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Women's Bureau

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## WOMEN OF HISPANIC ORIGIN IN THE LABOR FORCE

The population of women of Hispanic origin has risen dramatically over the past decade in the United States. The number of Hispanic women age 16 and over rose from 3.9 million in 1977 to 6.7 million in 1988--a 70 percent increase. The largest subgroup was women of Mexican origin (3.8 million), followed by women of Puerto Rican origin (894,000) and Cuban origin (432,000) (see table 1). The remaining 1.5 million were of other Spanish descent.<sup>1</sup>

The fertility rate of Hispanic women in 1987 was significantly higher than that of women not of Hispanic origin--95.8 total births per 1,000 women 18 to 44 years old as compared with 68.8 per 1,000 women, respectively. This high fertility rate stems partially from the fact that 71 percent of the noninstitutional population of Hispanic women is between the primary childbearing ages of 16 to 44. Therefore, we can expect the overall Hispanic population to continue to grow at a rapid rate.

**MEDIAN AGE**--The median age of Hispanic women was only 26.1 years in March 1988. Overall, Hispanic women are younger than Black and White women whose median ages are 28.5 years and 31.2 years, respectively. Cuban women are the only exception. With a median age rapidly approaching 40 years (39.0 years), they are generally an older group. This higher median age could result from an aging Cuban population, lower child birth rates and the fact that there has been little immigration of Cubans to the United States in recent years.

**LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION**--Of the 54.7 million women in the civilian labor force in 1988, 3.6 million, or 6.5 percent, were of Hispanic origin. Of this 3.6 million, 58.5 percent were of Mexican origin, 10.4 percent were of Puerto Rican origin, 6.6 percent were of Cuban origin, and 24.5 percent were of other Hispanic origin. Hispanic women reached a milestone in 1986, when, for the first time, their labor force participation rate reached 50 percent. Even though 53.2 percent of all Hispanic women were in the labor force in 1988, this figure was somewhat lower than that for non-Hispanic women (56.6 percent). However, the labor force participation rate for all Hispanics (women and men, 67.4 percent) is higher than that for all Whites--66.2 percent, and higher than for all Blacks--63.8 percent.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics has projected that the number of Hispanic women in the labor force will increase by 2.7 million to 5.8 million and that their labor force participation rate will be 57 percent in the year 2000.

<sup>1</sup>According to the U. S. Bureau of the Census, our Spanish individuals are those whose origins are from Spain or they are persons identifying themselves generally as Spanish, Spanish-American, Hispano, and the Latino.

**Table 1**  
**Hispanic Women in the Labor Force,**  
**16 Years of Age and Over, 1988 Annual Averages**  
**(Numbers in thousands)**

	<u>All Hispanic Women</u>	<u>Mexican- Origin Women</u>	<u>Puerto Rican- Origin Women</u>	<u>Cuban- Origin Women</u>
Civilian				
Noninstitutional				
Population	6,721	3,880	894	432
Civilian Labor Force	3,573	2,090	370	237
Percent of Population	53.2	53.9	41.4	54.9
Employed	3,227	1,889	340	224
Unemployed	296	201	30	12
Unemployment Rate	8.3	9.6	8.1	5.2

Source: U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment and Earnings, January 1989.

**EMPLOYMENT**--Over the past decade, Hispanic women increased their employment by 94 percent--from 1.7 million in 1978 to 3.3 million in 1988. Even though they represented only 6.9 percent of the total female noninstitutional population in 1988, they accounted for 12.5 percent of the increase in total female employment since 1980.

**UNEMPLOYMENT**--Unemployment for Hispanic women has continued to follow a constant pattern--higher than that of White women (4.7 percent) but lower than for Black women (11.7 percent). Their 1988 unemployment rate was 8.3 percent. Cuban-origin women continued to have the lowest unemployment rate among Hispanic women (see table 1). In fact, their 1988 rate of 5.2 percent was lower than the 1988 annual average of 5.6 percent for all women. Women of Mexican origin had an unemployment rate of 9.6 percent in 1988. This was the highest among all Hispanic women--a position long held by Puerto Rican women.

**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**--As of March 1988, the civilian labor force of Hispanic women could be divided into basically three educational groups--those with less than 4 years of high school (34 percent), those who completed high school (37 percent), and those with 1 or more years of college (29 percent). Of the 1.2 million in the labor force that did not finish high school, 651,000 or 54 percent had completed only 8 years or less of schooling. The median years of school completed by Hispanic women in the labor force was 12.4 in March 1988. Of all employed Hispanic women in March 1988, only 37 percent have 4 years of high school as their highest level of educational attainment. Only 11 percent have completed 4 or more years of college. Median years of school completed for those that were employed in March 1988 was 12.5 years.

Among Spanish-origin women 25 years and over, just over one-third of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans had graduated from high school in 1980. Here, again, Cuban women surpassed their other Hispanic counterparts with a 53 percent graduation rate in 1980.

**OCCUPATIONS**--In March 1988, 3.2 million Hispanic females were job holders. The largest proportion of employed Hispanic women (41.1 percent) were concentrated in the technical, sales, and administrative support occupations (see table 2). Many are employed as sales workers, cashiers, computer operators, typists, secretaries, receptionists, bookkeepers, or teacher aides.

Compared with all women, Hispanic women are overrepresented in the service and the operator, fabricator, and laborer occupations. In the service area, they are found most frequently as private household cleaners and servants, child care workers, waitresses, and cooks. In the operator, fabricator, and laborer occupations, they are almost exclusively textile sewing machine operators with the remainder as assemblers and miscellaneous machine operators. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has predicted most of these occupations will grow slowly or decline between now and the year 2000.

Hispanic-origin women tend to be employed in precision production, craft, and repair jobs more frequently than do other women--3.5 percent as compared with 2.2 percent, respectively. Working mostly as electronic equipment assemblers, dressmakers, and food batchmakers, 86 percent in this occupational group are working in the precision production job classification.

**INCOME AND EARNINGS**--The 1987 median income for Hispanic women who worked year round, full time was \$14,893. This represented a 52 percent increase since 1980. However, it remained 15 percent below the median income for all women (\$17,504) and 17 percent below that of Hispanic men (\$17,872). Hispanic families with the householder as a year-round, full-time worker had a median income of \$28,848 and Hispanic households maintained by women had a median income of \$19,760 in 1987. The earnings of Hispanic wives accounted for a substantial portion of family income. Their contributions to total family income were approximately 32 percent on average.

**FAMILIES MAINTAINED BY WOMEN**--Similar to the trend for the rest of the Nation, the percentage of Hispanic families maintained by women is rising. Of the 4.6 million Hispanic families in the United States in 1988, 1 million were headed by women. Twenty-six percent (1.2 million) of all Hispanic families and 52 percent (555,000) of Hispanic families maintained by women had incomes which placed them below the poverty level in 1987. Hispanic families maintained by women who had earnings below the poverty level contained 1.2 million related children under the age of 18 and 191,000 other family members.

**Table 2**  
**Occupations of Employed Women, by Hispanic Origin, March 1988**  
**(Percent distribution)**

	Hispanic Women				
	<u>All Women</u>	<u>All Hispanic Women</u>	<u>Mexican- Origin Women</u>	<u>Puerto Rican- Origin Women</u>	<u>Cuban- Origin Women</u>
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Managerial and Professional Specialty	25.3	15.7	12.6	20.5	27.3
Technical, Sales, and Administrative Support	45.1	41.1	41.7	44.7	41.8
Service Occupations	17.7	21.7	21.9	15.3	13.0
Precision, Production, Craft, and Repair	2.3	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.2
Operators, Fabricators, and Laborers	8.8	16.6	18.0	15.8	14.7
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	0.9	1.5	2.1	----	----

Source: U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 1988 (Advance Report).