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Status of Women in Oklahoma

A SUMMARY REPORT TO UNITED WE

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OK women earn
\$0.75
for every dollar
of male earnings

Without change,
women in OK
will not see
**EQUAL PAY
UNTIL 2076**

**UNITED
WE .**



**SPEARS SCHOOL
OF BUSINESS**

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Executive Summary

In the summer of 2020, United WE commissioned researchers from the Spears School of Business at Oklahoma State University to examine women's socioeconomic status in the state of Oklahoma. Along with providing demographic information, this report presents benchmarking data for the status of women in Oklahoma in five major areas: employment and earnings, health care, childcare, poverty and social insurance, and civic engagement. Where relevant, comparisons are made between Oklahoma and the United States as well as the Oklahoma City (OKC) Metro and Tulsa Metro areas. Data comes from publicly-available sources, including the American Community Survey (ACS) for the years 2015 through 2019 and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Finally, we discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on labor market conditions in Oklahoma. We find the following:

Demographics

- Women in Oklahoma have higher levels of educational attainment than men, although both men and women in Oklahoma have lower levels of educational attainment than men and women in the United States overall.
- Education is the most common bachelor's degree field for women in Oklahoma. More than one-quarter of Oklahoma women ages 25 and over have an education degree. The largest percentages of bachelor's degrees for men and women in the United States overall and for men in Oklahoma are in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields.

Employment and Earnings

- Compared to women in the United States, larger percentages of women in Oklahoma work in sales and office industries, education, and food services and personal care services, which tend to be lower-paying occupations. More men in Oklahoma than in the United States work in industries related to production and transportation as well as natural resources, construction, and maintenance.
- Women's labor force participation rate in Oklahoma between 2015 and 2019 was approximately 56%, lower than the average of 58% for U.S. women overall.
- The gender earnings gap is larger in Oklahoma than in the United States overall. Oklahoma women earned 74.5 cents for every dollar earned by a man between 2015 and 2019, compared to 80.8 cents per dollar for U.S. women.
- Between 2017 and 2019, the gender earnings gap increased in Oklahoma but decreased for women in the United States overall.
- If current trends in Oklahoma continue, women will not reach earnings equality with men in the state until 2076.

Health Care

- The share of women in Oklahoma who lacked health insurance increased between 2015 and 2019. For men, the percentage without health insurance increased through 2018 and fell in 2019.

- Oklahoma also had an increase in the percentage of children under the age of 18 without health insurance.
- Men are less likely than women in Oklahoma to be enrolled in Medicaid. At the same time, men and women in the state are less likely to have Medicaid than men and women in the United States.

Childcare

- Oklahoma had a decrease in the number of licensed childcare facilities between 2015 and 2020. In 2021, there was an increase of more than 250 licensed childcare facilities in the state, bringing the state total to 2,964.
- About 50,000 children in Oklahoma received a childcare subsidy from the state each year between 2015 and 2019.
- The annual cost of childcare for an infant in Oklahoma in 2020 was \$8,940, or \$745 a month. The typical married family with two incomes spends about 12% of their income on infant childcare compared to 40% for the typical single-parent.
- The annual cost of infant care in Oklahoma is greater than the cost of in-state tuition at a public, four-year university in the state.

Poverty and Social Insurance

- Women in Oklahoma ages 25–64 have a higher poverty rate than men in Oklahoma as well as when compared to women in the United States overall. Fewer women live in poverty in the OKC Metro than in the Tulsa Metro, but the share of women earning an income below the poverty level is higher in the state overall than in both metro areas.
- Among women who are 65-years-old and older, the share of women in poverty in Oklahoma is lower than the percentage for women in the United States as a whole.
- In 2019, nearly four times as many single-mother households in Oklahoma received public food assistance compared to single-father households. A higher share of single-parent households in Oklahoma receive public food assistance than single-parent households in the United States.

Civic Engagement

- About one-fifth of the Oklahoma legislators were women in 2021, a smaller share than the United States average.
- Oklahoma women vote more than Oklahoma men, but voter turnout rates are lower in Oklahoma for both genders than for men and women in the United States overall.

COVID-19 Pandemic Effects on Oklahoma

- During the second quarter of 2020, women's unemployment rate in Oklahoma was about 4% percent greater than the unemployment rate for Oklahoma men.
- In April 2020, Oklahoma's unemployment rate was at its highest at 12.6% and slowly decreased over the rest of the year. The declines in employment in the state were highest in the industries of leisure and hospitality and mining and logging.
- Oklahoma had over 180,000 people receiving unemployment insurance in June of 2020. A larger number of women than men filed unemployment claims in the April of

2020, but more men filed unemployment claims beginning in May 2020. By October 2021, the number of unemployment insurance claims fell to pre-pandemic levels for both men and women.

Introduction

Women in Oklahoma face many challenges, both economically and politically, that hinder them from achieving their full potential. In 2018, *The Oklahoman* ran an article titled, “10 Stats that Show why Oklahoma Ranks Low for Women” (Hall, 2018). Among those statistics were high proportions of women in Oklahoma living in poverty and without health insurance, low female life expectancy at birth, and a small percentage of women who voted in the 2016 election. A 2020 study comparing the status of women across the 50 states and the District of Columbia on an index of 12 indicators of security, justice, and inclusion ranked Oklahoma 42nd overall, below the neighboring states of Kansas and Missouri, ranked 26th and 38th, respectively (Georgetown, 2020). In 2022, a study of the best and worst states for women ranked Oklahoma the worst state for women to live in, ranking low in both women’s economic and social well-being and in women’s health care and safety (McCann, 2022).

At the same time, women contribute millions of dollars to the Oklahoma economy. If women in the state took off one day of work, the Oklahoma GDP would lose \$222.4 million (Bahn and McGrew, 2017). Women’s contributions from paid labor, however, are undervalued because women are overrepresented in employment in low-income sectors of the economy. In the United States, women represent about 90% or more of workers in childcare services, preschool and kindergarten teachers, secretaries and administrative assistants, nurses, maids and housecleaners (Bahn and McGrew, 2017). In addition, an increasing number of women in the United States are becoming the breadwinners in the family. In Oklahoma, 27% of married white women were the breadwinner in the family, along with 19% and 17% of Black and Hispanic women, respectively (Institute for Women’s Policy Research [IWPR], 2016). It is crucial for women to have access to equal pay, quality health care, and affordable childcare services to promote a healthy, growing economy in the state of Oklahoma.

This report is divided into six chapters. In the first chapter, we present demographic characteristics for women in Oklahoma, including age, race/ethnicity, marital and household status, and educational attainment. Chapter 2 presents information about women’s employment, labor force participation, and earnings. The third chapter discusses health insurance and Medicaid enrollment along with Oklahoma’s recent Medicaid expansion. Chapter 4 presents measures of childcare affordability and access as well as related state programs, such as childcare subsidies and funding for children’s pre-Kindergarten enrollment. Chapter 5 discusses poverty and access to social assistance from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Chapter 6 briefly examines the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on men and women’s labor markets in the state of Oklahoma.

The primary data source for this study is the American Community Survey (ACS) for the years 2015 through 2019. The U.S. Census Bureau collects this information and provides detailed ACS data that is publicly available. We use data from both the annual tabulations and the five-year estimates. Additional data comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, and other sources. Our analysis also includes comparisons between Oklahoma and the United States. Data for the Oklahoma City (OKC) Metro and Tulsa Metro are also provided when available.

Chapter 1: Demographics

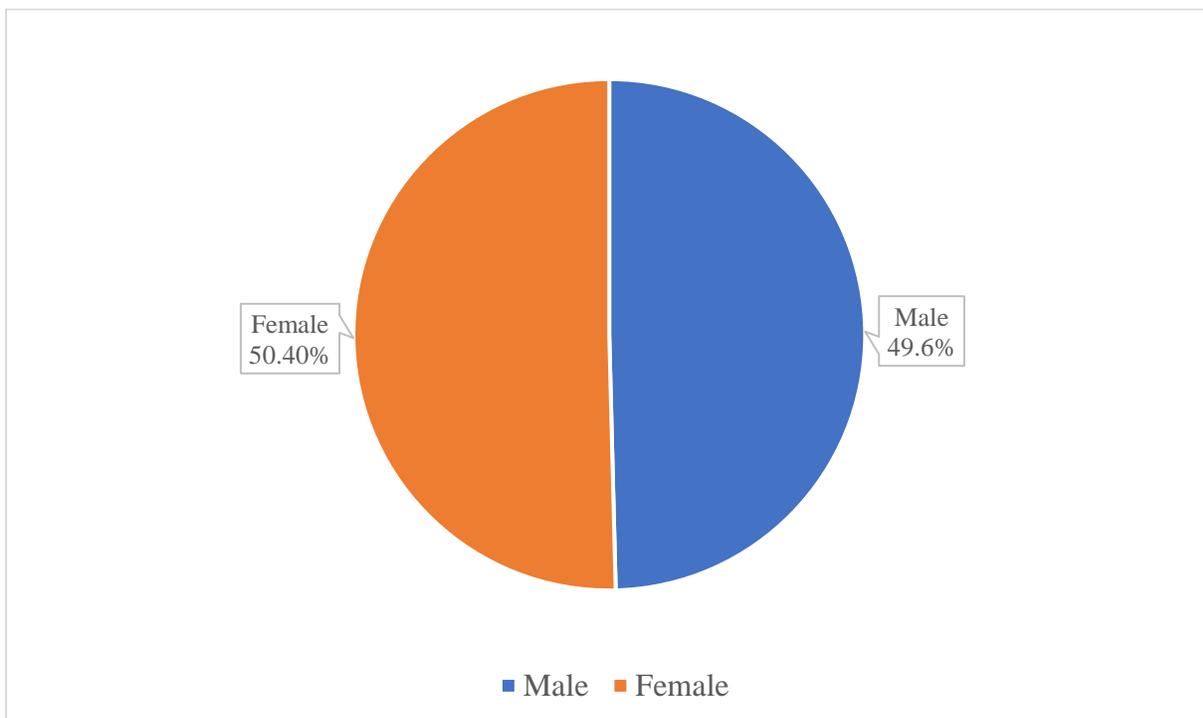
Based on the estimates from the most recent United States Census, Oklahoma's total population in 2020 was 3,959,353. Additionally, between 2010 and 2020, the population of Oklahoma grew by 5.5%, more slowly than the average population growth rate of 7.4% in the United States (America Counts Staff, 2021). Oklahoma's population is highly concentrated in metropolitan areas. The Oklahoma City (OKC) Metro had a 2020 population of about 1.43 million, while the population in the Tulsa Metro was a little over 1 million (America Counts Staff, 2021).

While general demographic results from the 2020 U.S. Census have been released, detailed information is not available as of the time of this writing. The data presented in this chapter come primarily from the American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates for 2015 to 2019, unless otherwise stated.

Gender and Age Distributions

Figure 1 shows the population of Oklahoma by gender. Women comprise 50.4% of the overall state population. Comparatively, women are 50.8% of the United States population. In additionally, 50.9% of adults 18-years-old and over in Oklahoma are women as well as 55.5% of adults ages 65 and older.

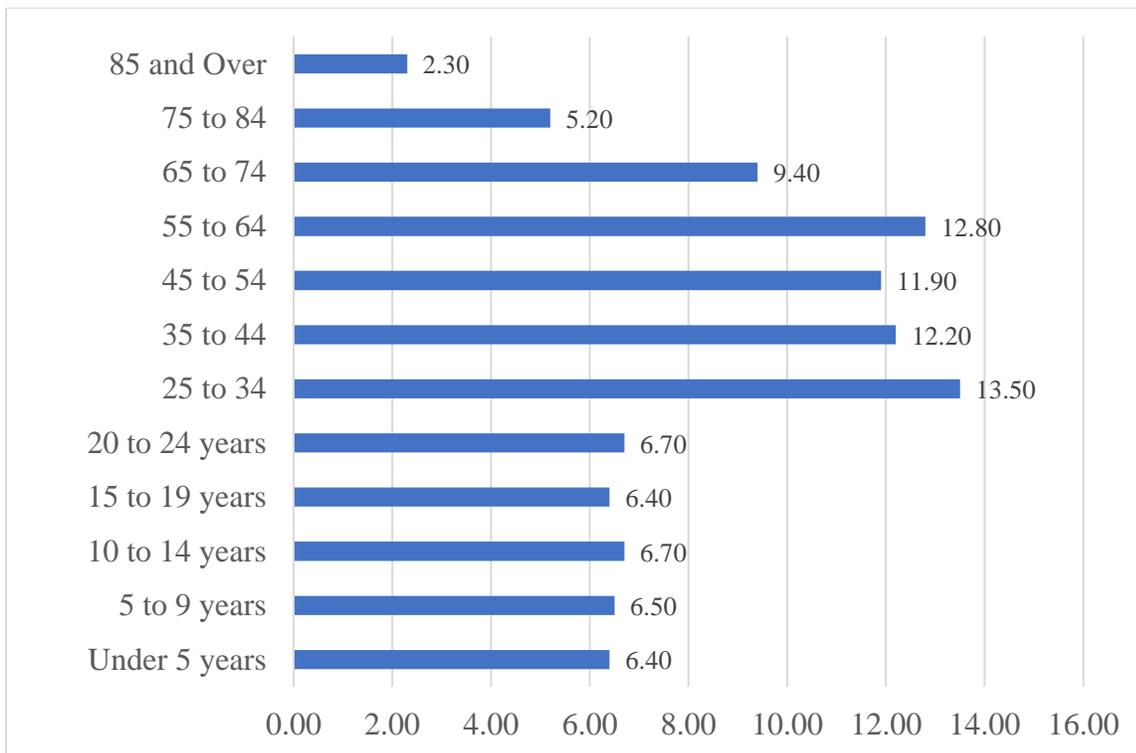
Figure 1. Oklahoma Population by Gender



The state of Oklahoma has experienced changes in its age demographics since the 2010 Census. As of 2020, approximately 76% of the Oklahoma population was 18 years old and older, an increase of about 7% from 2010. The proportion of children under the age of 18 grew by about 2.0% (America Counts Staff, 2021).

Figure 2 presents the distribution of women in Oklahoma by age group. Compared to the female population in the United States, the female population in Oklahoma is slightly younger. In Oklahoma, children under 5 comprise 6.4% of the female population compared to 5.9% in the U.S. overall. Also, females under the age of 18 make up 23.6% of the female population in the state relative to 21.8% of the US population. Moreover, 16.9% of women in Oklahoma are 65 years of age or older, which is slightly less than the 17.2% of women in the overall U.S. population.

Figure 2. Percentage of Females by Age

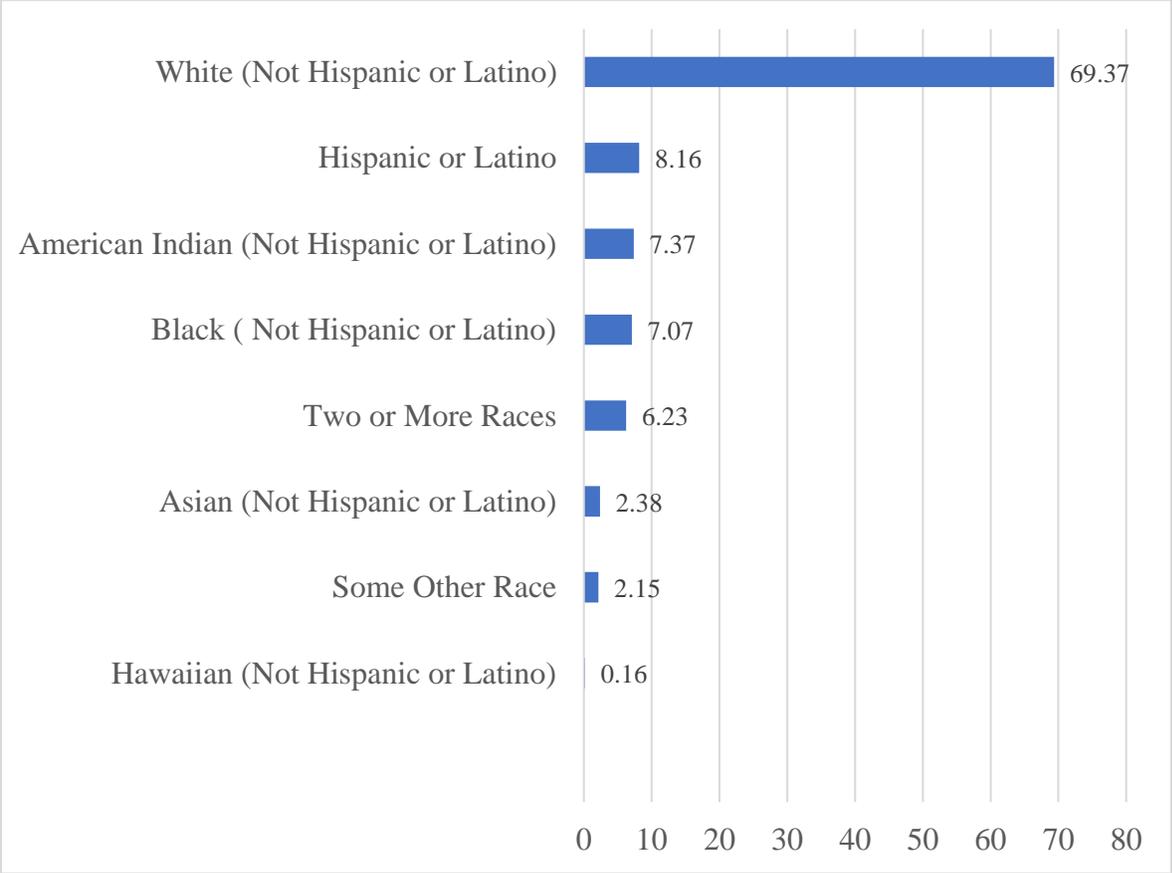


Race/Ethnicity

The results of the 2020 Census suggest the state has become more diverse. The white population comprises 63.5% of the total state population, a decrease of about 7% from 2010. The state experienced a 42% increase in the number of individuals of Hispanic/Latino origin and an 87% increase in the number of people identifying as American Indian in combination with another race or ethnicity (America Counts Staff, 2021).

Figure 3 displays the percentage of the female population by race and ethnicity for women in Oklahoma over the age of 16. Over two-thirds of the female population is white, while slightly more than 8% of women in the state are of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. Approximately 7.4% of the female population is of American Indian ethnicity alone, compared to 1% of the United States female population who are of American Indian descent. In addition, 7.1% of women in Oklahoma are Black alone, while 6.2% of women identify as two or more races. Asian women comprise 2.4% of the female population in Oklahoma, while Hawaiians represent less than 0.2% of women in the state.

Figure 3. Percentage of Women by Race/Ethnicity



Marital Status and Households

A woman’s marital status and number of children affect her overall earnings (Betrand, Goldin, and Katz, 2010). Full-time, year-round women mothers tend to have lower earnings than working women without children, and the gender earnings gaps may be largest for mothers from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds (Tucker, 2022). Marital status may also affect wealth. Elderly women who were married may have higher amounts of wealth compared to women who were never married, which may be related to spousal income and assets (Ruel and Hauser, 2013).

Figure 4 shows the marital status of men and women in Oklahoma for adults over the age of 18. Slightly more than half (50.4%) of men are married compared to 48.1% of women. Nearly one-third of men have never married compared to one-quarter of women. In addition, 14.3% of women and 12.0% of men in the state are divorced. Additionally, larger percentages of women are separated and widowed than men. Women are often economically disadvantaged after a divorce, especially if they have children (de Vaus et al., 2017).

Figure 4. Marital Status of Adults Age 18 and Over by Gender

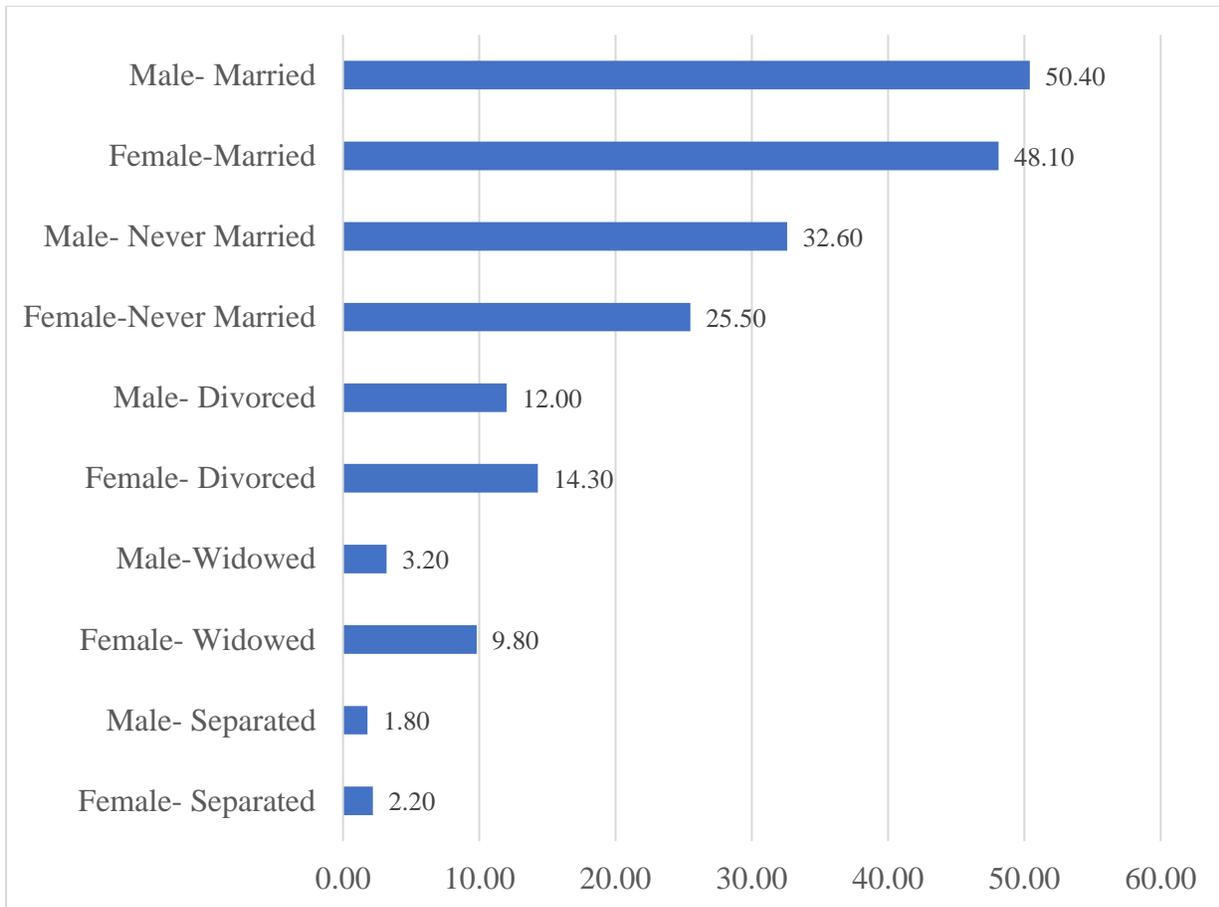
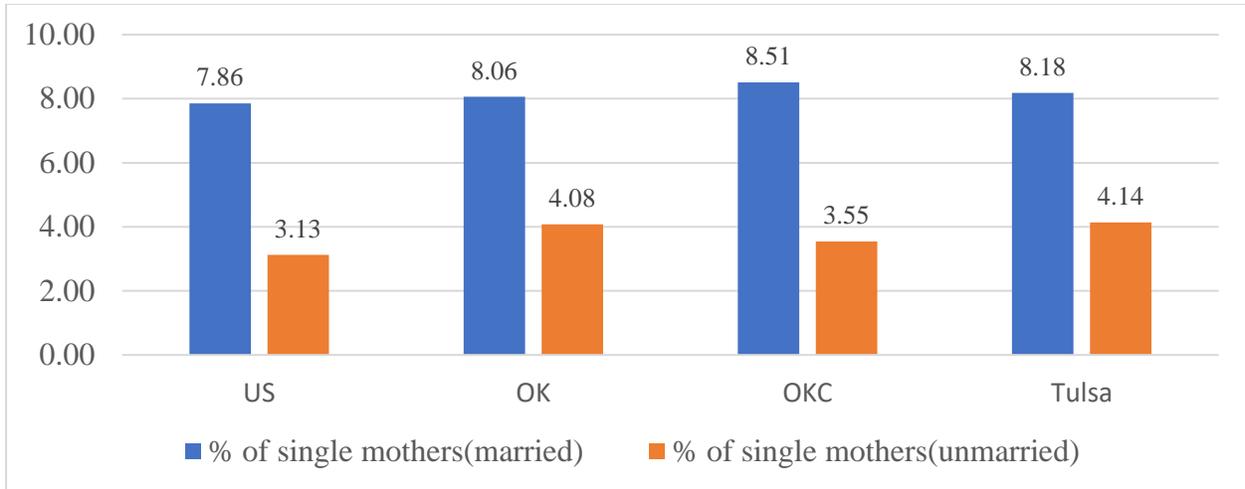


Figure 5 displays the percentage of single-mother households in the United States, Oklahoma, the OKC Metro, and the Tulsa Metro in 2019. Slightly higher percentages of women in Oklahoma are single mothers compared to the percentages in the United States overall. A higher share of previously married women in the OKC Metro and Tulsa Metro are single parents than in the state as a whole. About 4% of unmarried women in Oklahoma are single parents. Due to having less income than married adults, single parents must often spend higher proportions of their income on living expenses and childcare services.

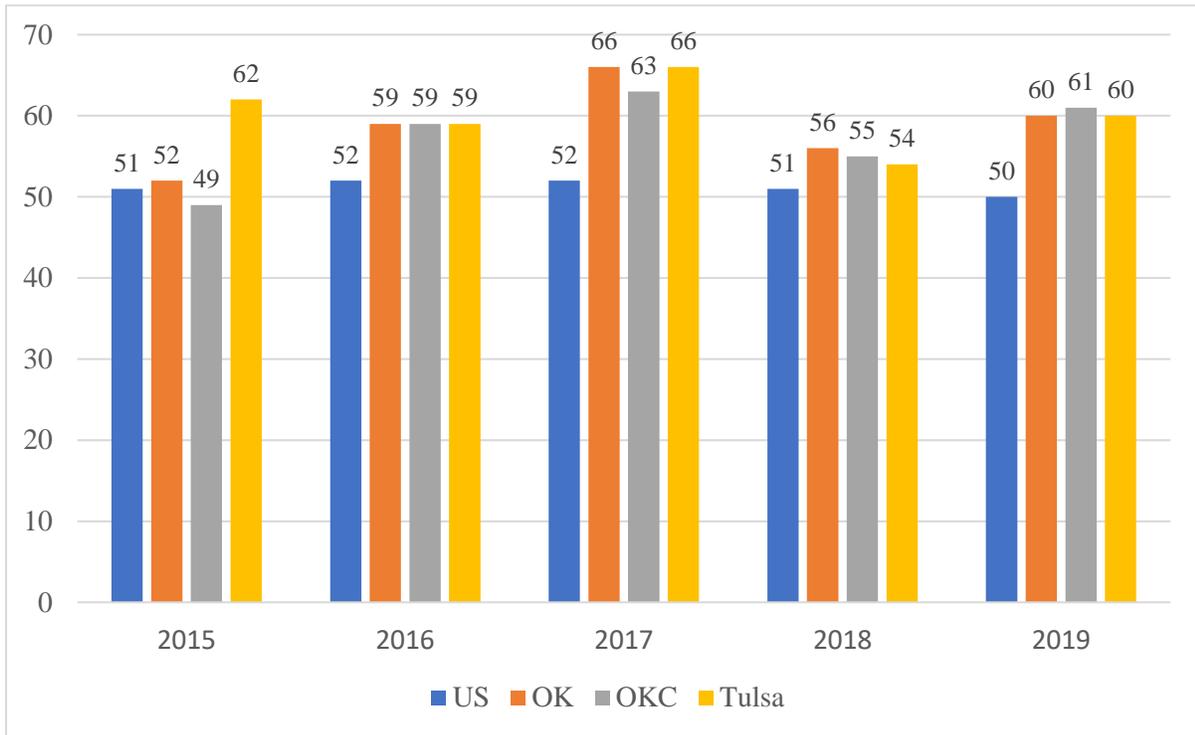
Figure 5. Percentage of single-mother households, US, OK, OKC, and Tulsa Metro Areas, 2019



Annual Birth Rate

Figure 6 presents the annual birth rate of women ages 15 to 50 in the United States, Oklahoma, the OKC Metro, and the Tulsa Metro. This data is based on one-year data tables from the American Community Survey for 2015 through 2019. In the United States, the annual birth rate of women remained consistent at approximately 51 births per 1,000 women. By comparison, Oklahoma had a larger share of women who had a child, averaging approximately 59 births per 1,000 women over the time period. The annual birth rate peaked in Oklahoma as well as in the OKC Metro and Tulsa Metro in 2017.

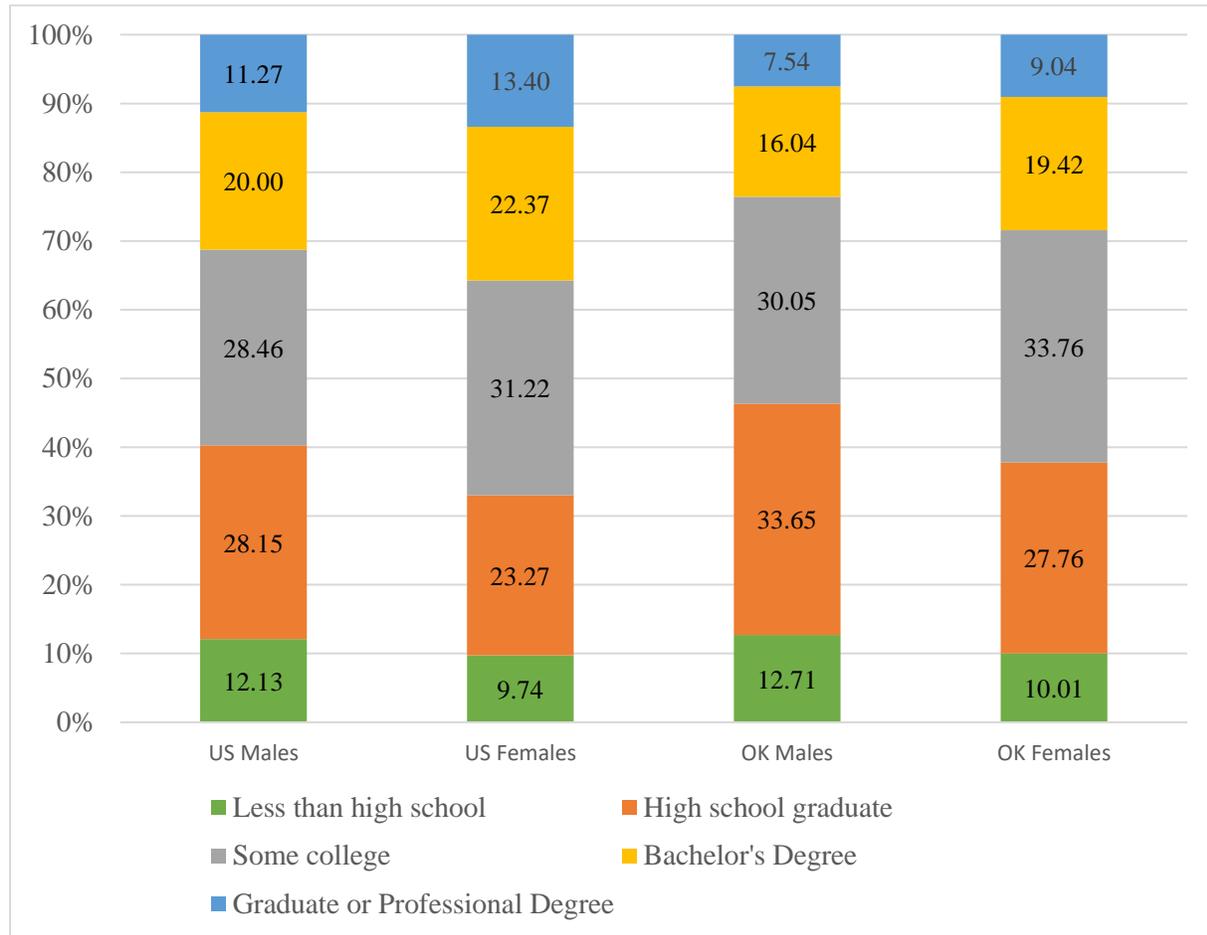
Figure 6. Annual Birth Rate of Women Age 15 to 50



Educational Attainment

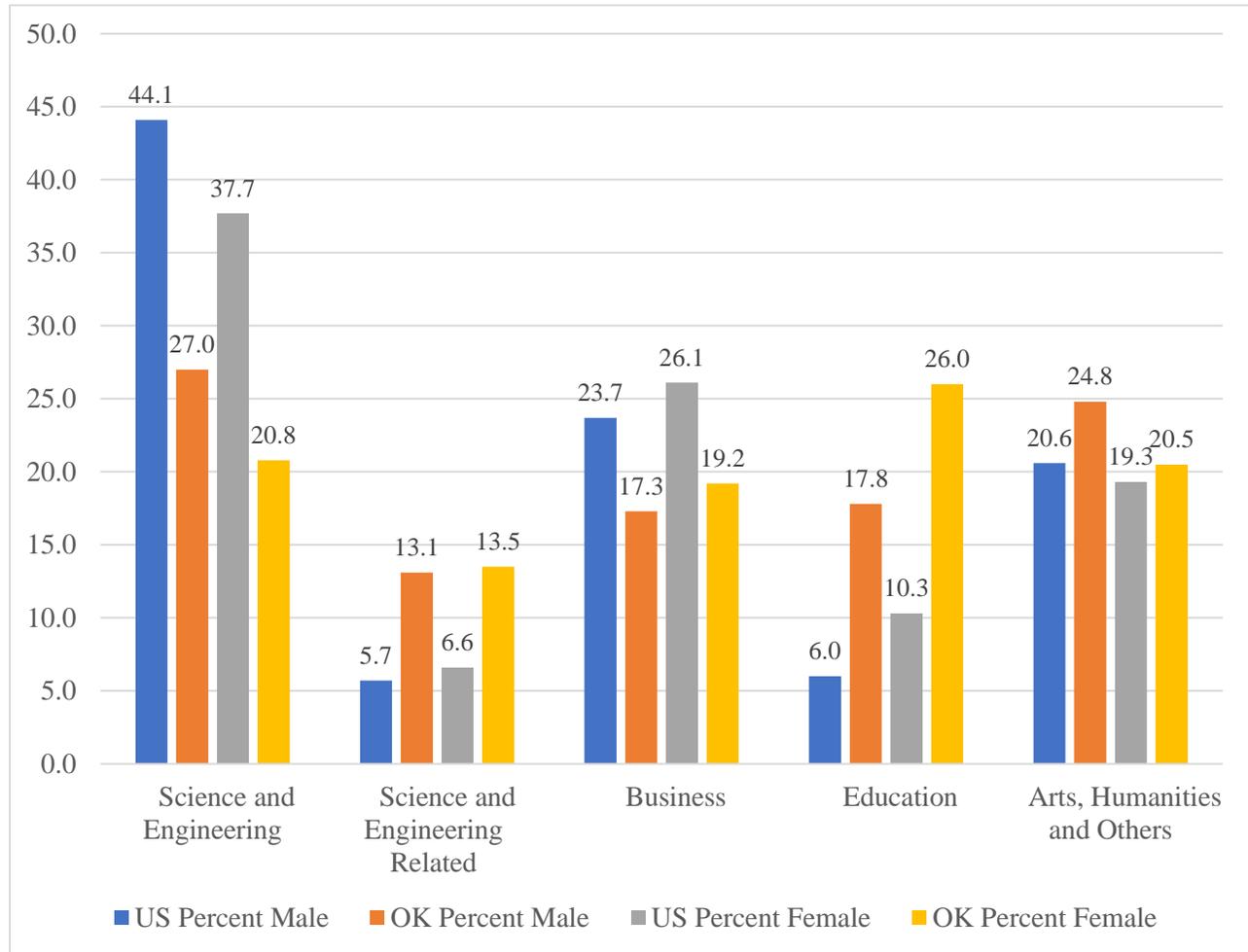
Differences in educational attainment contribute to disparities in personal income, both in terms of annual salaries and wages and overall career earnings. Figure 7 compares the distribution of educational attainment among male and female adults ages 25 – 64 in the United States and Oklahoma. Men and women in the United States have higher levels of education than adults of both genders in Oklahoma, although women in both geographic regions have higher levels of educational attainment than men. Moreover, men in Oklahoma have the lowest levels of education. Less than 54% of Oklahoma men have some college or more compared to about 60% of men in the United States. Two-thirds of women in the United States have some college or more relative to about 62% of Oklahoma women. Additionally, women in Oklahoma earned a larger percentage of bachelors and advanced degrees combined at 28.5% compared to Oklahoma men at 23.6%. Also, these percentages are smaller than the 35.8% of women and 31.3% of men in the United States who earned a bachelors or advanced degree. The small percentages of individuals with less than a high school diploma is comparable for the United States and Oklahoma.

Figure 7. Educational Attainment of Adults Age 25 – 64 by Gender, US and OK, 2019



The distribution of bachelor’s degree fields for the first major for men and women ages 25 and over in the United States and Oklahoma is shown in Figure 8. Approximately 21% of women and 27% of men in Oklahoma earned a degree in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics) field compared to 38% of women and 44% of men in the United States overall. This category includes degrees in fields, such as engineering, mathematics, computer science, and the physical, natural, and social sciences. Science and engineering degrees were the largest degree fields for men and women in the United States and also for men in Oklahoma. By contrast, education was the most common degree for Oklahoma women, representing 26% of degrees completed compared to 18% for Oklahoma men and 10% and 6% for women and men in the United States, respectively. Compared to 17% of Oklahoma men, 19% of Oklahoma women earned a business degree, less than the 26% of women in the United States overall. One in five women in Oklahoma earned a degree in the arts, humanities, or other related fields, which is slightly more than the 19% of women in the United States overall. About 13 to 14% women in the United States and Oklahoma have a degree in a science or engineering related field, including nursing, architecture, and physical therapy.

Figure 8. Percent of Adults 25 and Over with a Bachelor's Degree by Degree Field



Chapter 2: Employment and Earnings

Women’s earnings are associated with their choice of occupation, amount of educational attainment, and degree of labor force participation (Goldin, 2014). In this section, we examine employment and labor force participation for women in Oklahoma and compare the gender earnings gaps in Oklahoma and the United States. The information in this chapter comes from the American Community Survey 5-year report for 2015 – 2019. We also discuss the minimum wage in Oklahoma.

Labor Force Participation

Figure 9 shows the percentages of women in the labor force in the United States, Oklahoma, the OKC Metro, and the Tulsa Metro between 2015 and 2019. In all years, a larger share of women in the United States were a part of the labor force relative to women in Oklahoma. About 56% of women in Oklahoma participated in the labor force compared to about 59% of the women in the United States as a whole. Slightly higher

percentages of women participated in the labor force in the OKC Metro and Tulsa Metro compared to the state overall.

Figure 9. Women in the Labor Force by Geographic Region, 2015 - 2019

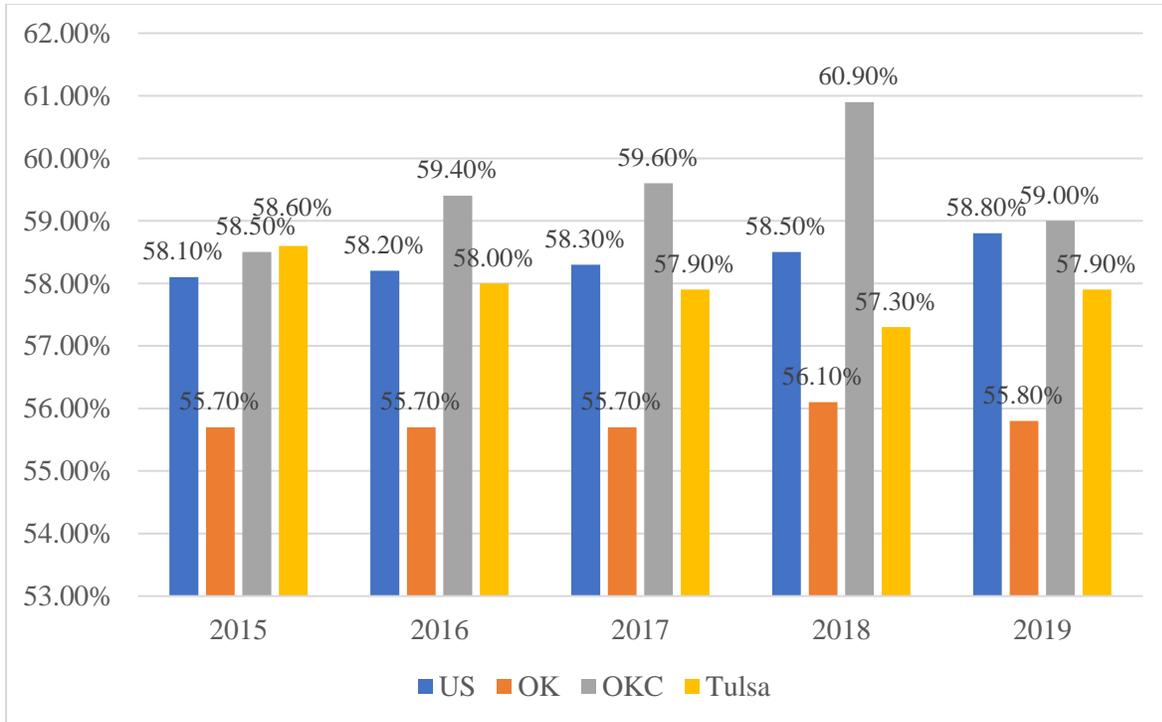
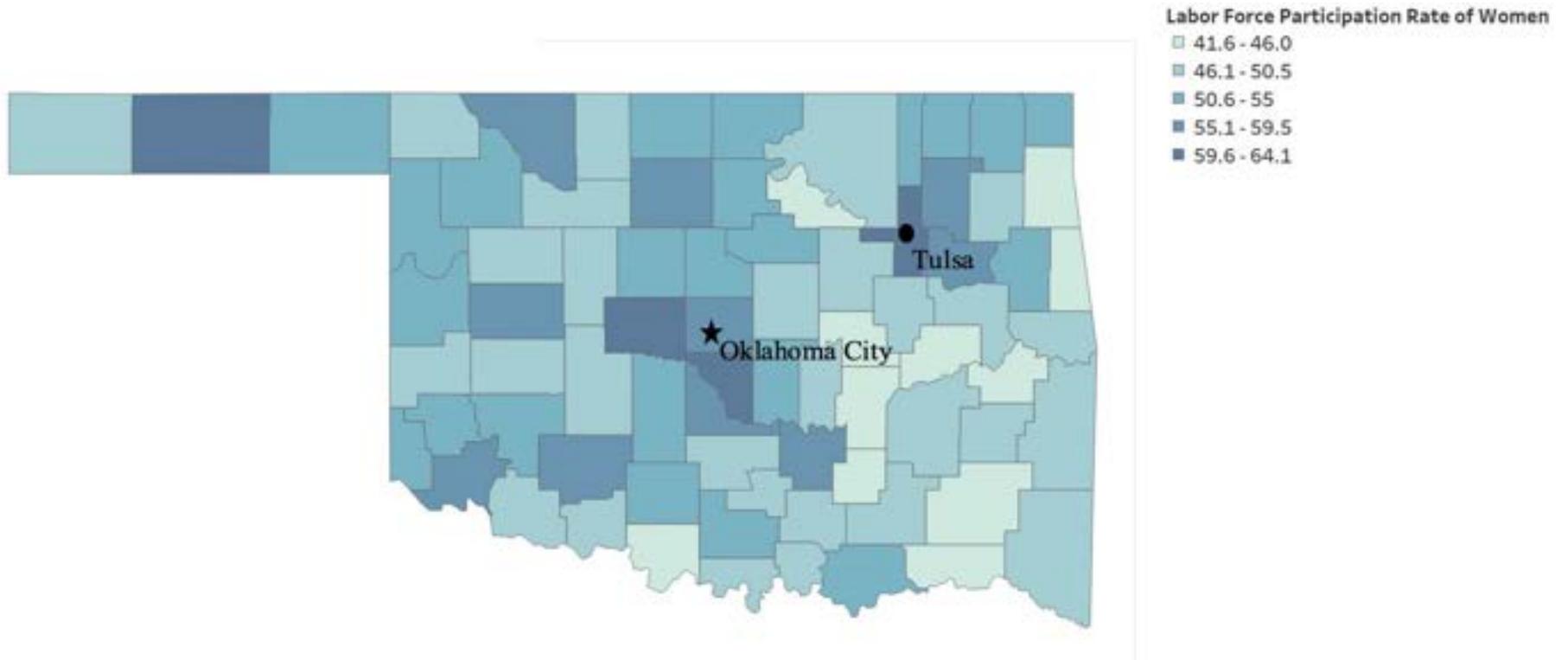


Figure 10 displays the labor force participation rate among Oklahoma women by county. Oklahoma has 77 counties, many of which are rural. Labor force participation rates are higher in counties that are more metropolitan. The overall county average labor force participation rate for women in the state is 50.8%. Across counties, women’s labor force participation rates range from a low of 41.6% in McIntosh County, a medium-sized county with a population of about 19,000, to a high of 64.1% in Canadian County, the fourth most populated county in the state with over 154,000 residents in 2020.

Figure 10. Women's Labor Force Participation Rate by County

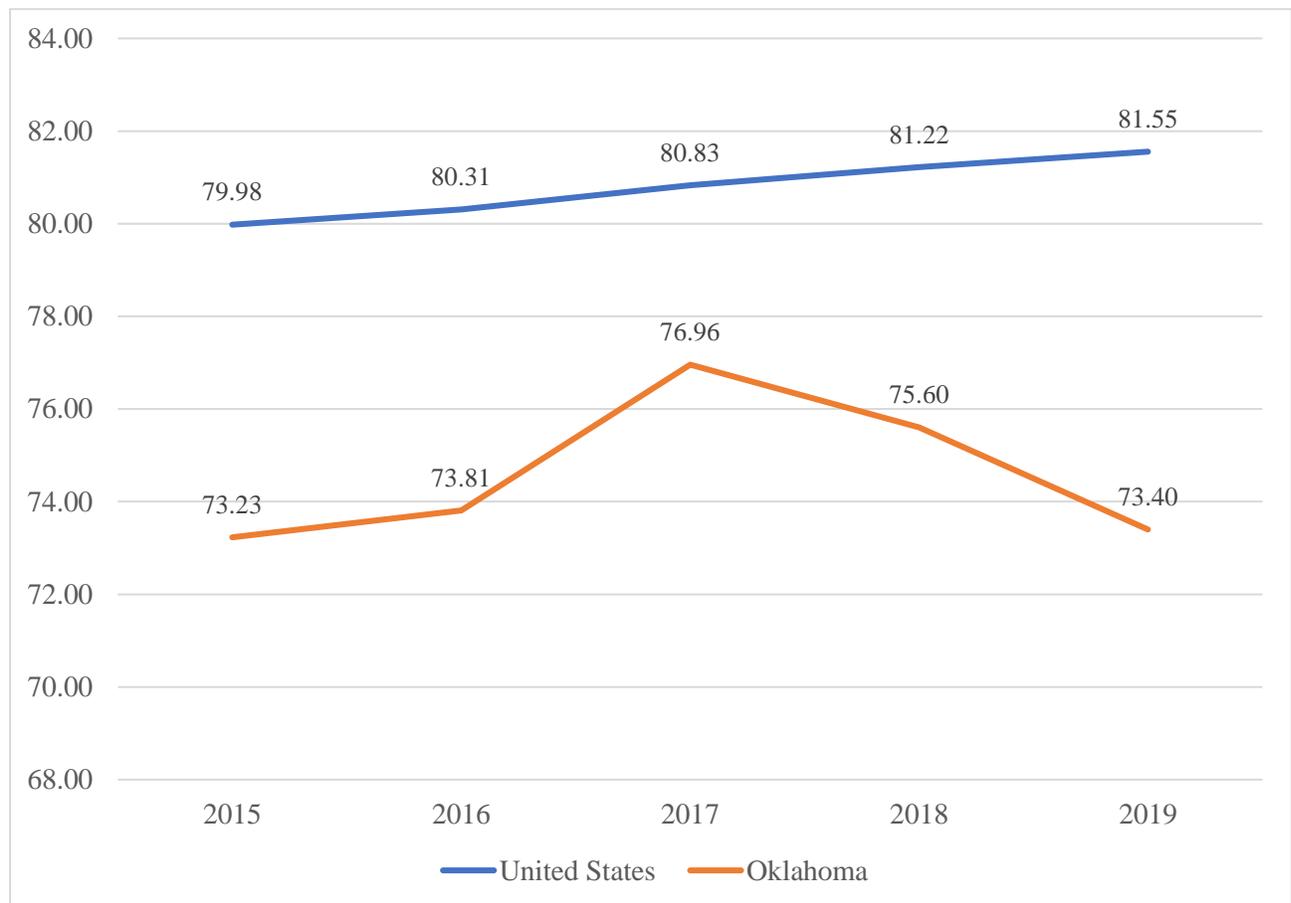


Earnings

Figure 11 displays the median gender earnings gap for full-time, year-round workers in the United States and Oklahoma. The gender earnings gap is larger in Oklahoma than in the United States. Between 2015 and 2019, women in the United States earned approximately 80.8 cents on average for every dollar earned by men compared to the 74.5 cents earned by Oklahoma women.

Additionally, the gender earnings gap in the United States slowly decreased between 2015 and 2019. In Oklahoma, there was a decrease in the gender pay gap between 2015 and 2017, but it increased in 2018 and 2019. The median salary earnings for a woman in Oklahoma in 2019 was \$36,494 compared to \$49,721 for men, equivalent to 27% less. By contrast, women's median earnings in the United States in 2019 were 18% less than their male counterparts.

Figure 11. Median Gender Earnings Gap, U.S. and Oklahoma, 2015–2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

Gender wage gaps in Oklahoma are also larger for women of color. Hispanic women have the largest gender wage gap and earn 50% of the median earnings of white, non-Hispanic

men. Black, Native American, and Asian women earn 58%, 62.5%, and 63%, respectively, of men's earnings (National Women's Law Center [NWLC], 2020).

The gender wage gap in Oklahoma was at an all-time high in 2009 with women earning 87 percent of men's earnings (Bailey, 2016). Since then, it has fluctuated annually but generally trended downward. According to recent estimates, if equal pay were a reality in Oklahoma, women's earnings would increase by approximately \$5.4 billion annually, and the poverty rate for working women would be reduced by nearly 50% (Cullison, 2020).

Employment

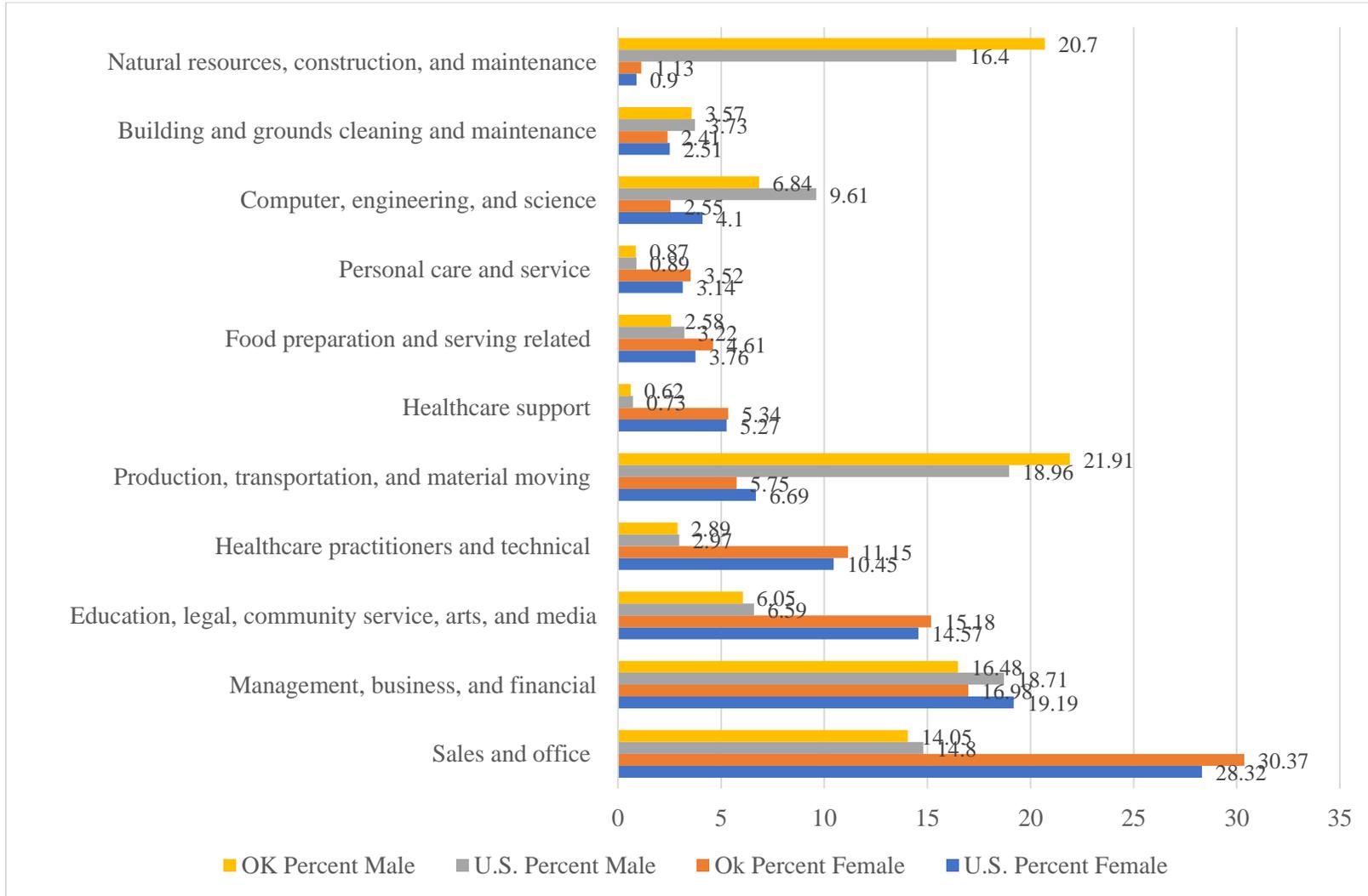
Gender differences in occupational choices may be related to the gender earnings gap (Blau and Kahn, 2017). Across the United States, more women than men are employed in service-related occupations and industries, such as hospitality and education, which tend to be lower-paying occupations. At the same time, research indicates that pay differences among men and women within occupations also account for a large amount of the overall gender earnings gap (Goldin et al., 2017).

Figure 12 compares the distribution of men and women for full-time, year-round civilian employees ages 16 years and over by occupation in the United States and Oklahoma. In both geographic regions, the largest shares of women are employed in sales and office occupations with 30% in Oklahoma and 28% in the United States overall. Compared to men and women in the United States, smaller percentages of men and women in Oklahoma work in management, business, and financial occupations. However, slightly larger percentages of women in Oklahoma work in education, legal, community services, arts, and media occupations, in healthcare practitioners and technical occupations, and in food service and serving related occupations relative to women in the United States as a whole. About 5% of women in both geographic areas work in health care support occupations, while less than 1% of men in both regions are employed as health care support workers. Additionally, higher proportions of men in Oklahoma are employed in occupations related to natural resources, construction, and maintenance as well as in production, transportation, and material moving occupations compared to men in the United States.

The occupational selections of men and women in Oklahoma may be associated with the large gender earnings gap in the state. Based on information from Data USA (2021), sales and office occupations, including grocery store clerks, administrative assistants, and retail store employees, tend to be lower-paying jobs, particularly for women who earned \$35,337 on average compared to the average male salary of \$58,597 in 2019. Health care support occupations, such as home health care aides and nursing care facility employees, are also lower-paying jobs, with female workers earning on average \$26,295 annually in health care support occupations, while their male peers earn \$32,116 (Data USA, 2021). Childcare employment is categorized as a personal care and services occupation, and childcare workers in Oklahoma earned an average of \$21,480 in 2019 (Ogle, 2021). By contrast, the average 2019 salary was \$67,155 for women working in healthcare

practitioners and technical occupations, including medical doctors, veterinarians, and nurses, although the average salary for men in these occupations was almost double women's average salary at \$130,520 (Data USA, 2022). Moreover, some of the higher paying jobs for women are in management, business, and financial occupations, with women's average salary at \$75,236 compared to the average salary of \$110,237 (Data USA, 2021).

Figure 12. Employment of Adults by Gender and Occupation, U.S. and Oklahoma, 2015–2019

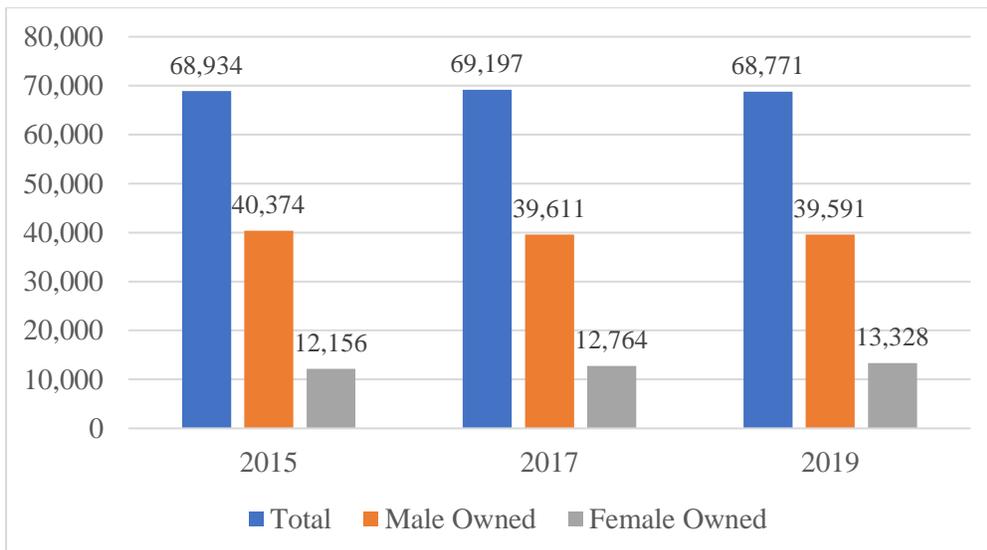


Another factor associated with the gender earnings gap in Oklahoma may be related to the large share of women employed in education, which is the largest industry in Oklahoma. In 2019, about 3.1% of Oklahoma’s population were elementary or secondary school teachers compared to 2.8% of the United States population overall (Data USA, 2021). On average, a Kindergarten through 12th grade teacher in Oklahoma earned a salary of \$54,256 in the 2020–2021 school year compared to the national average of \$65,090 (Will, 2021). Each year, the Oklahoma State Department of Education establishes a minimum teacher salary schedule based on a teacher’s years of experience and level of education. During the 2020 – 2021 school year, the minimum salary for a first-year teacher with a bachelor’s degree was \$36,301, while the minimum salary for a faculty member with a doctoral degree and 25 years of teaching experience was \$54,395 (Hoffmeister, 2020). Moreover, many school districts in Oklahoma follow the state minimum salary schedule when determining teachers’ salaries, and these minimum salary amounts have not changed since the 2018 – 2019 school year.

Business Ownership

Figure 13 displays the total number of firms with paid employees as well as the numbers of male and female owned businesses in Oklahoma in 2015, 2017, and 2019. Between 2015 and 2019, the percentage of women owned business in Oklahoma grew by nearly 10%. By contrast, the number of male owned business decreased by 2%. However, male owned firms in Oklahoma tend to have more employees than female owned businesses. In 2019, male owned business in the state had approximately 13 employees on average compared to about 9 employees on average for female owned firms in Oklahoma. Additionally, female entrepreneurs who experience challenges between business and family may be significantly more likely to exit their business than their male counterparts (Hsu et al, 2016).

Figure 13. Number of Firms with Paid Employees in Oklahoma by Ownership



Policy: Minimum Wage

The Oklahoma Equal Pay Act prohibits an employer from willfully paying a woman a lower wage rate than a man for performing comparable work (“Oklahoma equal pay, 2022”). Despite this statute, the gender earnings gap in Oklahoma is one of the worst in the country. The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) estimates that the median difference in men and women’s annual earnings is equivalent to 3.5 years of community college tuition in the state, which is estimated to be \$3,412 during the 2021–2022 school year (IWPR, 2018; OK College Start, 2022). Additionally, women in Oklahoma effectively stop getting paid on September 24 relative to October 29 for women in the United States overall (IWPR, 2018). Moreover, estimates suggest if current trends continue, women in Oklahoma will not see equal pay until 2076 (IWPR 2018).

In 2021-2022, many states increased their state minimum wages. Currently, 30 states have a state-minimum wage above the Federal Minimum Wage. In Oklahoma, however, the minimum wage rate in Oklahoma is \$7.25 per hour, equal to the current Federal Minimum Wage rate. For an individual employed full-time, this wage represents an annual income of \$15,080. The state last changed the minimum wage in 2008, when it was raised \$0.70 from \$6.55 to \$7.25. Oklahoma also has a set of special minimum wage of \$2.00 per hour for employment not covered under the Federal Minimum Wage. The minimum wage applies to most employees in Oklahoma. Exceptions include tipped workers and employees in certain occupations, such as maids, ranch and farm workers, and feed store employees as well as government workers and temporary part-time employees (“Oklahoma minimum wage,” 2022).

In 2018, over one-quarter of jobs in Oklahoma were considered low-wage, defined as a median annual pay below the poverty level for a family of four, equivalent to \$25,100 (“Minimum Wage”, 2022). Additionally, about 6 in 10 minimum wage workers in the state are women (NWLC, 2021). Given that the gender earnings gap in Oklahoma is large and poverty rates are higher for women than men in Oklahoma, an increase in the state minimum wage would help to reduce the gender earnings gap and poverty among women. Two pieces of legislation that would raise the state minimum wage are under consideration in the Oklahoma Senate during the 2022 Legislative session (Payeton, 2022).

Chapter 3: Health Care

Access to quality and affordable health care is important for women, improving their mental and physical well-being. It also helps to maintain a healthy labor force, which is good for society as a whole. In 2010, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was enacted, and the federal mandate required full implementation by 2014. The information in this chapter comes from the American Community Survey one-year and five-year data sets from 2015 through 2019.

Health Insurance

Figure 14 presents the percentage of the Oklahoma adult population without health insurance between 2015 and 2019. During this time, the total share of Oklahomans without health insurance increased from 12.7% to 15.2%. Similarly, the percentage of women in Oklahoma without health insurance increased slightly. For men, the percentage lacking health insurance increased between 2015 and 2018. It decreased from 15.2% to 13.8% between 2018 and 2019, while the share of women who were uninsured increased from 13.2% to 14.3%. In 2018, the penalty for remaining uninsured under the ACA individual mandate was reduced to \$0, and most people were not assessed a penalty in 2019 if they were uninsured. In 2019, Oklahoma was only one of two states where the uninsured rate was higher than 14% while the U.S. national average was 9.2%. The state had the second highest number of uninsured women in the United States in 2022 (McCann, 2022).

Figure 14. Adult Population in Oklahoma Without Health Insurance, 2015 - 2019

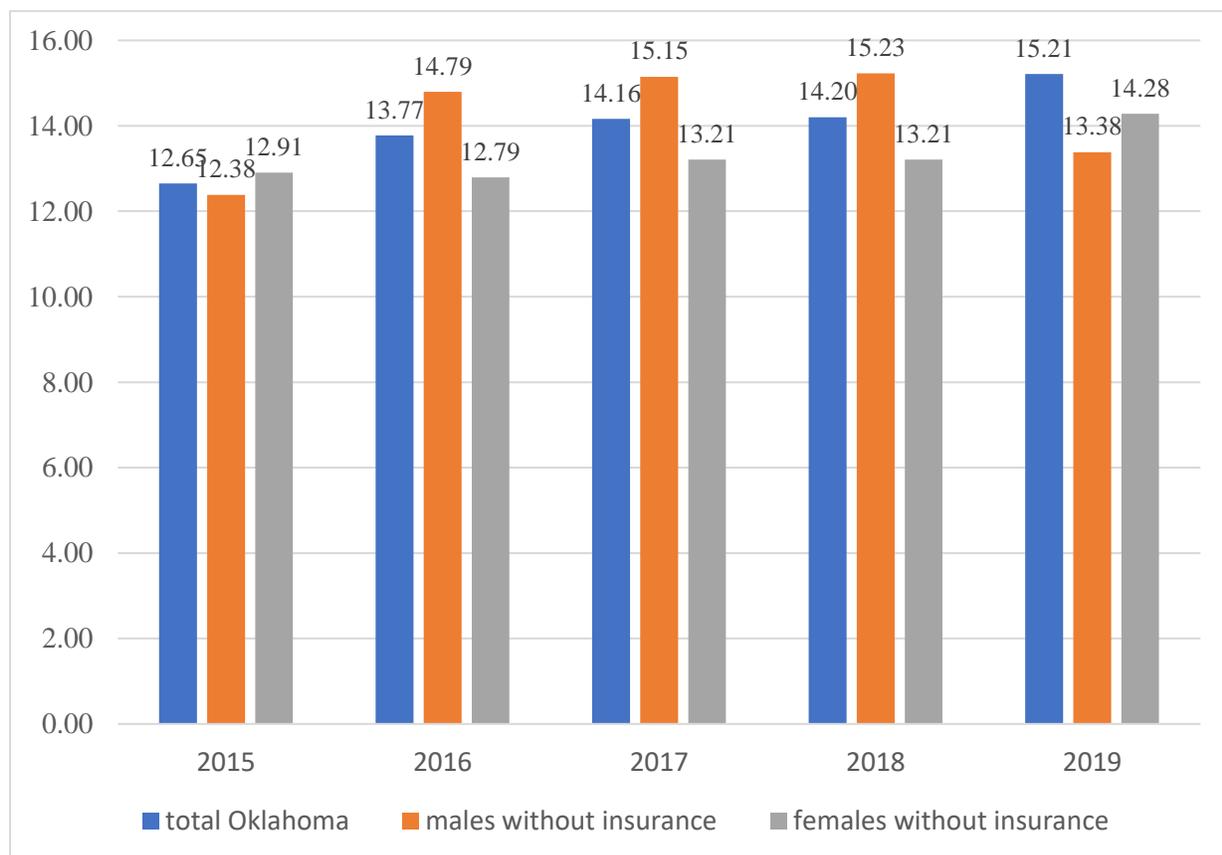
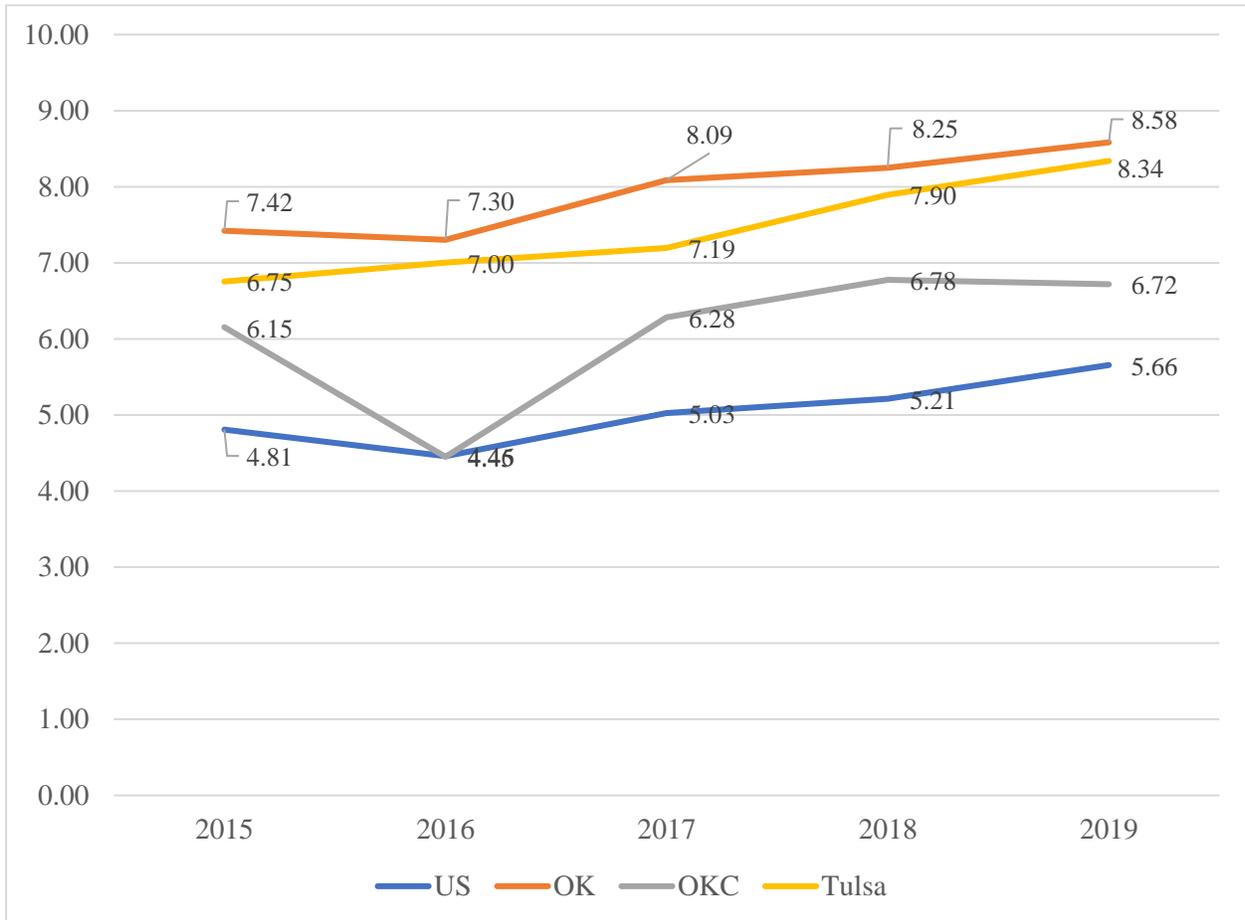


Figure 15 compares the share of children under 18 without health insurance for the United States, Oklahoma, and the OKC Metro and Tulsa Metro. A larger share of children in Oklahoma lack health insurance than children in the United States as a whole, although

both geographic regions experienced an increase in the share of children who were uninsured over time. By 2019, 8.6% of Oklahoma children and 5.7% of children nationwide lacked insurance. Also, compared to the OKC Metro, the Tulsa Metro area had a larger percentage of children without health insurance.

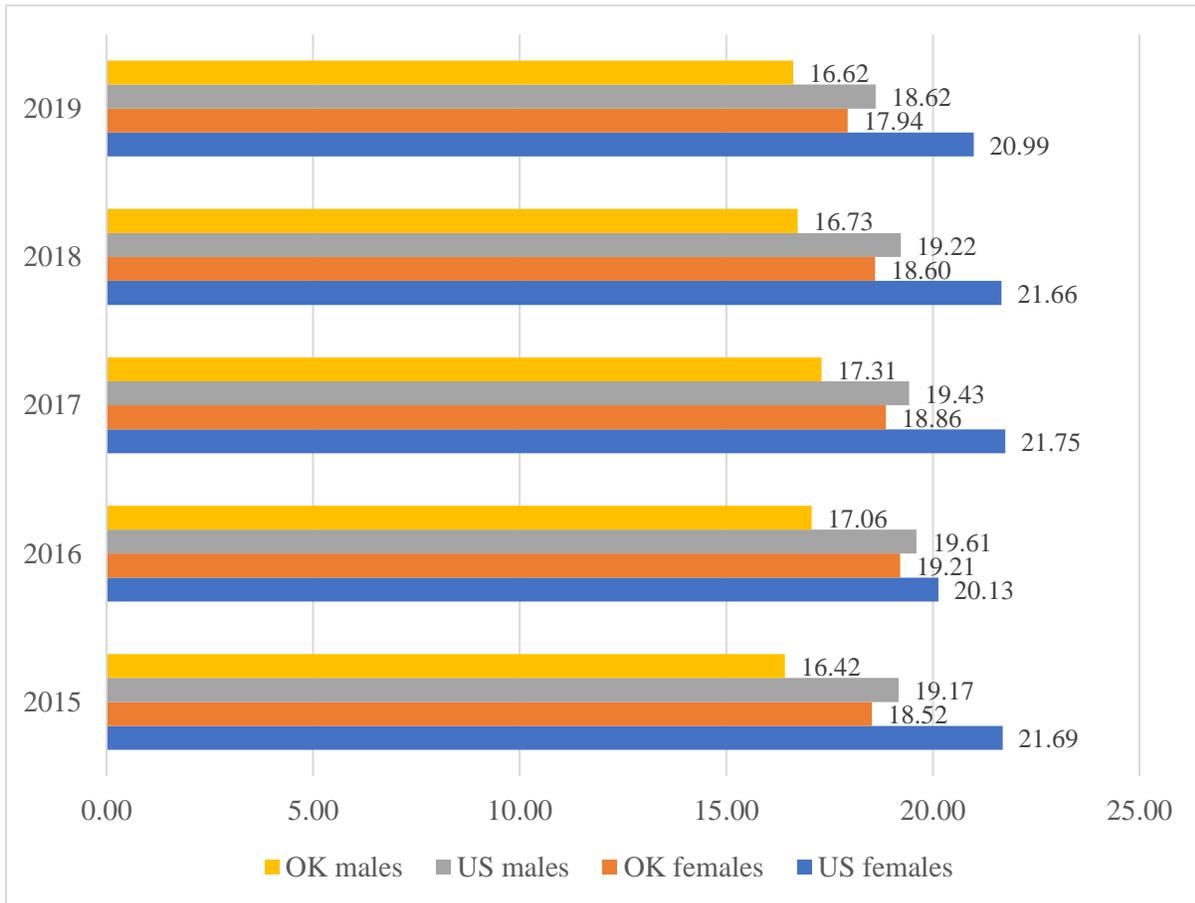
Figure 15. Children Under 18 Without Health Insurance, 2015 – 2019



Medicaid

Figure 16 shows the percentage of the population enrolled in Medicaid in Oklahoma and the United States by gender for 2015 through 2019. Smaller percentages of men and women in Oklahoma are enrolled in Medicaid compared to their United States peers. Among women in the United States, about 21% are enrolled in Medicaid relative to 18 – 19% of Oklahoma women. Oklahoma men have the smallest percentage of Medicaid enrollment at about 17% compared to 19% of men nationwide.

Figure 16. Medicaid Enrollment by Gender, US and OK, 2015 – 2019



Source: ACS 1-year estimates

Policy: Medicaid Expansion

Oklahoma voters passed a Medicaid expansion ballot initiative for non-elderly adults making up to 138% of the poverty level in June of 2020. The change applied to individuals earning an estimated annual income up to \$17,796 for an individual and \$36,588 for a family of four. The expansion in Oklahoma Medicaid, known as SoonerCare, took effect on July 1, 2021. Since that time, over 250,000 additional Oklahomans, mostly children, have enrolled in Medicaid, bringing the total number of Medicaid enrollees in the state to over 1.1 million, an increase of 12% since 2013 (Norris, 2021). Although the neighboring state of Missouri also implemented Medicaid expansion around the same time, the expansion has been more successful in Oklahoma.

In Oklahoma, Native American tribes operate more than 45 health care facilities, and many of them are located in rural areas. These tribal health care facilities provide critical health care services for rural Oklahomans and financial benefits to the state. Most locations provide health care to both Native American and non-Native American Oklahomans, especially in rural areas. Also, the entire cost of care provided to Native

Americans at tribal health facilities is paid by the federal government. In 2019, tribes paid \$232 million in Medicaid expenditures, and the state saved \$86 million because it did not have to pay any Medicaid matching funds (Dean, 2019).

Chapter 4: Childcare

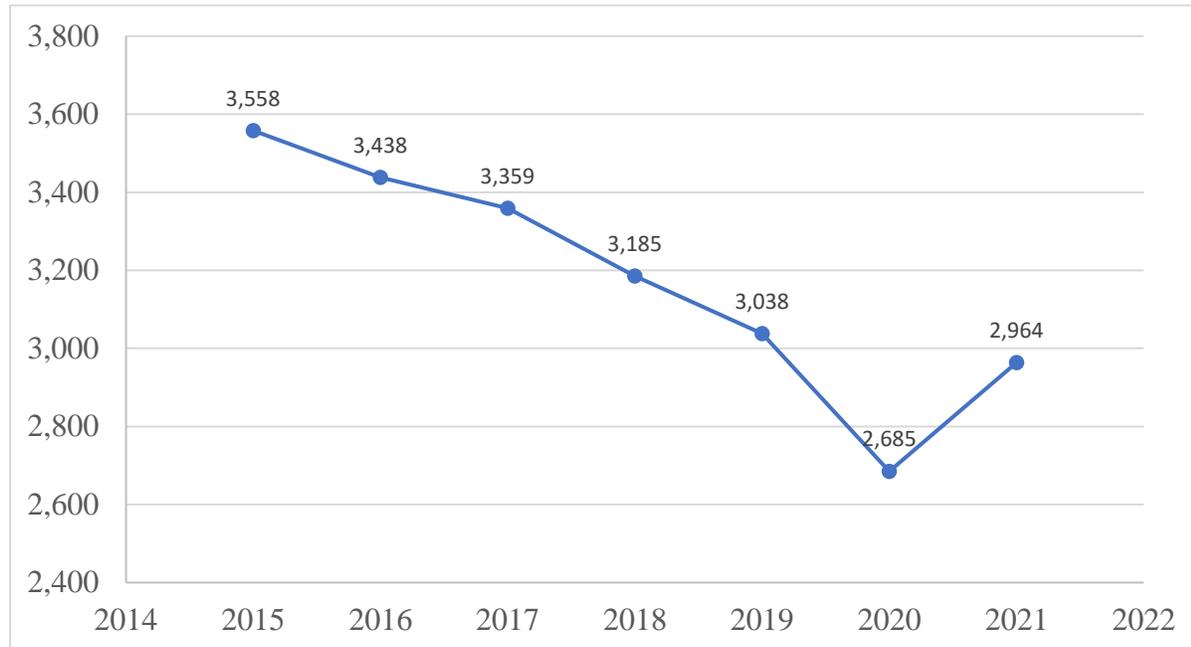
According to the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Annual Report for 2021, “the pandemic proved that the child care industry is vital to the economic success of Oklahoma families,” (Child Care Services [CCS], 2021). Access to safe and affordable childcare is vital for working parents. High-quality childcare is also important for children as their bodies grow and develop. In 2021, Oklahoma had an average of 115,687 children in childcare, an increase from the average of 105,610 children in 2020 (CCS, 2021). Still, there are fewer children who received childcare services in 2021 than on average in 2019.

The data for this chapter come from a variety of sources, including information about childcare services and subsidies using Annual Reports from the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Annual Reports. We also present statistics about childcare costs in Oklahoma from Child Care Aware and the Economic Policy Institute (EPI).

Childcare Access

The number of licensed childcare facilities by year in Oklahoma is presented in Figure 17. According to data from the Oklahoma Human Services Annual Reports from 2015 through 2021, there has been a sharp decline in the number of licensed childcare facilities in the state. In 2015, there were 3,558 licensed facilities in Oklahoma. That number decreased each year until 2021. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a sharp decline in the number of licensed facilities, totaling 2,685. A year later, that number increased by over 10% to 2,964, although there were still fewer childcare facilities in the state than in 2019.

Figure 17. Number of Licensed Childcare Facilities in Oklahoma, 2015 – 2021



Source: Oklahoma Human Services Annual Reports, 2015 – 2021

Some of the facilities that closed due to COVID-19 in 2020 reopened after a brief time period, although other facilities did not reopen at all (Ogle, 2021). Moreover, the ongoing pandemic caused childcare facilities that did reopen to later close entire classrooms or facilities due to COVID-19 quarantining requirements. Childcare workers who were exposed to COVID-19 also had to follow isolation procedures. Additionally, some childcare workers found that unemployment compensation was greater than their income from employment, and they chose to leave the childcare industry (Ogle, 2021).

Oklahoma also has stringent licensing requirements for childcare facilities and workers, including fingerprinting requirements and background checks that can take several weeks, all of which have resulted in labor shortages in the childcare industry in the state (Ogle, 2021). A study from 2018 found that 55% of Oklahomans lived in a “child care desert”, defined as a census tract with more than 50 children under the age of five that has either no childcare facilities in the region or has such a small number of childcare providers that there three times as many children as there are licensed child care slots available (Malik et al., 2018). Given the decrease in the number of childcare facilities in the state since 2018, more families may lack access to childcare, hindering the ability of some parents, especially mothers, to work outside the home.

Childcare Affordability

The annual cost of childcare for an infant in Oklahoma was \$8,576, or \$715 dollars a month in 2018 and \$8,940, or \$745 a month, in 2020 (Child Care Aware, 2022). For two

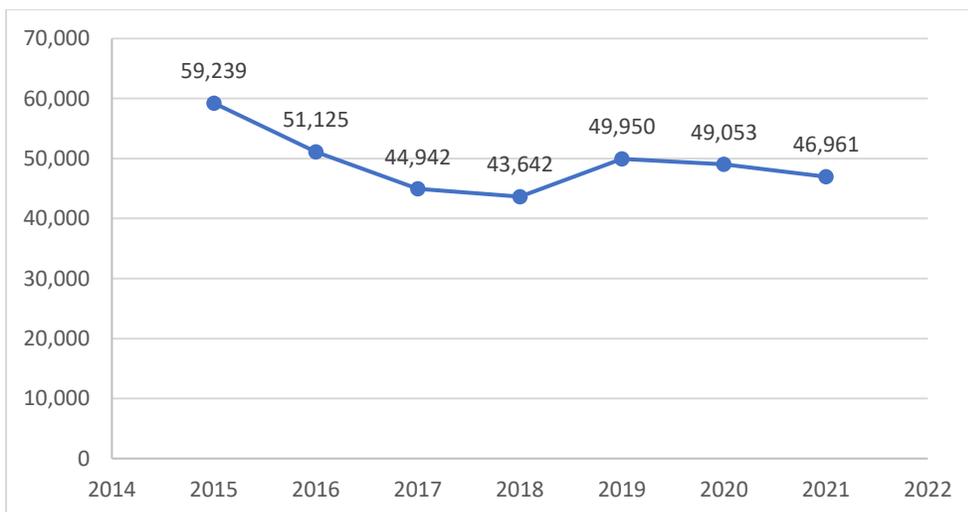
children, an infant and a four-year old, the 2020 annual cost in Oklahoma was \$15,702 (Child Care Aware, 2022). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, childcare is considered affordable if it costs 7% or less of a family’s income. Using this standard, childcare in Oklahoma is unaffordable for many families. The typical married couple in Oklahoma spends about 11.7% of their income for infant care and 20.6% of their income for two children. For single parents, the price of childcare takes 39.6% of their income for an infant compared to 69.5% for two children (Child Care Aware, 2022). Additionally, the average cost of childcare in Oklahoma is more expensive than a year of in-state tuition at a four-year public college (Economic Policy Institute [EPI], 2019). The average cost of tuition and fees at a regional, public university for a full-time Oklahoma resident in the 2021–2022 school year was \$8,044 (OK College Start, 2022).

Childcare Subsidies

Figure 18 shows the number of children who received a childcare subsidy from the state of Oklahoma between 2015 and 2019. The trend shows a decrease in the number of children receiving the state childcare subsidy from nearly 60,000 children to less than 44,000 children between 2015 and 2018, which may be related to families seeking the subsidies as a result of less access to childcare facilities. In 2019, the number of children who received the subsidy increased by about 6,000 children, although slightly fewer children received a subsidy than in 2019. By contrast, the number of childcare subsidies given in 2021 decreased to 46,691.

The state of Oklahoma pays the subsidy directly to the childcare provider. Childcare subsidies are particularly helpful for low-income workers, increasing the likelihood that they will return to work after having a child (Ogle, 2021). At the same time, the cost of childcare prevents some

Figure 18. Number of Children Receiving Childcare Subsidies in Oklahoma, 2015 – 2019



workers in Oklahoma from returning to work (Wilkerson and Shupert, 2021). There are also fewer childcare facilities and fewer children enrolled in childcare programs in 2021 due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also estimated that Oklahoma's subsidy only reimburses childcare providers for about 60% of the true cost of providing care, which is below the federally recommended rate of 75%. As a result, low-income families may pay as much as 23% of the true cost of the care for their children (Jacobi, 2022).

Policy: State-Funded Pre-Kindergarten

In 1998, Oklahoma became the second state in the country to fully-fund preschool education for every four-year-old child. Today, 100% of school districts offer the program, and most programs are full-day. Funding has also expanded to include 3-year-olds. In 2019, Oklahoma had 76% of 4-year-olds enrolled in a state pre-Kindergarten program. That percentage fell to 70% in 2020 (National Institute for Early Childhood Education [NIEER], 2021). The share of 3-year-olds enrolled increased from 3% in 2019 to 5% in 2020. Additionally, about 15% of 3-year-olds and 10% of 4-year-olds in Oklahoma were enrolled in a federal Head Start program in 2020 (NIEER, 2021).

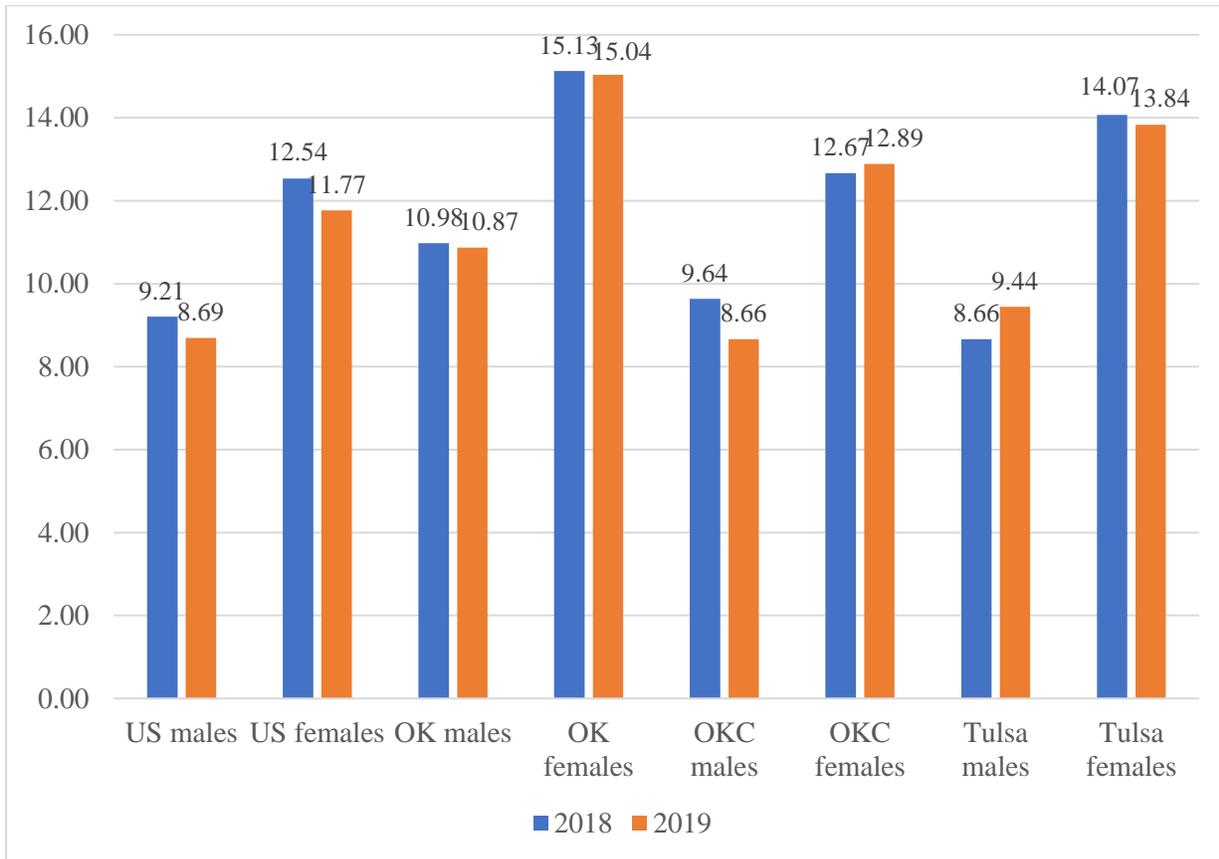
Chapter 5: Poverty and Social Insurance

Poverty

Figure 19 displays poverty rates for men and women between the ages of 25 and 64 in the U.S., Oklahoma, the OKC Metro, and the Tulsa Metro. Across all geographic areas, women have higher poverty rates than men. Comparing 2018 and 2019, the percentage of men and women in poverty decreased in the United States from 9.2% to 8.7% for U.S. men and 12.5% to 11.8% for U.S. women. By contrast, the shares of men and women below the poverty level in Oklahoma were higher than for men and women in the United States and remained fairly consistent at approximately 11% for men and 15% for women.

Different trends in poverty existed in the OKC Metro and Tulsa Metro. For men in the OKC Metro, poverty rates fell slightly, although it increased among women in the OKC Metro. In the Tulsa Metro, the share of men in poverty increased, while it decreased slightly for women. Also, a somewhat higher percentage of women are in poverty in the Tulsa Metro than the OKC Metro at about 14% compared to 13%.

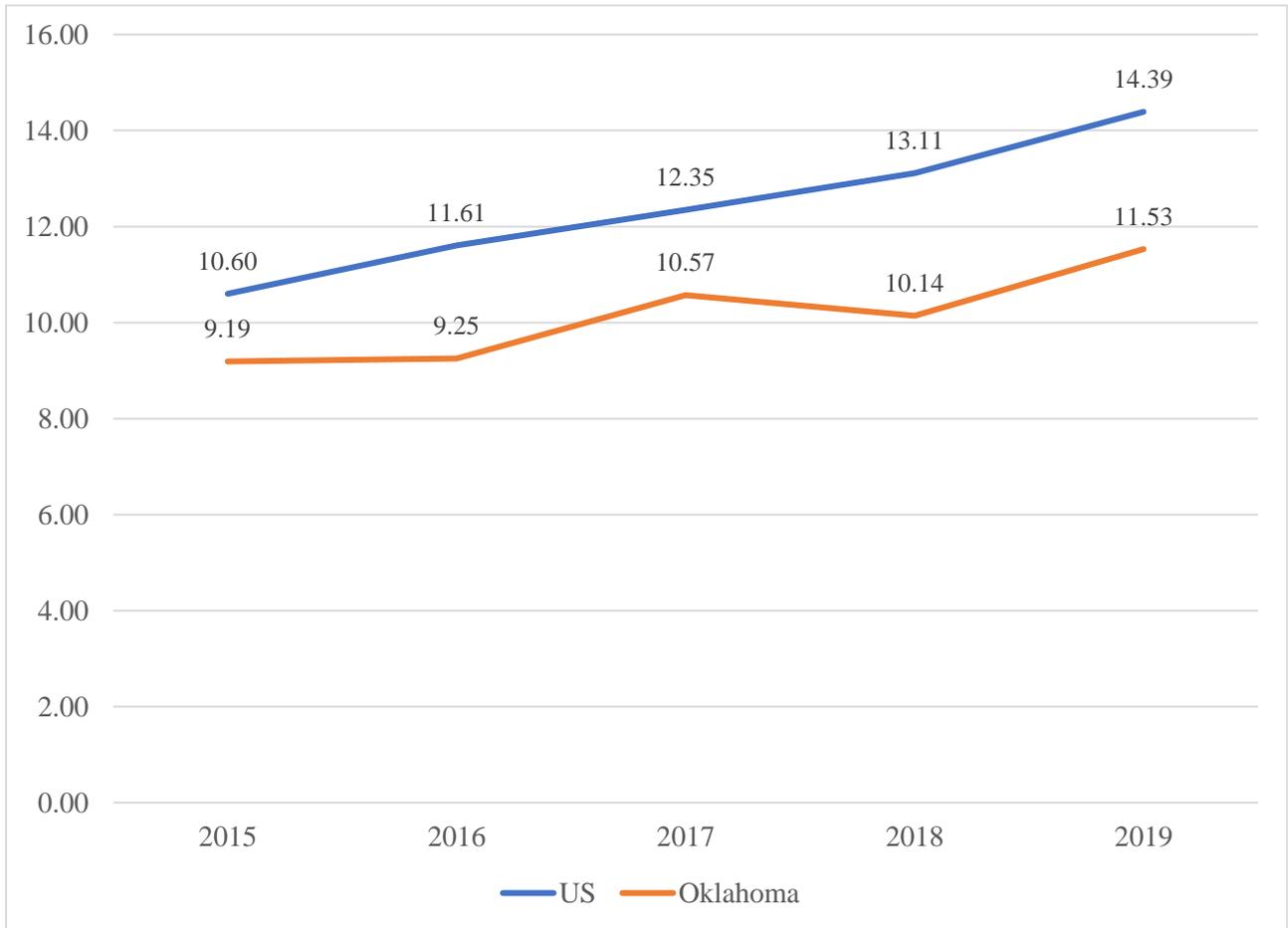
Figure 19. Percentage of Adults Age 25 – 64 in Poverty by Gender- includes US, and OK, OKC and Tulsa Metro Areas, 2018 – 2019



Source: ACS one-year estimates

The share of women 65-years-old and older who are in poverty in Oklahoma and the United States is presented in Figure 20. In contrast to the findings from Figure 19 for adults ages 25–64, the percentage of women who are 65+ in the United States and living in poverty is larger than the percentage of elderly women in poverty in Oklahoma. At the same time, in both geographic regions, the percentage of elderly women living below the poverty level increased between 2015 and 2019. In Oklahoma, the increase was from 9.2% to 11.5%, while the increase in the United States as a whole was from 10.6% to 14.4%.

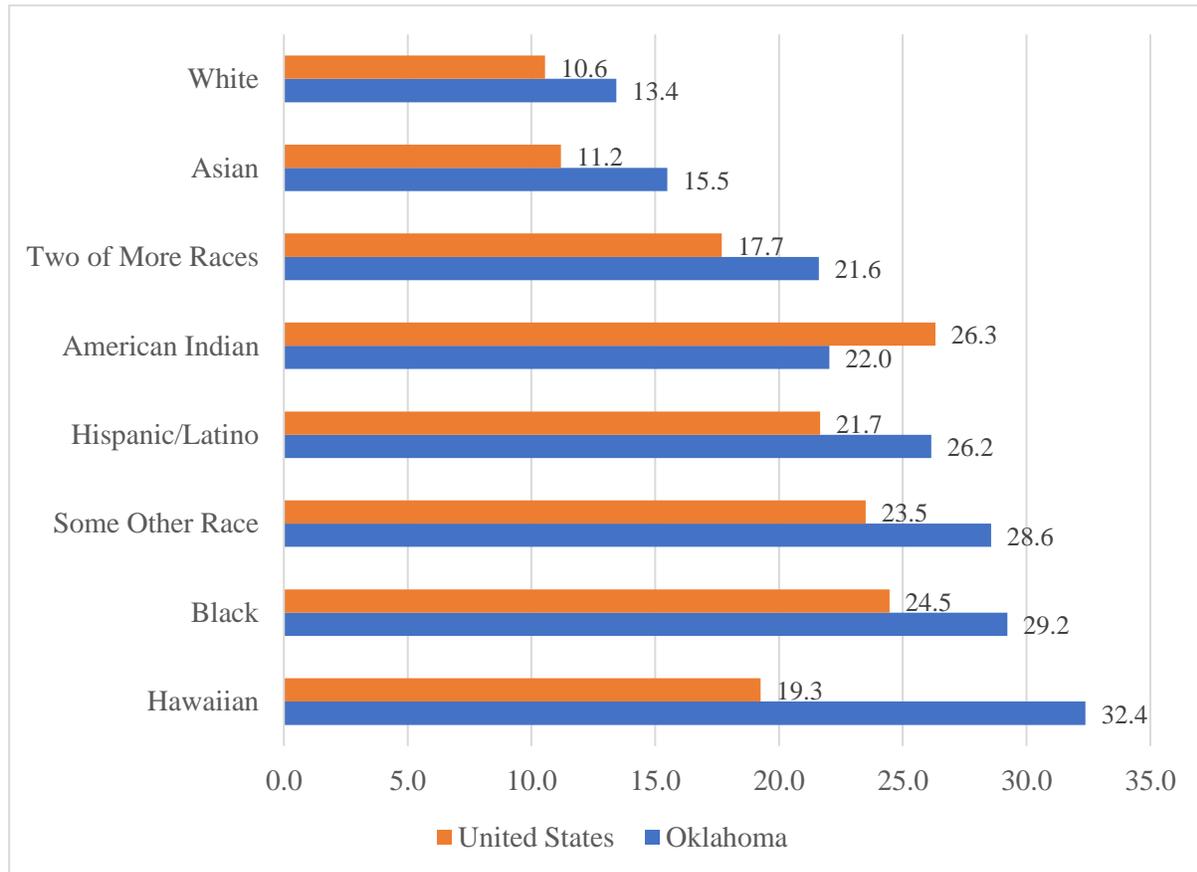
Figure 20. Poverty Rate for Women Age 65 and Over, 2015 – 2019



Source: ACS one-year estimates

Figure 21 shows the poverty rates for adult women in Oklahoma and the United States by race and ethnicity. For all races and ethnicities except American Indian, the percentage of women in poverty in Oklahoma is higher than the share of women in the United States living below the poverty level. In Oklahoma, non-Hispanic white women represent the smallest share of women in poverty at 13%, while approximately 16% of Asian women are in poverty in Oklahoma. Among Hispanic/Latino women in Oklahoma, 26% have incomes below the poverty level as do 29% of women who identify as some other race as well as 29.2% of Black women. Women of Hawaiian ancestry, who represent a small but growing share of the female population, have the highest percentage of women in poverty in Oklahoma at 32.3%.

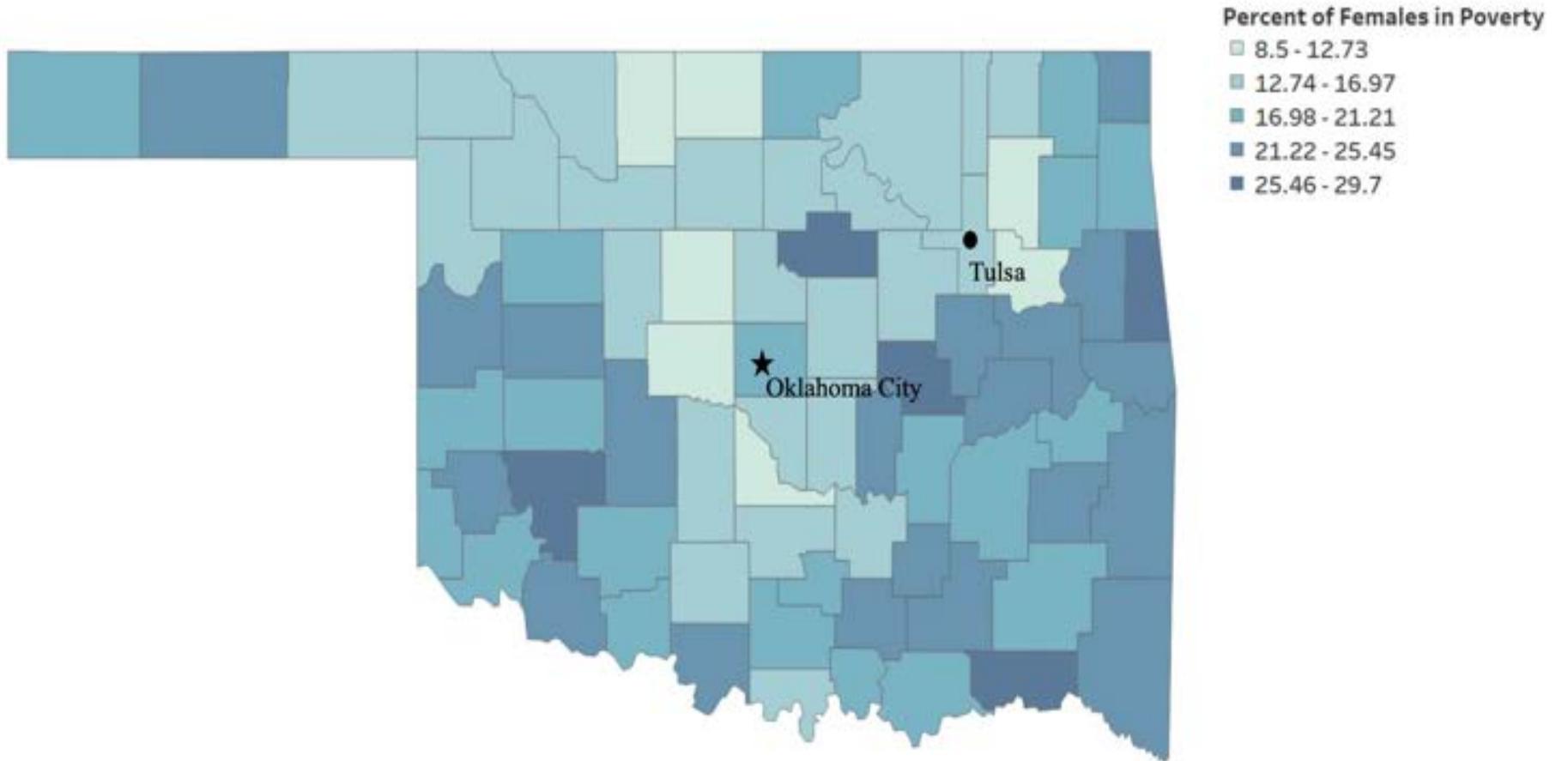
Figure 21. Poverty Rate of Women by Race/Ethnicity



The percentage of American Indian women who are in poverty in Oklahoma is about 22%. In the United States, however, the largest share of women in poverty are of American Indian descent, with 26% living below the poverty level. Native tribes invest heavily in the Oklahoma economy. According to the 2019 Oklahoma Native Impact Report, Oklahoma tribal nations spent more than \$300 million on roads and construction projects, directly employed over 54,000 people, and paid almost \$2.5 billion in wages and benefits (Dean, 2019). Moreover, the tribes also invest heavily in local communities in areas including health care and education. Tribal businesses in Oklahoma had an estimated direct impact of \$8.3 billion in output for the state. Furthermore, the total economic impact of tribal investment in 2019 was over \$15.6 billion dollars, due to the workers and industries the tribes support (Dean, 2019).

Figure 22 shows a map of the female poverty rates for the 77 counties in Oklahoma. The percentage of women in poverty in a typical Oklahoma county is 18.4%. In general, the poverty rates are lower in more counties surrounding the more metropolitan areas of Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Poverty rates are generally higher areas in southeastern Oklahoma.

Figure 22. Percent of Women in Poverty by County



Public Assistance

The percentage of male and female single-householders who received food stamps or were part of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in 2019 in the U.S., Oklahoma, the OKC Metro, and the Tulsa Metro is presented in Figure 23. In every geographic region, over one-third of female-headed households received food assistance compared to about 7 – 10% of male-headed households. Additionally, a higher share of male and female single-householders in Oklahoma received food assistance than their peers in the United States. The OKC Metro had the highest share of single female-householders receiving food stamps/SNAP at 36.1% compared to 7.3% of male-headed households in the OKC Metro. Compared to the OKC Metro, more men but fewer women who were single householders received food assistance in the Tulsa Metro area.

Figure 23. Percentage of Single-Parent Households Receiving Public Food Assistance, 2019

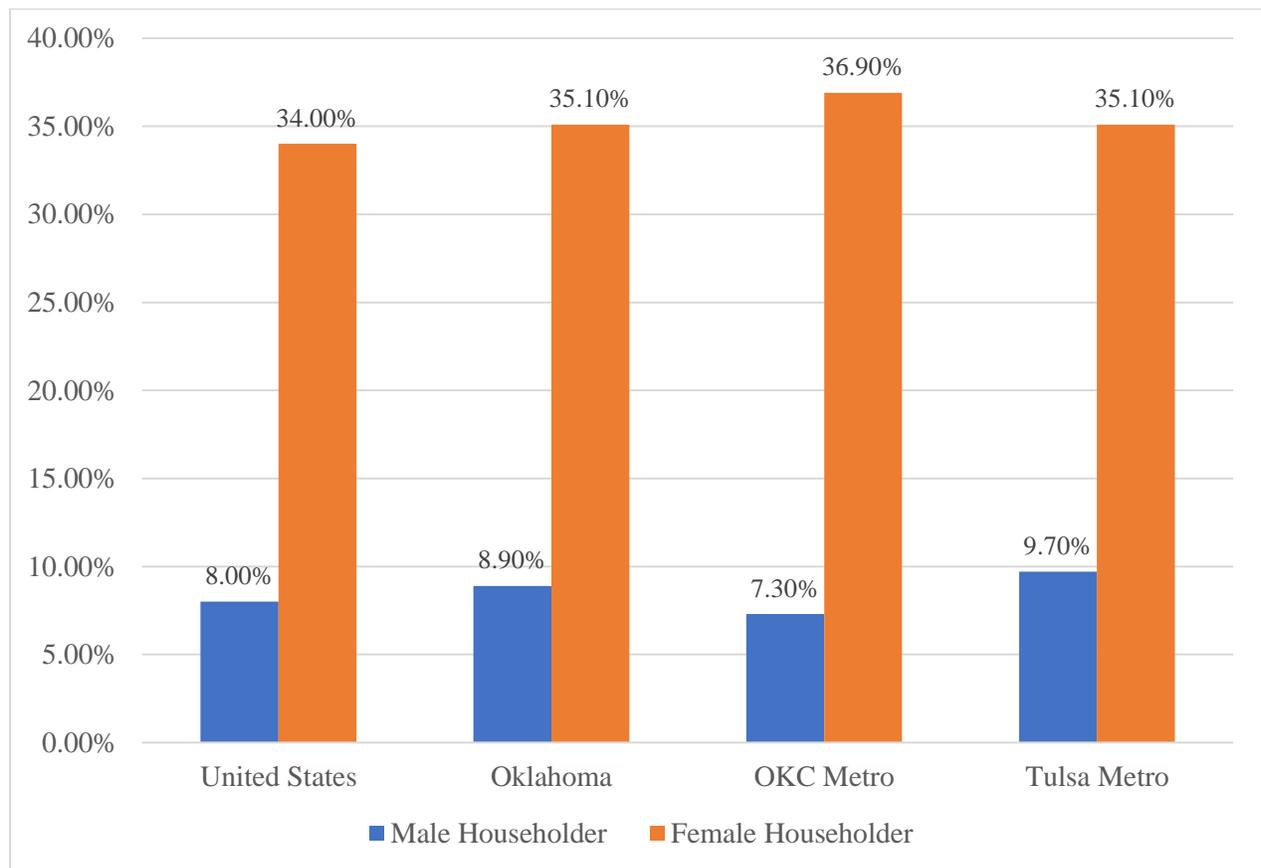
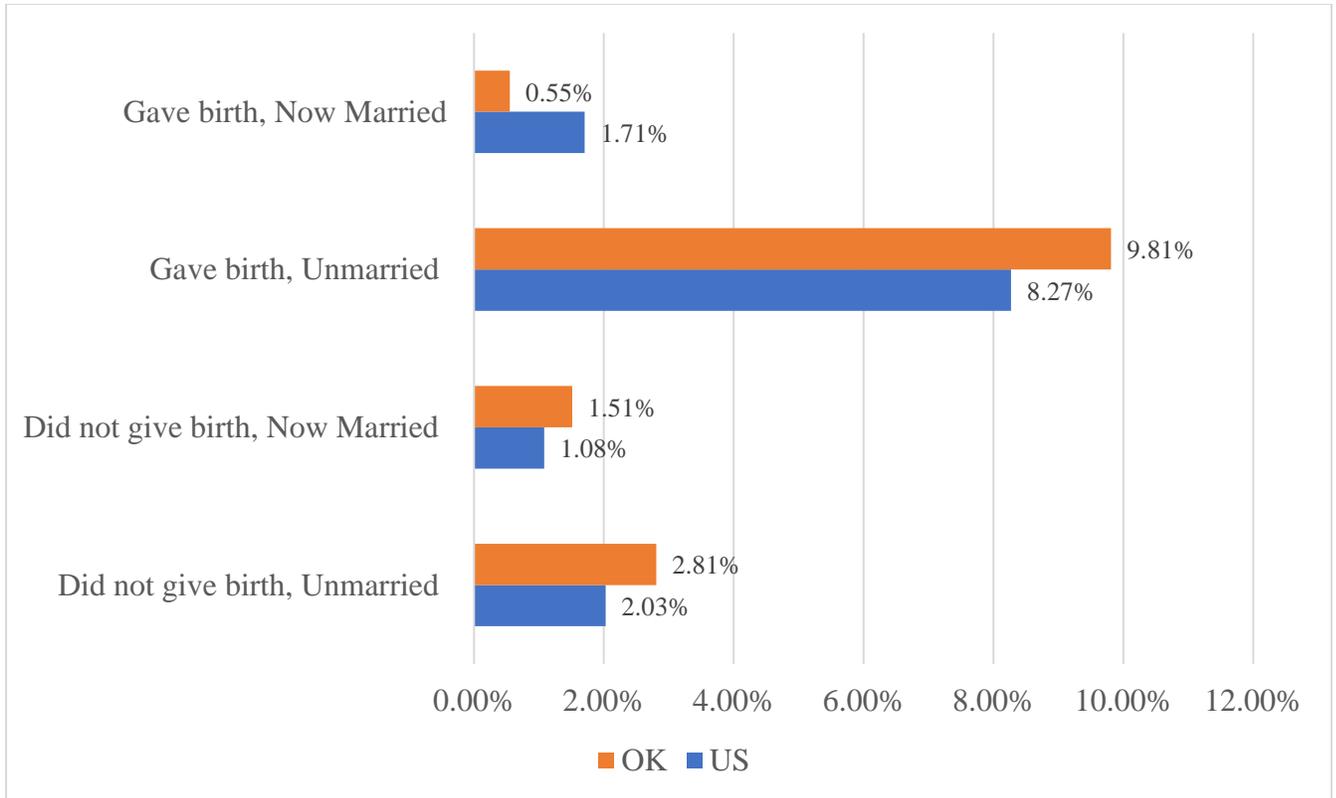


Figure 24 shows the percentages of women ages 25 – 64 who received public assistance income during the past twelve months by marital status in the United States and Oklahoma from 2015 to 2019. With the exception of married women who gave birth, higher shares of women in Oklahoma received public assistance income compared to women in the United States. In both geographic regions, the highest percentages of

women receiving public income assistance were unmarried women who gave birth in the past year, about 9.8% in Oklahoma relative to 8.3% in the United States.

Figure 24. Women Age 15 to 50 Receiving Public Assistance Income in the past 12 months



Source: ACS, five-year 2015 – 2019

Chapter 6: Civic Engagement

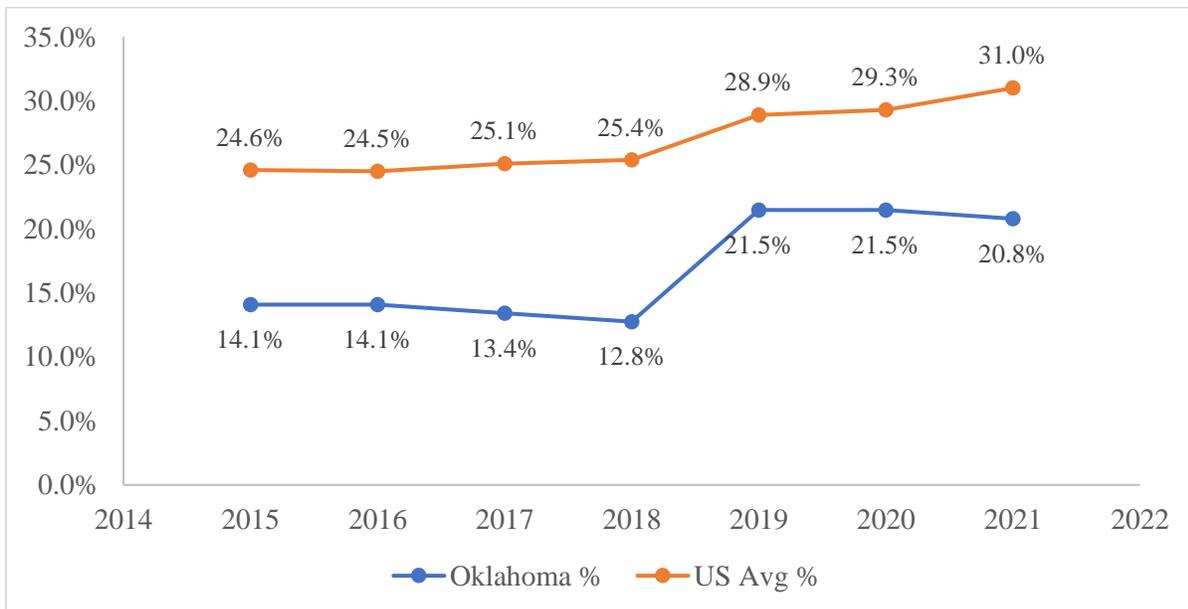
There are 149 representatives in the Oklahoma Legislature. In 2022, Republicans held approximately 81% of those seats. There are 101 members of the Oklahoma House of Representatives, with 82 Republicans and 18 Democrats. Oklahoma House members must be 21 years-old, are elected to serve a two-year term, and may serve no more than 6 terms, or 12 years. In the Oklahoma Senate, there are 48 members, 39 Republicans and 9 Democrats. Oklahoma Senators must be at least 25-years-old and are elected for four-year terms. They also have a three-term limit and may serve no more than 12 years.

Women in the State Legislature

Based on information from the Center for American Women and Politics, the percentages of women in the Oklahoma State Legislature and in state legislatures in the United States between 2015 and 2021 is presented in Figure 25. In Oklahoma, women’s representation in the state legislature decreased between 2015 and 2018 from 14.1% to 12.8%, while the average share of women in state legislatures in the nation increased slightly from 24.6%

to 25.4%. During the 2018 election, a large number of women ran for political offices around the country. In Oklahoma, the result was a record number of women elected to the legislature, with women winning 23 of 101 seats in the Oklahoma House of Representatives and 9 of 48 seats in the Oklahoma Senate (Forman, 2019). Still, women’s representation in the Oklahoma Legislature lags behind the share of women in state legislatures in the United States on average. Furthermore, by 2021, the percentage of women in the Oklahoma Legislature decreased from 21.5% to 20.8%. In contrast, women’s representation in state legislatures in the country increased to 31.0% in 2021, up from 28.9% in 2020. In the United States Congress in 2022, there are 24 female Senators and 121 female members of the House of Representatives, comprising 27.1% of the 535 total legislative seats.

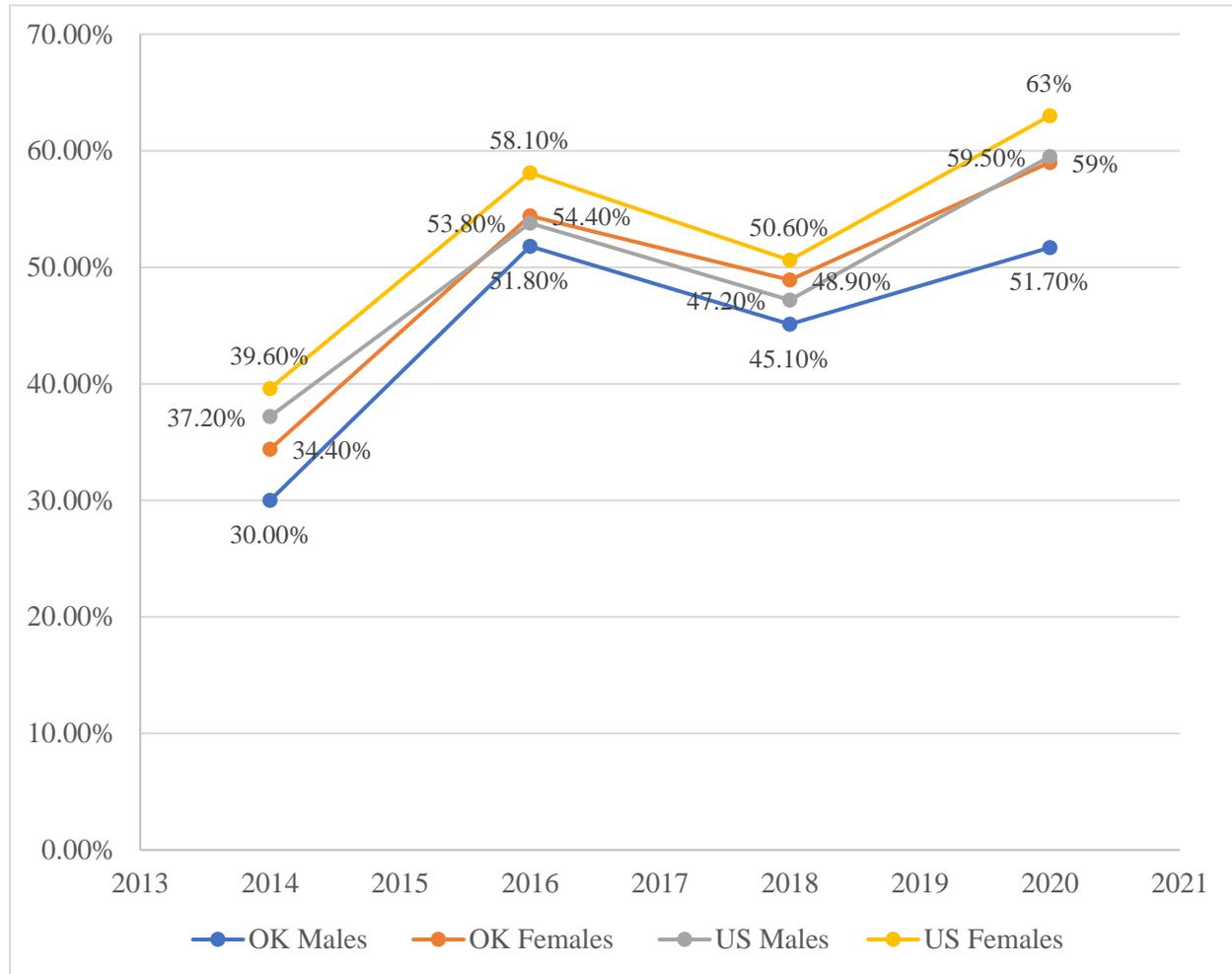
Figure 25. Percentage of Women in State Legislatures, US and Oklahoma, 2015 – 2021



Source: Center for American Women and Politics
Voting

Figure 26 shows the percentage of male and female adults who voted in elections between 2014 and 2020 in the United States and Oklahoma. Both across the U.S. and in Oklahoma, the share of adults voting has increased overall since 2014. Consistent with historical trends, during the presidential election years of 2016 and 2020, voter turnout increased among all groups relative to off-year elections. Additionally, a consistently smaller share of men and women in Oklahoma voted compared to their typical U.S. peers. Women in the U.S. had the largest percentage of adults of who voted in the 2020 election, with 63%. The shares of males in the U.S. and females in Oklahoma who voted in 2020 were about equal, with 59.5% and 59.0%, respectively. In contrast, only 51.7% of Oklahoma men voted in 2020.

Figure 26. Percentage of Adults who in Voted, US and Oklahoma, 2014 – 2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2014 – 2020

Chapter 7: The COVID-19 Pandemic in Oklahoma

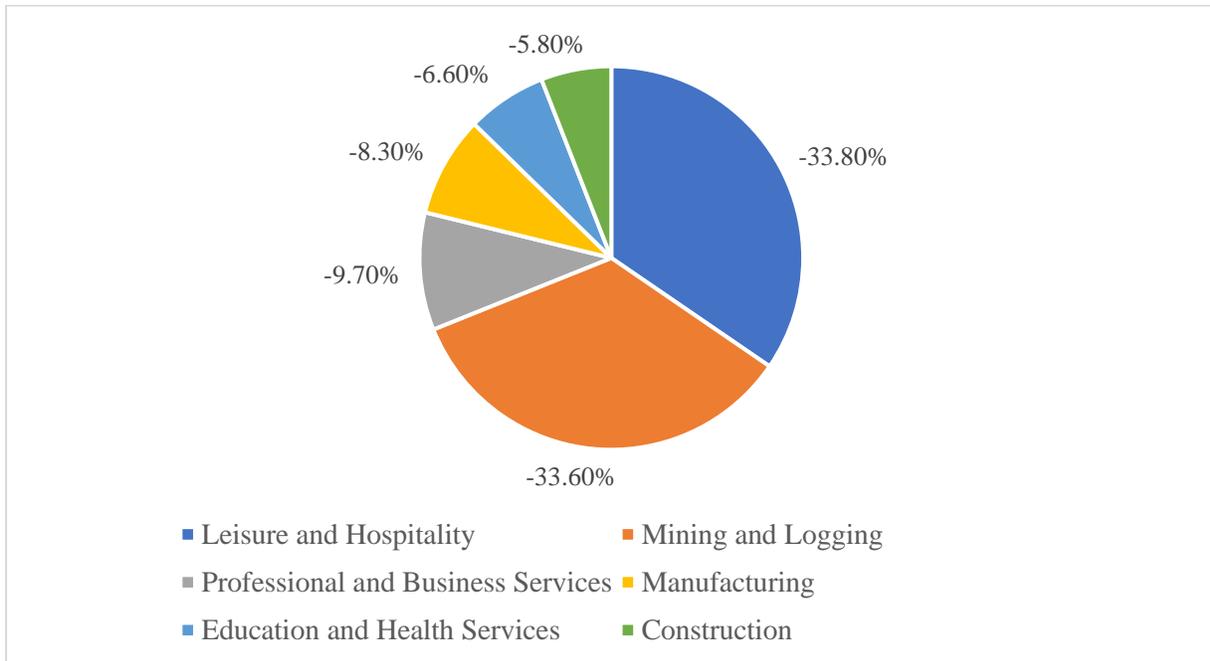
The first case of COVID-19 was reported in Oklahoma on March 7, 2020. On March 16, 2020, Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt declared a state of emergency and issued a "Safer at Home" executive order on March 24, effective through April 30. This executive order required members of vulnerable populations to remain at home unless participating in essential activities, such as medical appointments and shopping. In counties with confirmed cases, "non-essential" businesses, including bars, dine-in restaurants, and gyms, were ordered to close for 21 days. Additionally, the state board of education voted to close all public schools until the end of the school year on March 25, 2020.

Employment

The pie chart in Figure 27 shows the 12-month percentage change in employment by industry in Oklahoma between April 2019 and April 2020. In the leisure and hospitality

industry, which employs many women in the state, there was a 34% decrease in employment, the largest share of jobs lost of any industry. In the mining and logging industry, there was a similarly large decrease during that same time. Employment in professional and business services and in construction fell by 9.7% and 8.3%, respectively. In education and health services, the decrease was 6.6%, while construction employment fell by 5.8%.

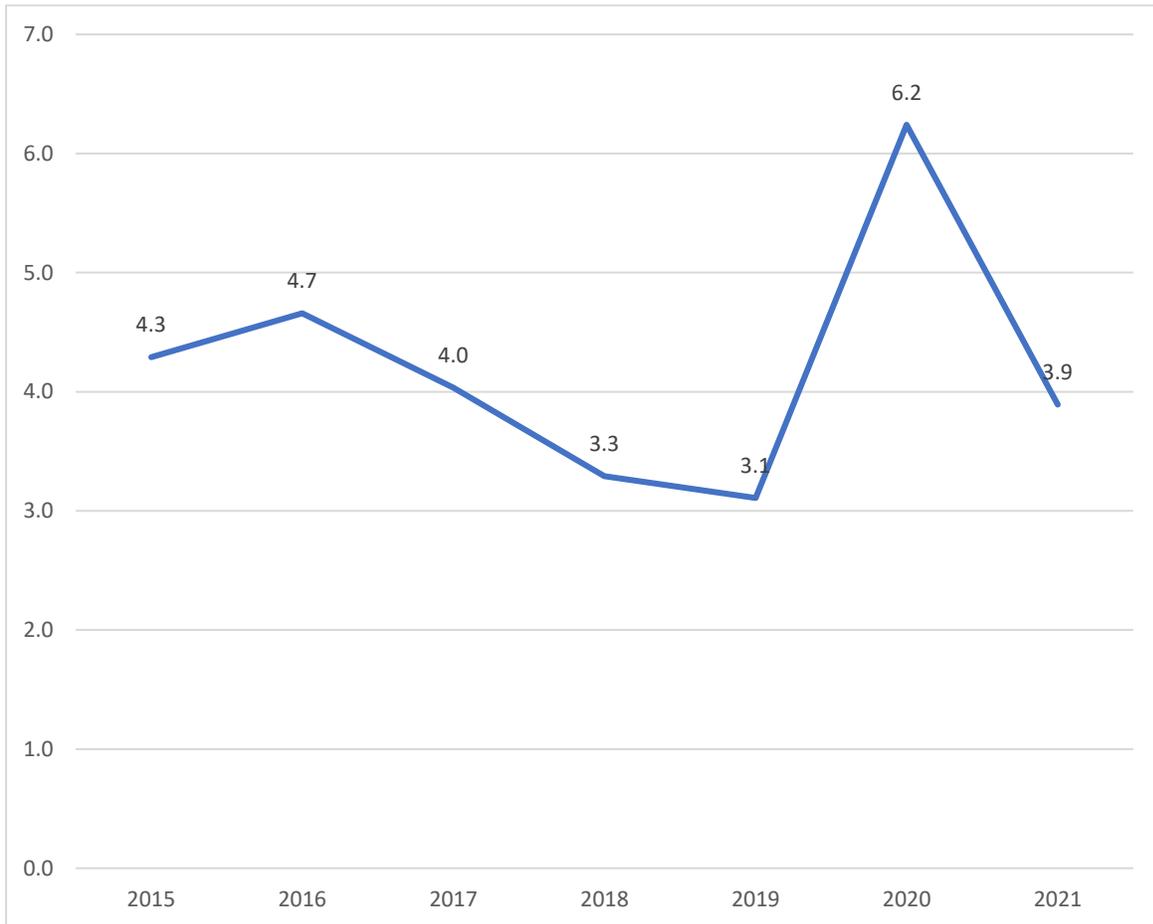
Figure 27. Twelve-Month Percent Change in Employment by Industry, April 2020



Unemployment

Using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Figure 28 shows the average annual unemployment rate in Oklahoma between 2015 and 2021. In 2019, the unemployment rate fell to a low of 3.1%. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen in 2020, when the state unemployment rate doubled to an average of 6.2%. There is also evidence of a sharp economic recovery with a decrease in the unemployment rate to 3.9% on average in 2021.

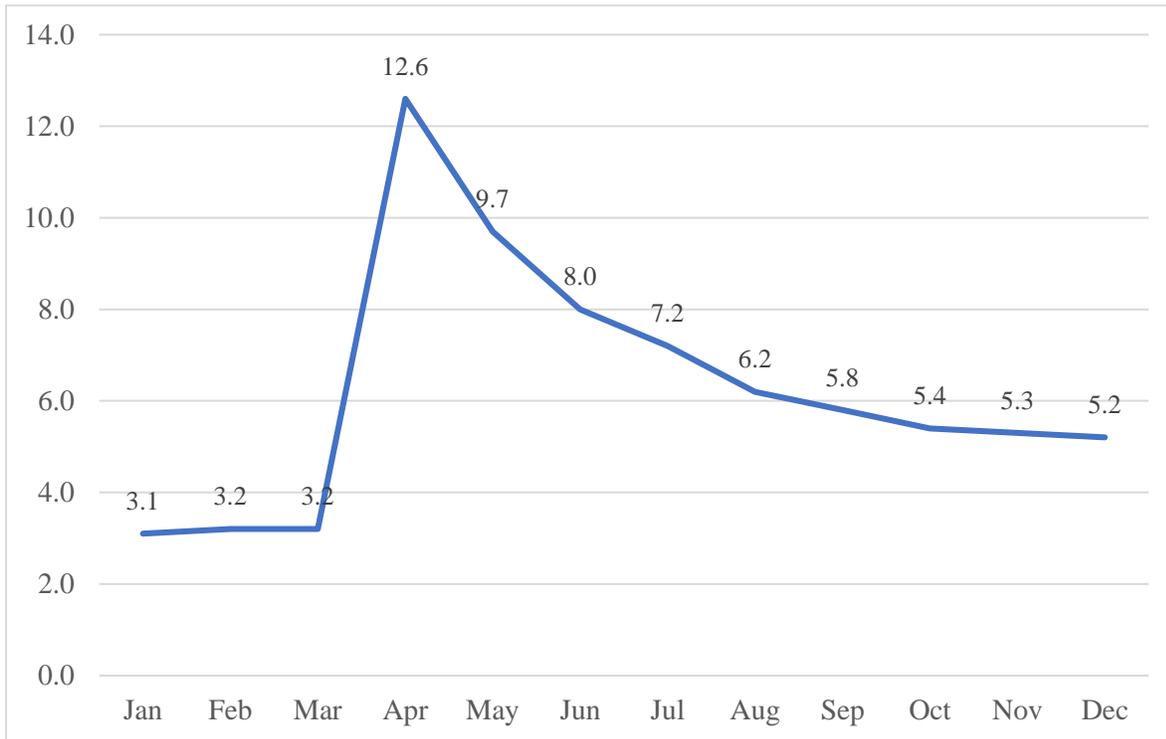
Figure 28. Annual Unemployment Rate in Oklahoma, 2015–2021



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Figure 29 shows the monthly unemployment rate in Oklahoma in 2020. Between March and April of 2020, there was a significant increase in the unemployment rate from 3.2% to 12.6%. By May, however, the unemployment rate began to decline. It steadily decreased over the rest of the year, falling to 5.2% in December. Twelve months later in December of 2021, the state unemployment rate was 2.8%, one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country.

Figure 29. Monthly Unemployment Rate in Oklahoma, 2020



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Unemployment by Gender

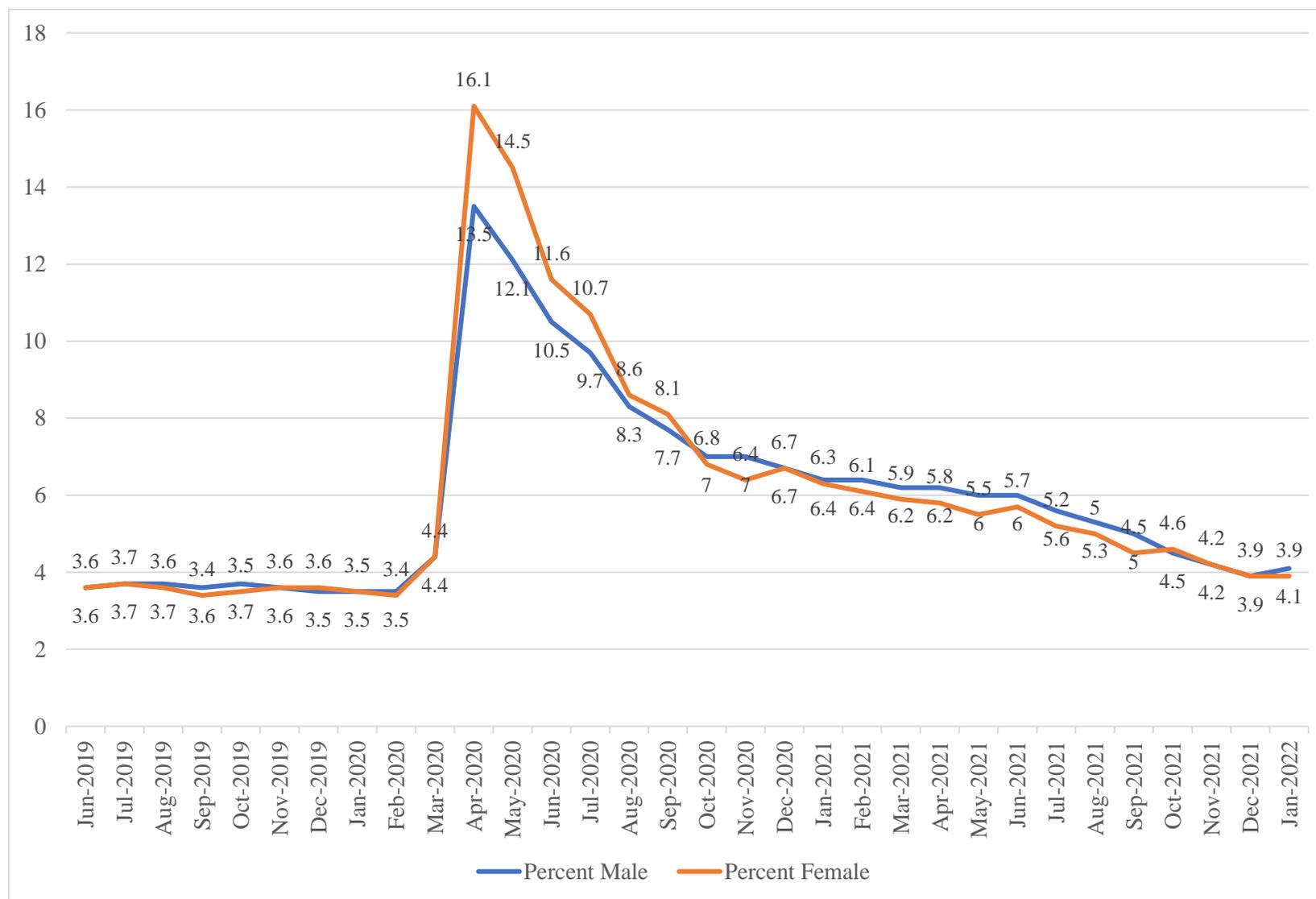
While the COVID-19 pandemic increased unemployment rates for both men and women, some people began referring to the contraction in the United States in the economy during the spring of 2020 economy as a “She-cession” (Gupta, 2020). In contrast with the typical U.S. recessions, such as the recession in the U.S. economy from 2008 to 2009, which often result in high unemployment rates among men, the contraction in the U.S. economy resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected women.

In Oklahoma, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, women had an unemployment rate of approximately 3%, which was slightly above the unemployment rate for men in the state. During the second quarter of 2020, women’s unemployment rate in Oklahoma increased to 12% compared to 8% for men (Wilkerson and Shupert, 2021). By the second quarter of 2021, however, the unemployment rate fell to 4.1% for women, although it still remained slightly higher than the unemployment rate for Oklahoma men (Wilkerson and Shupert, 2021).

Figure 30 displays the monthly unemployment rates for men and women in the United States between June 2019 and January 2022. Unemployment rates were similar for men and women in the United States prior to April 2020, ranging from 3.4% to 4.4%. In April 2020, unemployment rates for both genders increased significantly to 13.5% for men and

16.1% for women. A rapid economic recovery led to decreasing unemployment rates for both genders after April 2020,

Figure 30. Monthly Unemployment Rate in the United States by Gender, June 2019 – January 2022



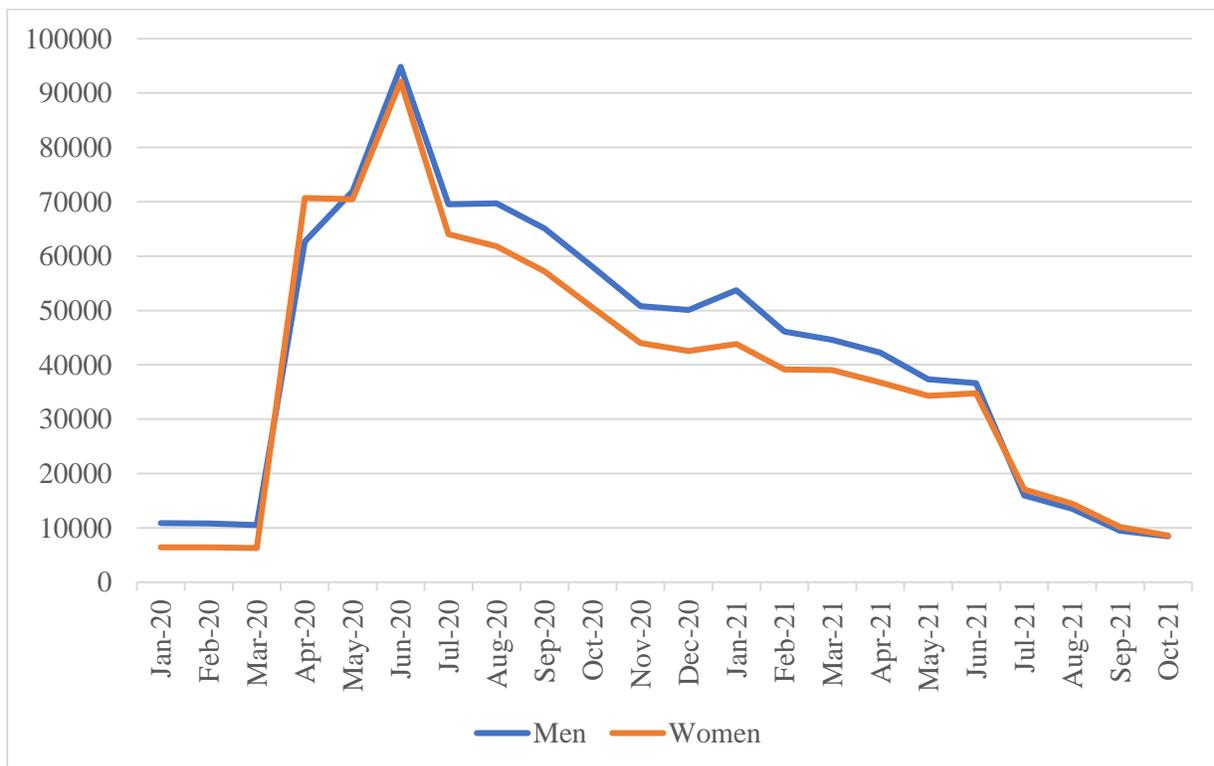
Source: Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED)

although the unemployment rate for women remained above men’s unemployment rate into the fall of 2020. After that time, the difference between men and women’s unemployment rates decreased considerably. As of January 2022, unemployment rates for both genders had fallen to nearly pre-pandemic levels at approximately 4%. One particularly lasting result of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, may be associated with changes in how people perceive their work and careers. A recent survey found working women felt less productive and less satisfied at work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to working men (Feng and Savani, 2021). With many children at home and having online schooling, women may also have experienced greater difficulties balancing work and childcare responsibilities, leading to less satisfaction in their work.

Unemployment Benefits

Figure 31 shows the number of monthly unemployment insurance claims by men and women in Oklahoma between January 2020 and October of 2021. In April 2020, near the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of monthly uninsured claims was greater for women than men in 2021. The number of individuals seeking unemployment benefits increased into June of 2020, when the state received over 188,000 unemployment insurance claims. Unemployment insurance claims decreased considerably in the fall of 2020, and by October of 2021, the numbers of men and women filing for unemployment were closer to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 31. Monthly Unemployment Insurance Claims by Gender, 2020 – 2022



Source: Oklahoma Security Commission, 2022

Conclusions

According to a recent study of approximately 25 indicators of economic and social well-being, Oklahoma ranks as the worst state for women (McCann, 2021). This study uses publicly available data to present information about the economic and civic status of women in the state of Oklahoma from 2015 through 2021. These findings present insights into the status of women in Oklahoma and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in the state.

The Current Status of Women in Oklahoma

Oklahoma has an aging population, and as workers retire, the state's labor force participate will decline as will the state's income tax revenues. Women in Oklahoma have higher levels of educational attainment than men, although women in Oklahoma are more likely to choose lower-paying fields, such as education, than women in the United States. Since earnings associated with levels of education and occupation selection, increasing students' access to an affordable college education will increase incomes for both men and women in the state.

Additionally, the gender earnings gap is larger in Oklahoma than in the United States overall. Oklahoma women earned 74.5 cents for every dollar earned by a man between 2015 and 2019, compared to 80.8 cents per dollar for U.S. women. Between 2017 and 2019, the gender earnings gap increased in Oklahoma but decreased for women in the United States overall. Also, women's labor force participation rate in Oklahoma is lower than the national average for women. Moreover, many women in Oklahoma work in lower-paying occupations, such as sales and office industries, education, and food services and personal care services. If current trends in Oklahoma continue, women will not reach earnings equality with men in the state until 2076.

In terms of health insurance, the share of Oklahoma women who lacked health insurance increased between 2015 and 2019. For men, the percentage without health insurance increased through 2018 and fell in 2019. Men are less likely than women in Oklahoma to be enrolled in Medicaid. At the same time, men and women in the state are less likely to have Medicaid than men and women in the United States. The state adopted Medicaid expansion in 2021 and a large number of adults have enrolled in Medicaid as a result of the state's efforts to increase Medicaid enrollment. Rural Oklahomans also receive access to health care from a large number of health care facilities operated by the 39 Native American tribes of Oklahoma, and the state economy benefits heavily from tribal investments in their communities.

The annual cost of childcare for an infant in Oklahoma in 2020 was \$8,940, or \$745 a month, and the typical married couple spends about 12% of their combined income on infant childcare compared to 40% of income for the typical single parent. Moreover, the annual cost of infant care in Oklahoma is greater than the cost of in-state tuition and fees at a public, four-year regional university in the state. Access to childcare facilities have

also increased considerably since 2015. Along with this decreased access to childcare, there has been a decline in the number of children receiving childcare subsidies in state. Lack of affordable childcare may prevent parents from working. The costs of childcare may also be more of a hardship for single parents, especially single mothers, who have to spend a larger percentage of their income on childcare.

The poverty rate for women in Oklahoma ages 25–64 is higher than the poverty rate for men in the state. Additionally, the poverty rate for women ages 65 and older has been increasing, a concern for the state with its aging population. Single mothers in Oklahoma also tend to depend more on public assistance. Nearly four times as many single-mother households in Oklahoma received public food assistance compared to single-father households.

Women comprise a small percentage of representatives in the Oklahoma State Legislature. About one-fifth of the Oklahoma legislators were women in 2021, a smaller share than the United States average. At the same time, Oklahoma women vote more than Oklahoma men, but voter turnout rates are lower in Oklahoma for both genders than for men and women in the United States overall.

The COVID-19 pandemic had significant effects on women's employment, particularly in the spring of 2020. During the second quarter of 2020, women's unemployment rate in Oklahoma was about 4% percent greater than the unemployment rate for Oklahoma men. The declines in employment in the state were highest in the industries of leisure and hospitality and mining and logging. Oklahoma had over 180,000 people receiving unemployment insurance in June of 2020. A larger number of women than men filed unemployment claims in the April of 2020, but more men filed unemployment claims beginning in May 2020. By October 2021, the number of unemployment insurance claims fell to pre-pandemic levels for both men and women. Still, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced working parents to face new hurdles managing work and childcare simultaneously. Among working parents, survey evidence suggests women feel less productive and less satisfied with their jobs than men after the outbreak, which may be related to more responsibilities both at work and at home (Feng and Savani, 2021). Many women also left the labor force in Oklahoma during the COVID-19 pandemic due to lack access to or inability to afford childcare for their children or to take care of sick family members.

Improving the Status of Women in Oklahoma

While the state of Oklahoma has done much to support childcare providers and working parents, families in the state would benefit considerably from an increase the childcare subsidy rate in Oklahoma would help both childcare providers and parents in the state. The state's childcare subsidy rate is also considerably lower than the recommended federal rate (Jacobi, 2022). While the state expanded access to childcare subsidies for three months to all workers seeking unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic, a large percentage of adults indicate that the cost of childcare hinders their ability to work outside the home (Wilkerson and Shupert, 2021). Women are also more likely to leave the

labor force to take care of children or sick family members, and caregiving responsibilities increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cullison, 2020). An increase in the childcare subsidy rate would also help women return to employment after giving birth, increasing women's labor force participation and incomes and reducing poverty rates for women in the state. The state would benefit from the increased productivity and output.

Another policy consideration that would benefit women in Oklahoma would be an increase in the state minimum wage. Despite increases in state minimum wages across in the country in 2021, the minimum wage in Oklahoma remains at the federal rate of \$7.25 per hour. In Oklahoma, 60% of minimum wage workers are female. Many women in Oklahoma are employed in food service occupations, and women would also benefit from an increase in the minimum wage rate paid to tipped workers.

Finally, working parents in the state would benefit from paid family leave laws. Nine states have passed paid family leave laws since 2002. Although Oklahomans are entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), since this leave is unpaid, almost half of workers are not able to take advantages of the leave because of lost wages. Since one-quarter of jobs in Oklahoma are considered low-wage, many parents in Oklahoma cannot afford to take time away from work to care for their children (Phillips, 2022). Single mothers would especially benefit from access to paid family leave, and it would help to reduce women's poverty rates. While the state legislature has considered paid family leave bills, none of them have passed.

Although the state of Oklahoma has found ways to improve the lives of women in recent years by passing Medicaid expansion, improving access to childcare subsidies, and increasing the pay of elementary and secondary school educators in the state, women in Oklahoma face many challenges. As the state population ages and becomes more diverse, women in Oklahoma would benefit from several policy changes designed to promote women's economic development. State policies designed to benefit women economically and financially in Oklahoma would also generate income, output, and revenue for the state.

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