

Changes in the Social and Economic Status of Women by Metro-Nonmetro Residence. By Carolyn C. Rogers. Rural Economy Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 732.

Abstract

Between 1980 and the mid-1990's, the earnings of American women and men became more equal. The narrowing of the earnings gap reflects a number of changes in women's life experiences (delayed marriage and childbearing, increased labor force participation, greater educational equity with men), as well as lower wages for men. This study presents a review and an appraisal of the advancement of women, especially nonmetropolitan women, during the 1980's and mid-1990's. Trends in gender differences in educational attainment, labor force attachment, earnings, and occupational placement are analyzed by metro-nonmetro residence. High poverty rates among nonmetro women are cause for public policy concern. This report originated from a request to review the Draft Platform for Action for the Fourth U.N. World Conference on Women held in September 1995 in Beijing, China.

Keywords: women, educational attainment, labor force participation, earnings, poverty, metro-nonmetro residence

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Summary

Between 1980 and the mid-1990's, the earnings of American women and men became more equal. The narrowing of the earnings gap reflects a number of changes in women's life experiences (delayed marriage and childbearing, increased labor force participation, greater educational equity with men), as well as lower wages for men. While there have been substantial improvements in gender equity in the United States, nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) women have not consistently improved their standing relative to men when compared with women in metropolitan (metro) areas. High poverty rates among nonmetro women are cause for public policy concern. The 1993 poverty rate for nonmetro women was 19.3 percent compared with 16.2 percent for metro women and 15.0 percent for nonmetro men.

This report examines recent trends in gender differences in educational attainment, labor force attachment, occupational placement, and earnings by metro-nonmetro residence. The report originated from a request to review the Draft Platform for Action for the Fourth U.N. World Conference on Women held in September 1995 in Beijing, China.

- Between 1980 and 1994, the percentage of currently married women age 25-44 declined 10 percent in nonmetro areas and 8 percent in metro areas. However, nonmetro women were still more likely to be currently married (71 percent) than metro women (62 percent). This decline, especially among young adults who have delayed marriage, provides a significant source of growth in female labor force participation.
- In 1980, in nonmetro areas, there were 74 female college graduates age 25-44 for every 100 male graduates; by 1994, there were 96 female college graduates for every 100 male college graduates. Women in nonmetro areas, though, remained less well-educated (about 16 percent college graduates age 25-44) than their metro counterparts (26 percent).
- In 1994, 55 percent of nonmetro women and 59 percent of metro women age 25 and older were in the labor force, an increase of about 10 percentage points from 1980 for women in both residential areas. Nearly 57 percent of nonmetro women age 25-44 were full-time, year-round workers in 1993, up from 42 percent in 1979. Metro women made comparable gains in work experience.
- Despite the growth in professional employment (women are now a majority of professional workers), women are more likely to work in lower paying service occupations than men. In 1994, 71 percent of these nonmetro positions were held by women compared with 58 percent of metro positions.
- By 1993, nonmetro women's earnings were 69 percent of men's, up from 58 percent in 1979. (Metro women's earnings also increased from 57 percent to 73 percent of metro men's.) Regardless of residence, female college graduates had earnings roughly 73 percent of men's in 1993, up 13 percentage points from 1979.