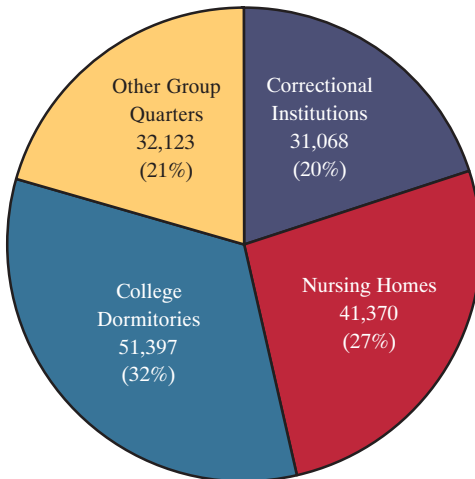


Wisconsin Households and Families

The census provides a great deal of information on the living arrangements of people. For example, much data are provided for those who live in housing units (single detached homes, duplexes, apartments, condominiums, manufactured homes, houseboats, etc.). The individuals who reside together in a housing unit are referred to as members of a “household” regardless of the number of such people or their relationships to one another. In 2000, there were 2.1 million households (occupied housing units) in Wisconsin. The population living in these households totaled 5.2 million persons (97% of the total population). Simple division yields an average household size in 2000 of 2.5 persons.

People who do not live in housing units (or, said another way, are not part of a household) are counted in the census among the “group quarters” population. These are people who reside in dormitories, nursing homes, prisons, long term health care facilities, various kinds of shelters, etc. – including those who have no usual place of residence (commonly called the “homeless” population). In 2000, 156,000 Wisconsin residents (3% of the total population) lived in some type of group quarters. The three principal types of living arrangements for the group quarters population are college dormitories, nursing homes, and correctional institutions (Fig. 37).

Figure 37
Group Quarters Population, Wisconsin: 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population, 2000

Households have gotten smaller over time. Fifty years ago, the average household size in Wisconsin was 3.4 persons. Today it's almost one person smaller on average: 2.5. What accounts for this change? By 1950, the early years of the post-war baby boom had arrived, and young adults were marrying at early ages. The median age at first marriage was approximately 20.3 years for women and 22.8

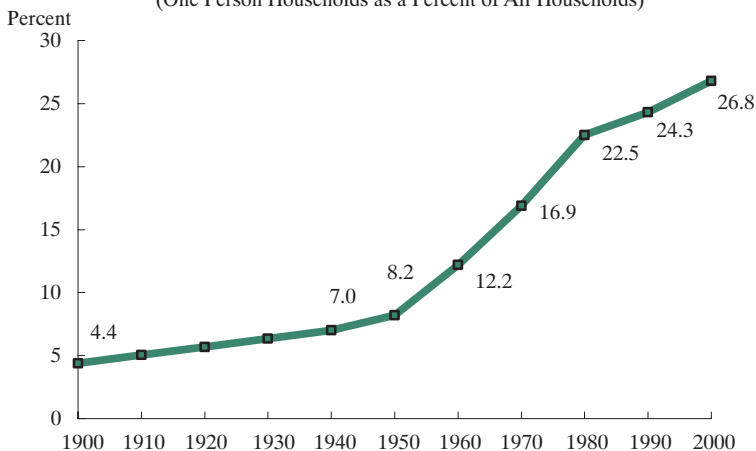
years for men. In addition, these young married couples were having children at younger ages and had a preference for somewhat larger families (three to four children was a common aspiration). When the baby boomers reached adulthood, they did so at a time when later marriage was common (median age at first marriage was 25.1 for women and 26.8 for men in 2000). These young adults tend to have their own children at later ages than did their parents. This led to larger numbers of young adults (the “baby boomers”) in the 1970s and 1980s living alone, or married without children, or remaining unmarried but living with a roommate or partner.

Another trend was underway in the 1960s and 1970s. The divorce rate rose and reached very high levels in the United States, relative, say, to most European countries. The rise in divorces also contributed to the growth of small households. And finally, improvements both in health care and in the financial well-being of older citizens also contributed to smaller households (one or two persons). Consequently, these various demographic trends – later marriage, fewer children, high divorce rates and healthy older citizens, working together – meant that small households became increasingly common in the late 20th century.

Figure 38

One Person Households, Wisconsin: 1900 to 2000

(One Person Households as a Percent of All Households)



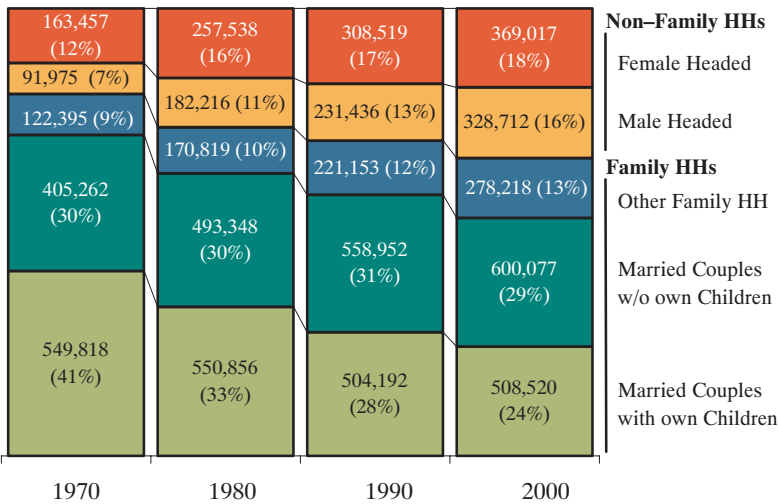
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*

Data points are interpolated for 1910 through 1930 for which no data are available.

All of these forces conspired to reduce the average size of households in Wisconsin. As the population in general was increasing and household size was becoming smaller, the number of households grew at rates faster than the population. The difference between population growth and household growth was widest in the 1970s when, despite slow population growth (6.5% for the decade), the number of household increased by 24.3%. This was the decade that baby boom children left

their parents' homes in large numbers and began forming their own households. High rates of divorce and the tendency for the elderly to maintain their own households later into older life also contributed to the high growth of households in the 1970s. See, for example, Figure 38 which shows the prevalence of one-person households over the past 100 years.

Figure 39
Households by Type, Wisconsin: 1970 to 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population and Housing: 1970 to 2000

The composition of households in Wisconsin has changed dramatically in recent decades. In 1970, about 20% of households consisted of one person living alone or multiple unrelated people living together (non-family households). Approximately 80% of all households enumerated in the 1970 Census were composed of families, defined by the Census Bureau as two or more persons living together and related by blood, marriage, or adoption. Of these family households, more than half were made up of married couples and their children (Fig. 39). Over the next three decades, non-family households increased from 255,000 to 698,000 and, by 2000, constituted more than one-third of all households in the state. Family households increased by more than 300,000 during this time but, as a proportion of all households, dropped in relative terms from 80% to 66%. Married couple families with children, 41% of the total in 1970, had fallen to 24% by 2000 – smaller by several percentage points than non-family households in 2000. Using television metaphors, “Ozzie and Harriet” had given way to “Friends.”

Wisconsinites at Work

The labor force is defined as persons age 16 or more who are either working or not working but looking for work. Between 1990 and 2000, Wisconsin’s labor force

