

# More mothers are punching the clock

By Cheryl Wetzstein  
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More mothers of babies are working, and fewer American women are becoming mothers than ever before, according to a Census Bureau report issued today.

Also, for the first time, more than half of married couples with children had both parents in the work force in 1998.

These changes caused some social analysts to call for workplace reforms and others to lament the tearing of family bonds.

Of 3.7 million women with infants, 59 percent were in the labor market in 1998, according to the report, "Fertility of American Women: June 1998."

Thirty-six percent of women with infants worked full time,

while 17 percent worked part time and 6 percent actively sought work, said Amara Bachu, co-author of the report with Martin O'Connell.

Most mothers went to work after their babies were 3 months old — roughly the same time as the unpaid-leave provisions of the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act expired, noted Ms. Bachu.

Of 31.3 million mothers ages 15 to 44 whose children were more than 1 year old, 73 percent were in the work force, stated the report.

Fifty-two percent of these mothers worked full time while 17 percent worked part time and 4 percent looked for work.

These high numbers of working mothers led to a record number of "dewks" or families who are "dual-employed with kids," said Ms. Bachu. In 1998, 51 percent of

married-couple families had both parents in the work force, compared with 33 percent in 1976.

Regarding U.S. childbearing, the report found that the percent of childless women ages 40 to 44 has almost doubled in two decades.

In 1976, 10 percent of women ages 40 to 44 didn't have children. By 1998, 19 percent of women this age were childless.

This increase is related to more women postponing marriage and childbearing in favor of getting an education, a career and good income, said Ms. Bachu. Later, many women find they cannot find a suitable mate or bear children because of infertility or advanced age. Only 10 percent say they never wanted to have children.

The trend of more working women "has been building for a long time," with a booming econ-

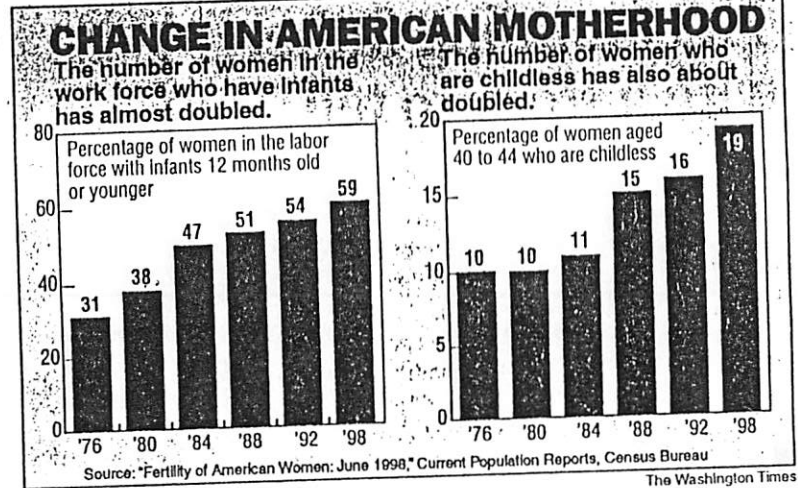
omy and millions of educated women, said Donna Lenhoff of the National Partnership for Women and Families.

"The real challenge is for our workplaces and public policy to catch up with this reality," she said, calling for more flexible work hours, more infant-care providers, paid maternity leave and health benefits for part-time workers.

Infant care is essential today, said Lynne Vaughan of YMCA of USA, which has 36 million children in its child-care centers.

Already more than 300 YMCA centers offer infant care, and in virtually all the day-care centers the YMCA helps set up with corporations, infant care "is a priority," she said.

Others see trouble in the trends. "I don't think mothers are always aware of the high cost that



their children will pay for their absence, particularly in that first year," said psychologist Brenda Hunter, author of "Home by Choice: Raising Emotionally Secure Children in an Insecure World."

The bond forged between moth-

er and baby lays the foundation for adult intimacy, empathy "and the rudiments of conscience and self-image," said Mrs. Hunter.

Too much time in day care robs mothers of this bonding and may even be linked to the growth in childlessness, she said.