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Pregnant Workers in the United States¹

Of about 3,034,000 women who had a live birth during a 12-month period in 1972-73, an estimated 1,260,000 or 41.5 percent worked during their pregnancy, according to the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG). This Survey was conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics. Such pregnant workers comprised about 8.8 percent of the estimated 14,357,000 ever-married women of reproductive age in the labor force at the time.

For the survey, there were interviews of about 9,800 women representing the population of women aged 15-44 in households in the conterminous United States who were married, previously married, or single with their own children in the household. This report is based on information about women who had a live birth in the year before their interview. Because interviewing occurred over an 8-month period in 1973-74, the years of preinterview experience reported by women include different 12-month periods. The aggregated reports of years of preinterview experience refer to an average 12-month period ending on September 13, 1973—the interviewing midpoint. For that and other reasons, estimates of births reported here are not comparable to calendar period estimates from the birth registration system. Other aspects of sample design and statistical reliability are discussed in the Technical Notes to this report.

Table 1 shows estimates of the number of women who had a live birth in the year before the interview, and who worked at some time during the nine months before the birth. The estimates would have been somewhat higher had the sample included all single women instead of just those with their own children in the household. Of the approximately 1,260,000 pregnant workers, 83.9 percent were white women, and

16.1 percent were of “all other”² races. Women under 25 years of age were 53.3 percent of the total, and women 25 years and over were 46.6 percent of the total. Among pregnant workers under 25 years of age, 78.9 percent were white women, while among pregnant workers 25 years and over, 89.8 percent were white. Among white pregnant workers, 49.9 percent were 25 years and over; among pregnant workers of all other races, only 30.0 percent were 25 years and over.

Table 2 shows estimates from the Current Population Survey³ of the numbers of ever-married women employed or seeking employment in March 1972, a date near the midpoint of the period during which the pregnancies began. These numbers estimate the population potentially becoming the pregnant workers in table 1, although single women with children of their own are not included.

The ratios in table 3 (derived by dividing the numbers in table 1 by the numbers in table 2 and multiplying this by 1,000) are crude indexes of the probability that during a 1-year period women in the labor force will work while pregnant. The index was 85 per 1,000 for white women as compared with 102 for all other women. It is highest for women of all other races under 25 years of age (370 per 1,000), lowest for women of all other races who are 25 years of age and over (38 per 1,000), and averages 88 per 1,000 for the total population of ever-married, reproductive-age women in the labor force.

²The term “all other” refers to the combined grouping of all races other than white.

³Bureau of Labor Statistics: *Marital and Family Characteristics of Workers, March 1972, Special Labor Force Report 153*. Washington. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973. This publication provides appropriately classified data nearest in time to the estimated midpoint of the period during which the women who are subjects of this report became pregnant.

¹This report prepared by Gerry E. Hendershot, Ph.D., Division of Vital Statistics.

Table 4 shows estimates of the number of women in the sampled population who had a live birth in the year before their interview. Table 5 shows ratios of pregnant workers (from table 1) to women who had a live birth in the year before their interview (from table 4). The ratios are approximations to proportions of recently confined women who worked during their pregnancy. The proportion is highest among women of all other races in the younger age category (48.5 percent), lowest among white

Table 1. Number and percent distributions of women 15-44 years of age who worked during a pregnancy ending in live birth during a 12-month period in 1972-73 by color and age: United States

Age	Color		
	Total	White	All other
Number of women			
15-44 years.....	1,260,000	1,057,000	203,000
15-24 years.....	672,000	530,000	142,000
25-44 years.....	587,000	527,000	61,000
Percent distribution by color			
15-44 years.....	100.0	83.9	16.1
15-24 years.....	100.0	78.9	21.1
25-44 years.....	100.0	89.8	10.4
Percent distribution by age			
15-44 years.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
15-24 years.....	53.3	50.1	70.0
25-44 years.....	46.6	49.9	30.0

Table 2. Number of ever-married women 16-44 years of age who were in the labor force in March 1972, by color and age: United States

Age	Color		
	Total	White	All other
16-44 years.....	14,357,000	12,370,000	1,987,000
16-24 years.....	3,265,000	2,881,000	384,000
25-44 years.....	11,092,000	9,489,000	1,603,000

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Marital and Family Characteristics of Workers, March 1972, Special Labor Force Report 153. Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973.

women in the older age category (36.5 percent), and averages 41.5 percent for the total population of recently confined women.

A detailed analysis of these and related data, entitled "Patterns of Employment Before and After Childbirth," is being prepared for publication in *Vital and Health Statistics*, Series 23. For an earlier report based on a sample of legitimate live births, see "Employment During Pregnancy: Legitimate Live Births, United States, 1963," *Vital and Health Statistics*, Series 22, No. 7.

Table 3. Number of women 15-44 years of age who worked during a pregnancy ending in live birth during a 12-month period in 1972-73, per 1,000 women in the labor force in March 1972, by color and age: United States

Age	Color		
	Total	White	All other
15-44 years.....	88	85	102
15-24 years.....	206	184	370
25-44 years.....	53	56	38

Table 4. Number of women 15-44 years of age who had a live birth during a 12-month period in 1972-73, by color and age: United States

Age	Color		
	Total	White	All other
15-44 years.....	3,034,000	2,582,000	452,000
15-24 years.....	1,432,000	1,139,000	293,000
25-44 years.....	1,602,000	1,443,000	159,000

Table 5. Number of women 15-44 years of age who worked during a pregnancy ending in live birth during a 12-month period in 1972-73, per 1,000 women who had a live birth in the same period, by color and age: United States

Age	Color		
	Total	White	All other
15-44 years.....	415	409	449
15-24 years.....	469	465	485
25-44 years.....	366	365	384

TECHNICAL NOTES

DESIGN OF THE SURVEY. The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) is designed to provide data on fertility, family planning, and related aspects of maternal and child health. Field work for Cycle I was done by the National Opinion Research Center in 1973 and early 1974 with September 13, 1973 as the midpoint of the interviewing.

A multistage probability sample of women in the noninstitutional population of the conterminous United States was used. Approximately 33,000 households were screened to identify the sample of women eligible for the NSFG, i.e., women aged 15 to 44 years, inclusive, who were currently married, previously married, or never married but had biologically-related children presently living in the household. In households with more than one eligible woman, a random procedure was used to select only one to be interviewed.

Interviews were completed for 5,864 white women and for 3,933 women of other races. A detailed description of the sample design will be presented in a forthcoming report, "Sample Design, Estimation Procedures and Variance Estimation for Cycle I of the National Survey of Family Growth."

RELIABILITY OF ESTIMATES. Since the statistics presented in this report are based on a sample, they may differ from the figures that

would have been obtained from a complete census. This difference, referred to as sampling error, is measured by a statistic called the standard error of estimate. Approximate standard errors for estimated numbers from this survey are shown in table I.

The chances are about 68 out of 100 that an estimate from the sample would differ from a complete census by less than the standard error. The chances are about 95 out of 100 that the differences between the sample estimate and a complete count would be less than twice the standard error.

Table I. Approximate standard error for estimated numbers for total or white women and black women: 1973 National Survey of Family Growth

Total and white		Black	
Size of estimate	Standard error	Size of estimate	Standard error
25,000.....	6,000	50,000.....	15,000
50,000.....	9,000	100,000.....	21,000
100,000.....	13,000	200,000.....	30,000
150,000.....	16,000	500,000.....	47,000
250,000.....	20,000	1,000,000.....	67,000
350,000.....	24,000	2,000,000.....	95,000
500,000.....	28,000	5,000,000.....	151,000
750,000.....	35,000	10,000,000.....	216,000
1,000,000.....	40,000	20,000,000.....	311,000

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Age.—Age is classified by the age of the respondent at her last birthday before the date of interview.

Color.—Classification by color of the woman interviewed, based on interviewer observation, was reported as white or other. "All other" refers to the combined grouping of all races other than white.

Labor Force Status.—A woman is categorized as being in the labor force if she was working full-time or part-time, had a job but was not at work because of temporary illness, vacation, or a strike, or if she was unemployed, laid-off, or looking for work. In this report ever-married women

are included in the labor force estimates; other estimates include single women with children.

Work During Pregnancy.—Women are classified as having worked during pregnancy if they had a live birth in the year before the interview, and reported that they worked within the nine months before the birth.

Live Births.—A live birth is a fetus that gives signs of life after birth, regardless of the length of gestation. Since this report focuses on women having a live birth in a specified period, rather than upon the births themselves, it does not allow for plural births, and is not, therefore, comparable to reports of births from the birth regis-

tration system. Because of the sample design, this report also does not include births in Alaska or Hawaii. Nor does it include women under 15 nor over 44 years of age. Finally, the period for which births were reported is the 12 months before the interview. Since interviewing took place

over an 8-month period, the years of preinterview experience reported by women differ, and the aggregated experience is not directly comparable to any calendar period for which data from the birth registration system might be reported.

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