Census Says Marriage Market Expands for U.S. Women

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By Sue Pleming

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The marriage market offers more promise for American women seeking a spouse, with the male population growing at a faster rate than females in the past decade, according to 2000 census data released Sunday.

Women still outnumber men in the United States but the Census Bureau (news - web sites) said the gender gap had narrowed during the 1990s, due largely to a rise in immigration and the fact that men lived longer because of healthier lifestyles and medical advances.

In 2000, there were 138.1 million men, a 14 percent increase from 1990, and 143.4 million women, a 13 percent rise from the previous census. Females made up 50.9 percent of the population in 2000, against 51.3 a decade earlier.

``The greatest increase in the male-female ratio between 1990 and 2000 was in the age group 75 to 84," said Renee Spraggins of the Census Bureau.

Spraggins attributed the narrowing of the gap to greater life expectancy of men and the number of male immigrants coming to the United States, especially among the Hispanic population.

The National Center for Health Statistics said the life expectancy for women in 1999 was 79.4 years versus 73.9 years for men, against 74.4 years for women in 1969 and 66.8 for men that year.

Demographer and sociologist Philip Cohen from the University of California, Irvine, said the figures meant there would be fewer widows and more choices for elderly women seeking a spouse.

``This is good news for the marriage market, especially for older women who will have more men available," said Cohen.

Alaska, with more traditionally male jobs such as logging and oil available, had the highest male-female ratio followed by Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho and Utah.

The lowest male-female ratios were in the District of Columbia, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

The female population grew at a faster rate than the male population in three states -- Alaska, California and Hawaii.

Of the 10 largest cities, the male population exceeded the female population in Phoenix, San Diego and Dallas. Philadelphia and Detroit had the lowest female ratios.

Spraggins said areas where there were high concentrations of men could usually be traced to big prison populations or a military base as well as the kind of work available.