

Program Participation

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In 1990, 36 million persons participated in a major assistance program.

Approximately 36 million persons participated in major assistance programs¹ for at least 1 month in 1990, representing roughly 15 percent of the population. The median length of participation was 7.9 months, and median monthly family benefits from such programs amounted to \$418. Participation was highest for Medicaid and food stamps, which were comparable to one another. Twenty-two million persons received food stamps sometime in 1990, representing 9.1 percent of the population. In the same year, 23 million persons (9.7 percent of the population) were covered by Medicaid.

¹Persons are counted as participants in a major assistance program if they live in public housing or are beneficiaries of one of the following programs: Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), General Assistance, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid, food stamps, and Federal or State rent assistance.

Females were more likely than males to participate in a major assistance program.

The proportion of persons who participated for at least 1 month was over 4 percentage points higher for women than for men, 17.0 versus 12.4 percent. The difference between the sexes in the receipt of assistance reflects eligibility rules as well as differences in income. In 1990, the male poverty rate was 11.7 percent, compared with 15.2 percent for females.² The relationship between poverty status and program participation is correlated with family type. Most single-parent families are maintained by a female householder with no husband present (80 percent), and participation in ma-

²U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P60-175, *Poverty in the United States: 1990*. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1991.

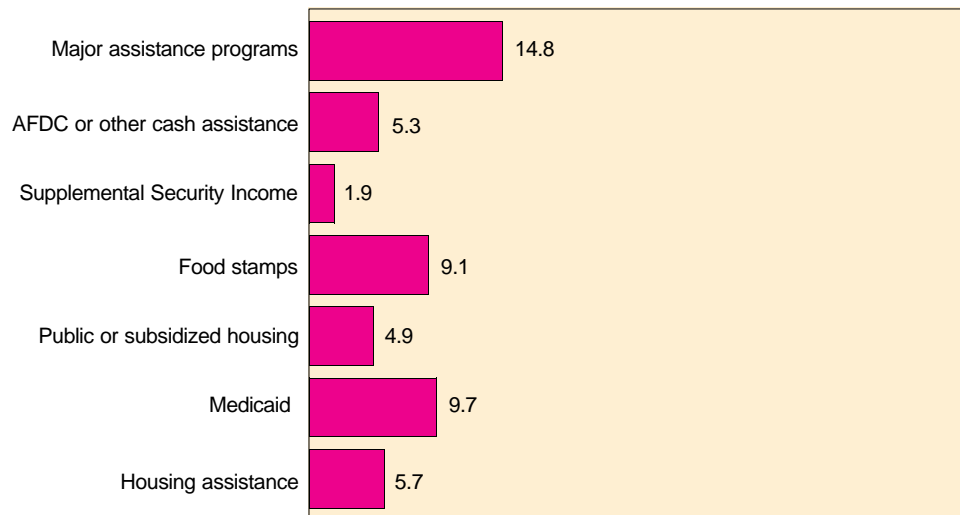
ior assistance programs is higher for persons in female-householder families than for persons in married-couple families and unrelated individuals. While 42 percent of persons in female-householder families received assistance during 1990, only 9 percent of persons in married-couple families received assistance.

The median sum of benefits from cash assistance and food stamps³ was higher for persons in families with a female householder with no husband present than for persons in married-couple families. The median combined family benefits for persons in female-householder families amounted to \$529 in 1990, which is substantially higher than the \$334 received by

³Cash assistance consists of AFDC, General Assistance, and Supplemental Security Income.

Program Participation Rates for Persons in Selected Programs: 1990

(In percent)



persons in married-couple families. Furthermore, the latter experienced median spells of reciprocity 4 months shorter than the spells experienced by persons in female-householder families, 7.3 months versus 11.4 months.

There was a strong association between race and Hispanic origin and the likelihood of reciprocity.

Whites had significantly lower participation rates than Blacks, and persons of Hispanic origin⁴ had rates intermediate between Whites and Blacks. About 38 percent of Blacks participated in major assistance programs during 1990. The comparable figures for Whites and persons of Hispanic origin were 11 and

⁴Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. These data do not include the population of Puerto Rico.

33 percent, respectively. Despite significantly higher participation rates for Blacks and persons of Hispanic origin, 65 percent of all participants were White.

The differences by race and Hispanic origin result from differences in poverty status and its correlates, such as family type. In 1990, 31.9 percent of Blacks and 28.1 percent of persons of Hispanic origin lived in poverty, compared with 10.7 percent of Whites.⁵ In the same year, 10 percent of Whites lived in families maintained by a female householder with no husband present, compared with 39 percent of Blacks and 19 percent of persons of Hispanic origin.⁶

In 1990, the median sum of means-tested family benefits

⁵U.S. Bureau of the Census, op. cit.

⁶U.S. Bureau of the Census, op. cit.

was higher for Black and Hispanic origin participants than for their White counterparts. Whites received median benefits of \$363, compared with \$455 for Blacks and \$432 for persons of Hispanic origin.

Data show that children are disproportionately represented among recipients.

Children under 18 years old constituted 26 percent of the population but 42 percent of all program participants in 1990. They were substantially more likely to have participated in major means-tested programs than persons in other age groups, reflecting eligibility rules as well as their higher likelihood of living in

poverty. About 24 percent of children under 18 years old participated 1 or more months during 1990, compared with 11 percent of persons 18 to 64 years old, and 14 percent of persons 65 years old and over. Median monthly family benefits received by children under 18 years old amounted to \$528, substantially higher than the \$385 received by persons 18 to 64 years old, and the \$185 received by persons 65 years old and over.

For Further Information

See: Current Population Reports, Series P70-41, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Program Participation, 1990 to 1992.*

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Program Participation Rates in Major Assistance Programs for Persons with Selected Characteristics: 1990

