

Federal Studies

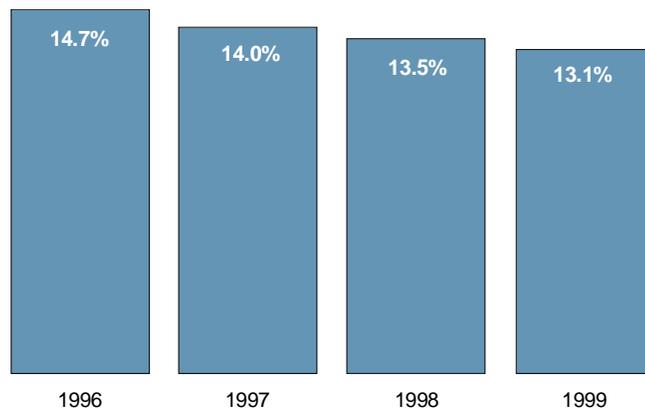
Who Gets Assistance?

Changes in the welfare system have increased the interest in information about the degree to which certain groups of people are involved in assistance programs, about the characteristics of program participants, about the types of programs they use, and about the intensity and extent of their participation. Of particular interest is how people’s participation extends over time. This report focuses on participation and on the characteristics of participants in the following major means-tested public assistance programs: (1) Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), (2) General Assistance (GA), (3) Food Stamps, (4) Supplemental Security Income (SSI), (5) Medicaid, and (6) housing assistance. The data are from the 1996 panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). The 1996 SIPP panel covered the period from January 1996 to December 1999 and provided data on the civilian noninstitutionalized population of the United States.

Assistance program participation declines

In 1999, about 36 million people or 13.1 percent of the population participated in one or more major means-tested assistance programs, on average, during each month. This represents a decline from the 1996 average monthly participation rate of 14.7 percent. A small proportion of the population (6.5 percent) participated in means-tested programs each month of the 1996-99 period.

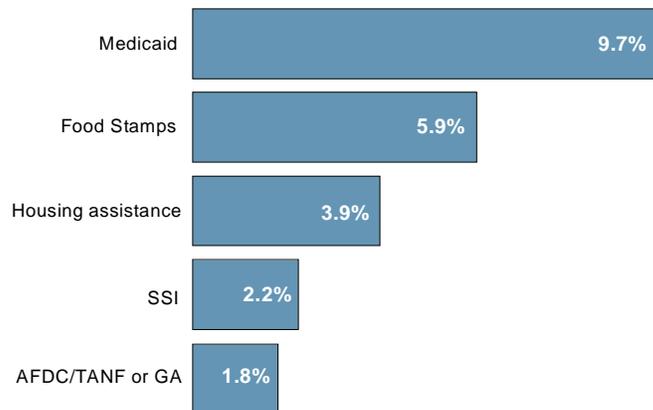
Average monthly participation rates in major means-tested programs



Medicaid has the highest participation rate

People were more likely to participate in Medicaid than in any other program. The average monthly participation rate in 1999 for Medicaid was 9.7 percent, compared with 1.8 to 5.9 percent for the other programs. Of the 27 million people receiving Medicaid benefits in an average month of 1999, about 12 million were children.

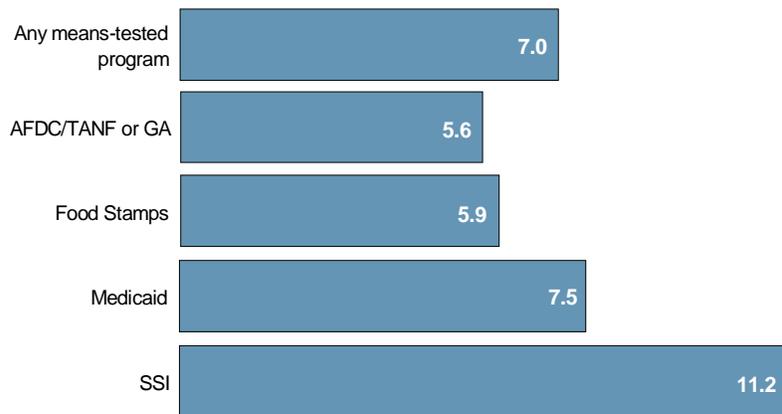
Average monthly participation rates in means-tested programs, 1999



Duration of spells of participation differs by program

For people who received assistance during the 1996-99 period, the median spell length, in general, was 7.0 months. The median spell length for SSI was 11.2 months, significantly longer than that for Food Stamps, AFDC/TANF or GA, or Medicaid (5.9, 5.6, and 7.5 months, respectively).

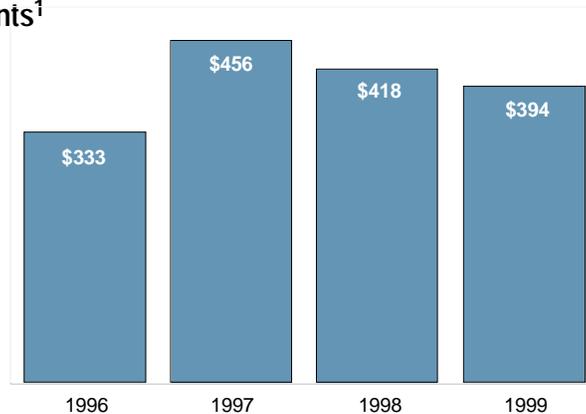
Median spell length in months, by program, 1996-99



Median monthly benefit level (in 1999 dollars) varies over years

The median monthly family benefit of AFDC/TANF or GA, SSI, and Food Stamps was \$394 in 1999, compared with \$333 to \$456 (in 1999 dollars) in 1996-98. Benefits differed by population groups. In 1999, children under 18 years old received a median monthly family benefit of \$429, significantly greater than the \$269 for the elderly. Children also had a higher average monthly participation rate.

Median monthly family benefits (in 1999 dollars) of program participants¹



¹Consists of AFDC/TANF or GA, SSI, and Food Stamps only.

Source: Lester, G.H., & Tin, J. (2004). *Dynamics of economic well-being: Program participation, 1996-99: Who gets assistance?* Current Population Reports (P70-94). Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

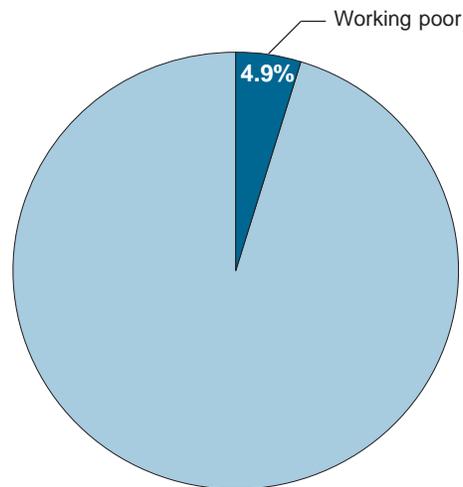
The Working Poor in 2001

A number of the poor also participate significantly in the labor force. In 2001, 32.9 million people of all ages, or 11.7 percent of the population, lived at or below the official poverty threshold. Most of them were children or adults who had not participated in the labor force during the year. However, many were 16 years old and older and were in the labor force for 27 weeks or more during the year. These individuals are typically referred to as the working poor. This study presents data on the relationships between labor force activity and poverty in 2001 for individual workers, including those who were family members and those who did not live with their families. A variety of economic, demographic, educational, occupational, and family characteristics of the working poor are explored. For the most part, the data used in this study were collected in the 2002 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey.

Working poor totals 6.8 million people

About 6.8 million people were classified as the working poor. They represented 4.9 percent of all persons 16 years and older who were in the labor force for 27 weeks or more in 2001—an increase of 319,000 (0.2 percentage point) from the previous year.

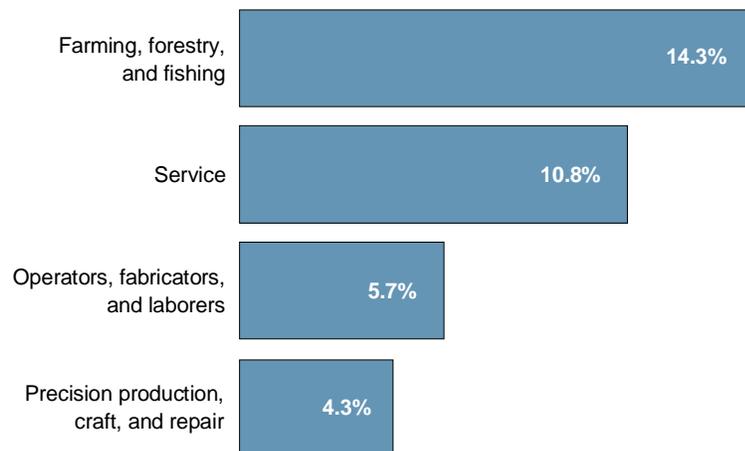
Percentage of people in the labor force and also in poverty



Service and farmworkers more likely to be among working poor

Farmworkers (including those employed in forestry and fishing) and service employees were more likely to be classified as working poor than were workers in other occupations. The 2 million working poor in service occupations accounted for 31.3 percent of all those classified as the working poor.

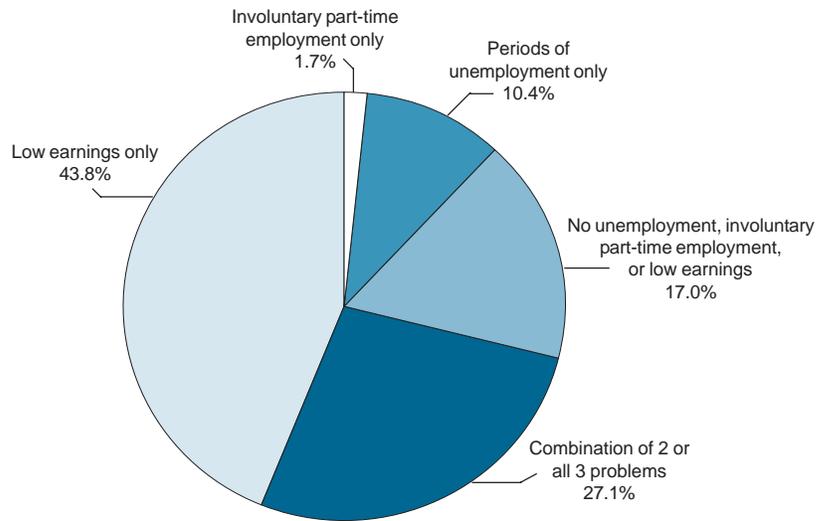
Poverty rate of people in the labor force, by selected occupations



Low earnings most common among working poor

For the working poor, low earnings was the most common labor-market condition encountered, with 44 percent facing low earnings only. Seventeen percent of the working poor did not experience low earnings, involuntary part-time employment, or periods of unemployment: Their status was likely attributed to short-term employment, some weeks of involuntary part-time work, or a family structure that increases the risk of poverty.

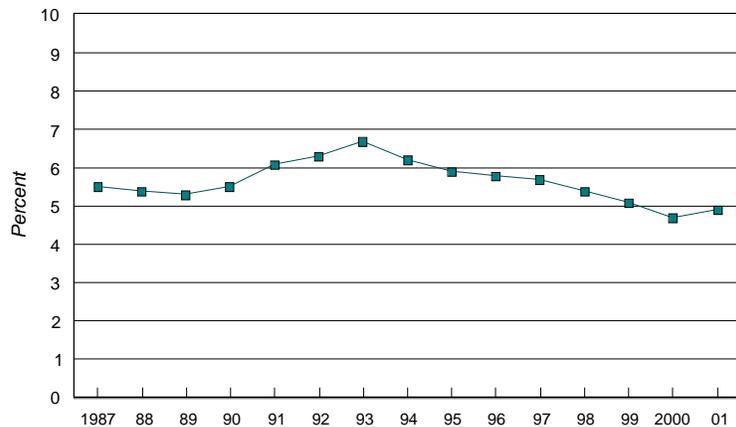
Labor market problems of working poor



Poverty rate of those in labor force at peak in 1993

The rise in the percentage of people classified as the working poor in 2001 was the first year-to-year increase since 1992-93. During the 1987-2001 period, poverty rates of people who were in the labor force for 27 weeks or more peaked in 1993 at 6.7 percent and was lowest in 2000 at 4.7 percent.

Poverty rates of people in the labor force



Source: Mosisa, A. (2003). *The working poor in 2001*. *Monthly Labor Review*, 126(11/12),13-17.

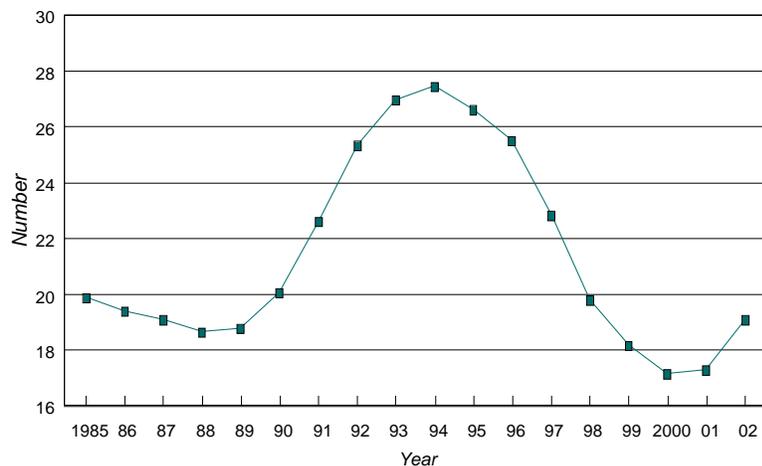
Food Stamp Households: 2002

The Food Stamp Program (FSP) provides Americans with the means to purchase food for a nutritious diet. The FSP is the largest of the 15 domestic food and nutrition assistance programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). In an average month in fiscal year 2002, the FSP provided benefits to about 19 million people living in 8.2 million U.S. households. The total cost of the program over fiscal year 2002 was \$20.7 billion, \$18.3 billion of which were for food stamp benefits. This report presents the characteristics of U.S. food stamp households in fiscal year 2002 (October 2001 to September 2002). This information comes from FSP household data collected by FNS for quality control purposes.

Food stamp participation increases from 2001 to 2002

After declining slowly from 1985 to 1989, FSP participation grew substantially during the early 1990s, increasing by 37 percent from fiscal year 1990 through 1994. Since peaking at 28 million people in March 1994, the number of FSP participants declined steadily through 2000 but began to rise in 2001 and rose further in 2002. There were 18.2 million participants at the beginning of fiscal year 2002, rising to 19.8 million by the end of the fiscal year.

Number of Food Stamp Program participants (in millions)¹

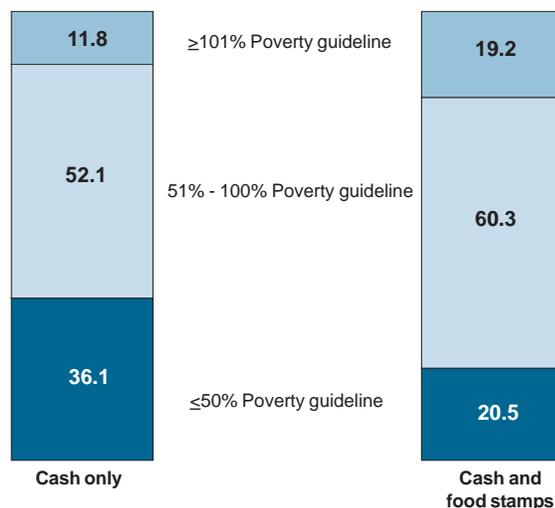


¹Average monthly values.

Food stamps increase households' purchasing power

The combination of cash and food stamps yields a significantly different distribution of food stamp households by poverty status. Specifically, when food stamps are included in gross income, the resulting increase in income of food stamp households was enough to move 7 percent of them above the poverty guideline in 2002. Food stamp benefits had an even greater effect on the poorest food stamp households, moving 16 percent of them above 50 percent of the poverty guideline.

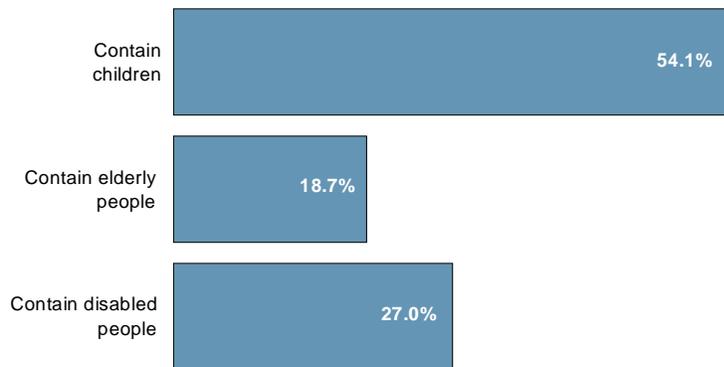
Income distribution of food stamp households, based on cash only and cash and food stamps



More than half of food stamp households contain children

In fiscal year 2002, 54 percent of FSP households contained children; these households tended to be headed by a single female. Nineteen percent of FSP households contained elderly people (age 60 or older); these households tended to consist of people living alone. Twenty-seven percent of all FSP households contained disabled people; about 59 percent of these households consisted of people living alone.

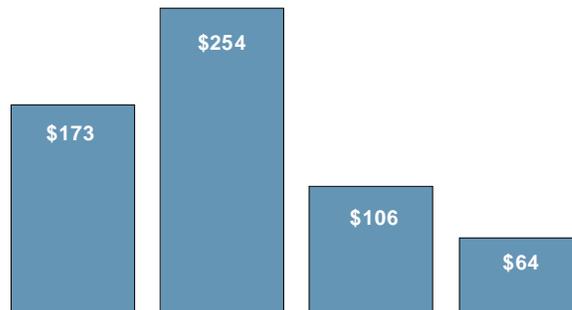
Characteristics of food stamp households



Average monthly food stamp benefit: \$173

The average monthly food stamp benefit was \$173 in 2002 for all food stamp households. This value varied among household types by household size. Food stamp households with children had a greater monthly benefit and household size (\$254 and 3.3 people) than did food stamp households with elderly people (\$64 and 1.3 people) or those with disabled people (\$106 and 2.0 people).

Average monthly food stamp benefit, by food stamp household characteristic



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation. (2003). *Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2002*. FSP-03-CHAR02.

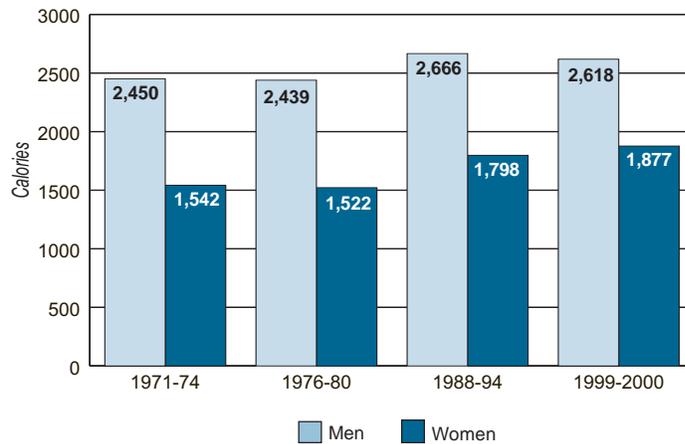
Trends in Intake of Energy and Macronutrients

During 1971-2000, the prevalence of obesity in the United States increased from 14.5 to 30.9 percent. Unhealthy diets and sedentary behaviors have been identified as the primary causes of deaths attributable to obesity. Evaluating trends in dietary intake is an important step in understanding the factors that contribute to the increase in obesity. To assess trends in intake of energy (i.e., calories), protein, carbohydrate, total fat, and saturated fat during 1971-2000, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) analyzed data from four National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys conducted during 1971-74, 1976-80, 1988-94, and 1999-2000. All the surveys included a dietary recall interview to obtain information on food and beverages consumed during the preceding 24 hours. This report summarizes the results of that analysis. To compare estimates across surveys, CDC conducted analysis that included only adults ages 20 to 74 years. Samples ranged from 1,730 men and 2,003 women in 1990-2000 to 6,630 men and 7,537 women in 1988-94.

Energy intake up

During 1971-2000, average energy intake increased significantly. For men, average energy intake increased from 2,450 to 2,618 calories and for women, from 1,542 to 1,877 calories.

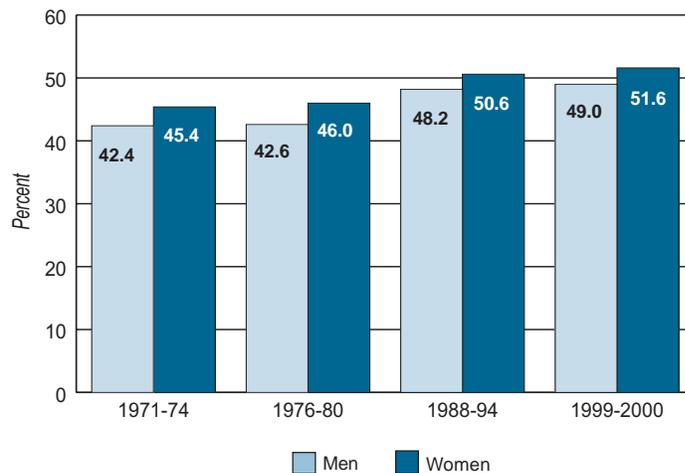
Mean energy intake among adults over time, by gender



Percentage of calories from carbohydrate also up

For men, the percentage of calories from carbohydrate increased from 42.4 to 49.0 percent between 1971-74 and 1999-2000. For women, the percentage increased from 45.4 to 51.6 percent over this time.

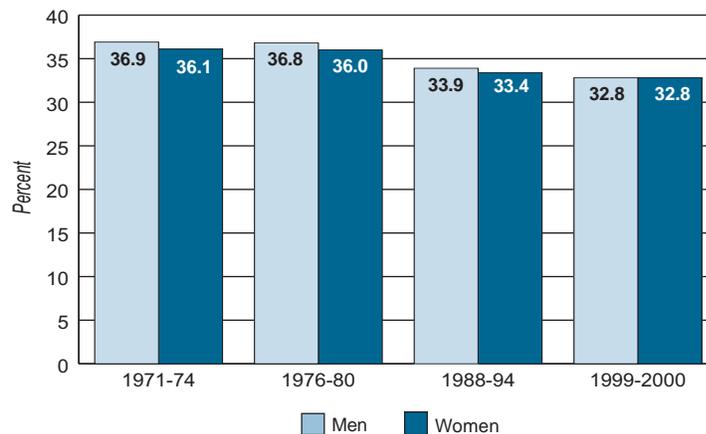
Percentage of calories from carbohydrate among adults over time, by gender



Percentage of calories, however, from total fat down

The percentage of calories from total fat decreased from 36.9 to 32.8 percent for men between 1971-74 and 1999-2000 and from 36.1 to 32.8 percent for women. The decrease in the percentage of calories from fat during 1971-91 is attributed to an increase in total calories consumed; absolute fat intake in grams increased.

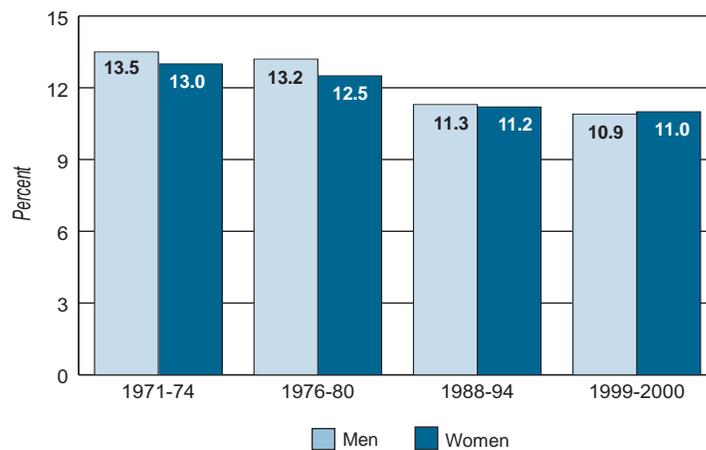
Percentage of calories from total fat among adults over time, by gender



Percentage of calories from saturated fat also down

The percentage of calories from saturated fat decreased from 13.5 to 10.9 percent for men between 1971-74 and 1999-2000. For women, the percentage decreased from 13.0 to 11.0 percent over this time.

Percentage of calories from saturated fat among adults over time, by gender



Source: Wright, J.D., Kennedy-Stephenson, J., Wang, C.Y., McDowell, M.A., & Johnson, C.L. (2004). Trends in intake of energy and macronutrients—United States, 1971-2000. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 53(4), 80-82.