

Chapter 5

Families and Households: Young and Old Living Together



Family and Household Composition

Strong and vibrant communities are often tied directly to strong, supportive and nurturing families. Parents engaged in the social and academic environments of their children, who actively participate in the local labor market, who care about their community clearly represent an important foundation upon which communities can thrive and grow. When these elements are missing; when families are broken apart, living in poverty, relying on state or federal assistance, or mistreating their children or elders, the community is impacted and the overall quality-of-life diminishes.

Figure 5.1
Average Family Size, Northwest Arkansas: 1980-2006

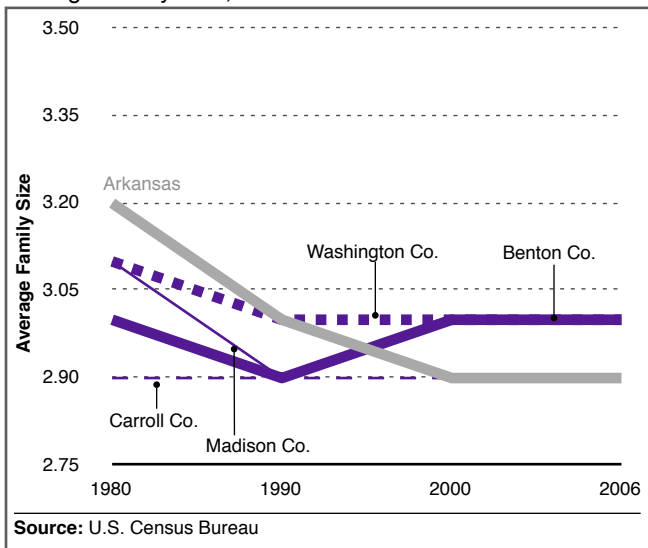
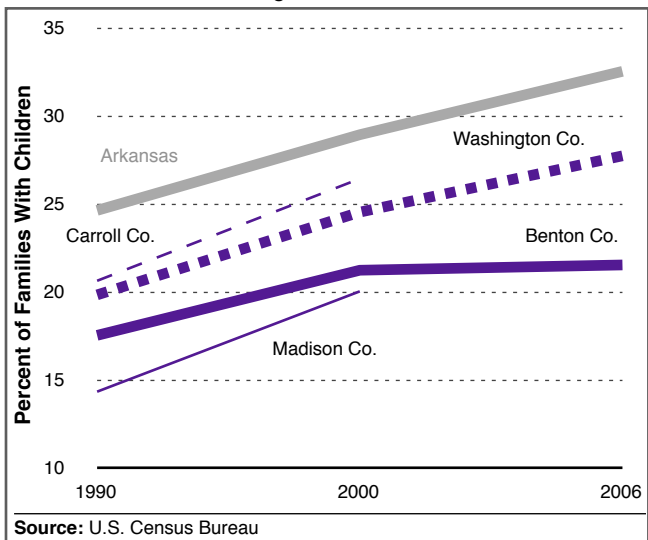


Figure 5.2
Families w/ Children: Single Head of Household: 1990-2006



While the indicators discussed in the following pages could have been integrated into other domains/sections of the report, they are presented here as important pieces of the larger story of families in Northwest Arkansas.

- ★ After reaching a high of 3.2 persons per family in 1980, the average number of persons per family in the state of Arkansas dropped to 2.9 persons in 2006.
- ★ With the exception of Carroll County, the average family size in Northwest Arkansas declined through the 1980s.
- ★ Benton County is the only Northwest Arkansas county to register an increase in average family size since 1990.
- ★ On average, Benton and Washington Counties have average family sizes higher than the state average.
- ★ Since 1990, Arkansas and the Northwest Arkansas region, experienced straight line growth in the percentage of families with children headed by a single person.
- ★ While the rate of single parent families in Benton County has leveled off in recent times, the other counties in Northwest Arkansas continue to see their rates rise.
- ★ By 2006, one-third of all Arkansas families with children were headed by single parents.



Family Wellness

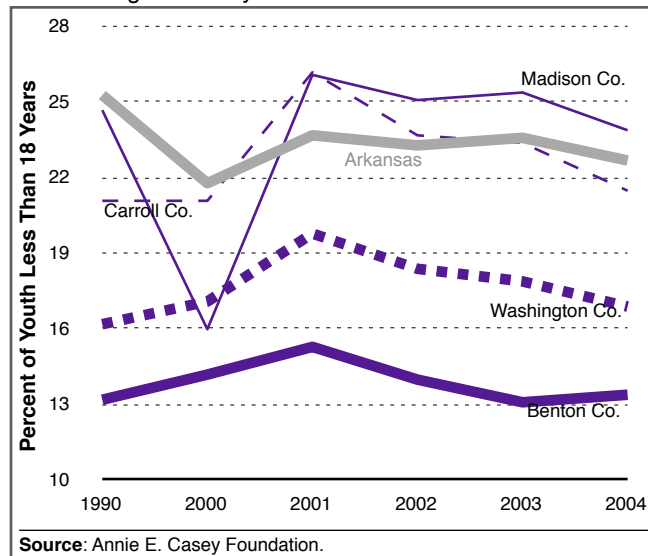
Child poverty may represent the single greatest threat to the well-being and future of the nation's children. At present, an estimated 17 percent of the American children live in poverty. The significance of living in such conditions cannot be overstated. Poverty impedes learning, social and emotional development, mental and physical health, and the prospect of successful, productive adulthood. Highest among minority children, poverty rates have and will continue to challenge the capacity of government and non-profit agencies.

Currently, there are over 150,000 children living in poverty in Arkansas; 42 percent of this population is African-American; 65 percent Arkansas' impoverished children live in a single-parent home. Arkansas ranks in the top fifth of states when it comes to child poverty rates. Of the four Northwest Arkansas counties, only Madison county had a of child poverty higher than the state average.



Figure 5.3

Youth Living in Poverty in Northwest Arkansas 1990-2004

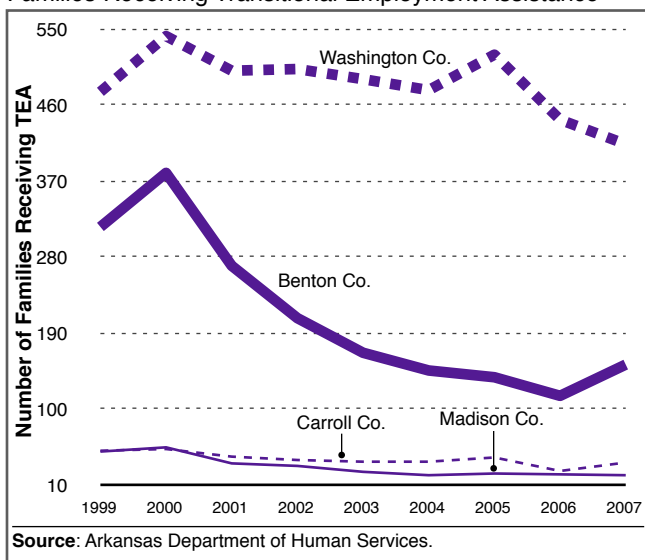


- ★ In 2004, nearly one-quarter of Arkansas's children were living in poverty. Only Madison County had a child poverty rate higher than the state average.
- ★ The percentage of children living in poverty in Northwest Arkansas counties between 1990 and 2000 increased slightly. Since peaking in 2001, the percentage of children living in poverty in Northwest Arkansas has declined.

Exhibit 5.1.
What is TEA?

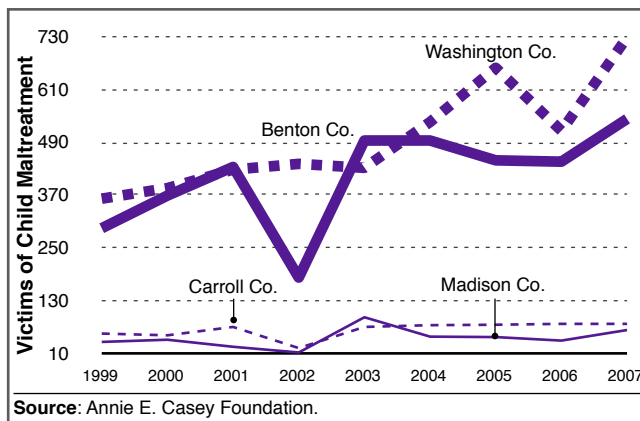
TEA is short for Arkansas' Transitional Employment Assistance program, which is jointly funded with the Federal government and designed to assist needy families in becoming economically self-sufficient by obtaining and retaining employment that is sufficient enough to sustain the family. Eligible families receive education and training that enable them to prepare for the transition out of welfare and into work.

Figure 5.4
Families Receiving Transitional Employment Assistance



- ★ Highly dependent on size and employment opportunities, the number of families receiving Transitional Employment Assistance (TEA) is greatest in Washington and Benton Counties.
- ★ In all the Northwest Arkansas counties, families receiving TEA has declined since 1999.
- ★ Benton County went from a high of over 370 families receiving TEA in 2000 to a low of 100 in 2006.
- ★ Washington County families receiving TEA declined in the last two years by nearly 100 cases.

Figure 5.5
Number of Child Maltreatment Cases Filed



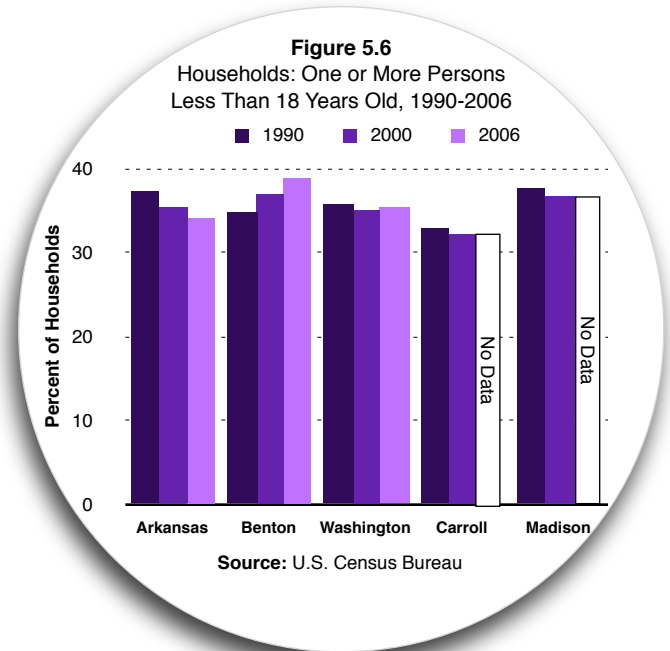
- ★ Highly dependent on population size, the number of maltreatment cases in both Washington and Benton County significantly increased between 1999 and 2007.
- ★ After experiencing a drop-off in maltreatment cases filed between 2001-2002, the number of cases in Benton County increased to nearly 500 cases in 2007.
- ★ Both Madison and Carroll Counties report on average fewer than 100 cases of maltreatment per year--that number has changed very little over the last decade.

Indicator in the Spotlight:

Young and Old in Northwest Arkansas Households

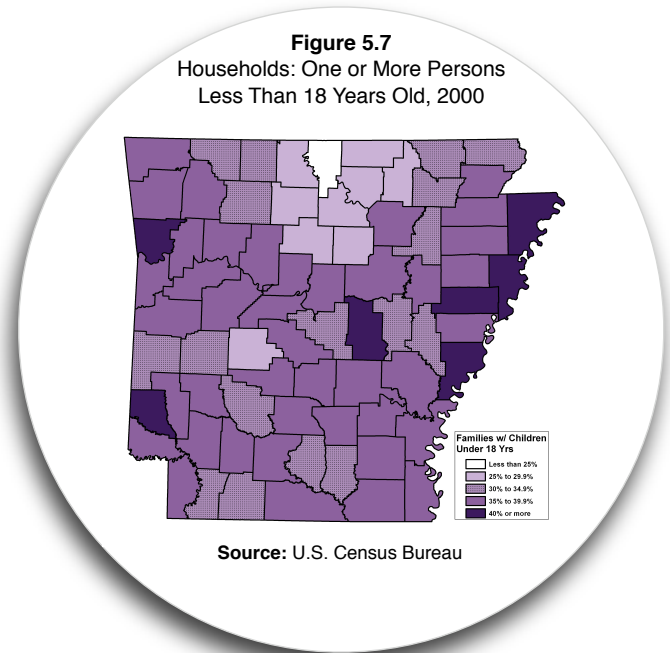
By 2050, experts estimate that the U.S. population under the age of 18 will grow by 39 percent. While this growth is slightly less than registered during other time periods (e.g. post World War II), children will represent nearly one-quarter of the total U.S. population. Notably, projections indicate that the majority of these children born during this period of time will be due to the arrival of new immigrant families. Without this immigration surge, population projections show the under 18 population would actually decline by nearly 8 percent.

- ★ The percentage of households with children under 18 in the state of Arkansas has slowly declined over the last several decades.
- ★ In Northwest Arkansas, only Benton County has experienced significant growth in the number of households with children under the age of 18.
- ★ Relative to many of the other counties in the Northern part of the state, the Northwest Arkansas region had a higher percentage of children living in households in 2000.



"Perhaps the greatest social service that can be rendered by anybody to this country and to mankind is to bring up a family."

George Bernard Shaw

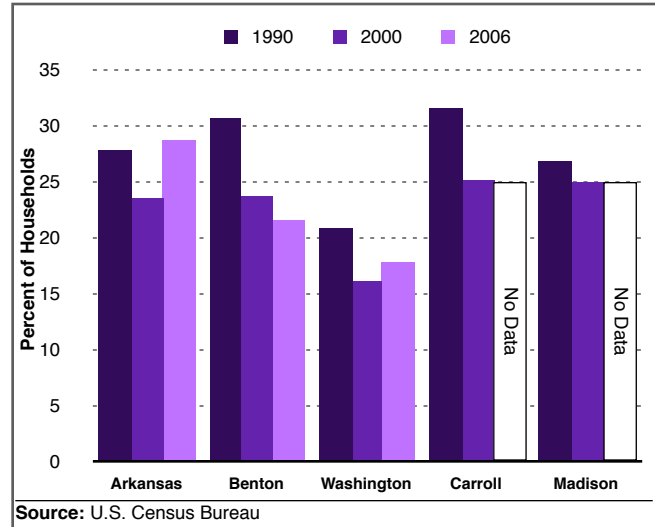




Current population estimates show the nation's elderly population doubling in size by 2050. As the baby-boomer generation continues to age, the number of households with one or more persons over 65 years of age will continue to grow. While Northwest Arkansans age-in-place and newly retired seniors look for a place to move to, Northwest Arkansas, already designated as an up-and-coming retirement destination, is likely to experience significant changes in household age composition in the next several decades.



Figure 5.8
Households: One or More Persons 65 Years or Older



- ★ In 2006, nearly 30 percent of households in Arkansas had one or more persons 65 years of age or over.
- ★ The majority of households in the United States are uni-generational; this is likely the case for Arkansas as well.
- ★ Washington County mirrored the state-wide shifts in households with regards to elderly persons. After a 5 percent drop between 1990 and 2000, the percent of households with elderly persons increased in 2006.
- ★ Except for Washington County, in the percent of households with one or more persons over 65 years of age has declined since 1990.



What's It All Mean?

Family composition in Northwest Arkansas looks quite different than the rest of the state. Other than average family size, Northwest Arkansas counties had fewer families headed by a single person, fewer households with persons over the age of 65, and in all but one of the counties (Madison), smaller percentages of children living in poverty. This is good news. Nevertheless, each of the four Northwest Arkansas counties are registering double digit percentages of children currently living in poverty. Related to these figures are the maltreatment numbers that have showed alarming increases over the last several years--primarily in Washington and Benton Counties.

Compositionally, households in Northwest Arkansas are not undergoing radical change relative to the rest of the state or the the country as a whole. The projections for what will take place in this country hold special meaning for Northwest Arkansas because of its rapid inflow of immigrants. The projected growth in the under 18 population will be a function of immigration. Responding to this change and developing new and innovative strategies for addressing the challenges associated with developing multi-cultural communities will need to be a primary focus for city and county administrators.

