

# *Women Leaving and Re-entering the Workforce*

## ***Challenges Counting Women Leaving and Re-Entering the Workforce***

There are few studies that track the number of women who leave the workforce to raise children or who re-enter the workforce after raising children. Studies exist that explore these topics, but all struggle with issues such as not being able to pinpoint the exact reason women leave the workforce (partly because it is often a confluence of factors that affect a woman's decision), imprecise research methods, anecdotal evidence that does not necessarily translate into hard facts, and the general difficulty of trying to count women after they have already left a company.

What we have, however, are a variety of facts presented below, as well as years of Catalyst expertise about women and work. A woman's career path is rarely strictly linear. Many women spend some parts of their career working full time, some parts working part time, and often spend time out of the labor force taking care of family or for other reasons. What we can do is continue to study this as well as make companies aware of the vital influence they have on these decisions.

## ***2009 U.S. Census Bureau Research***

In 2009, the Census Bureau published a report looking at opting out, based on the American Community Survey 3-year data file for 2005-2007. The researchers found that, despite many media stories to the contrary, most working mothers return to the workforce within a year after having a child.<sup>1</sup>

- No large differences appear in employment status between women with children who were at least one year old and women who had no children in the household.
- There was some variability by occupation.
- The researchers hypothesized that two groups of women may opt out: women whose earnings are so low they may not be able to afford child care and women whose family earnings allow them to forgo personal earnings.

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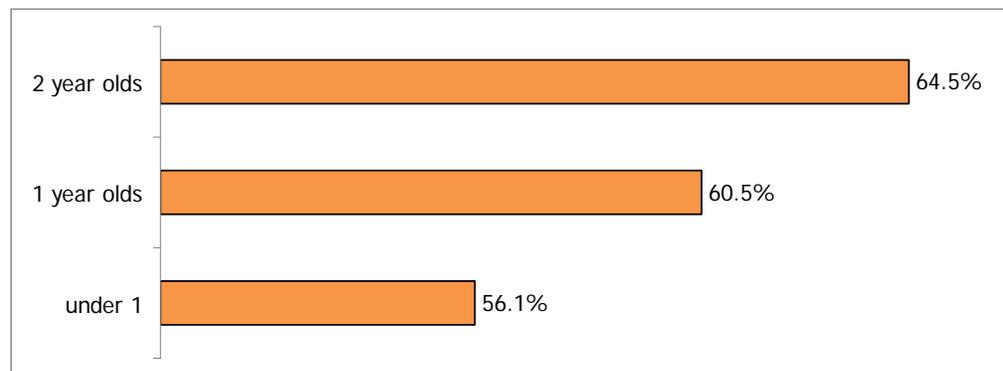
## **2007 Bureau of Labor Statistics Research**

The Bureau of Labor Statistics released research in February 2007 called, "Trends in Labor Force Participation of Married Mothers of Infants." This study found that the trend of mothers stepping out of the labor force is broader than previously believed and applies to women of all income levels, race/ethnicities, and education levels.

The decline according to income level was interesting. Women with husbands in the highest 20% of earners had an 8.6% decrease in their labor force participation rates between 1997 and 2005. The study found, however, that women with husbands in the second lowest 20% also had a significant decrease – 7.9%. Although many affluent mothers of infants stopped working, the effect held for much poorer women too. The authors speculated that while some wealthier mothers of infants may choose not to work, the high cost and low availability of child care may prevent some poorer mothers from working even if they wanted to.<sup>2</sup>

## **Women With Young Children in the Labor Force**

60.2% of women with children under 3 years old are in the labor force.<sup>3</sup>



## **Part-Time Work of Mothers**

29.4% of employed women with children under 3 years old work part-time.<sup>4</sup>

- 26.7%: 2 years old

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QUICK TAKES

- 30.6%: 1 year old
- 30.8%: under 1 year old

24.3% of all employed women with children under 18 are working part-time.<sup>5</sup>

17.4% of all employed workers work part-time.<sup>6</sup>

- 11.1% of employed men work part-time
- 24.6% of employed women work part-time

18.6% of employed women ages 25-54 work part time.<sup>6</sup>

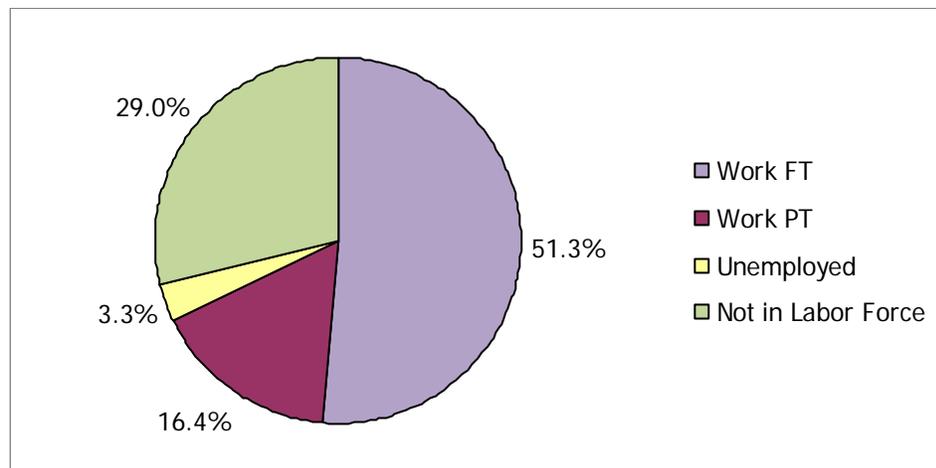
5.3% of employed men ages 25-54 work part time.<sup>6</sup>

## ***Snapshot of Women With Children Under 18***

More than 10 million women with children under 18 are not in the labor force (10.7 million women, compared to 1.7 million men).<sup>7</sup>

Total women with own children under 18: 37,117,000<sup>7</sup>

- 19,053,000 work full time
- 6,104,000 work part time
- 1,211,000 unemployed
- 10,749,000 not in labor force



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## ***Labor Force Participation Rates Of Women And Men, By Age***

The labor force participation rate of all people ages 16 and older was 66.0% in 2008. For women 16 and older, it is 59.5%, and for men 16 and older it is 73.0%.<sup>8</sup>

Since 2000, the participation rate of workers has declined. A recent study analyzed the data and has credited it to a variety of reasons. Although children do have an affect on women's labor force participation, the rate recently has fallen for both women with children and women without children. Other factors the researchers cited included the effect of the large baby boom cohort on age groups; the participation rates of women flattening after more than three decades of steady increase; new cohorts of men are less inclined to participate in the labor market than previous cohorts; and young adults are remaining in school longer and are "reducing their labor force attachment" in or out of school. The decline, however, may be offset to some extent as older workers remain longer in or reenter the workforce after traditional retirement age.<sup>9</sup>

## ***Employment Patterns of First-Time Mothers***

*Note: This is the most up-to-date data available, from a report released in February 2008.<sup>10</sup>*

Not all women return to the workforce right away.

- During the time period between 2000 and 2002, 79.4% of women who worked during pregnancy had returned to the workforce within a year of their first childbirth.
- This means that more than one-fifth of working mothers did NOT return to the workforce within one year of their first childbirth.

Among mothers returning to work, those who move to a different employer often do so for higher pay and/or reduced work hours.

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- Between the years of 2000 and 2002, 17.0% of women who worked during pregnancy and returned to work within a year of childbirth did so at a different employer.
- Of those who went to a different employer, 33.2% reported that they worked fewer hours than before their first childbirth.
- 35.2% reported that they received higher pay at a new employer after their first childbirth.

## ***When Women Choose To Leave Their Jobs***

There is a misunderstanding that women find it easy to leave their jobs to stay home with their children. Though our work with our clients, including exit interview and assessment projects, we find that most women are very conflicted about leaving their jobs and find it very difficult to do so. They have spent much time and money investing in their professional development, and their jobs are a large part of their ongoing personal and professional identification. If they do leave, often it is because employers are not making available or not making obvious a way to conceivably combine work with the rest of their lives.<sup>11</sup>

## ***The Effect of Children on Women's Labor Force Participation***

A study by economist Heather Boushey for the Center for Economic and Policy Research in 2005 analyzed whether a women with a child at home would be any less likely to be in the labor force that she was at earlier points in the last two decades, simply because there was a child in her household. Findings include the following<sup>12</sup>:

- Women's labor force participation rates have not fallen due to the presence of children at home
- Women's labor force participation rates have fallen due to the early 2000s recession
- Labor participation rates for highly-educated women in their thirties are, for the most part, unchanged

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## Trade-Offs

73% of executive women surveyed in Catalyst's "Women in U.S. Corporate Leadership" study said they were comfortable with the trade-offs they have made between career and personal goals.<sup>13</sup>

## SOURCES

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