent and their capacity grew 18 percent (Table 5-2). The licensed facilities are spread throughout the state, though in July 2002, there were ten counties, mostly in western Oklahoma, with fewer than ten such facilities per county. At the other end of the spectrum, there were 1,381 licensed facilities in Oklahoma County and 937 in Tulsa County. In FY 2001 DHS spent \$8 million on claims for child care services.

In spite of the program funded as a result of the 1996 welfare reform legislation, it appears that there is still a large number of working poor families in Oklahoma facing child care problems. Research on early childhood development emphasizes the critical importance of effective child care for the very young. Children deprived of necessary care and affection may suffer intellectual/emotional deficits during the balance of their lives. With its public schools already underfunded, the state would face great fiscal difficulty in any sort of major thrust to provide greatly expanded early childhood education.

**Table 5-1 Percent of Population Employed,
by Age and Sex, Oklahoma and U.S., 2000**

Age range	Male	Female	Total
16 to 24 years			
Oklahoma	59.0	53.5	56.4
United States	56.4	53.1	54.8
25 to 54 years			
Oklahoma	81.5	68.8	75.2
United States	82.0	70.3	76.1
55 and over			
Oklahoma	38.4	23.5	30.1
United States	37.7	24.2	30.1
16 years and over			
Oklahoma	66.0	52.1	58.8
United States	66.7	54.0	60.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Table PCT35.

**Table 5-2 Licensed Child Care
Facilities, Oklahoma, 1998-2002**

Year (June 30)	Number of Facilities	Capacity
1998	5,565	114,271
1999	5,729	120,220
2000	5,829	124,175
2001	5,904	130,144
2002	6,058	135,226

Source: Oklahoma Department of Human Services, *Annual Report 2001, Monthly Statistical Bulletin*, July 2002.

6. Education

Poor educational background as measured by level of educational attainment places both women and men at risk of a variety of conditions which involve a less satisfactory life. At the extreme, people with low levels of educational attainment face daily difficulties performing basic tasks requiring reading and simple mathematical processes. Criminal behavior is often related to inadequate education, as is poor health and lack of participation in civic affairs. But a central feature of educational attainment and life quality involves the ability to earn income.

For full-time, year-round female workers in 2000 at the national level, high school graduates earned 54 percent more than women with less than a 9th grade education. Female college graduates with only a bachelor's degree earned 62 percent more than those with a high school diploma and no further education. And the payoff for women with a doctorate degree was an income 46 percent greater than was obtained with a bachelor's degree.

Similar payoffs to education are observed for men, though men with professional degrees gain substantially higher differential returns than similarly situated women. At every level of education, men out-earn women—with women generally receiving only 70-75 percent of what is received by men.

In 2000, four-fifths of both adult (25 and over) women and men in Oklahoma had graduated from high school (Table 6-1). However, a smaller share of women had bachelor's degrees (18.9 percent) than men (21.8 percent). For both men and for women, the overall level of educational attainment as measured by percent with bachelor's degree or higher was about four percentage points less than the national average. Nationally,

22.8 percent of women and 26.1 percent of men 25 and over had at least bachelor's degrees in 2000.

The levels of high-end educational attainment by White non-Hispanic women in Oklahoma were substantially greater than other population subgroups—except for Asians. One out of five such White women (19.9 percent) had graduated from a four-year college, while the shares for Black women (14.5 percent), American Indian women (13.3 percent, and Hispanic women (10.2 percent) were substantially lower. However, nearly one-third of adult Asian women (31.3 percent) had bachelor's degrees or above. Black, American Indian, and especially Latino women also exhibit relatively low high school graduate shares, with only half the Latino women having passed that educational milestone. All groups of women except American Indians had smaller shares with high-end educational attainment than their national counterparts (Figure 6-1).

Educational challenges for Oklahoma women include (1)attaining higher high school graduation rates for Black, American Indian, and Hispanic women, (2)implementing measures to get those three groups into and out of college with degrees, and (3)improving the overall high-end achievement of Oklahomans in comparison with national norms. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education's "Brain Gain 2020" program is a significant initiative to improve the state's population share with high-end educational attainment.

Table 6-1 Educational Attainment for Population Subgroups, Oklahoma, 2000 [a]

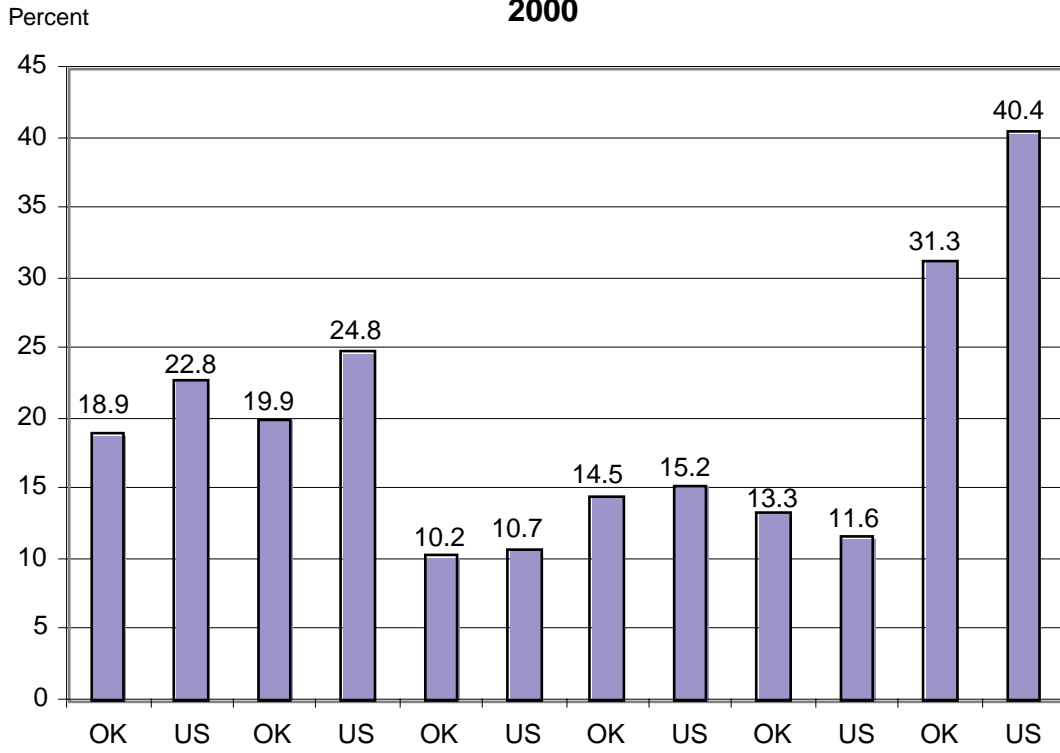
	Total	White not Hispanic	Hispanic	Black	American Indian	Asian
Male	1,053,504	827,825	44,107	67,620	66,145	12,377
Number						
Percent:						
Population 25 and over	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Less than 9th grade	6.4	5.1	33.2	4.9	6.5	7
9th to 12th, no diploma	13	12	18.9	16.4	17.7	10.9
High school graduate	30.4	30.5	21.4	34.3	34.4	15.3
Some college, no degree	23.2	23.5	14.6	26	22.9	16.4
Associate degree	5.2	5.2	2.8	5.6	5.4	5.1
Bachelor's degree	14	15.3	5.7	8.9	8.9	20.4
Graduate or professional degree	7.7	8.3	3.3	3.8	4.2	25
High school graduate or higher	80.6	82.9	47.9	78.7	75.7	82.1
Bachelor's degree or higher	21.8	23.7	9	12.8	13.1	45.3
Number	1,149,669	910,048	35,956	73,955	74,184	15,632
Percent:						
Population 25 and over	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Less than 9th grade	5.9	4.9	27.2	5.2	6.2	13.3
9th to 12th, no diploma	13.5	12.8	18.2	16.5	16.7	13.4
High school graduate	32.4	33.1	23.2	30.7	33.2	22.5
Some college, no degree	23.7	23.7	16.7	26.9	24.2	12.9
Associate degree	5.6	5.5	4.4	6.2	6.5	6.6
Bachelor's degree	13	13.8	6.8	10	9	18.6
Graduate or professional degree	5.9	6.2	3.5	4.6	4.3	12.7
High school graduate or higher	80.6	82.3	54.5	78.4	77.2	73.3
Bachelor's degree or higher	18.9	19.9	10.2	14.5	13.3	31.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, SF 3 file, Tables P148A-I, P37.

[a]Some Hispanics could be included in Black, American Indian, and Asian. Data are not presented for subgroups Hawaiian, other, and multiple races.

Figure 6-1

**Percent of Female Population 25 and Over
with Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Oklahoma and United States
2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Table P 37, P 148A-I.

7. Minority Status

Throughout the data in this report, it is clear that race and Hispanic status are important categories in differentiating the socioeconomic condition of Oklahoma women. One of the most significant variables reflecting these differences is median family income (Table 7-1, Figure 7-1). The great majority of families in Oklahoma (78 percent) are classified as White not Hispanic. With median income of \$43,451 in 1999, these families were, on average substantially better off than Black, Native American, “other race” and Hispanic families, with differentials ranging roughly between \$12,000 and \$16,000 per year. Asian families, however, exhibited income levels above White families.

The data in Table 7-1 apply to all families—both husband-wife families and families without one spouse present. The data in Table 4-1 covering poverty rates for female headed households indicate the same pattern of differentials.

Settlement patterns of the racial-Hispanic groups vary substantially across the geographic areas of the state. Tables 7-2 and 7-3 give a summary idea of where women in different categories will be found in Oklahoma. Four-fifths of Oklahoma’s Black women lived in the Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Lawton MSAs in 2000. Asian women were equally concentrated in the three large MSAs, but the Oklahoma City MSA alone held 56 percent of Asian women. Hispanic women also tend to be located in the state’s MSAs, but a little more than a third of this population group is found in non-metropolitan areas.

Native American women are much less concentrated in the metropolitan areas, with 58 percent living in non-metropolitan small cities and rural areas. It is difficult to interpret the information on the geographic distribution of those in the “other race alone”

category. The bulk of this group lived outside the state’s metropolitan areas—suggesting a similar pattern to that of Native American women. The pattern for women reporting “two or more races” is essentially the same as for the “White alone, not Hispanic” group. Many of the women in this group are White and Native American combined.

Programs targeting various racial/Hispanic groups can use this census data to determine where best to focus efforts. At the same time, it is important to note that rural areas are often under-served with various programs of assistance to women in comparison with metropolitan areas.

It is emphasized that programs to assist minority women in Oklahoma cannot be designed with “one size fits all” approaches. Cultures are vastly different. The status of Blacks in Oklahoma cannot be examined without an awareness of the legacy that this was a “Jim Crow” state with constitutional and statutory segregation until the 1950s and 1960s. Not only do Native Americans possess a unique culture, there are tremendous variations across tribal groups and continued influences of various policies of the federal government. As the most rapidly growing minority, Hispanic women are profoundly influenced by the cultures in nations of recent family origin. Recent international migration and assimilation also impact the culture of the state’s Asian Americans.

Table 7-1 Median Family Income, Selected Race, Hispanic Classification, Oklahoma, 1999

Classification	Number of Families	Family median income (dollars)
Total families	927,703	40,709
White alone	738,386	43,111
Black alone	61,956	27,580
Native American alone	63,382	31,565
Asian alone	9,647	45,771
Other race alone	18,303	27,664
Hispanic	37,005	28,748
White alone, not Hispanic	723,590	43,451

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, SF3 File 3, Table P-76-82/P154A-I/P156A-I/P157A-I.

Table 7-2 Female Population, Metropolitan Statistical Areas, and Rest of State, Oklahoma, 2000

	All races	White alone, not Hispanic	Black alone	Native American alone	Asian alone	Other race alone	Two or more races	Hispanic
Total state	1,754,759	1,308,344	132,034	139,252	24,307	117,214	79,227	82,474
Oklahoma City MSA	552,596	404,654	58,282	22,459	13,567	15,858	24,428	33,384
Tulsa MSA	411,392	305,056	37,235	27,869	4,909	7,761	21,186	17,232
Enid MSA (Garfield County)	29,840	26,111	886	653	331	465	945	1,076
Lawton MSA (Comanche County)	55,371	34,295	10,384	2,849	1,519	1,917	2,907	4,438
Ft. Smith MSA (Sequoyah County)	19,751	13,352	262	4,074	44	106	1,691	329
Total in MSAs	1,068,950	783,468	107,049	57,904	20,370	26,107	51,157	56,459
Rest of state	685,809	524,876	24,985	81,348	3,937	91,107	28,070	26,015

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, SF3 File, Tables P145A-I.

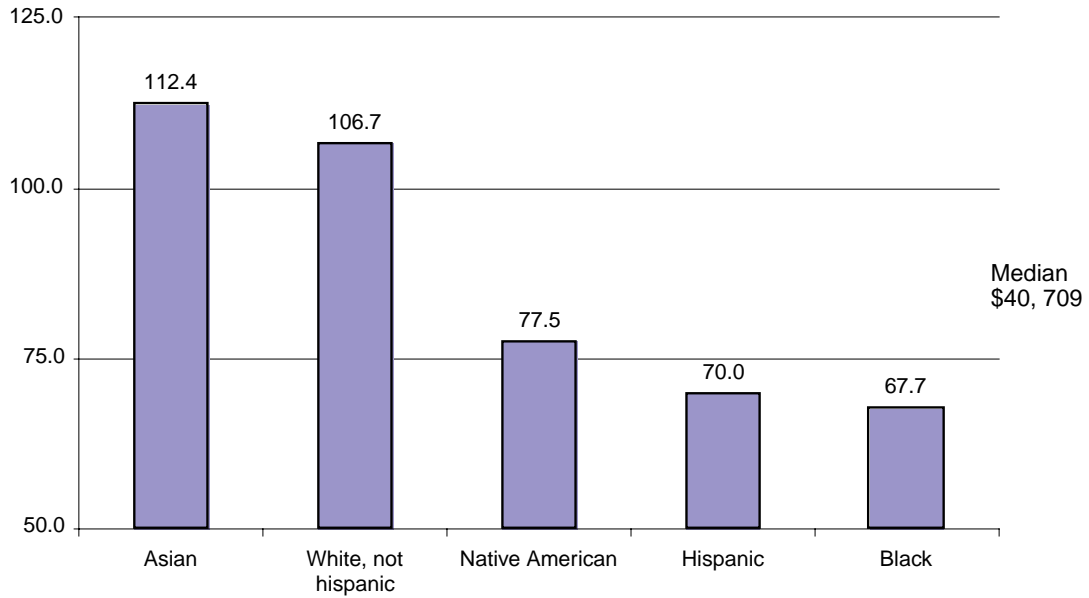
Table 7-3 Percent of Female Population, Metropolitan Statistical Areas and Rest of State, Oklahoma, 2000

	All races	White alone, not Hispanic	Black alone	Native American alone	Asian alone	Other race alone	Two or more races	Hispanic
Total state	100.0 0.0	100.0 0.0	100.0 0.0	100.0 0.0	100.0 0.0	100.0 0.0	100.0 0.0	100.0 0.0
Oklahoma City MSA	31.5	30.9	44.1	16.1	55.8	13.5	30.8	40.5
Tulsa MSA	23.4	23.3	28.2	20.0	20.2	6.6	26.7	20.9
Enid MSA (Garfield County)	1.7	2.0	0.7	0.5	1.4	0.4	1.2	1.3
Lawton MSA (Comanche County)	3.2	2.6	7.9	2.0	6.2	1.6	3.7	5.4
Ft. Smith MSA (Sequoyah County)	1.1	1.0	0.2	2.9	0.2	0.1	2.1	0.4
Total in MSAs	60.9	59.9	81.1	41.6	83.8	22.3	64.6	68.5
Rest of state	39.1	40.1	18.9	58.4	16.2	77.7	35.4	31.5

Source: Table
7-2

Figure 7-1

**Percent Deviation from Statewide Median Family Income
Selected Race, Hispanic Family Classifications
Oklahoma
1999**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Primary profile 9 (Oklahoma Department of commerce, State Data Center).

8. Disability

The federal census of 2000 reports 340,981 Oklahoma women and girls five years old and over as having some form of disability. This was one-fifth of the female population five and over (Table 8-1). The Census Bureau defines disability as “a long lasting physical, mental, or emotional condition” and specifies a set of conditions listed in Table 8-2. A disability makes life more challenging and often less satisfying for Oklahoma women and girls. Living with a disability frequently requires help from other individuals and from organizations specializing in assisting those with disabilities.

Table 8-1 indicates that the incidence of disability is very much dependent on age. The proportion of Oklahoma females with disability rises steadily from 4.8 percent for those 5 to 15 years of age to 59.9 percent for those 75 and over.

The various disability conditions are categorized as sensory, physical, mental, self-care, go-outside-home, and employment (Table 8-2). Sensory disabilities include blindness, deafness, or a severe vision or hearing impairment. Physical disabilities substantially limit one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying. Mental disability relates to difficulties learning, remembering, or concentrating. Those with self-care disability have difficulty dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home. Another form of disability is identified when a person has difficulty going outside the home alone to shop or visit a doctor’s office. An employment disability involves difficulty working at a job or business.

Mental disability is reported most often for girls 5 to 15—with the designation applying to half the disabled in that group. Employment disability and multiple types of disability are the disability most frequently encountered among women 16-64. Physical

disability and multiple disabilities accounted for 82 percent of the 65 and over group with disability.

There are significant variations in the incidence of disability among racial/Hispanic groups of Oklahoma women. For those five and older, the shares of female population with disability in 2000 were relatively low for Asian and Hispanic women (16.4 percent and 16.5 percent, respectively). Nearly one-quarter (24.8 percent) of Black women were reported with disability, while the shares were very similar for White women (20.9 percent) and Native American women (21.2 percent).

Since age plays such a significant role in the likelihood of disability (Figure 8-1), the longevity of White women increases the overall incidence for that racial group. Disabled White women accounted for 78.9 percent of all Oklahoma women reporting a disability, but were responsible for 93.8 percent of women 65 and over with disability.

[U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table PCT68A-I]

The presence of a disability does not prevent many Oklahoma women from holding jobs. Of the working age Oklahoma women 16-64 with disability in 2000, 49.7 percent were employed. However, the percent with jobs for women without disability was a significantly higher 65.8 percent. [Census Summary File 3, Table PCT32]

Women and girls in Oklahoma who reported a disability in 2000 were more likely to live in families with incomes below the federally-designated poverty level. The 73,155 Oklahoma women and girls who had a disability and who also were living in poverty accounted for 21.5 percent of the total female disabled population. For women without disability, only 13.9 percent were reported in the 2000 census as living below the poverty level. [Census Summary File 3, Table PCT34]

Any effort to alleviate problems of Oklahoma women and girls with disability should start with contact with the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services. This agency directs vocational rehabilitation programs to assist people with disability in gaining employment, provides educational services to the visual and hearing impaired, and provides various services to assist people in independent living. For the severely disabled requiring institutionalization, the Oklahoma Health Care Authority's Medicaid program provides an important source of support.

**Table 8-1 Incidence of Disability, Females,
by Age, Oklahoma, 2000 [a]**

Age range	Population	Number with disability	Percent with disability
5 to 15 years	267,374	12,851	4.8
16 to 20	128,946	15,682	12.2
21 to 64	967,875	194,461	20.1
65 to 74	130,659	47,167	36.1
75 and over	118,180	70,820	59.9
Total	1,613,034	340,981	21.1

[a]Noninstitutionalized civilian population
U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table
P42.

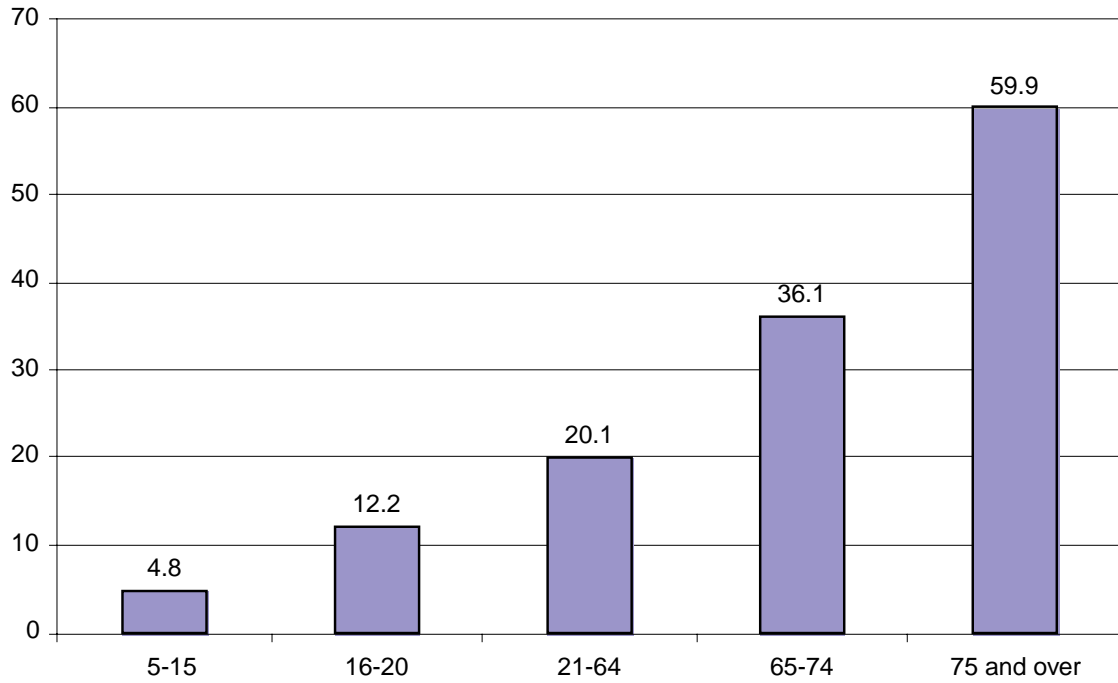
**Table 8-2 Persons with Disability by Type of
Disability, by Age, Oklahoma, 2000 [a]**

Type of disability	5 to 15 years	16 to 20 years	20 to 64 years	65 and over
With one type of disability	10,031	10,471	100,451	51,230
Sensory disability	2,124	1,198	11,608	6,891
Physical disability	974	957	28,904	29,627
Mental disability	6,607	2,006	7,820	2,706
Self-care disability	326	50	425	416
Go-outside-home disability	n.r.	1,645	7,530	11,590
Employment disability	n.r.	4,615	44,164	n.r.
Two or more types of disability	2,820	5,211	94,010	66,757
Includes self-care disability	1,627	836	23,846	30,728

[a]Noninstitutionalized civilian population; n.r. means no data reported
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table PCT26.

Figure 8-1

**Percent of Females Reported with Disability, by Age
Oklahoma
1999**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table P42.

9. Women's Health

Women's health issues cover a wide spectrum of variables. Poor health and inadequate health care can have overwhelming impacts on quality of life. The following comments on health data are limited to four topics: (1)the general state of health including women's health in Oklahoma, (2)data on leading causes of death of Oklahoma females, (3)the extent of health insurance coverage, and (4)health issues related to pregnancy and child bearing.

General Health Status of Oklahomans—In 1997 the Oklahoma Department of Health began issuing easily readable comparative statistical reports on health conditions, the latest of which is *2002 State of the State's Health Report*. [<http://health.state.ok.us/board/state/index.html>] The statistics for health variables are reported for Oklahoma and for the United States. The gist of these successive reports is that, on a wide variety of health variables, Oklahoma does less well than the nation as a whole. Moreover, there is also some trend evidence that the state is falling further and further behind many national norms. For example, after tracking right along the national figures during most of the 1980s, Oklahoma's death rate became much higher than the national figure during the 1990s. The data in these annual reports are not differentiated on the basis of gender.

Gender is the focus of another annual report card on general health status is prepared by the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) at the University of Pennsylvania. This project indicates that the dire observation of the Oklahoma Department of Health's *State of the State's Health* studies apply to women as well as to the total population. The 2001 issue is entitled *Making the Grade on Women's Health: A National and State-by-State Report Card* [<http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/2000ReportCard>].

The rating system deals with two classes of variables, status indicators and policy indicators. There are 33 status indicators and 32 policy indicators. Status indicators emphasize key women's health conditions as well as access to health and preventive care. States are rated on the basis of the status indicators, and Oklahoma ranked 42nd with a grade of "U" or unsatisfactory. Policy indicators focus on laws, regulations, policies and programs with emphasis on state government actions. Because policy indicators are difficult to quantify objectively, states were not ranked for this set of variables.

The NWLC attached grades for several of the health status variables. The following variables received grades of "F" for Oklahoma's female health status.

- Women without health insurance
- First trimester prenatal care
- Women in county without abortion provider
- Colorectal cancer screening
- No leisure-time physical activity
- Overweight
- Eating five fruits and vegetables a day
- Smoking
- Heart disease death rate
- Stroke death rate
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Maternal mortality ratio
- Infant mortality rate

Leading Causes of Death—Table 9-1 lists for 1999 the ten leading causes of death for Oklahoma women for racial classes and for Hispanics. Heart disease, cancer, and stroke (cerebrovascular disease) are the leading causes of death for Oklahoma women. Diabetes ranks high among American Indian women, reflecting a major health problem for that racial group.

The Centers for Disease Control source used for Table 10-1 also breaks down leading causes by age classifications. The leading cause of death for Oklahoma women

in the 1-34 age class is “unintentional injury” which includes auto accidents, drowning, and even poisoning. Homicide and suicide also appear as leading causes of death among young females.

Health Insurance Coverage—The U.S. Census Bureau’s survey of health insurance coverage indicates a significant deficit for Oklahoma, though the deficit is not as great as for neighboring New Mexico and Texas (Figure 9-1). The 2001 percent of Oklahomans without health insurance coverage during the year was 18.3 percent compared to a national average of 14.6 percent. Only California, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Texas had lower rates of coverage.

While the data are not broken down by gender, three conclusions can be inferred about health insurance and Oklahoma women. First, due to nearly universal eligibility for Medicare, virtually all women 65 and over have some form of health insurance. Second, since women are heads of a significant number of families with children under 18, the absence of coverage for children presents a special problem for women. In 2001, the Census Bureau estimated that 15.5 percent of Oklahomans under 18 were not covered by health insurance. Third, to the extent that Oklahoma children do have health insurance, the program of coverage is more likely to be based on a government sponsored system—especially Medicaid. Medicaid is a federal/state program providing health insurance for low-income persons including parents, children, the aged, and the disabled. Nationwide, 68.4 percent of children under 18 were covered by private health insurance—largely through employer based programs; private sources covered only 58.8 percent of Oklahoma children.

Coverage for children in Oklahoma has been expanded as a result of a 1997 federal program providing extra funds to state governments and actions by state government to expand health insurance coverage for low-income children. Between November 1997 and June 2002, the number of Oklahoma children covered by Medicaid rose from 161,732 to 327,268. [Oklahoma Health Care Authority, *Annual Report FY2002*, p. 25]

Pregnancy and Childbearing/Childrearing Issues—It is reported that 45.4 percent of the 48,470 live births in Oklahoma in 1999 were unintended at the time of conception. A pregnancy is said to be unintended if it is mistimed or unwanted at any time in the future. These unintended births are disproportionately by poor women—37.2 percent being Medicaid reimbursed. [Oklahoma Academy for State Goals, *The State of Oklahoma Health, 2002 Town Hall*, pp. 3-16 and 3-17]

Oklahoma has a relatively high rate of teen pregnancy (Figure 9-2). With a 2000 rate of 59.2 births per 1,000 to females aged 15-19, Oklahoma ranked 13 in the nation. The rate for the entire nation was 48.5. The teen birth rates generally tend to be higher in eastern than in western Oklahoma. There has been a significant and relatively steady drop in Oklahoma's teen birth rate since 1990. [Oklahoma Department of Health, "Teen Pregnancy Prevention Facts about Oklahoma 2002"] It is estimated that in 1996 there were 17 abortions per 100 teen pregnancies in Oklahoma—half the national average of 35. [The Alan Guttmacher Institute, *Teenage Pregnancy*, April 1999, http://agi-usa.org/pubs/teen_preg_stats.html]

In 1996, the number of abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44 (abortion rate) for Oklahoma was estimated to be 11.8 compared to 22.9 for the whole nation. Fourteen

states were estimated to have had lower abortion rates than Oklahoma. Also in 1996, 54 percent of Oklahoma women lived in a county without an abortion provider—compared to 32 percent nationwide. The same year, there were eleven providers in Oklahoma.

[The Alan Guttmacher Institute, *Abortion Incidence and Services in the United States, 1995-96, Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 30, N. 6, Nov.-Dec. 1998]

Pregnant women and women with young children who are poor may receive food and nutrition aid from state government through the federally funded Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program (WIC) administered by the Oklahoma Department of Health. As of July 31, 2000, the program was used by 22,680 women, 23,833 infants, and 42,026 children. [<http://www.healthstate.ok.us/program/wic>]

Long-Term Care—Given the relative longevity of females, the existence of government assistance for long-term care is especially important for Oklahoma women. During the 2002 fiscal year, the state’s Medicaid program administered by the Oklahoma Health Care Authority spent \$296 million on long term care in nursing facilities serving adults. [*Annual Report FY02*, p. 29.] The remarkable growth of the share of older women in the state’s population was discussed in Section 3 dealing with the aged.

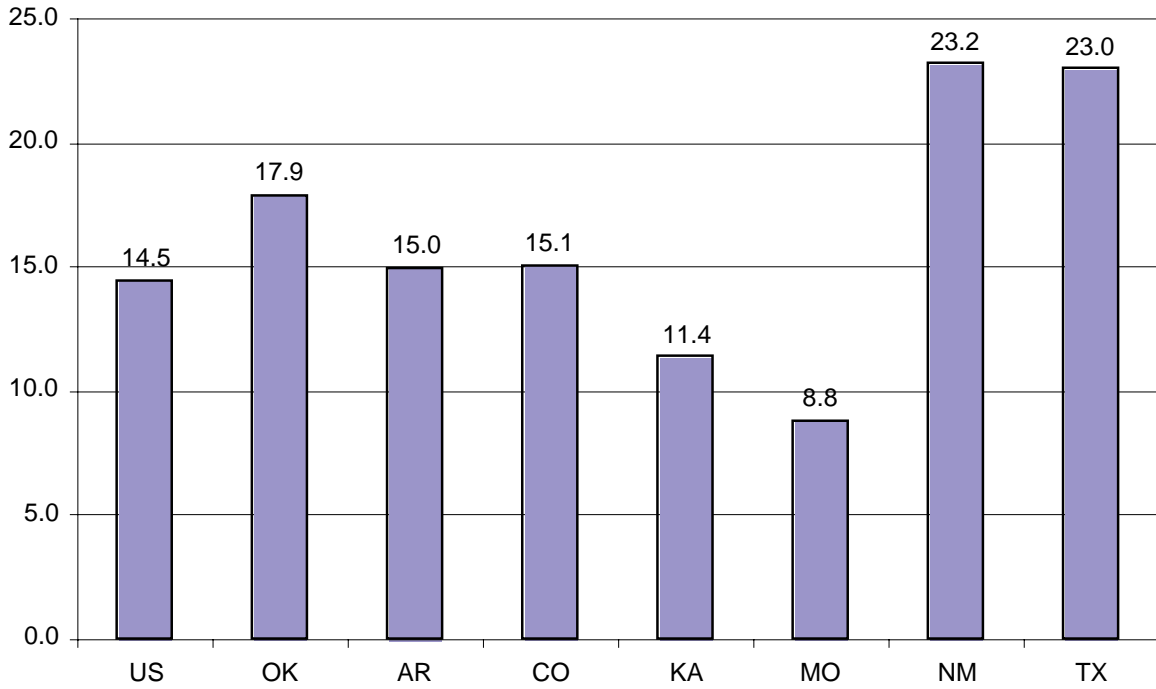
Table 9-1 Ten Leading Causes of Death, Females by Race and Hispanic Categories, Oklahoma, 1999

All females	White	Black	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic
Heart disease	Heart disease	Heart disease	Heart disease	Cancer	Cancer
Cancer	Cancer	Cancer	Cancer	Heart disease	Heart disease
Cerebro-vascular	Cerebro-vascular	Cerebro-vascular	Diabetes	Cerebro-vascular	Cerebro-vascular
Chronic low respiratory disease	Chronic low respiratory disease	Diabetes	Unintentional injury	Nephritis	Unintentional injury
Unintentional injury	Influenza & pneumonia	Unintentional injury	Cerebro-vascular	Unintentional injury	Diabetes
Influenza & pneumonia	Unintentional injury	Influenza & pneumonia	Chronic low respiratory disease	Diabetes	Congenital anomalies
Diabetes	Diabetes	Nephritis	Influenza & pneumonia	Atherosclerosis	Influenza & pneumonia
Alzheimer's disease	Alzheimer's disease	Chronic low respiratory disease	Nephritis	Eight tied	Septicemia
Atherosclerosis	Atherosclerosis	Atherosclerosis	Liver disease	Eight tied	Two tied
Nephritis	Septicemia	Alzheimer's disease	Septicemia	Eight tied	Two tied

Source: U.S. Center for Disease Control, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, <http://webapp.cdc.gov/cgi-bin/broker.exe>.

Figure 9-1

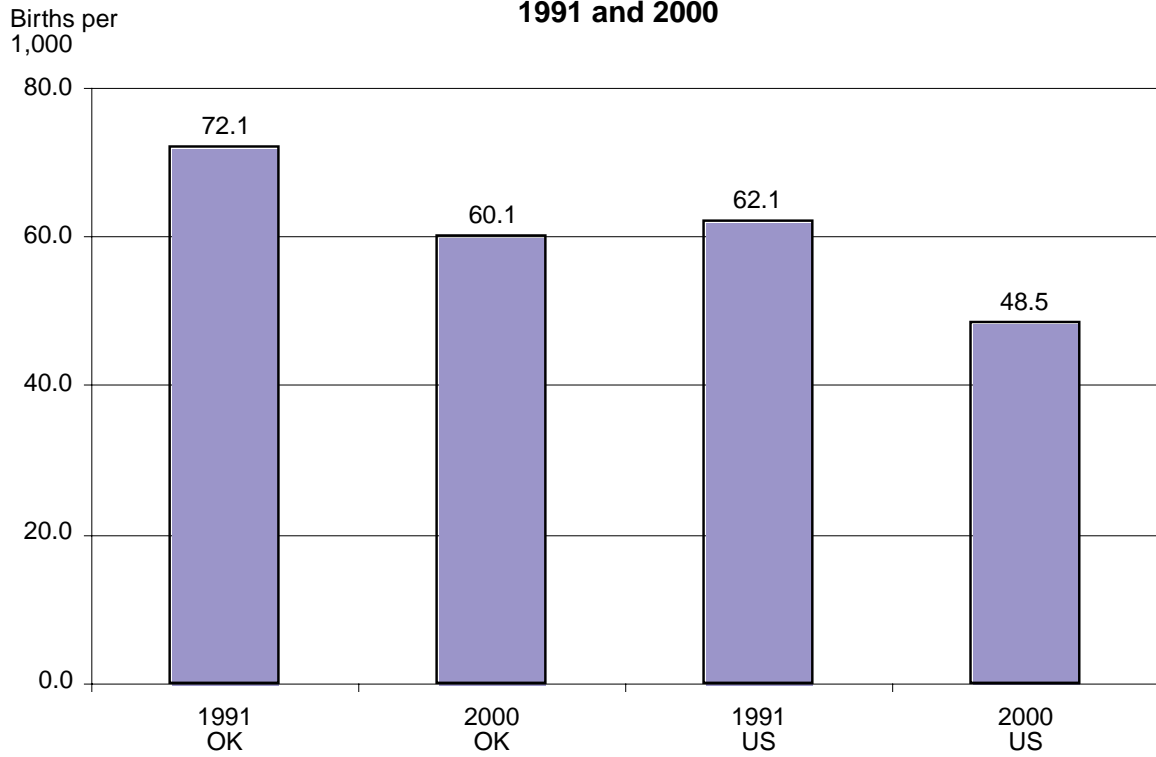
**Percent of People Without Health Insurance for the Entire Year,
Oklahoma, U.S., and Surrounding States
3-Year Average 1999-2001**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Health Insurance Coverage: 2001, Current Population Survey P60-220, 2002.

Figure 9-2

**Birth Rates for Teenagers 15-19
Oklahoma and U.S.
1991 and 2000**



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, "Teenager Births in the United States: State Trends, 1991-2000, an update," National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 50, No. 9, May 30, 2002.

10. Mental Illness and Substance Abuse

Women seeking assistance with problems of mental health are often facing problems functioning effectively in various work, family, and social settings. Data on mental illness is available as a result of contacts with various local service agencies—particularly those under the aegis of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS).

Table 10-1 reports, by gender, the record of various types of problems experienced by those served by DMHSAS during the year ending June 30, 2002. Biggest among the problems leading women to come into contact with the department are the categories “mood disorder,” “social conditions,” and “substance related.” With 11,747 women served, mood disorders are the most frequent cause of contact. This category of mental illness includes depression and bi-polar disorders. It is a more common problem for women than for men, with women accounting for 63.0 percent of those served.

The term “social conditions” in the classification of problems leading to contact applies to such behavioral conditions as sexual abuse, abuse of partner, and child abuse. This involved 8,000 by Oklahoma women in FY2002, with women accounting for two-thirds of the persons served.

The third most important reason for mental health service to women involves drug related matters and accounted for 5,120 women served. Men are much more likely to be treated for substance abuse, and account for 60 percent of those served.

An October, 2002, report of the federal National Drug Intelligence Center emphasizes how Oklahoma’s central location has made it both a destination and a transit area for drug shipments. [*Oklahoma Drug Threat Assessment*, Document ID: 2002-

SO387OK-001, www.usdoj.gov/ndic/pubs/2286/index.htm] Methamphetamine is indicated to be the greatest drug threat in Oklahoma. Because of this logistics feature, and because of the prevalence of local “meth” labs, Oklahomans may be particularly likely to encounter illicit drugs.

In the late 1990s, DMHSAS commissioned a telephone survey of alcohol and drug use in Oklahoma. The sample of telephone contacts resulted in 7,200 valid interviews. The research firm implementing the survey then used the sample data to estimate numbers in various categories of use for the entire population. The results for women by race are reported in Table 10-2. The survey indicates that alcohol is much more widely used by Oklahoma women than illicit drugs. For example, it was estimated that 30.7 percent of White women 18 and over had used alcohol in the last 30 days, while only 0.8 percent had used illicit drugs. Alcohol use by Asian women was observed at a relatively high rate of 35.9 percent during the past 30 days, while illicit drug use rates were relatively high for Native American women and those in an “other” racial classification. (Throughout this entire study, this is virtually the only instance of a socioeconomic variable in which the Asian category exhibits a particularly undesirable feature.)

The alcohol/drug abuse survey was designed to get enough information from the respondents to infer whether or not they were in need of treatment. The research indicated that 2.9 percent of Oklahoma adult females and 8.8 percent of males were in need of treatment.

The “social conditions” category of mental illness mentioned above related to abuse. It is emphasized that domestic abuse and sexual assault in Oklahoma are issues

that are much more significant than indicated by the DMHSAS data. For example, the Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault reports the following statistics for the state for 2001:

- 2,638 rape victims
- 4,858 adult survivors of childhood sexual assault
- 845 sexually abused children
- 470 victims of sexual harassment
- 13 victims of sexual misconduct by a physician, clergy, attorney, counselor, etc.
- 17,553 felony assault and battery crimes

The Coalition also asserts that only about half of the “intimate violence” crimes are reported to law enforcement officials. From a public policy viewpoint, what sorts of preventive mental health services could be provided to reduce the incidence of the deviant behavior involved in domestic violence and sexual assault?

**Table 10-1 Mental Health Problems/Diagnoses
Persons Served by Department of Mental Health
and Substance Abuse Services, Oklahoma,
Fiscal Year 2002**

Problem/Diagnosis	Females	Males	Total	Percent female
Alcohol abuse	1,757	4,418	6,175	28.5
Developmental disorder	671	1,339	2,010	33.4
Mood disorder	11,747	6,907	18,654	63.0
Non-alcohol/drug related				
organic	128	196	324	39.5
Other non-psychotic	2,927	2,369	5,296	55.3
Other psychotic	2,272	2,723	4,995	45.5
Personality disorder	145	89	234	62.0
Schizophrenia	1,506	2,618	4,124	36.5
Social conditions	8,000	3,835	11,835	67.6
Substance related	5,120	7,457	12,577	40.7
Unknown/other	6	14	20	30.0
Deferred/no diagnosis	322	141	463	69.5

Source: Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, *Data Book for Fiscal Year 2002*, Table 6.

**Table 10-2 Alcohol and Drug Use, By Race
Females, Oklahoma, Survey Results, 1999**

Race and Use	Last 18 months, number	Last 30 days, number	Rate estimate, last 30 days
White			
Alcohol	535,857	325,929	30.7
Illicit drugs	28,835	8,891	0.8
Black			
Alcohol	31,528	16,016	20.5
Illicit drugs	2,607	1,508	1.9
Asian			
Alcohol	4,609	2,601	35.9
Illicit drugs	358	n.a.	n.a.
Native American			
Alcohol	40,144	19,797	24.0
Illicit drugs	7,486	3,973	2.9
Other			
Alcohol	12,270	6,796	27.8
Illicit drugs	949	587	2.4
Total			
Alcohol	628,905	373,238	29.5
Illicit drugs	37,039	13,703	1.1

n.a. Not available.

Source: Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and
Substance Abuse Services, *State Treatment Needs
Assesment Study No. 1*, April 29, 1999.

11. Unemployment, Underemployment, and Low Wage Jobs

There are three measures relating to women and the workforce that are indicators of potential distress. These are “labor force participation rate,” “unemployment rate,” and “employment rate.” These three measures are presented for Oklahoma women in 2000 for racial and Hispanic classifications (Table 11-1). The labor force consists of all those who are at work (employed) or without a job but seeking work (unemployed). The labor force participation rate is the percentage of all women 16 years old and older who are in the labor force. The last half of the 20th Century witnessed a dramatic growth in female labor force participation rates. By the time of the 2000 Census of Population, 55.1 percent of Oklahoma women over 16 were in the state’s labor force. At 59.8 percent, the participation rate was particularly high for Black women.

The unemployment rate is the percentage of the population that is unemployed. While the overall rate in 2000 for Oklahoma women was 5.4 percent, the rates for minority women tended to be significantly higher, e.g. 10.7 percent for Black women.

In spite of the variations in labor force participation rates and unemployment rates across the various racial/ethnic groups in Table 11-1, the overall shares of female populations who were employed (the employment rate) were remarkably similar and tended to be slightly above 50 percent. Black women and American Indian women were more likely than white women to be in the labor force, but were less likely to be successful in having a job.

The growth of female labor force participation rates has had a significant impact on the nature of families. Table 11-2 reports this change in family structure from the point of view of Oklahoma’s children. In 2000, the traditional perception of the

American family with a father working and mother staying home and caring for children applied to only 29.2 percent of Oklahoma children under 6 years of age, and to only 20.2 percent of children 6 to 17. More married mothers work than stay at home. This also shows that women tend to be more likely to get jobs after their children have grown older. Slightly more than one-quarter of Oklahoma children did not live in a two-parent family at all.

Labor force participation for Oklahoma females tends to decline as women become relatively older. The female participation rates for Oklahoma women of different age groups in 2000 illustrate this decline with age.

25-54 years	71.8%
55-59 years	56.9
60-64 years	37.9
65-69 years	19.2
70 and over	6.2

The rewards to employment depend very much on the sort of job which a woman holds. Table 11-3 compares Oklahoma women and men with respect to the sorts of selected occupations at which they are employed. In general, Oklahoma women tend to be employed in occupations which pay less than the occupations of men. Women employed in “sales and office occupations” accounted for 38.1 percent of total female employment in 2000; only 16.8 percent of men fell into this occupational category. Women were also disproportionately represented in service occupations (Figure 11-1). The relative significance of women in the “professional and related” category is probably due to the concentration of women in “education, training, and library” sub-categories.

The concentration and large numbers of women in lower pay occupations is directly illustrated in Table 11-4 which shows mean annual wages for both men and

women in 2000 and the percent of females in various occupational categories. Low wages and occupational status are especially evident in the “sales and related,” and “office and administrative support” categories, along with “personal care and service” and “healthcare support.”

A significant number of Oklahoma women are employed in relatively high pay occupations such as “management occupations,” “health practitioners and technical,” and “business and financial operations.” Women account for almost half of the workers in the high-pay category of “legal occupations.” Further improvement of women’s occupational status is very dependent upon expanding levels of educational achievement.

Table 11-1 Rates of Female Workforce Involvement, Females, by Race and Hispanic Categories, Oklahoma, 2000

Race, Hispanic category	Labor force participation rate, percent	Unemployment rate, percent	Employment rate, percent
All females	55.1	5.4	51.9
White alone, not Hispanic	54.5	4.4	51.9
Black	59.8	10.7	52.4
American Indian	57.6	8	52.6
Asian	53.7	4.2	51.2
Other race	53.6	9.5	48
Two or more races	55.8	7.7	51.3
Hispanic	53.4	8.9	48.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, S.F. 3, Table P43/P150A-I.

Table 11-2 Children by Labor Force Status of Parent(s), Oklahoma, 2000

Percent:	Under 6 years of age	6 to 17 years of age
Living with two parents	72.0	72.1
Father only in labor force	29.2	20.2
Father and mother in labor force	37.3	45.6
Living with one parent	28.2	27.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, SF3, Table P46.

Table 11-3 Employment by Occupation, by Sex, Oklahoma, 2000

Occupation	Employees, female	Employees, male	Percent of total, female	Percent of total, male
Total employed	712,366	832,930	100.0	100.0
Management, business, and financial	76,798	112,210	10.8	13.5
Professional and related	161,588	118,492	22.7	14.2
Computer and related	7,630	17,163	1.1	2.1
Architectural and engineering	3,184	21,331	0.4	2.6
Education, training, and library	64,402	23,128	9.0	2.8
Healthcare practitioners	52,357	18,491	7.3	2.2
Other professional and related	34,015	38,379	4.8	4.6
Service occupations	142,166	97,646	20.0	11.7
Healthcare support	31,105	4,571	4.4	0.5
Protective service	4,584	31,105	0.6	3.7
Food preparation and serving	50,649	30,963	7.1	3.7
Personal care and service	35,444	8,259	5.0	1.0
Other service occupations	20,384	22,748	2.9	2.7
Sales and office occupations	271,299	139,854	38.1	16.8
Sales and related occupations	88,633	85,619	12.4	10.3
Office and administrative support	182,666	54,235	25.6	6.5
Farming, fishing, and forestry	2,623	11,098	0.4	1.3
Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations	7,325	197,214	1.0	23.7
Production occupations	37,359	100,436	5.2	12.1
Transportation and material moving	13,208	86,980	1.9	10.4

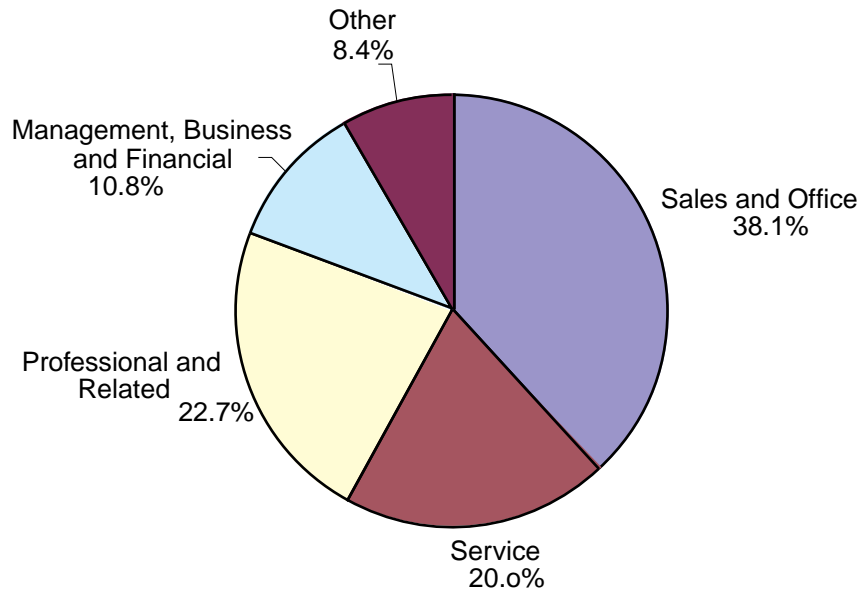
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table QT-P27.

Table 11-4 Annual Wages and Percent Female Employees, Selected Occupations, Oklahoma 2000

Occupation	Total	Female employees	Percent female	Median hourly wages
Legal occupations	14,999	6,938	46.3	23.99
Management occupations except farmers and farm managers	111,374	42,081	37.8	22.40
Architecture and engineering	24,515	3,184	13.0	21.56
Computer and mathematical	24,793	7,630	30.8	19.13
Business and financial operations	57,236	31,946	55.8	17.70
Life, physical, and social science	10,205	3,464	33.9	16.48
Health practitioners and technical	70,848	52,537	74.2	16.22
Education, training, and library	87,530	64,402	73.6	14.58
Installation, maintenance and repair	79,884	4,235	5.3	13.90
Community and social services	25,955	13,989	53.9	12.01
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media	21,235	9,624	45.3	11.70
Construction, extraction, and maintenance	94,655	3,090	3.3	11.62
Protective service	27,748	4,584	16.5	10.68
Production occupations	137,795	37,359	27.1	10.56
Office and administrative support	236,901	182,666	77.1	9.90
Transportation and material moving	100,188	13,208	13.2	9.42
Sales and related	174,252	88,633	50.9	7.93
Healthcare support	35,676	31,105	87.2	7.80
Farming, fishing, and forestry	13,721	2,623	19.1	7.69
Building and grounds cleaning and Maintenance	51,073	20,384	39.9	7.24
Personal care and service	43,703	35,444	81.1	6.94
Food preparation and serving	81,612	50,649	62.1	6.43

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table QT-P27; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, State Occupational and Wage Estimates, 2000

Figure 11-3
Major Occupational Classes, Females
Oklahoma
2000



12. Receipt of Public Assistance Payments

The receipt of various types of governmental assistance to low-income women is an indication of people with serious problems. Medicaid benefits for elderly women and for children have already been mentioned. The preceding section on employment discussed a tendency for working Oklahoma women to be concentrated in relatively low pay occupations and industries. Especially since the 1930s, government has provided various forms of assistance to people with low incomes. This section reviews one of the most important of these programs which provides help to families with children—families largely headed by single women. The section concludes with a reminder that many of the state’s low-income women are part of the “working poor” receiving little or no assistance from government.

Public Assistance for Families with Children—Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was a federal/state program created in the 1930s with a primary aim of assisting single women with children who were unable to provide adequate resources on their own. Critics of this program have asserted that it tended to generate a culture of dependency and that in some cases it even reduced the propensity of mothers to marry and led women to have additional children in order to receive additional “welfare” benefits.

The end of AFDC in federal legislation in 1996 represents one of the most significant changes in public policy affecting poor women in the United States. Instead of a program emphasizing cash payments to poor women with children, a new program was adopted with much greater flexibility whose principal purpose was to get women off welfare, into the workforce, and able to support themselves and their families without

government help. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) provides block grants to states in the place of the former AFDC payment program. The state's program is administered by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

Cash assistance is provided to families—either single parent, two parent, or caretaker relative—provided that they engage in one or more of a set of work participation activities intended to prepare adults to become employed, or to assist them in participating in actual job settings. To continue to receive benefits, recipients must begin such work participation activities within 24 months of their receipt of benefits. They must currently spend, on average, at least 30 hours per week in these activities.

TANF also provides other programs to assist families including eligibility for Medicaid, child care assistance, and food stamps. Expanded health insurance coverage for children has been a major benefit to low-income families. Without quality child care assistance, it becomes very difficult for mothers to arrange their lives so that they may be employed in a job leading to self-sufficiency.

One of the most significant changes in this public assistance program is the constraint that recipients are limited to a lifetime receipt of benefits for five years. This is aimed at eliminating chronic, long-term reliance on cash assistance. The limit is currently of special interest because it is only recently becoming operative for families receiving TANF benefits. States are allowed to implement a 20 percent hardship exemption, but clearly a significant number of recipients—mainly women—will be affected at a time when employment opportunities are dampened by the effects of a recently ended national recession. Fortunately, a very large share of the TANF recipients have already been able to get “off welfare” in Oklahoma.

TANF has been very successful in reducing the number of families receiving assistance. Table 12-1 and Figure 12-1 indicate that the total number of persons in Oklahoma receiving TANF benefits dropped from 126,539 in Fiscal Year 1995 to 35,624 in FY02. Significant declines in reliance are observed for various racial/ethnic groups, though the declines were proportionately less for Blacks and for the “Other” category which includes Asians and Hispanics.

The Limits of Public Assistance—Aside from selected housing subsidies and food stamps, low income adults under 62 years of age without children and without a disability are not eligible for significant governmental benefits. Those 62 and over are normally eligible for Social Security benefits, and the disabled are eligible for federal benefits called Supplemental Security Income. In 1999, 73,000 Oklahomans received Supplemental Security Income, and 271,000 received food stamps. Medicare provides health insurance for virtually everyone who is 65 and over.

The 2000 Census of Population reported 103,757 families with incomes so low in 1999 that they fell below the federally designated poverty level. As pointed out in Section 4 above, the 1999 poverty level for, say, a family of a mother and two children was \$13,290 or \$1,107 per month. The limit is higher for larger and lower for smaller families.

Nearly half the state’s poor families were married couples, both with and without children. Of those married couples, 69.0 percent received no Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, or public assistance benefits. [Census 2000 Summary File 3, Table PCT59] The bulk of these married couples (64.8 percent) can be classified as

the “working poor” because one or both adults worked full or part-time during the year.

[Census 2000 Summary File 3, Table PCT60]

Essentially the same applies to families headed by females with no husband present. These families accounted for 45.3 percent of all of Oklahoma’s poor families. Two-thirds of these poor female-headed families received no Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, or public assistance benefits during 1999. Moreover, in almost two-thirds of the families, the woman worked full or part-time during the year.

To the extent that those not eligible for public assistance receive any help at all beyond food stamps, etc., they are likely to be turning to private charity—to churches, food banks, hospital emergency rooms for medical care. Communities face a continued challenge to provide and coordinate an adequate level of these services for the poor.

Table 12-1 Public Assistance Recipients by Race, Ethnic Group, Oklahoma, Fiscal Years 1995 and 2002 [a]

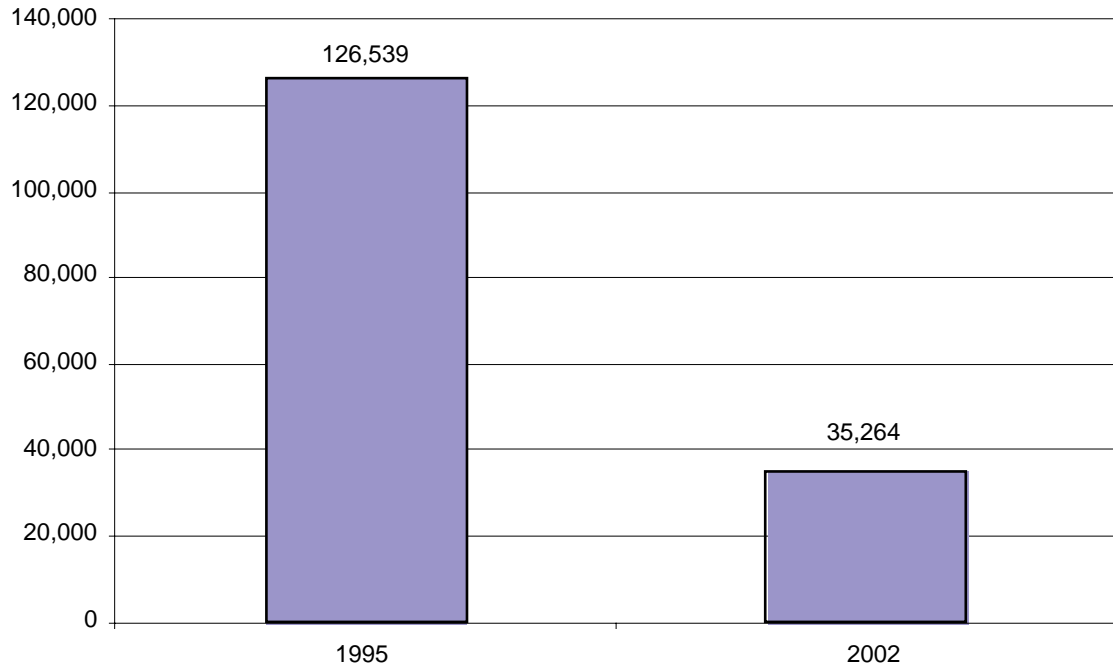
	Total FY95	Total FY02	Adults FY 95	Adults FY02	Children FY95	Children FY02
All persons	126,539	35,624	39,187	8,345	87,352	27,279
White	65,225	15,134	22,336	3,821	42,889	11,313
Black	39,293	13,907	10,816	3,164	28,477	10,743
American Indian	16,679	4,409	4,624	999	12,055	3,410
Other	5,342	2,174	1,411	361	3,931	1,813

[a]Aid to Families with Dependent Children, FY95; Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, FY02.

Source: Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Annual Report, FY95, p. 122; FY02, p. S-70.

Figure 12-1

**Number of Public Assistance Recipients
Oklahoma**



Source: Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Annual Report FY 95, p. 122; FY 02, p. 5-70.

13. Incarceration and Criminal Record

Three features of Oklahoma's criminal justice system and women are reviewed in this section. First, the general incidence of crime is examined. Second, note is taken of the state's remarkably high rate of female incarceration. Third, important characteristics of Oklahoma's female prison population illustrate the sorts of conditions and events that put women "at risk."

The Incidence of Crime--The commission of a crime obviously precedes action by the criminal justice system. Women as victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse were discussed in Section 10, Mental Illness and Substance Abuse. In 1999, Oklahoma's overall crime rate of 4,684 per 100,000 population was 9.8 percent above the national average. [U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2001*, p. 183] The state's overall violent crime rate was less than the national norm, but the property crime rate was well above. However, within the total set of violent crime categories, Oklahoma's rate for forcible rape (40.9 per 100,000) was 25 percent above the national average. Oklahoma women were much more likely than their national counterparts to be victims of forcible rape.

A 1998 study of crime incidents in Oklahoma set forth three important caveats regarding the link between crime and victimization on the one hand and conviction on the other. [W. Robert Reed and Mickey Hepner, "Summary of a Survey of Oklahoma Crime," Oklahoma Office of State Finance, Jan. 20, 1998] The study reported that:

- Almost half of all reported crime incidents did not result in an arrest.
- Over a third of the adults who were arrested were not prosecuted.
- An implication . . . is that less than a third of the reported crime incidents resulted in somebody being punished.

Oklahoma’s Female Incarceration Rate—The U.S. Department of Justice defines the female incarceration rate as the number of female prisoners with sentences of more than one year per 100,000 residents. In 2001, as in earlier years, Oklahoma had the highest female incarceration rate in the nation. Rates for the United States, Oklahoma, and surrounding states are illustrative.

United States	58
Oklahoma	130
Arkansas	74
Colorado	62
Kansas	36
Missouri	73
New Mexico	50
Texas	96

With a rate of 113, Mississippi was the only other state besides Oklahoma with a female incarceration rate in excess of 100. [*Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics Online*, <http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/1995/pdf/t641.pdf>]

Although this high rate of female incarceration in Oklahoma is of concern, it must be emphasized that the absolute number of women in prison is not great—2,290 in 2001. Nevertheless, it is natural to wonder about causes. For example is this high rate indicative of something about the state’s underlying attitudes toward women? Or is it a reflection of a more general tendency to want to “lock up the bad guys” regardless of gender?

Characteristics of Women in Prison—The second feature of the Oklahoma criminal justice system and women serves as a reminder and, in a sense, a summary of features already examined. Various socioeconomic characteristics of women “at risk” and in need of more desirable life situations have been the topic of previous sections.

Many of these features appear to converge at the same time in situations in which a woman commits a felony and is then imprisoned.

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections' "Facts at a Glance" for October 31, 2002 reported 2,318 female and 20,708 male inmates. The racial/ethnic mix of Oklahoma women inmates was disproportionately black. The shares were as follows:

White	57.7 percent
Black	29.3
Native American	8.2
Hispanic	4.3

In addition to the women in prison, there were 6,932 on probation and 805 on parole.

While women accounted for 10.1 percent of the prison inmates, they were 25.0 percent of those on probation and 19.8 percent of those on parole. In spite of the high female incarceration rate, female felons are more likely than men to receive punishment outside prisons.

An "Inmate Profile" by the Oklahoma Department of Corrections for June 2002 shows that nonviolent crimes dominate the offenses leading to female incarceration. Miscellaneous nonviolent crimes such as larceny and forgery accounted for 28.8 percent of the crimes, with drug and alcohol offenses at 44.6 percent and violent crimes at 25.4 percent. The average female in prison at that time was 36 years old.

Substantially more information about typical Oklahoma female inmates may be gleaned from a report of 1991 and 1996 surveys administered by the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. [Susan Marcus-Mendoza and Robert Briody, "Female Inmates in Oklahoma: An Updated Profile and Programming Assessment,"

<http://www.doc.state.ok.us/DOCS/OCJRC/OCJRC96/Ocjrc85.htm>] The generalized

conclusions of these surveys match many of the features discussed in preceding sections.

- A significant proportion of the female inmates were single parents. While 95 percent had children in 1996, only 27 percent were married.
- Eighty-one percent from the 1991 study believed they needed more education to get a job. One-third had not graduated from high school, while only 4 percent had college degrees.
- Eighty percent of the 1991 group had experience physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.
- Twenty-three percent of the 1996 group had been treated at a psychiatric hospital.
- Seventy-three percent reported that they had a drug or alcohol problem before entering prison.
- In the 1991 study, 46 percent of women in prison had not held a job during the year before their arrest.
- For those with children, 27 percent received public assistance and 8 percent received disability benefits.

Of course none of these characteristics justify committing a felony. Most women with these various problems never commit felonies or end up in prison.

14. Political Participation and Representation

The preceding sections indicated various ways of identifying Oklahoma women who could benefit from help—either from private organizations or from government. Participation in political processes, whether voting or serving in office, may have an impact on the character and extent of assistance available to women with problems.

Voting—Oklahoma women tended to be a little more likely to be registered voters but a little less likely to have voted than the average for the nation in the elections of 1998 and 2000 (Table 14-1). In comparison with the surrounding states during those two elections, 48.1 percent of Oklahoma women 18 and over voted. This was a lower ratio than was observed for Missouri (56.5 percent), Colorado (53.8 percent), and Kansas and New Mexico, both at 51.7 percent. However, Oklahoma women were more prone to vote than those in Arkansas (47.5 percent) and Texas (41.7 percent).

Although data are not readily available, it should be pointed out that voter participation rates for women at the less advantaged end of the socioeconomic spectrum are likely to be less than the averages quoted above. It is, however, possible that women who do vote are somewhat more likely than men to be sensitive to the special problems which create difficult life situations for women.

Elected Officials—Again, it is speculative to assume that women who are elected officials have special concerns for problems of women. Clearly some do, and some do not—as is also the case with men who are elected to office. With four offices filled, Oklahoma is a leader among the states with respect to the number of women serving in statewide elected posts. However, at 10.1 percent, the Oklahoma Legislature's share of women members was less than half the national average of 22.0 percent in 2000 (Table

15-1). Women were also less well represented than in any of the surrounding states. In Colorado and Kansas, for example, one-third of the legislators were women. In the election held in November 2002, women ran for 24 of the seats in the Oklahoma Legislature and won in 13 of the contests. [Center for American Women in Politics, <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu>]

Women have not played prominent roles in representing Oklahoma in the U.S. Congress. The only female from the state to serve in either the House of Representatives or the Senate was Alice Mary Robertson, who served in the House during 1921-23.

Casual observation suggests that women are more likely to serve in elected local offices in Oklahoma. At the start of 2002, however, only two of the state's cities of 30,000 or greater population (Edmond and Stillwater) were served by a woman mayor.

Oklahoma's state constitution grants a great deal of power to the legislature. That body is the focal point for the development of many policies affecting Oklahoma women. In comparison with the national and regional norms, there is substantial room for increased participation of women in the legislature.

Table 14-1 Women in State Legislatures, Registered and Voting, Oklahoma and Surrounding States, 2000

State	Number of women	Total members	Percent women members of legislature	Percent of all women registered to vote [a]	Percent of all women voting [a]
Arkansas	21	135	15.6	63.9	47.5
Colorado	34	100	34.0	67.8	53.8
Kansas	54	165	32.7	67.8	51.7
Missouri	44	197	22.3	74.5	56.5
New Mexico	31	112	27.7	62.4	51.7
Oklahoma	15	149	10.1	66.6	48.1
Texas	33	181	18.2	62.1	41.7
Total U.S.	1,672	7,610	22.0	64.6	49.3

[a]Average of 1998 and 2000. Applies to population of women 18 and over.

Source: Council of State Governments, *Book of the States, 2000*, Lexington, KY, 2000, p. 73; U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2000*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001, p. 249; Institute for Women's Policy Research, *The Status of Women in the States*, 4th ed., 2002-03, <http://www.iwpr.org/states2000/index.htm>, p. 84.