

### 3: Trends in Food Stamp Caseloads, 1987-1999

Trends in the total numbers of food stamp participants are the sum of widely varying trends in the number of participants in different types of households. This chapter shows that the numbers of FSP participants in households consisting of single or multiple adults with children, adults or elderly persons living separately, and elderly persons living with adults or children have all changed in different ways since the late 1980s. Trends in caseloads from households with and without non-citizens have also diverged sharply. An examination of nationwide caseloads generally cannot directly reveal the impacts of specific policy changes. Nevertheless, this review of recent caseload trends raises several important issues for the statistical analysis presented later in this report.

This discussion of FSP caseload trends is based on the FSP-Quality Control (QC) microdata. These administrative data, which have been produced for each fiscal year since 1987, contain detailed information on a nationally representative annual sample of about 50,000 FSP units.<sup>1</sup> The main purpose of the QC review is to assess the accuracy of eligibility determinations and benefit calculations and to determine each state's error rate. These data also serve as an important source of detailed demographic and financial information on a large sample of active food stamp participants. The QC data have been used in numerous studies of the Food Stamp Program,<sup>2</sup> and are perhaps the best available data for a study of recent trends in FSP caseloads from important groups of households.<sup>3</sup> Using these administrative data avoids reporting biases that are present in data based on personal surveys.<sup>4</sup>

**Classifying FSP households:** In the Food Stamp Program, the terms “participant” or “recipient,” “food stamp household,” and “food stamp unit” have very specific meanings. FSP “participants” or “recipients” are defined as persons who are certified for and receive food stamps. FSP participants who generally live together and are certified to receive food stamps as a group constitute a “food

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<sup>1</sup> Annual state samples ranging from 300 to 2,400 units. The QC data for fiscal years 1987 and 1988 contain smaller samples.

<sup>2</sup> These studies include the annual USDA/FNS report entitled *Characteristics of Food Stamp Households*, and the QC Minimodel, a microsimulation model that estimates the impact of proposed reforms to the FSP on participants.

<sup>3</sup> The QC data have some limitations. Information on the educational attainment of recipients is frequently missing, a problem that limits research on participation trends for those with more and fewer years of schooling. The QC data record the presence of some household members who are ineligible for food stamps, but no one knows how completely this information is recorded; some of persons who reside in the household but who are ineligible for food stamps could be missing. Exemptions from ABAWD provisions appear to be unreliably recorded.

<sup>4</sup> The Current Population Survey under-reports the FSP caseload by about 17 percent (Wilde et al. 2000)

stamp unit.” A “food stamp household” is generally a residence that includes the food stamp unit and any additional persons who are ineligible for food stamps and are who not food stamp participants. After PRWORA, for example, many disqualified non-citizens became ineligible non-participants who are in the food stamp household but not in the food stamp unit. The QC data consist of a series of records of food stamp units. These records identify participants in the unit and ineligible non-participants who are also in the household. In the late 1990s, about one in six FSP participants are in units in which ineligible non-participants are recorded by administrative data.<sup>5</sup>

This report places each food stamp unit record in the QC data into one of six mutually exclusive categories based on the age and number of participants – the members of the unit who are certified to receive food stamps. Adults are defined as those between the ages of 18 and 60; elderly persons are those older than age 60; and children are those under the age of 18. The six categories are:

- single adults with at least one child;
- multiple adults with at least one child;
- one or more adults living separately (without elderly persons or children);
- one or more elderly persons living separately;
- elderly persons living with adults or children; and
- the remaining group of that includes households in which the only participants are children.

Throughout this report, these six categories are described as “*types of households*.” The focus of the report is on the unit members of households because published counts of “caseloads” generally include only those certified to receive benefits, and because trends in the number of participants are an important determinant of program costs. The last type of household – in which the only participants are children -- is typically known as a “child only unit.” In these households, the adult or elderly guardians are not certified to receive benefits. These households may include children in foster care or, after PRWORA, children with guardians who are ineligible non-citizens.

### **3.1 FSP Caseload Trends by Type of Household**

FSP participants include persons from a much broader range of households. Figure 3-1 shows the proportion of FSP participants from several types of households in 1994, the year in which the

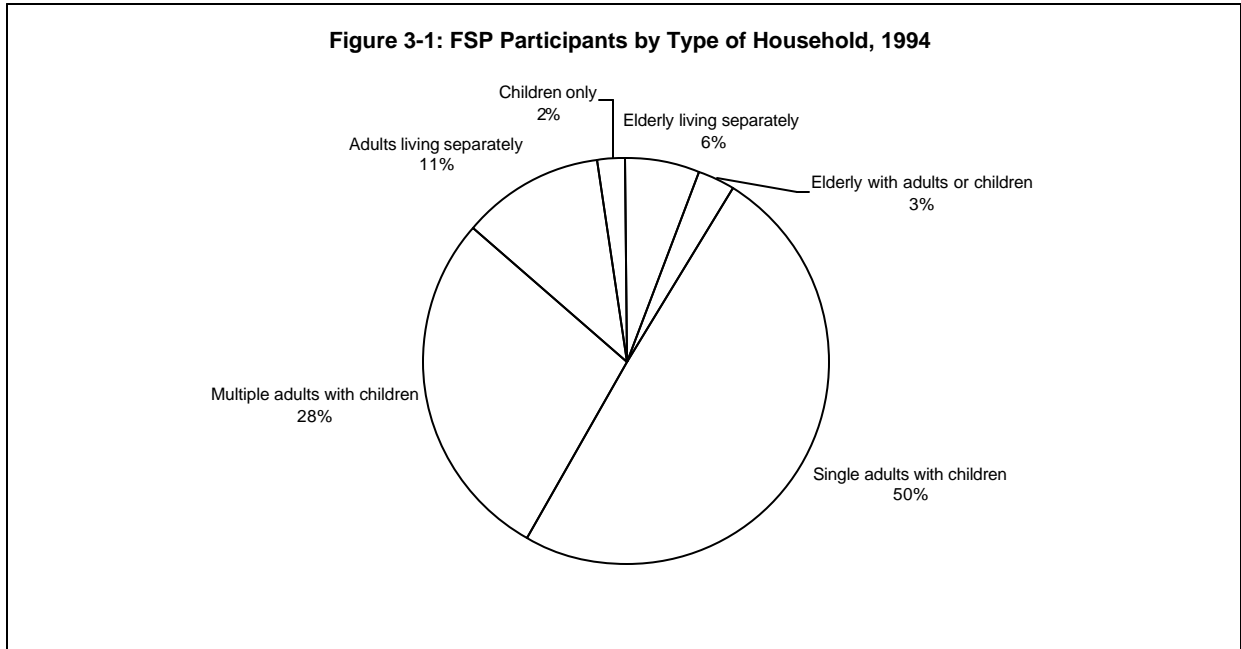
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<sup>5</sup> "FSP participants" are those defined in the QC data as "members of the FSP case under review."

number of FSP participants peaked in the 1990s. Most of these groups include children and could have been affected by the rules of TANF. About half of FSP participants were in households that consisted of a single adult and at least one child. Another 28 percent of participants were in households that consisted of more than one adult and one or more children. Two percent were children in “child only” units that include children in foster care and children whose guardian is ineligible for food stamps. Another three percent of participants lived in households in which an elderly person resided with either children or adults or both. Two other groups of households did not include children. Adults living separately, without children or elderly persons, accounted for another 11 percent of the caseload. This group includes adults subject to the ABAWD rules. Six percent of FSP participants were elderly persons living without adults or children.

Since the late 1980s, the numbers of FSP participants in each of these major types of households displayed unique trends (Table 3-1). The number of participants in single adult households with children rose by 52 percent from 1989-1994, remained fairly stable from 1994-1996, and then fell by 31 percent from 1996 to 1999. The number of participants in multiple adult households with children increased less rapidly from 1989 to 1994, but then fell more rapidly after 1994. From 1989-1994, the number of adult participants living separately rose by more (in percentage terms) than the number of participants in households with adults and children. After 1996, the number of adult participants living separately also fell dramatically. The number of participants in households with elderly persons living with others changed very little during the early 1990s but fell rapidly after 1994. The number of elderly participants living separately rose by over one-quarter in the early 1990s but declined only modestly after 1994. The number of participants in “child only” units displayed yet another trend: these more than doubled in the early 1990s and continued to increase even after 1994.

These trends suggest that policy changes and economic trends had different effects on food stamp receipt among persons in each of these types of households. For several groups, the average annual rate of caseload decline was far more rapid from 1996-1999 than from 1994-1996, even though the economy improved steadily after 1994. This especially rapid decline after 1996 suggests but does not prove that PRWORA and TANF could have reduced FSP receipt. The last column of Table 3-1 shows that most of the decline in caseloads after 1996 occurred because of declines in the number of participants in households consisting of either adults and children or adults living separately. These groups could have been affected by PRWORA and TANF, but the precise impact of these policy changes is unclear based on these trends alone.



**Table 3-1  
Summary of Trends in the Number of FSP Participants**

Type of Household	Percentage change in the number of FSP participants			Percentage of the 1996-99 change in the total number of participants
	1989-94	1994-96	1996-99	
<b>All FSP Households</b>	47.8%	-7.5%	-30.0%	100.0%
Single adults with children	51.9%	-6.2%	-30.6%	50.9%
Multiple adults with children	42.8%	-13.5%	-39.2%	34.7%
Adults living separately	58.5%	-2.6%	-29.4%	11.6%
Elderly living separately	27.5%	-1.1%	-8.3%	1.7%
Elderly living with adults or children	8.9%	-14.2%	-24.4%	2.2%
Children only	147.9%	6.9%	14.7%	-1.3%

*Source: FSP-QC data*

Households are classified as consisting of single- and multiple-adult households with children, adults or elderly living separately, elderly living with others, or children only based on the participants in the household. The last column is equal to the change in the number of participants in each category divided by the change in the total number of participants.

Clearly, general population trends alone cannot account for the large changes in FSP caseloads that occurred during these years. As Table 3-2 indicates, the U.S. population in each of these types of households grew steadily over time. These population estimates are based on an analysis of households in the Current Population Surveys. Some of the earlier increases in FSP caseloads through 1994 can be explained by the fact that the population in each type of household increased during these years, so one would expect to see increases in caseloads even if the participation rate had not changed. A comparison of trends in FSP caseloads (Table 3-1) and population trends (Table 3-2) shows, however, that most of this earlier increase in FSP caseloads cannot be explained by population trends. Similarly, none of the abrupt declines in FSP caseloads after 1996 can be explained by

**Table 3-2**  
**Summary of Population Trends, by Type of Household**

Type of Household	U.S. Population		Percentage change in the U.S. Population		
	1989	1999	1989-94	1994-96	1996-99
<b>All Households</b>	243,684,941	271,742,834	6.6%	1.8%	2.8%
Single adults with children	15,038,599	18,653,304	16.6%	2.4%	3.9%
Multiple adults with children	113,280,902	122,839,895	6.7%	1.3%	0.4%
Adults living separately	59,571,332	69,176,211	5.1%	3.0%	7.3%
Elderly living separately	29,259,720	31,361,857	2.8%	1.6%	2.6%
Elderly living with adults or children	26,459,404	29,671,134	8.5%	0.8%	2.5%

*Source: FSP-QC data*

These figures are obtained from the March Current Population Surveys. The "unit of analysis" is the CPS household, rather than the CPS family. (Other tabulations of population changes may be based on counts of CPS families). Households are classified as consisting of single- and multiple-adult households with children, adults or elderly living separately, or elderly living with others based on the number and age of the persons in the CPS household.

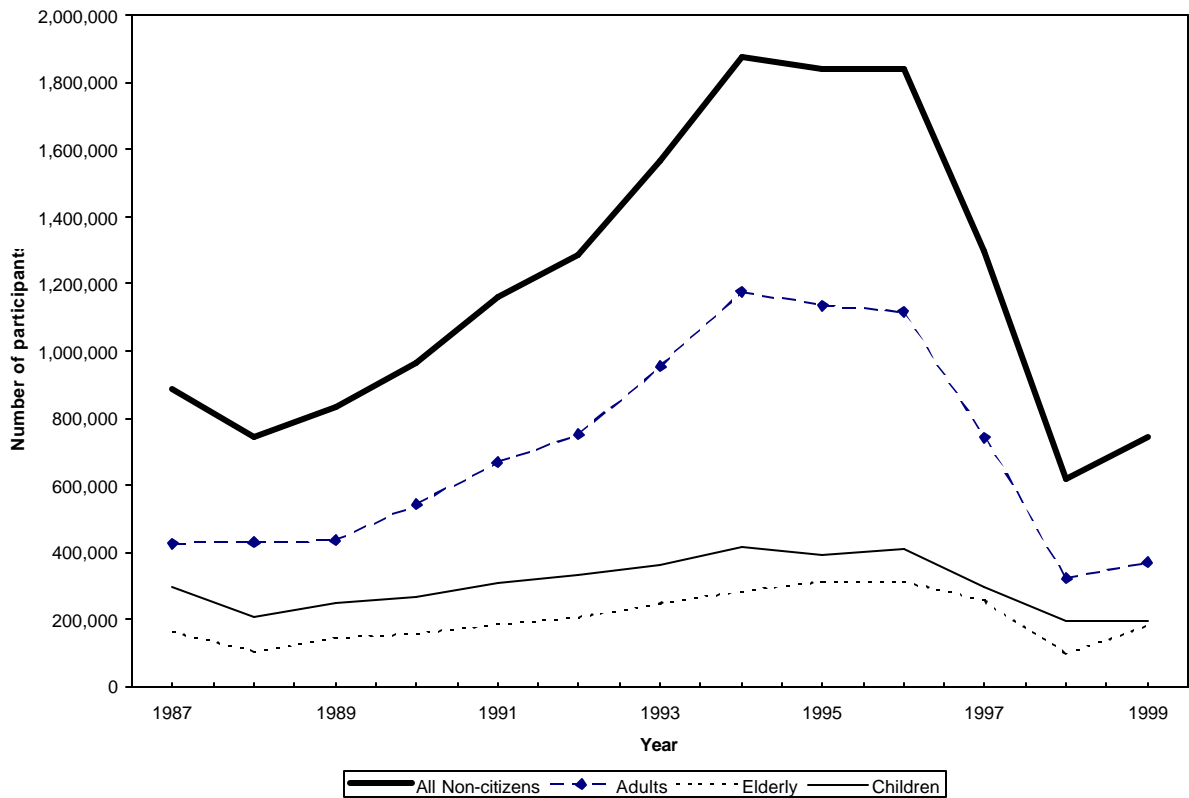
population trends within specific types of households. Some combination of changes in economic conditions, policies, and perhaps attitudes toward public assistance must account for most of these large swings in FSP caseloads.

### 3.2 Households with Non-citizens

Policy changes caused at least some of the dramatic changes in the numbers of non-citizen FSP participants. As Figure 3-2 shows, the numbers of non-citizen participants rose by about 150 percent from 1989-1994, remained steady from 1994 to 1996, and then fell by 60 percent from 1996 to 1999. Increases in the numbers of recent immigrants, improved access to food stamp offices, the recession, and perhaps expanded eligibility for Medicaid and SSI all may have contributed to the steep rise in the number of non-citizen participants from 1989-1994. At least some of the abrupt decline in the number of these participants after 1996 must have been caused by PRWORA, although the strong economy also played a role.

The end of the decline in the number of non-citizen participants after 1998 also suggests a role for policy changes. After 1998, the number of adult and elderly non-citizen food stamp participants increased slightly, and the number of non-citizen food stamp participants who were children stopped declining. By the end of 1998, PRWORA had already removed a large group of non-citizens from the FSP, leaving only those who were exempt from the legislation. After 1998, PRWORA continued to reduce the number of non-citizen participants by preventing smaller groups of non-citizens, including newly arrived non-citizens, from receiving food stamps for the first time. Any reductions

**Figure 3-2: Non-citizen Food Stamp Participants, 1987-1999**

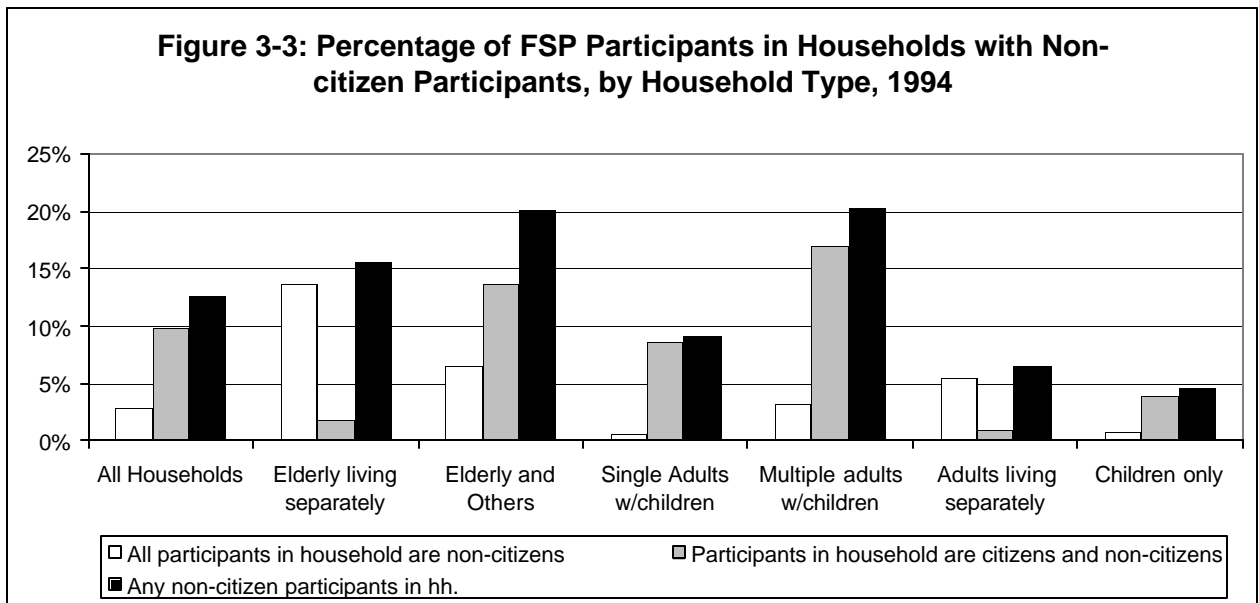


in the number of non-citizen food stamp participants caused by PRWORA after 1998 were offset by the 1998 legislation that restored food stamp eligibility to non-citizens who arrived before August, 1996 and who were elderly persons, children, or disabled adults. Some recent immigrants also regained eligibility for food stamps by obtaining citizenship.

The rapid decline in the number of non-citizen participants after 1996 can explain only a limited amount of the caseload decline from each of the major types of households. Only about 7 percent of participants were non-citizens just before PRWORA, and about 15 percent of the decline in the total number of FSP participants from 1996 to 1999 is due to the decline in the number of non-citizen participants. The share of the recent caseload decline that is accounted for by the decline in the number of non-citizen participants varies by type of household. The decline in the number of non-citizen participants after 1996 accounts for 9 percent of the decline in caseloads from households with single adults and children and less than 20 percent of the decline in caseloads from households with multiple adults and children and with adults living separately. The decline in the number of non-citizen participants after 1996 accounts for one-third of the decline among elderly persons living with

others, and over 80 percent of the decline among elderly persons living separately. These figures (not shown in tables) probably exaggerate the impact of the non-citizen rules on caseloads because economic trends could also have reduced caseloads from households with non-citizens.

The effect of the non-citizen rules of PRWORA on food stamp caseloads depends partly on the behavior of citizens in households with non-citizens. As Figure 3-3 shows, most food stamp households with non-citizen participants included participants who were *both* citizens and non-citizens. This finding persists for all types of households except those consisting of elderly persons or adults living separately, mainly because these households tend to consist of only a single participant. It is also important to note that in 1994, over 80 percent of households with non-citizens



included children. Among food stamp households that included non-citizens and that consisted of children living with adults or elderly persons, about two-thirds were “mixed households” consisting of elderly or adult non-citizens living with children who were citizens.<sup>6</sup> Under PRWORA, the non-citizens in these “mixed” households lost their eligibility, but the citizens in these households remained eligible for food stamps. Some chose to leave the FSP – perhaps because of misinformation or because the reduced food stamp benefits were not worth the perceived costs of participation -- and some chose to continue to receive benefits.

<sup>6</sup> These results are very similar to those shown in a study of FSP-QC data by Stavrianos, Cody, and Lewis (1997). This report showed that in 1995, about 11 percent of FSP units contained at least one non-citizen and 8.8 percent include at least one permanent resident alien that appeared to be subject to the food stamp disqualification. About two-thirds of these units contained both PRAs and citizens; the rest consisted entirely of PRAs. Of these “mixed” food stamp units, over 90 percent contain at least one adult with children, and about half consist of an adult non-citizen and children who are citizens. This report also found that about three-quarters of PRAs live in only four states – California, New York, Florida, and Texas.

The QC data can provide some information on the possible effects of PRWORA's non-citizen rules. These data record the presence of not only non-citizens who are FSP participants, but also non-citizen household members who are non-participants. With this information, one can also compare trends on the number of participants in households that do and do not include non-citizens, regardless of whether these non-citizens are FSP participants. Table 3-3 summarizes this analysis and makes several points. In this table and the following discussion, "households with non-citizens" include households with non-citizens who were participants and households with non-citizens who were ineligible non-participants, as recorded in the QC data.

Declines in the number of participants from 1996-1999 tended to be far more rapid among households that include some non-citizens than among households that include only citizens. This trend can be observed by comparing the first and second sets of rows in Table 3-3. The last column of Table 3-3 shows that almost one-quarter of the total decline in FSP participants after 1996 is explained by these very rapid declines in numbers of participants in households with non-citizens. The non-citizen rules most likely caused less than one-quarter of the total caseload decline during these years because the economy and other factors also contributed to the decline in caseloads from households with non-citizens. Nevertheless, the relatively more rapid caseload declines among households with non-citizens must have occurred at least partly because of the non-citizen rules of PRWORA. The rapid caseload declines among households with non-citizens occurred among all households except child-only units, which are discussed below.

After 1996, the number of citizen participants in households *with* non-citizens tended to fall at a much faster rate than the number of citizen participants in households *without* non-citizens. The first set of rows in Table 3-3 shows trends in the number of citizen participants in households without non-citizens (that is, without non-citizen participants and without non-citizen non-participants). The third set of rows in Table 3-3 shows trends in the number of citizen participants in households with some non-citizens. Among all households, households with adults and children, and households with adults living separately, the number of citizen participants in households with non-citizens (third panel of Table 3-3) fell at a much faster rate than the number of citizen participants in households without non-citizens (first panel of Table 3-3). These results suggest the possibility that the non-citizen rules may have encouraged many citizens in households with non-citizens to leave the FSP, perhaps



**Table 3-3  
Trends in the Number of Food Stamp Participants in Households with and without Non-Citizens**

	Percentage of all participants,		Percentage change in numbers of participants		Percentage of 1996-1999 change in the total number of participants
	1994	1989-94	1994-96	1996-99	
	<b><i>Households consisting of citizens only</i></b>				
<b><i>All participants</i></b>					
All households	85.8%	38.5%	-8.0%	-26.9%	76.5%
Single adults with children	44.4%	45.2%	-5.9%	-28.0%	42.2%
Multiple adults with children	22.6%	29.6%	-16.2%	-32.5%	22.2%
Adults living separately	10.5%	53.6%	-2.8%	-26.6%	9.8%
Elderly living separately	5.0%	19.5%	-3.7%	-1.9%	0.3%
Elderly living with adults or children	2.3%	-2.7%	-9.7%	-20.7%	1.6%
Child only households	0.9%	89.2%	9.6%	-10.9%	0.4%
<b><i>Households that include non-citizens who are either participants or non-participants</i></b>					
<b><i>All participants</i></b>					
All households	14.2%	149.3%	-4.1%	-47.9%	23.5%
Single adults with children	4.8%	165.3%	-9.0%	-55.4%	8.8%
Multiple adults with children	5.8%	138.0%	-2.6%	-62.0%	12.5%
Adults living separately	0.7%	186.2%	0.7%	-67.3%	1.8%
Elderly living separately	0.9%	98.4%	12.7%	-37.5%	1.4%
Elderly living with adults or children	0.6%	106.0%	-32.3%	-44.0%	0.6%
Child only households	1.4%	207.5%	5.2%	31.3%	-1.6%
<b><i>Participants who are citizens</i></b>					
All households	7.5%	174.9%	-6.2%	-37.0%	9.4%
Single adults with children	3.0%	188.4%	-7.8%	-48.9%	4.8%
Multiple adults with children	2.9%	154.6%	-5.1%	-61.1%	6.0%
Adults living separately	0.1%	35.2%	57.1%	-70.8%	0.2%
Elderly living separately	0.1%	193.0%	-29.4%	41.5%	-0.1%
Elderly living w/adults or childrer	0.2%	178.8%	-63.6%	24.2%	-0.1%
Child only households	1.3%	212.2%	4.0%	30.0%	-1.5%
<b><i>Participants who are non-citizens</i></b>					
All households	6.7%	125.7%	-1.8%	-59.6%	14.1%
Single adults with children	1.9%	135.4%	-10.9%	-66.2%	4.0%
Multiple adults with children	2.9%	123.5%	-0.1%	-62.9%	6.6%
Adults living separately	0.7%	217.1%	-4.3%	-66.8%	1.6%
Elderly living separately	0.9%	94.0%	15.7%	-40.9%	1.5%
Elderly living w/adults or childrer	0.3%	74.3%	-10.6%	-63.3%	0.7%
Child only households	0.0%	116.3%	37.3%	57.7%	-0.1%

*Source: FSP-QC data*

because the reduced food stamp benefits were no longer worth the transactions costs or because of misinformation about eligibility.<sup>7</sup> Many of these former citizen FSP participants were children.

<sup>7</sup> Among households with elderly participants, the number of citizen participants in households with non-citizens displayed a different pattern, rising after 1996. One possible but unverifiable explanation is that the non-citizen rules increased the number of citizens and non-citizens that chose to live together in these households for financial reasons. These types of households with non-citizens make up less than one percent of the FSP caseload.

The number of child FSP participants in child-only units with non-citizens rose sharply after PRWORA, while the number of participants in all other types of households with non-citizens fell after PRWORA. Most of this increase occurred because of an increase in the number of citizen children who received food stamps and who resided in households with non-citizen guardians who became ineligible for food stamps. In the absence of PRWORA, many of these FSP households would have been classified as having both adult and child participants. Despite this sharp increase in the number of participants in child-only units with ineligible non-citizens, the *total* number of child FSP participants in households with non-citizens declined markedly after PRWORA.

**Summary:** A review of these trends confirms that policies played at least some role in the decline in FSP participants after 1996. The new rules for non-citizens clearly reduced the number of non-citizen participants. The evidence is also consistent with the possibility that the non-citizen rules also reduced the total number of citizen participants in households with non-citizens. These rules reduced the total number of child participants in households with non-citizens, but increased the number of child participants in child-only FSP units by making many non-citizen adults ineligible for benefits.

As Table 3-3 also shows, about three quarters of the total 1996-99 decline in the FSP caseloads occurred because of declines in the number of participants in households that include only citizens. Many of these households could have been affected by TANF and the rules for ABAWDs. Adults living separately in households without non-citizens accounted for 10 percent of the decline, while households with adults and children and without non-citizens accounted for almost two-thirds of the total decline. A comparison of Table 3-3 and Table 3-1 shows that, with the exception of child-only units, trends in the total numbers of FSP participants are mostly similar to trends in the number of participants in households without non-citizens. The next sections of this chapter provide more information on trends in participants in households without non-citizens.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> PRWORA's rules for non-citizens could further complicate an analysis of participation rate trends by type of household because these rules could change the way "mixed" food stamp households are categorized into the types of households in Figure 3-1. The non-citizen rules could affect measured caseload trends by "moving" some households from one type to another. A household that had consisted of a single eligible non-citizen adult and eligible citizen children would appear in the QC data after PRWORA as a child-only household, causing the number of eligible recipients single adult households with children to fall. Households consisting of two adults -- a citizen and a non-citizen -- and citizen children would appear in the QC data as a multiple adult household with children before PRWORA, but a single adult household with children after PRWORA. Trends in participation by type of household could be in part a reflection of these "classification effects" rather than changes in the total numbers of recipients in each type of household. Further analysis of the QC data indicates that there were only minor changes in the proportion of households with ineligible non-citizens within types of households other than child only units. These findings suggest that these "classification effects" played only a minor role in caseload trends of types of households other than child-only units.

### 3.3 Single Adults with Children

Trends in the numbers of these food stamp participants are not always closely linked to economic trends (Figure 3-4). In some years in the late 1980s and the mid 1990s, the number of food stamp recipients in single-adult households with children continued to rise even though unemployment was falling. Food stamp receipt for these historically low-income households may be affected by not only the economy, but also state-level AFDC waivers, state TANF plans, Medicaid expansions, the SSI program, the expanded EITC, and the increased minimum wage. Figure 34 and Table 3-4 present additional details on trends in the number of participants in these households. To control for the effects of the non-citizen rules, these figures are based on FSP households without non-citizens.<sup>9</sup>

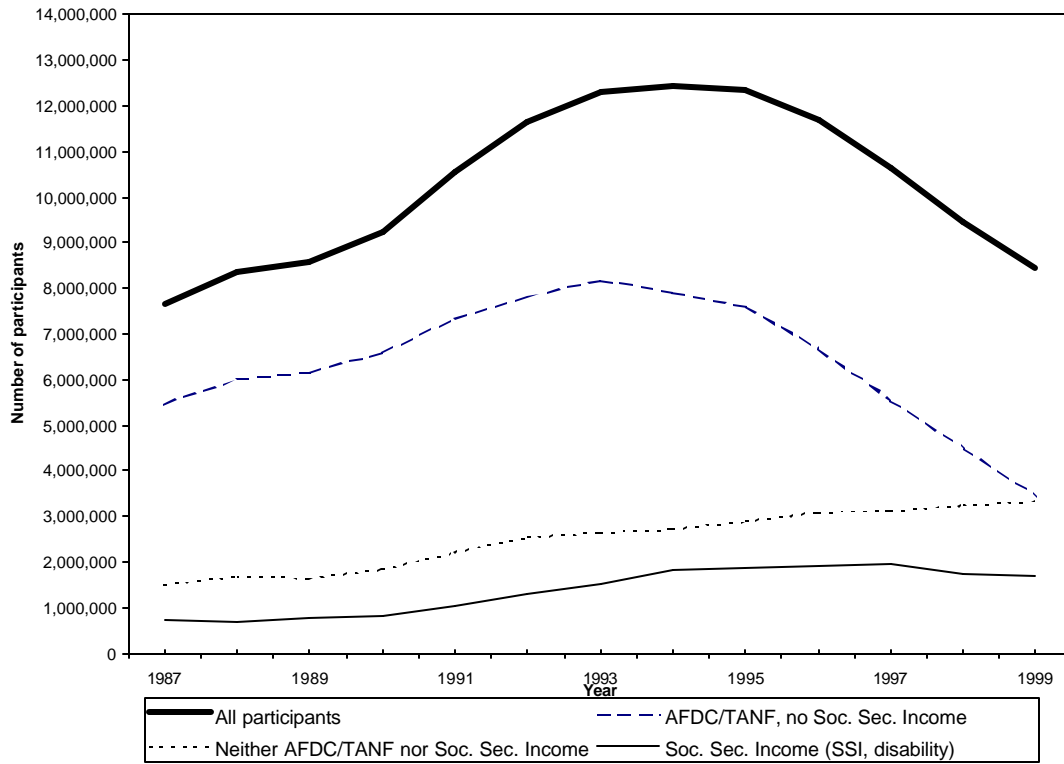
These trends for single adult households with children are the sum of very different trends for three subgroups defined by the presence of other types of public assistance. In 1994, most of these participants -- and over one-quarter of the total FSP caseload -- were in households that also received AFDC or TANF, but no Social Security income. (Throughout this report, "Social Security income" includes Supplemental Security Income, disability benefits, and "old age" Social Security) These households were directly affected by the rules of TANF and most could not obtain an exemption because of a disability. Another large group of "working poor" participants received neither AFDC/TANF nor Social Security income, and include those who had left TANF or SSI (possibly as a result of policy changes) and those who had never received aid from these programs. A third group consists of households that receive food stamps and Social Security income. These participants may have been exempt from the work requirements of AFDC and TANF because of a disability, and some may have become FSP participants as a result of becoming eligible for Social Security income.

Some TANF leavers continued to receive food stamps; others may have switched from TANF to SSI; and still others may have received SSI continually. These outcomes could have limited the effects of TANF on food stamp receipt among single adults households with children. The number of persons who received both food stamps and AFDC/TANF (and not Social Security income) fell sharply by almost 50 percent from 1996-1999. TANF, economic trends, the expansions of the EITC and Medicaid eligibility, and the increased minimum wage could all account for some of this decline. The number of participants that received food stamps but neither AFDC/TANF nor Social Security

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<sup>9</sup> That is, the sample includes participants from households without non-citizen participants and without non-citizens who are non-participants.

**Figure 3-4: Food Stamp Participants, 1987-1999: Single Adults with Children, Households without Non-citizens**



**Table 3-4  
FSP Participants in Households with Single Adults and Children**

	Percentage of all participants, 1994	Percentage change in numbers of participants 1989-94	Percentage change in numbers of participants 1994-96	Percentage change in numbers of participants 1996-99	Percentage of the 1996-99 change in the total number of participants
<b>Households consisting of citizens only</b>					
Single adults with children	44.4%	45.2%	-5.9%	-28.0%	42.2%
AFDC/TANF, no Social Security inc.	28.3%	28.5%	-15.5%	-48.6%	41.8%
No AFDC/TANF, no Social Security inc.	9.7%	65.8%	13.9%	7.4%	-2.9%
Social Security income	6.5%	134.5%	6.8%	-13.4%	3.3%

*Source: FSP-QC data*

"Social Security income" includes SSI and disability. In this group of households, most recipients of "Social Security income" receive SSI.

income rose fairly steadily from 1987 to 1999. Because the economy continued to be strong after 1994, it seems unlikely that the number of single parent food stamp participants who never qualified for TANF would grow during these years. A more likely explanation for the increase in the number of these "food stamp only" participants in the late 1990s is that some TANF and SSI leavers continued to receive food stamps. TANF, expanded eligibility for Medicaid and the EITC, higher

minimum wages, and tightened eligibility rules for SSI could have encouraged families to leave TANF or SSI but retain food stamps.

The modest decline in the number of persons receiving food stamps and Social Security income after 1996 may have resulted from the tightening of the rules for SSI, economic growth, or some state TANF policies that did not exempt families with disabled persons. The decline in the number of FSP recipients after 1996 may have been modest because the TANF rules encouraged some families to switch from TANF to SSI.

Several explanations could account for the earlier increases in caseloads from these households. Many factors -- the recession, increases in the number of single parent households, and Medicaid expansions -- could explain the earlier increase in the number of participants receiving food stamps and AFDC or food stamps alone. The rapid rise in the number of persons in households receiving food stamps and Social Security income from 1989-1996<sup>10</sup> may have resulted from Medicaid expansions or policies that led to a general increase in the number of SSI recipients. Some of the new Medicaid and SSI eligibles could also have learned that they could qualify for food stamps. The effect of these programs on food stamp receipt during these years is hard to assess because some could have received food stamps regardless of the rules of these other programs.

### **3.4 Multiple Adults with Children**

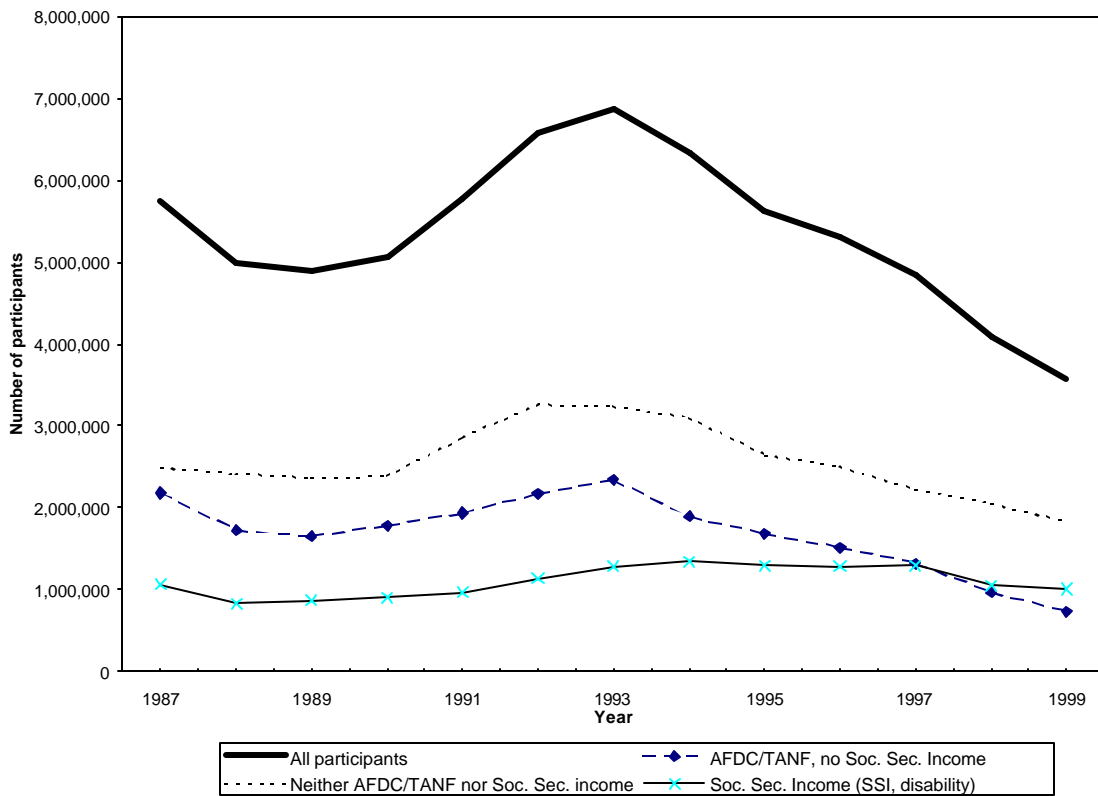
Food stamp receipt among these households could have been affected by many of the same factors that could have affected food stamp receipt among single adult households with children, although the size of the effects of policies and economic trends on these two groups of households could differ. Food stamp households with multiple adults and children are less likely than food stamp households with single adults and children to receive TANF. Trends in the number of participants from multiple adult households with children may be dominated by the behavior of “working poor” households that never received TANF.

Trends in caseloads from single and multiple adult households with children differed in several ways.  
Trends in the number of participants in multiple adult households with children (considering only

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<sup>10</sup> While the data indicate the value of benefits a household receives from other public assistance programs, such as TANF or SSI, they may not accurately record which persons in each household are eligible for this benefit. In other words, one can tell whether a household received SSI but one may not necessarily know whether a child or an adult is eligible for this benefit.

**Figure 3-5: Food Stamp Recipients, 1987-1999: Multiple Adults with Children, Households without Non-citizens**



**Table 3-5  
FSP Participants in Households with Multiple Adults and Children**

	Percentage of all participants, 1994	Percentage of all participants, 1989-94	Percentage change in numbers of participants, 1994-96	Percentage change in numbers of participants, 1996-99	Percentage of the 1996-99 change in the total number of participants
<b>Households consisting of citizens only</b>					
Multiple adults with children	22.6%	29.6%	-16.2%	-32.5%	22.2%
AFDC/TANF, no Social Security inc.	6.8%	14.7%	-19.8%	-51.5%	10.1%
No AFDC/TANF, no Social Security inc.	11.1%	31.0%	-19.4%	-26.7%	8.6%
Social Security income	4.8%	54.6%	-3.9%	-21.4%	3.6%

Source: FSP-QC data

"Social Security income" includes SSI and disability. In this group of households, most recipients of "Social Security income" receive SSI.

households without non-citizens) appear to be relatively more clearly tied to economic conditions (Figure 3-5). Among both single- and multiple-adult households with children, there was a sharp decline in the number of FSP participants who received AFDC/TANF but not Social Security income after 1996 (Table 3-4, 3-5). During these same years, however, there was a substantial decline in the

number of FSP participants from multiple-adult households with children that received neither TANF nor Social Security income; this decline did not occur among single-adult households with children. After 1996, the number of FSP participants with Social Security income also declined more rapidly (in percentage terms) among multiple adult households with children than among single-adult households with children. Among multiple adult households with children, increases in the number of “food stamp only” households because of departures from TANF and SSI were more than outweighed by declines in the number of “food stamp only” households. In sum, trends in the number of FSP participants in single- and multiple-adult households with children are sufficiently different to justify a separate analysis of the two groups.<sup>11</sup>

### **3.5 Adults Living Separately**

These food stamp households will be affected most directly by the ABAWD provisions, the rules of programs that assist persons with disabilities, the expanded EITC, and the increased minimum wage. The rules of TANF and AFDC probably had little or no effect on this group. The number of participants in these households is also very closely linked to economic conditions (Figure 3-6 and Table 3-6).

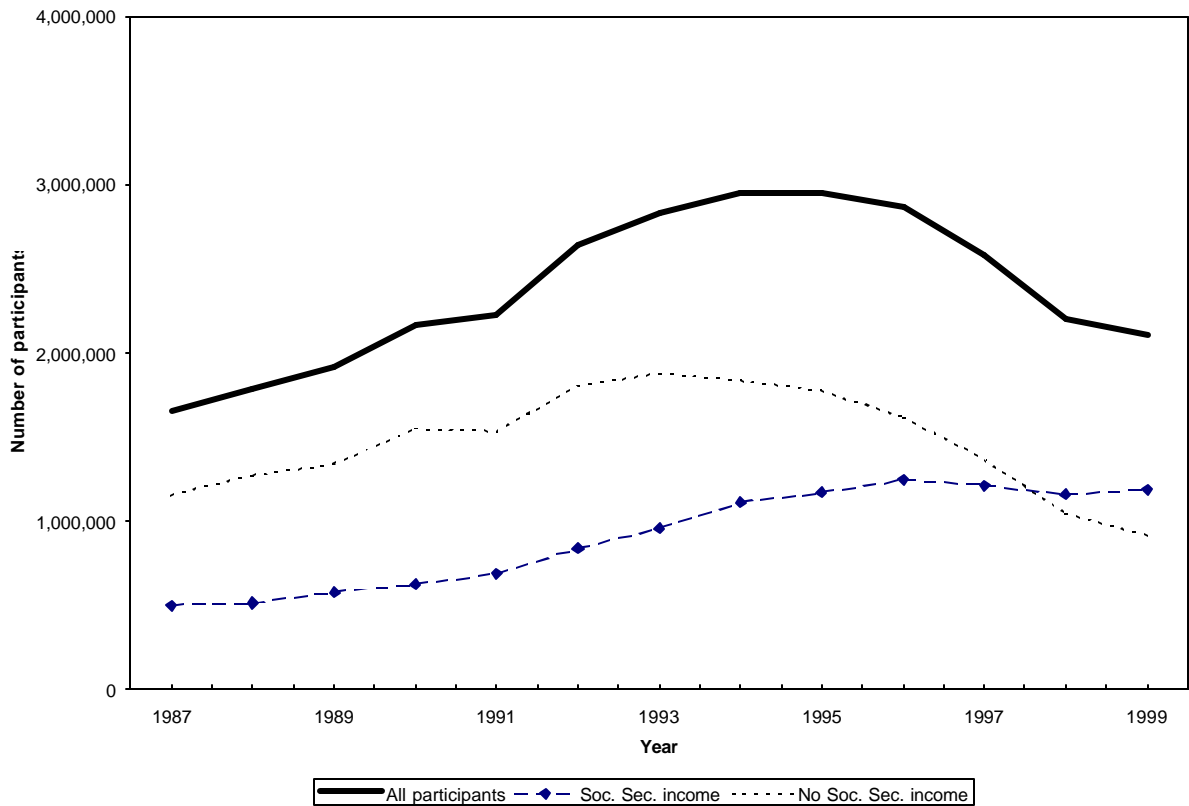
Participants that do and do not receive Social Security income (SSI or disability) exhibit very different trends. The number of food stamp participants receiving Social Security income almost doubled from 1989-1996 and then declined by only 5 percent from 1996-1999. Some of the earlier increase in the number of food stamp participants may have been a consequence of increases in the number of persons who received Social Security income, although the evidence is inconclusive. The decline in the number of food stamp participants who also received Social Security income after 1996 may have been modest because many disabled adults were unable to work even in a strong economy. The decline in the number of FSP participants without Social Security income was far more rapid.

The effect of the ABAWD provisions on food stamp receipt was limited by exemptions and other factors. The decrease in the number of participants after 1996 was driven by the behavior of persons who did not receive Social Security income, at least some of whom were affected by the ABAWD rules. Almost half of adults living alone were in households that also received Social Security income

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<sup>11</sup> Not all of these food stamp households consist of a married couple with children. In recent years, 62-69 percent of persons in food stamp households with multiple adults appear to be in families consisting of a married couple and children. About 6 percent of persons are in households consisting of more than one adult, none of whom is married, and children. The remaining 25-32 percent of persons are in households consisting of a married couple, children, and other adults, most of whom are related to other household members. Recent trends in the number of recipients in these subgroups are very similar.

**Figure 3-6: Food Stamp Participants, 1987-1999: Adults Living Separately, Households without Non-citizens**



**Table 3-6  
FSP Participants in Households with Adults Living Separately**

	Percentage of all participants, 1994	Percentage change in numbers of participants		Percentage of the 1996-99 change in the total number of participants
		1989-94	1994-96 1996-99	
<b>Households consisting of citizens only</b>				
Adults living separately	10.5%	53.6%	-2.8% -26.6%	9.8%
No Social Security income	6.6%	37.1%	-11.8% -43.5%	9.1%
Social Security income	4.0%	91.9%	12.1% -4.8%	0.8%

Source: FSP-QC data

"Social Security Income" includes SSI and Disability

and were most likely exempt from the ABAWD work requirement and time limit. Some adults with disabilities may have responded to the ABAWD provisions by qualifying for Social Security income. Economic trends already started reducing the number of non-disabled food stamp recipients from 1994-1996; continued growth could clearly explain some of the decline in food stamp recipients after 1996, even without the ABAWD rules.



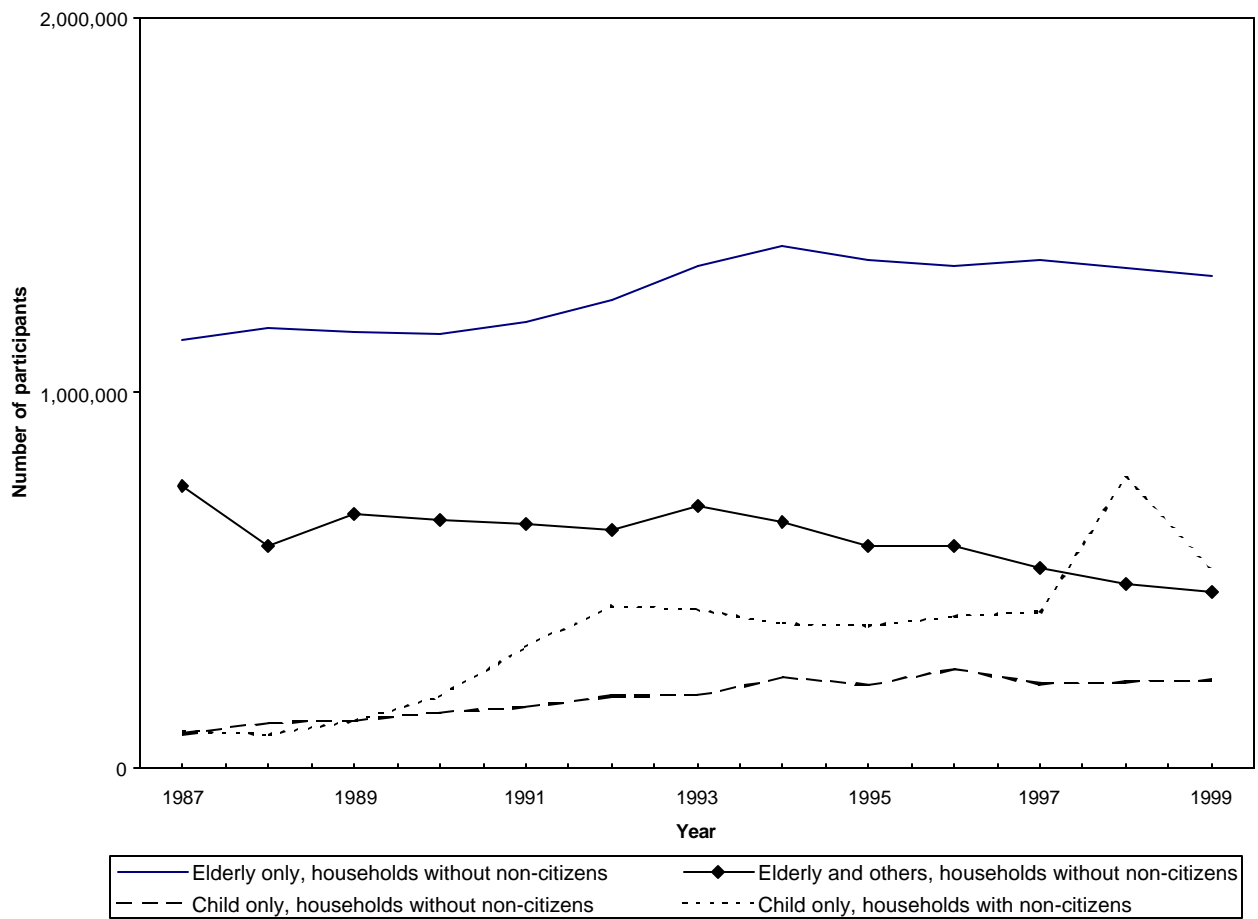
## 3.6 Other Types of Households

**Elderly persons with adults or children:** All of the policy changes discussed in Chapter 2 could have affected this group of households. In 1994, somewhat more than half of these FSP participants (considering only those in households without non-citizens) lived in households that included children, with or without adults. These households could receive TANF, but the effects of TANF on these households may have been diminished because many TANF plans exempt households with elderly persons from work requirements. The other FSP participants in this group were in households consisting of elderly persons and adults but no children. These adults may be subject to the ABAWD provisions but may receive an exemption because of a need to care for an elderly (and possibly incapacitated) person. The FSP's eligibility rules for households with elderly persons are more generous than for similar households without elderly persons. For all of these reasons, trends in FSP participation for these households are studied separately. As Figure 37 shows, the number of participants in this group of households without non-citizens rose by 9 percent from 1989-1994, fell by 14 percent from 1994 to 1996, and fell by 24 percent after 1996.

After 1996, trends in the number of these participants differed across households with and without children. (These trends are not shown in tables). There were large declines in the number of participants in households consisting of elderly persons living with two adults and children, and in households consisting of elderly persons living with adults but no children. On the other hand, there was almost no change at all in the number of participants in households consisting of elderly persons living with a single adult and children, or in households consisting of elderly persons living with children but no adults. One possible though unverified explanation for this pattern is that some single parent families responded to TANF by moving in with extended family members to address child care and other needs, or by allowing older relatives (who were exempt from TANF work requirements) to take care of children.

**Child-only units and households consisting of elderly persons living separately:** The number of food stamp participants in child-only units and "elderly only" households did not fall sharply in the late 1990s. The number of participants who were elderly persons not living with adults or children increased steadily from 1989-1994 and then changed very little afterward. These elderly persons are exempt from work requirements of TANF and the FSP. The number of poor elderly persons living alone is explained by aging of the population and other demographic trends in addition to current economic conditions.

**Figure 3-7: Food Stamp Participants, 1987-1999: Other Types of Households**



Child-only units consist of children in households in which the adult or elderly is ineligible for food stamps or will not accept food stamps. The number of these cases has risen steadily since the late 1990s. As the earlier analysis indicated, much of the increase in the number of these participants after 1996 occurred because of the non-citizen rules of PRWORA. These rules denied eligibility to adults and elderly persons in these households, so a number of low-income households with adults and elderly persons with children who are citizens appeared in the QC data as child only households.

### 3.7 Summary

The major types of households studied in this chapter each displayed unique caseload trends from 1987-1999. During these years, numerous policy changes most likely had different effects on different types of households. These different trends suggest that a study of the determinants of

caseloads from each of these groups of households might yield insights not obtained by a study of aggregate caseloads.

This review of general caseload trends provides some evidence consistent with the possibility that policy changes affected caseload trends. PRWORA's restriction of eligibility for non-citizens surely explains some of the abrupt decline in the number of non-citizen participants after 1996, the decline in the number of citizen participants in households with non-citizens after 1996, and the increase in child-only FSP households after 1996. The evidence for an effect of changes in the SSI program, the ABAWD rules, and TANF on FSP caseloads is less clear-cut. The ABAWD rules probably explain some of the recent sharp decline in the number of FSP participants who were non-disabled adults living separately, but economic trends could also account for some of this trend. The earlier, large increases in the number of persons who received both food stamps and Social Security income may have been driven by the growth in SSI and disability caseloads, although these participants could have received food stamps without Social Security income. The number of participants receiving food stamps with TANF fell dramatically after 1996, but economic trends and policy changes other than TANF contributed to this trend as well. A more detailed analysis of caseload trends by state and year is needed to learn more about the effect of TANF rules on caseloads. The next chapter reviews some of these more detailed studies.