

The Older Population in the United States

March 1999

Population Characteristics

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This report presents a statistical portrait of selected social and economic characteristics of the civilian noninstitutional population age 55 years and over in the United States. These characteristics, which are shown by age and sex, include race and Hispanic origin,¹ marital status, educational attainment, labor force status, income, and poverty status. The findings are based on the results of the March 1999 Current Population Survey (CPS).²

POPULATION SIZE AND COMPOSITION

Women outnumber men among older adults.

In 1999, 24.7 million men and 30.6 million women were age 55 and over, yielding a male-female ratio of 81 to 100. The male-female ratio dropped steadily with age. In the 55 to 64 age group, the ratio was 92 to 100, and in the age group 85 years and over, the ratio was 49 to 100 (Figure 1).

¹Hispanics may be of any race.

²The population universe in the March 1999 CPS is the civilian noninstitutional population of the United States and members of the armed forces in the United States living off post or with their families on post, but excludes all other members of the armed forces. Thus, the findings in this report do not cover people living in institutions such as nursing homes and correctional facilities.

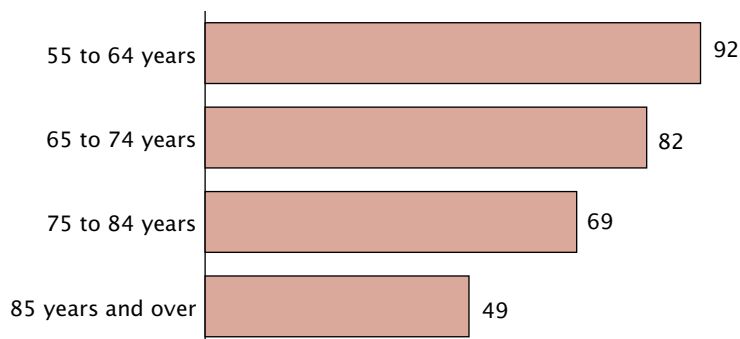
As a corollary to the declining male-female ratios with age, the age distribution of women was older than for men among the population 55 and over. For example, the 55 to 64 age group accounted for 39 percent of women and 44 percent of men, whereas the age group 85 and over accounted for 7 percent of women and 4 percent of men.

Less diversity is evident among the older population than among the younger population.

Non-Hispanic Whites accounted for 71 percent of the total population in 1999; however, the proportion varied greatly with age — 68 percent of the population under age 55 and 82 percent for those 55 and over. Among the older population, the proportion was 79 percent in the 55 to 64 age group, 82 percent in the 65 to 74 age

Figure 1.
Sex Ratio of People 55 Years and Older by Age: 1999

(Number of men per 100 women)



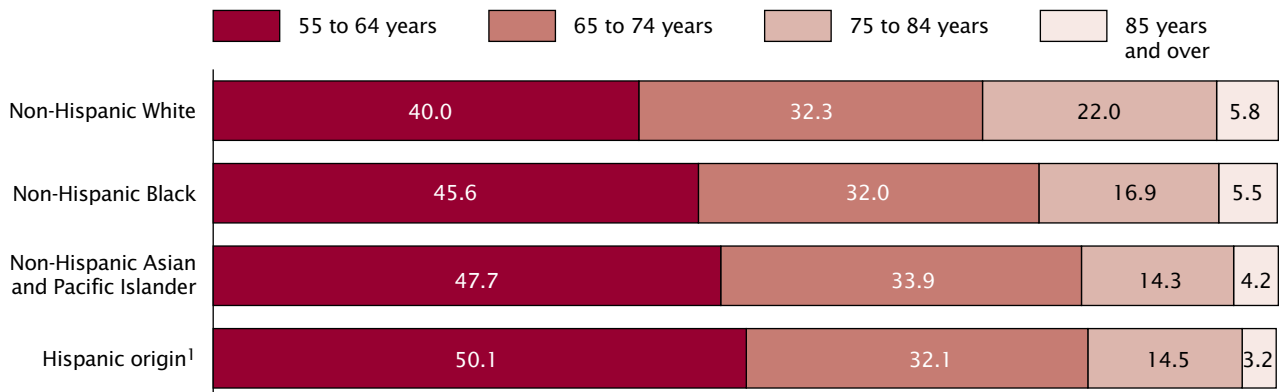
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 1999.

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Figure 2.

Percent of People 55 Years and Older by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1999



¹Hispanics may be of any race.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 1999.

group, 86 percent in the 75 to 84 age group, and 85 percent in the age group 85 and over.³

The age distribution among the older population varies considerably among racial and ethnic groups. Among those groups shown in Figure 2, non-Hispanic Whites had the oldest age distribution in 1999, with 40 percent in the 55 to 64 age group and 6 percent 85 and over. Hispanics had the youngest age distribution, with 50 percent in the 55 to 64 age group and only 3 percent 85 and over.

MARITAL STATUS

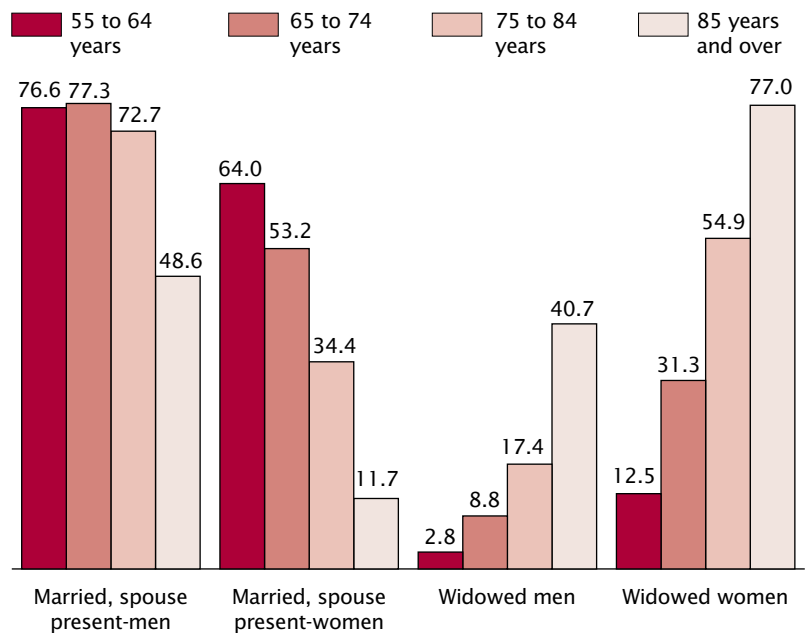
Living arrangements and marital status among the older population differ considerably between men and women as they age.

In 1999, men 55 years and over were more likely than women in this age group to be married and living with their spouse. In the younger ages, the majority of men (77 percent) age 55 to 64 years old

³Percentages between those age 75 to 84 and 85 and over or those age 55 and over and age 65 to 74 were not statistically different.

Figure 3.

Percent of People 55 Years and Older Who Were Married With Spouse Present or Widowed by Age and Sex: 1999



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 1999.

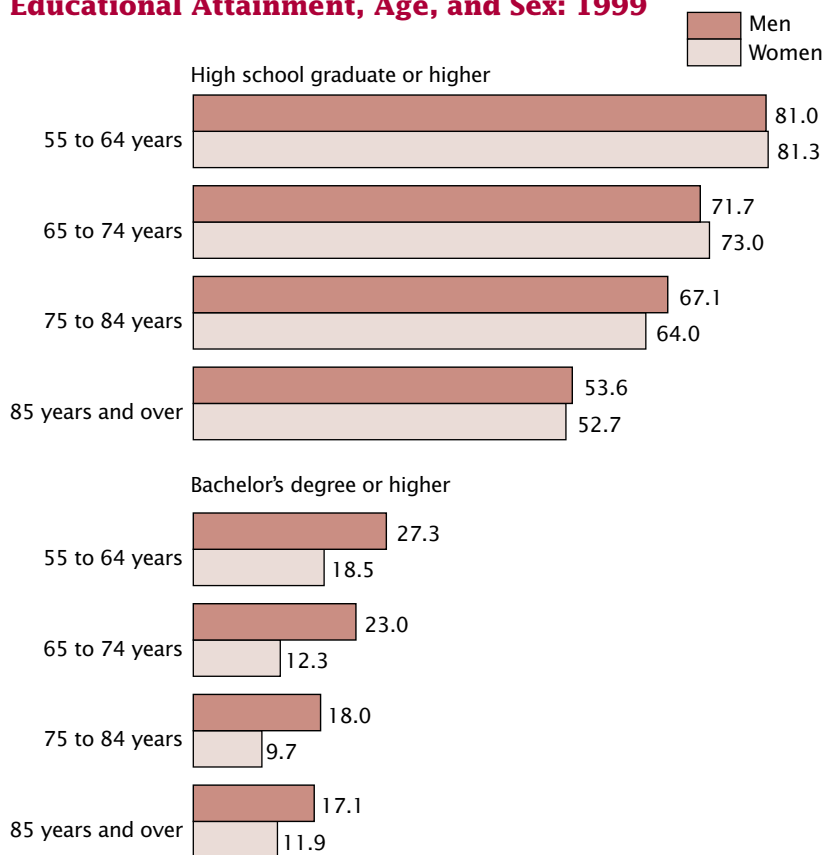
and women (64 percent) were married and living with their spouse. Among people 65 to 84 years old, the majority of men (76 percent) were married and living with their spouse, compared with less than half (46 percent) of women the same

age.⁴ For people 85 years and over, the proportion who were married and living with their spouse was much lower: 49 percent of men and only 12 percent of women.

⁴Percentages for men age 55 to 64 and 65 to 84 are not statistically different.

Figure 4.

Percent of People 55 Years and Older by Educational Attainment, Age, and Sex: 1999



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 1999.

Because women have higher life expectancies than men, it is not surprising that 32 percent of women and only 9 percent of men age 55 and over were widowed. With increasing age, the likelihood that a woman is widowed rises rapidly: 13 percent of women at 55 to 64 years, 41 percent of women at 65 to 84 years, and 77 percent of women 85 years and over (Figure 3).

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Men are more likely than women to have a bachelor's degree or more education among the older population.

High school completion rates vary among the older population. In 1999, 81 percent of people age

55 to 64 and 70 percent of those age 65 to 84 had completed high school. In contrast, only 53 percent of people age 85 years and over were high school graduates or higher. The percentage of people with less than a ninth grade education also varied. At the older ages, 31 percent of people 85 years and over had less than a ninth grade education, compared with only 8 percent of people 55 to 64 years old and 16 percent of people 65 to 84 years old.

In most age categories, women and men age 55 and over were equally likely to be high school graduates.⁵

⁵Percentages between men and women for the age groups of 55 to 64, 65 to 84, and 85 and over were not significantly different.

In the 55 to 64 age group, 81 percent of both men and women had graduated from high school, compared with about 70 percent in the 65 to 84 age group, and just over half of those age 85 and over.

Among the older population, however, men were more likely to have a bachelor's degree or more education (Figure 4). Of people age 55 to 64, 27 percent of men and 19 percent of women had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 21 percent and 11 percent, respectively, among those age 65 to 84, and 17 percent and 12 percent, respectively, among those 85 and over.⁶

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Older men are more likely than older women to be in the civilian labor force.⁷

Men age 55 and over are more likely than women to be in the civilian labor force, and that proportion declines with age for both sexes. In 1999, 79 percent of men age 55 to 59 were in the civilian labor force, compared with 62 percent of women (Figure 5). Among people 60 to 64, 56 percent of men were in the civilian labor force, compared with 39 percent of women. Among people 65 and over, only 16 percent of men were in the civilian labor force, compared with 10 percent of women. Of the people 55 and over in the civilian labor force, nearly 97 percent were employed.

⁶Percentages between women age 65 to 84 and 85 and over were not significantly different.

⁷Civilian labor force data shown in this report reflect characteristics of the civilian noninstitutionalized population for March 1999 and are not adjusted for seasonal changes. Data released by the Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, may not agree entirely with data shown in this report because of differences in methodological procedures and their seasonal adjustment of the data.

FAMILY INCOME

Married-couple households with a householder age 55 to 64 are more likely to have higher incomes than married couples 65 to 74 and 75 and over.⁸

In 1998, 74 percent of married-couple households with a householder age 55 to 64 had incomes of \$35,000 or more (Figure 6). Among married-couple households with a householder age 65 to 74, 51 percent had incomes of \$35,000 or more, compared with 37 percent of married couples with a householder age 75 and over. The percentages of married-couple households with a householder age 75 and over and incomes of \$20,000 to \$34,999 and \$35,000 or more were not significantly different.

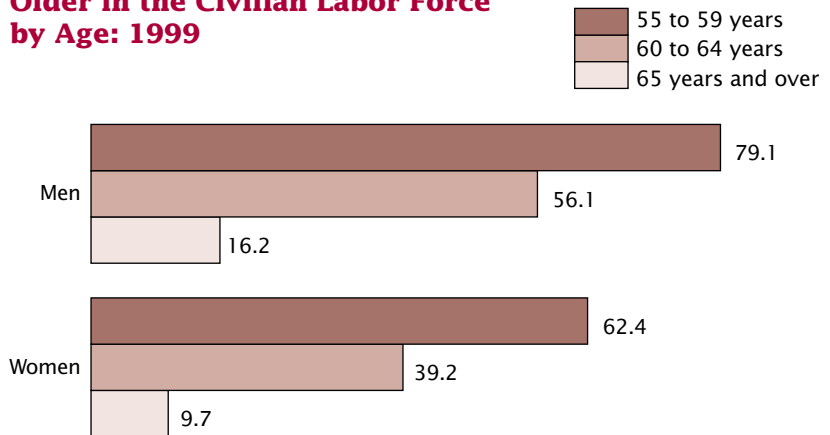
POVERTY STATUS

Among people 55 and over, those age 75 and over are most likely to be poor.

Of the 55.3 million people 55 years and over in 1999, 5.6 million (10.1 percent) were poor in 1998. In the younger ages, the poverty rate was 9.6 percent for those 55 to 64 years old. For those 75 years and over, the poverty rate was 12.2 percent. Older women, in general, had a higher poverty rate than older men—for those age 55 to 64, 10.9 percent and 8.2 percent, respectively. Among those age 65 to 74 and 75 and over, 10.7 percent and 15.1 percent of women were poor, compared with

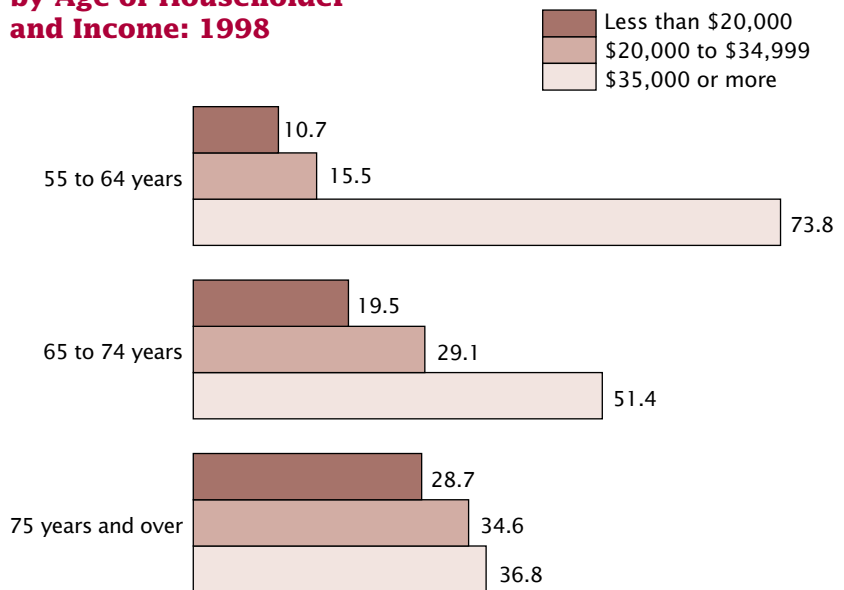
⁸Throughout the report, references to income and poverty status for families and individuals in 1999 are based on their incomes in calendar year 1998. For a detailed discussion on the definitions of income and poverty, see Joseph Dalaker, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P60-207, *Poverty in the United States: 1998*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1999, pp. A2-A4.

Figure 5.
Percent of Men and Women 55 Years and Older in the Civilian Labor Force by Age: 1999



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 1999.

Figure 6.
Percent of Married-Couple Households by Age of Householder and Income: 1998



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 1999.

7.0 percent and 7.5 percent of men (Figure 7).⁹

In 1998, 7.2 million families were in poverty, representing 10.0 percent of

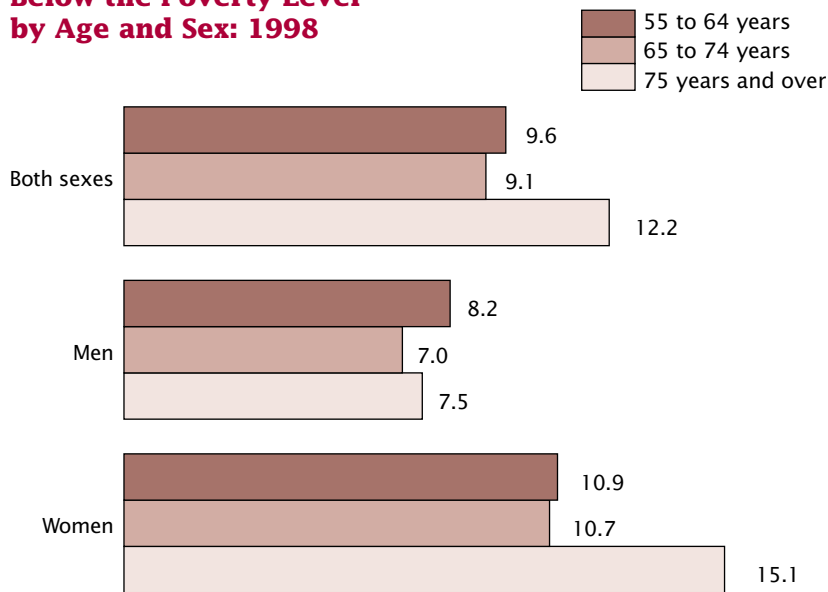
⁹There is no statistical difference between the poverty rates for men age 55 to 64, 65 to 74 and 75 and over, or women age 55 to 64 and women age 65 to 74.

all families. Married-couple families with householders 65 and over and with householders 18 to 64 were equally likely to be poor (5.1 percent compared with 5.3 percent).

Families with a female householder and no husband present were more

Figure 7.

Percent of People 55 Years and Older Below the Poverty Level by Age and Sex: 1998



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 1999.

likely than families with a male householder and no wife present to be poor, regardless of age. Among families with a female householder age 65 and over with no husband present, 13.4 percent were poor, compared with 9.7 percent of those with a male householder, no wife present.

SOURCE OF THE DATA

The estimates in this report are based on data obtained from the March 1999 Current Population Survey (CPS). The Census Bureau conducts the CPS every month, although this report uses only data from the March survey for its estimates.

ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES

The data in the detailed tables (PPL-133) are from the March 1999 Current Population Survey. Statis-

tics from surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and meet the Census Bureau's standards for statistical significance. Nonsampling errors in surveys may be attributed to a variety of sources, such as how the survey was designed, how respondents interpret questions, how able and willing respondents are to provide correct answers, and how accurately the answers are coded and classified.

The Census Bureau employs quality control procedures throughout the production process - including the overall design of surveys, the wording of questions, reviews of the work of interviewers and coders, and statistical review of reports.

The Current Population Survey employs ratio estimation, whereby

sample estimates are adjusted to independent estimates of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for bias due to undercoverage, but how it affects different variables in the survey is not precisely known. Moreover, biases may also be present when people who are missed in the survey differ from those interviewed in ways other than the categories used in weighting (age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin). All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources.

For further information on statistical standards and the computation and use of standard errors, contact the Demographic Statistical Methods Division on the Internet at: dsmd_s&a@census.gov.

MORE INFORMATION

Detailed tabulations are available that provide demographic characteristics by age. The electronic version of these tables is available on the Internet at the Census Bureau's Web site (www.census.gov). Once on the site, click on "E," then select "Older Population." Under "CPS March 1999," choose "Data Tables."

A paper version of these tables is available as PPL-133 for \$22.00. To receive a paper copy, send your request for "PPL-133, The Older Population in the United States: March 1999," along with a check or money order for \$22.00, payable to "Commerce-Census-88-00-9010," to U.S. Census Bureau, P.O. Box 277943, Atlanta, GA 30384-7943, or call the Statistical Information Staff at 301-457-2422. A copy of these tabulations will be made available to any existing Current Population Report P20 sub-

scriber without charge, provided that the request is made within 3 months of the issue date of this report.

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USER COMMENTS

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