

Social Indicators 1976: Population

Social Indicators 1976 is a 647 page report (mostly charts and graphs) that contains statistics on just about everything you might want to know about life in the United States. Like its predecessor, *Social Indicators 1973*, it was published by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Beginning with population, the report examines eleven major social areas in separate chapters.

The official ten-year census is probably the best known social indicator. It shows that the U.S. population has grown from about 4 million people in 1790 to more than 204 million in 1970. Extrapolating from census data, *Social Indicators 1976* traces three alternative paths of population growth to the year 2040. A fertility rate of 2.7 children per woman (such as was seen during the post-war "baby boom") would generate exponential population growth, with the population reaching 450 million by 2040. A fertility rate of 2.1 children (the number required under current mortality conditions for each generation to replicate itself numerically) would result in slowed but continued population growth, due to assumed positive net migration, yielding a population of 312 million by 2040. The third path, assuming 1.7 children per woman, would result in a maximum population of 250 million by 2020, followed by a gradual decline.

The family

Despite the sharply rising rate of divorce (an increase of 250 percent between 1953 and 1974), the proportion of married (and remarried) persons has remained remarkably stable during the past three decades and is expected to remain so until 1990. Only among persons aged 65 and older has there been evidence of a drastic change in living arrangements. The proportion of older men who are heads of their own households has risen from 80 percent in 1955 to 95 percent in 1975. For women in that age group, the increase has been from 23 percent to 39 percent. The report calls this "a clear indication of the growing independence and growing isolation of this population group."

The average family size in the United States reached a peak of about 3.7 persons in 1965, has declined since then and is expected to reach 3.0 by 1990.

The husband-wife family group (more than 80 percent of all families) remains the basic core of family types, but the number of female-headed families has increased and is expected to continue to be an important group affecting family and child-care-related decisions.

Housing

Persons per room and plumbing facilities are used as measures of the quality of housing. Figures show that since 1940 the average number of persons per room in the United States has declined to a low of 0.5 in 1974. Similar data were available for 15 other countries. The U.S. and Canadian figures are the lowest, with Israel's 1.5 persons per room being the highest.

The number of housing units lacking plumbing facilities has declined similarly during the past three decades. Only 3 units out of every 100 are reported with that condition, although the figure is higher than 6 percent outside of metropolitan areas. International comparisons show the proportion of homes with inside toilet facilities to range from a low of 22 percent for Japan to a high of almost 100 percent for the United Kingdom.

Health and nutrition

Trends in the health status of the population can be seen in mortality rates. The U.S. infant mortality rate, which declined from 24.7 per 1,000 live births in 1965 to 16.7 per 1,000 in 1974, is

still rather high when compared with the rates of countries like Sweden and Japan — both near 10 per 1,000.

Gains continue to be made in average life expectancy, though not as rapidly as between the late 1930s and the mid 1950s. Females born in 1974 can expect to live 75.9 years, males 68.2 years — a male-female gap that continues to widen.

Health care expenditures have risen from \$8 per person per month in 1955 to almost \$40 per month at present. An increasing share of this cost, however, is being borne by health insurance systems and by public funds. In 1955, 60 percent of health care expenditures were met by private funds. By 1975, that proportion was down to 33 percent.

Nutrition data reveal increases in the consumption of meat, fish, poultry, fats, oils, sugars and other sweeteners. Flour and cereal products, dairy products and fresh fruits and vegetables account for declining shares of the total food intake.

Education and training

By 1975, close to 99 percent of the population aged 5 to 13 years was enrolled in elementary schools, and nearly 94 percent of the 14- to 17-year-olds were in secondary or high schools. By 1974, 80 percent of the population aged 25 to 34 years had graduated from high school, and 20 percent had completed at least four years of college. Due to population trends, however, the aggregate levels of enrollment are declining. Enrollment in elementary schools began to decline in 1970 and is expected to continue to drop until the early 1980s. High school population is expected to peak toward the end of the 1970s and decline until around 1990. A substantial drop in college and university enrollments is expected by 1980, continuing into the mid-1990s.

The quantity of education, however, seems not to be matched in quality. Standardized tests show nearly 20 percent of the adult population to be severely limited in "functional competence." About one-third function with minimum adequacy, and only 46 percent are judged to be "proficient."

Income, wealth and expenditures

In 1975, 26 million persons in the United States were classified in the poverty category on the basis of the income they received, but the substantial rise in the real median income during the past 25 years is called "one of the remarkable achievements of our economy." Expressed in constant dollars, the median real income of all families in the early 1970s was nearly double what it was in the late 1940s. Between 1954 and 1974, the proportion of families with real incomes below \$4,000 declined from 22 percent to 9 percent. During the same period, the proportion of families with incomes of \$15,000 or more rose from 10 to 40 percent. Despite these major gains, black families were still three times as likely as white families to be living on incomes of less than \$3,000 in 1974.

The increasing participation of married women in economic activities is a significant factor in the total income of families. Another factor has been the rise, between 1964 and 1974, in the proportion of families (both black and white) who receive some income from sources other than wages, salaries or self employment, such as social security or public assistance. By 1974, 72 percent of all families received some type of income other than earnings, as compared with 54 percent in 1967.

And much, much more

In addition to the above, *SI 1976* contains chapters on social security and welfare, public safety, work, culture, leisure and use of time, and social mobility and participation. The report is available from the Government Printing Office for \$7. For a detailed analysis of the report, consult the following publication: The American Academy of Political and Social Science, "America in the Seventies: Some Social Indicators," *THE ANNALS*, Vol. 435 (January 1978).