

TRENDS IN HOUSEHOLD SIZE

HISTORICAL TRENDS

The size of the average central Puget Sound household declined significantly during the latter part of the 20th century in response to major demographic shifts that were taking place on a national scale. Regional average household size dropped from 3.04 persons per household in 1960 to 2.49 in 2000.

FIGURE 1: Trends in Average Household Size

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2004*
King	2.97	2.89	2.49	2.40	2.39	2.36
Kitsap	3.07	2.95	2.68	2.65	2.60	-
Pierce	3.11	3.02	2.66	2.62	2.60	2.57
Snohomish	3.25	3.22	2.76	2.68	2.65	2.64
Region	3.04	2.96	2.58	2.50	2.49	-
	1960-00	1960-70	1970-80	1980-90	1990-00	2000-04
King	-0.58	-0.09	-0.40	-0.09	-0.01	-0.03
Kitsap	-0.47	-0.12	-0.27	-0.04	-0.05	-
Pierce	-0.50	-0.09	-0.36	-0.04	-0.02	-0.03
Snohomish	-0.60	-0.03	-0.46	-0.08	-0.02	-0.02
Region	-0.54	-0.08	-0.38	-0.07	-0.01	-

Note: *Data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) program are not yet available for Kitsap County. ACS estimates are published with lower and upper bounds (representing 90 percent confidence intervals) that are not included in this table.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

During the 1960s and 1970s, fertility rates fell as women entered the labor force in increasing numbers and delayed childbearing, thus producing a dramatic drop-off in average household sizes. Rising divorce rates and the accompanying dissolution of formerly married households also furthered the decline. These trends stabilized during the 1990s, with the region's four counties experiencing only minor decreases in average household size.

FIGURE 2: Fertility and Divorce Rates, Washington State

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Fertility Rate	3.67	2.32	1.82	2.07	1.95
Divorce Rate	3.21	5.24	6.93	5.89	4.64

Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management

An examination of the distribution of households (by the number of persons per household) over the past two decades reveals several trends consistent with the ongoing decrease in average household sizes. From 1980 to 2000, the percentage share of three-person, four-person and five-plus-person households declined. Moreover, the share of one-person households rose steadily, and data from the

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2004 American Community Survey indicate that this trend is continuing in those counties for which data is available (King, Pierce and Snohomish). Periods of strong performance in the regional economy are likely a significant contributor to growth in one-person households, with job opportunities attracting large numbers of single workers to the region.

During the 1990s, however, a countervailing trend emerged in the five+ persons per household category, in which the proportion of such households showed a small increase. This is consistent with census data for families, which show regional average family size rising slightly during this period, driven by trends in King County.

The increase is attributable, in part, to brisk growth in the foreign-born population and sub-populations with larger average family sizes. The region's foreign-born population grew by 89 percent during the 1990s, compared to 19 percent for the general population, with over two-thirds of the growth occurring in King County. Again, data from the American Community Survey provide evidence that these trends are continuing into the present decade.

FIGURE 5: Foreign-Born Population, Central Puget Sound Region

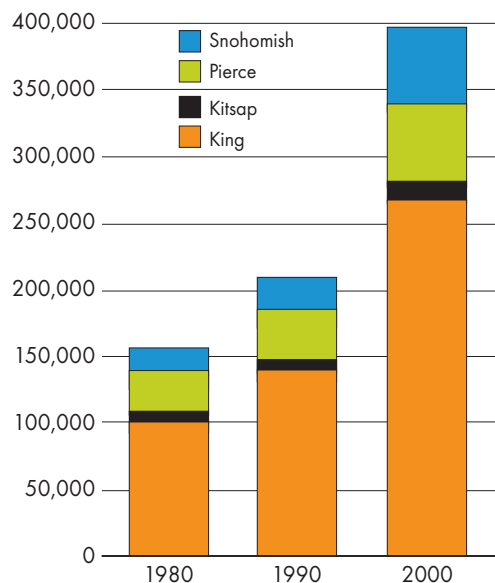


FIGURE 3: Households by Number of Persons, Central Puget Sound Region

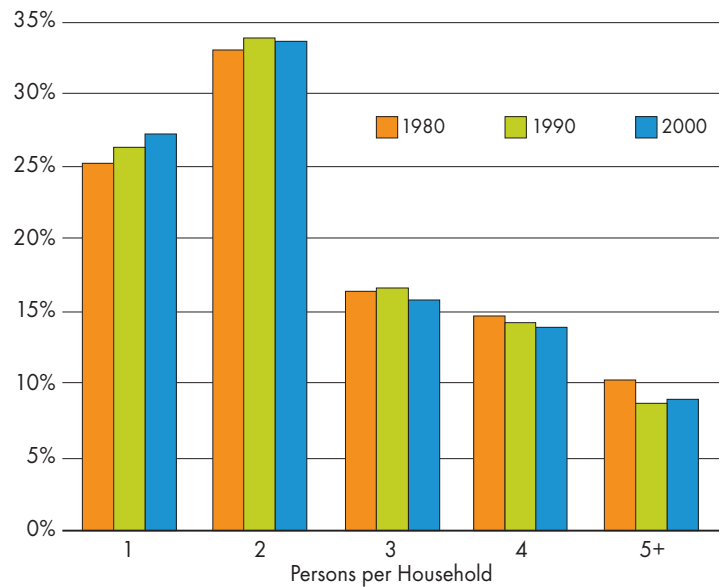


FIGURE 4: Trends in Average Family Size

	1980	1990	2000	2004*
King	3.10	3.00	3.03	3.07
Kitsap	3.15	3.11	3.05	-
Pierce	3.16	3.11	3.10	3.10
Snohomish	3.20	3.13	3.13	3.11
Region	3.13	3.05	3.07	-
	1980-00	1980-90	1990-00	2000-04
King	-0.07	-0.10	0.03	0.04
Kitsap	-0.10	-0.04	-0.06	-
Pierce	-0.06	-0.05	-0.01	0.00
Snohomish	-0.07	-0.07	0.01	-0.02
Region	-0.06	-0.08	0.01	--

Note: *Data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) program are not yet available for Kitsap County. ACS estimates are published with lower and upper bounds (representing 90% confidence intervals) that are not included in this table.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

PROJECTED TRENDS

In the decades to come, household sizes are expected to continue to decrease, albeit at a relatively slower pace. As the baby boomer cohort ages, the region and nation will likely see a substantial rise in the number of one-person and two-person empty-nester households.

FIGURE 6: Age Pyramids, Central Puget Sound Region



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Washington State Office of Financial Management

In addition to the downward influence that the aging of the population will have upon average household sizes, a continued gain in smaller households moving to the region would further such a trend, while sustained growth in sub-populations with larger average family sizes would act as a moderating factor.

Copies of this issue of *Puget Sound Trends* are available on the Regional Council's Web site at psrc.org, or by contacting the Regional Council Information Center at 206-464-7532 or infoctr@psrc.org. For questions regarding the data presented in this article, contact Carol Naito at 206-464-7535 or cnaito@psrc.org.