Childless Older Americans

Tayelor Valerio, PhD
U.S. Census Bureau

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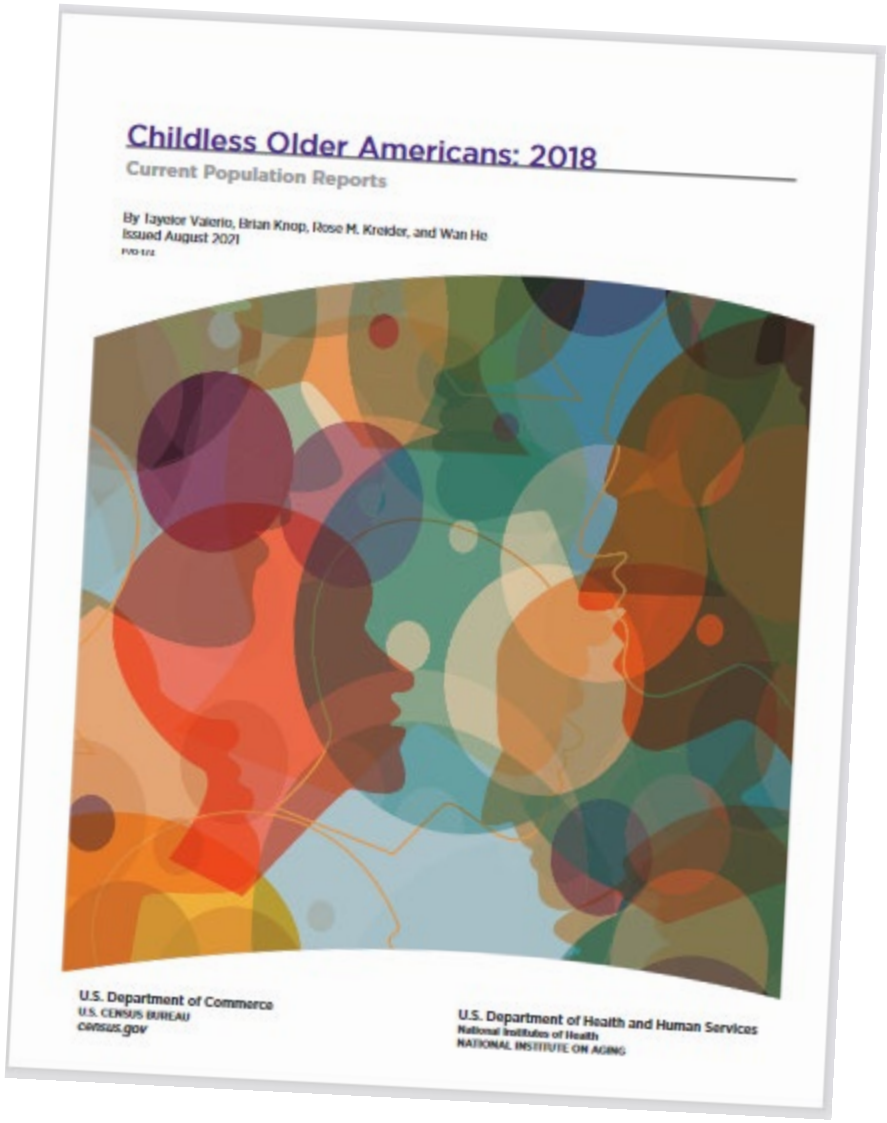
Report by Tayelor Valerio, Brian Knop, Rose M. Kreider, and Wan He



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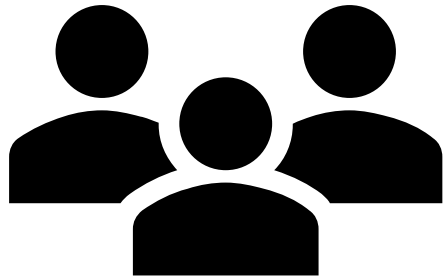
Fertility Data Collected by the U.S. Census Bureau



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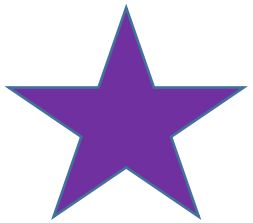
Fertility Data Collected by the U.S. Census Bureau

1. **Current Population Survey (CPS) June Fertility Supplement**
   - SAMPLE: Women aged 15-50
   - FREQUENCY: Asked every 2 years (cross-sectional)
   - CONTENT: Asks about children ever born & information about first birth
2. **American Community Survey (ACS)**
   - SAMPLE: Women aged 15-50
   - FREQUENCY: Asked on an on-going basis (released as annual estimates, cross-sectional)
   - CONTENT: Asks about birth in the past year
3. **Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)**
   - SAMPLE: All adults (age 15+)
   - FREQUENCY: Asked annually (longitudinal; ~4 years per panel)
   - CONTENT: Collects a full fertility history



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The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)

- Administered by the U.S. Census Bureau since 1984
- Longitudinal survey of a nationally representative sample of the civilian, non-institutionalized population
- Follows the same people over time, usually a few years
- Collects detailed socioeconomic, demographic, and relationship information

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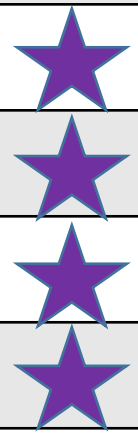
2014 SIPP Redesign

	Classic SIPP (1984 - 2008)	Redesigned SIPP (2014 -)
Content	Comprehensive	Comprehensive
Universe	Civilian, non-institutional	Civilian, non-institutional
Interview Type	Personal visit/telephone	Personal visit/telephone
Interview Frequency	3x/year	Annual
Reference Period	Previous 4 months	Previous year
Panel Length	2.5-5 years	4 years
File Structure	Complex	Simplified



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2014 SIPP Redesign

- Expanded collection of fertility data

  - ❖Full fertility histories of women AND men 15+
  - ❖Direct question about Multiple Partner Fertility

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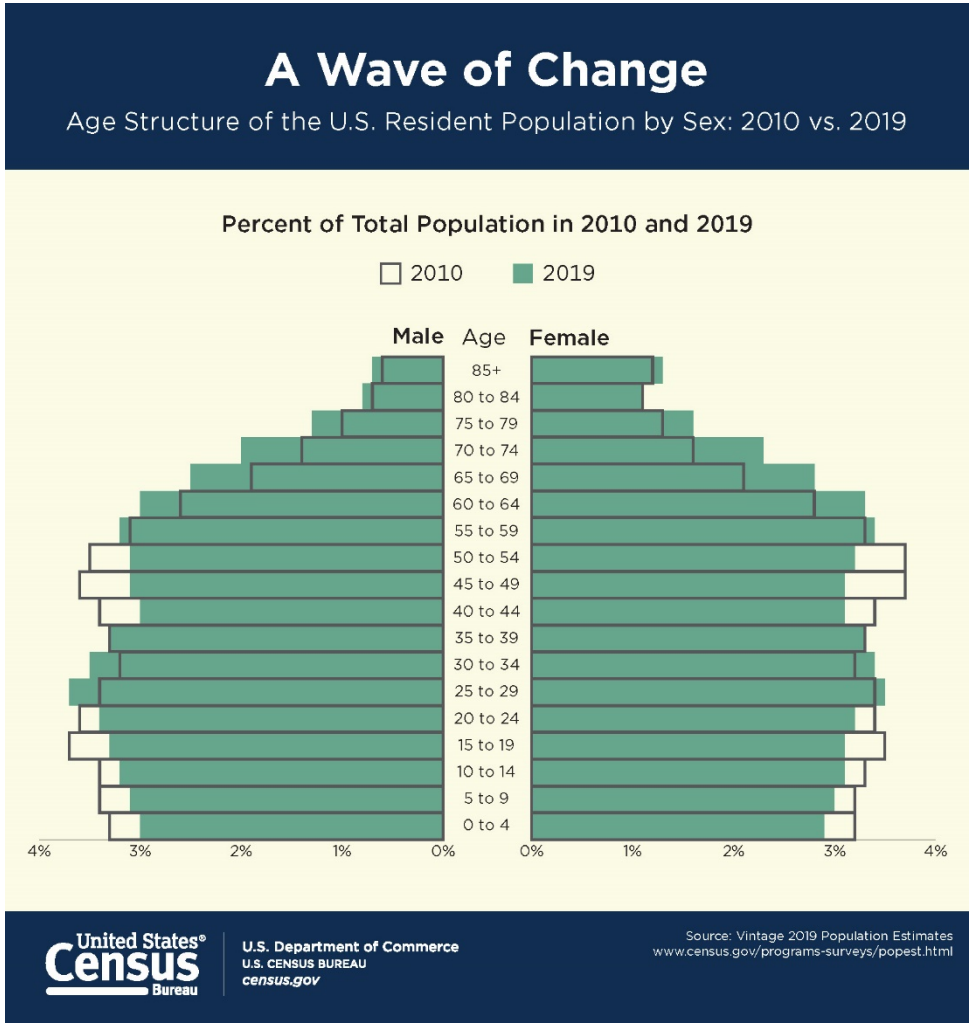
Background: Aging population

The 65-and-older population grew by over a third from 2010 to 2019, and by 3.2% from 2018 to 2019



Source: https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/65-older-population-grows.html

Draft

Aging population; Changing family dynamics

- Changing family dynamics impact the pool of potential caregivers available to adults as they age (Seltzer and Bianchi, 2013; Stone, 2015).
- Majority of older people with a disability reside at home (He and Larsen, 2014).
- Upon turning age 65, over half of individuals can expect the need for someone to help them with activities of daily living or will require supervision for at least 90 days or longer (Favreault and Dey, 2016).

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Goal: Develop a comprehensive, up-to-date description of the childless older adult population

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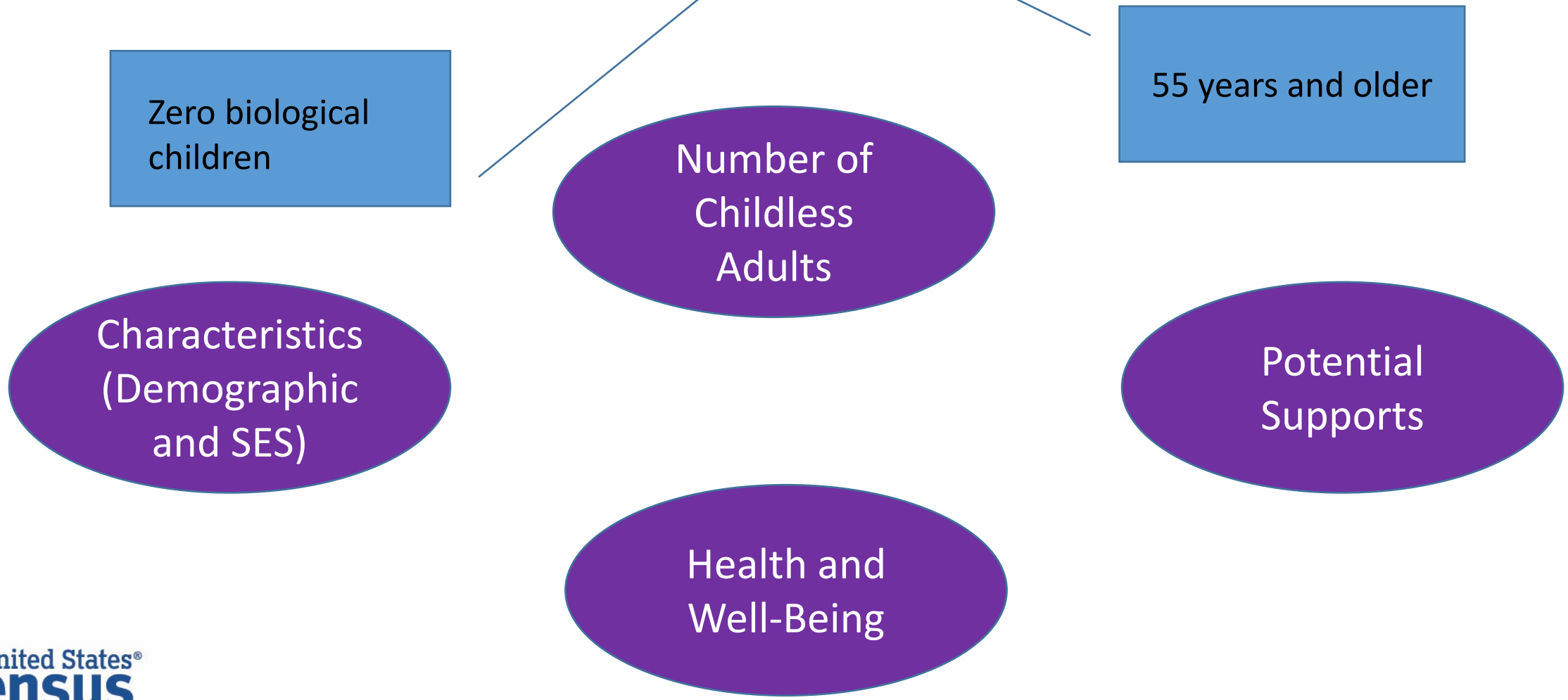

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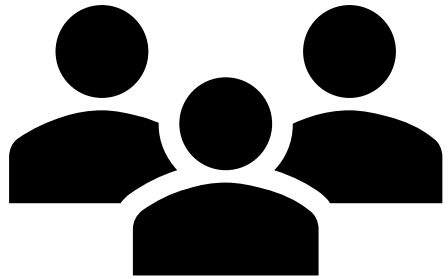
How many older adults are childless?



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Of the 92.2 million adults ages 55 and older in 2018, 15.2 million (16.5%) are childless

Childlessness and Parenthood Among Adults Aged 55 and Older by Age and Sex: 2018

(Numbers in thousands)

Age	Total	Childless adults[1]			Biological parents		
		Number	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Number	Percent	Margin of error (±)
Total	**92,200**	**15,190**	**16.5**	**0.5**	**77,010**	**83.5**	**0.5**
55–64	41,890	8,212	19.6	0.7	33,680	80.4	0.7
65–74	29,970	4,761	15.9	0.9	25,210	84.1	0.9
75 and older	20,340	2,214	10.9	0.8	18,130	89.1	0.8
Women	**49,530**	**7,433**	**15.0**	**0.6**	**42,090**	**85.0**	**0.6**
55–64	21,740	3,770	17.3	1.0	17,970	82.7	1.0
65–74	15,990	2,453	15.3	1.0	13,540	84.7	1.0
75 and older	11,800	1,210	10.3	1.0	10,590	89.7	1.0
Men	**42,670**	**7,754**	**18.2**	**0.7**	**34,920**	**81.8**	**0.7**
55–64	20,150	4,442	22.0	1.1	15,710	78.0	1.1
65–74	13,980	2,308	16.5	1.2	11,670	83.5	1.2
75 and older	8,542	1,004	11.8	1.3	7,538	88.2	1.3

[1] Childless adults are those who reported having zero biological children.

Source: Valerio et al., 2021.

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Childlessness is more prevalent among those who are 55-64 years old compared to those who are in older age groups

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Source: Valerio et al., 2021.

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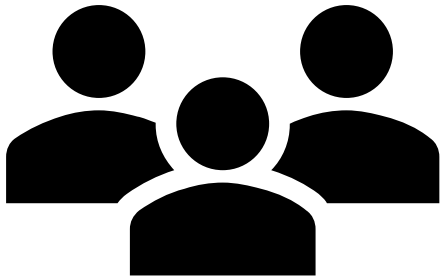
Who are the Childless Older Adults?



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Demographic Characteristics

- The majority of childless older adults are non-Hispanic White and native-born
- 79.0 percent of childless adults are non-Hispanic White, compared to 72.8 percent of parents
- Almost 90 percent of childless adults were native-born, compared to 84.7 percent of parents

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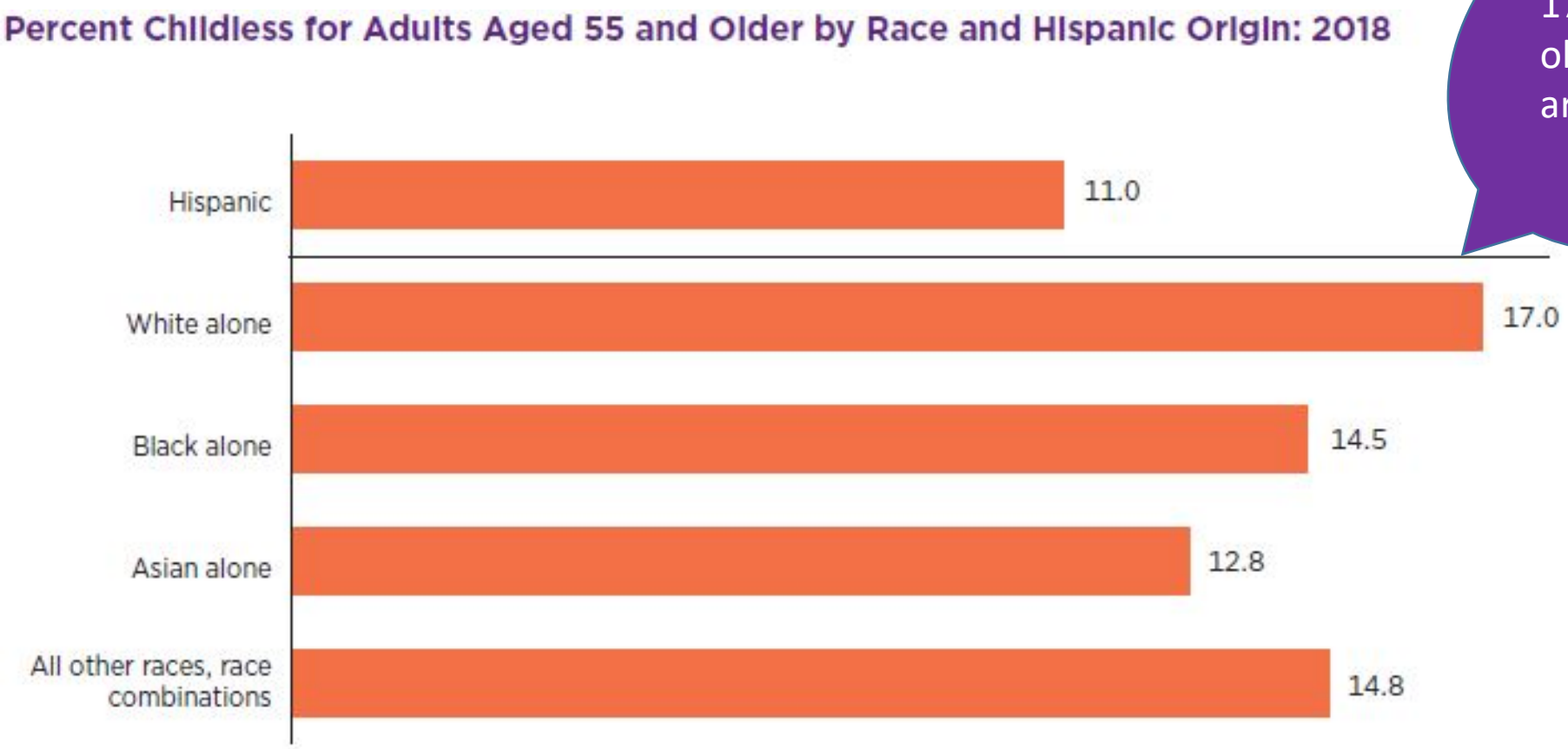
Source: Valerio et al., 2021.

Demographic Characteristics



17% of White older adults are childless

Note: Childless adults are those who reported having zero biological children.
Source: Valerio et al., 2021.

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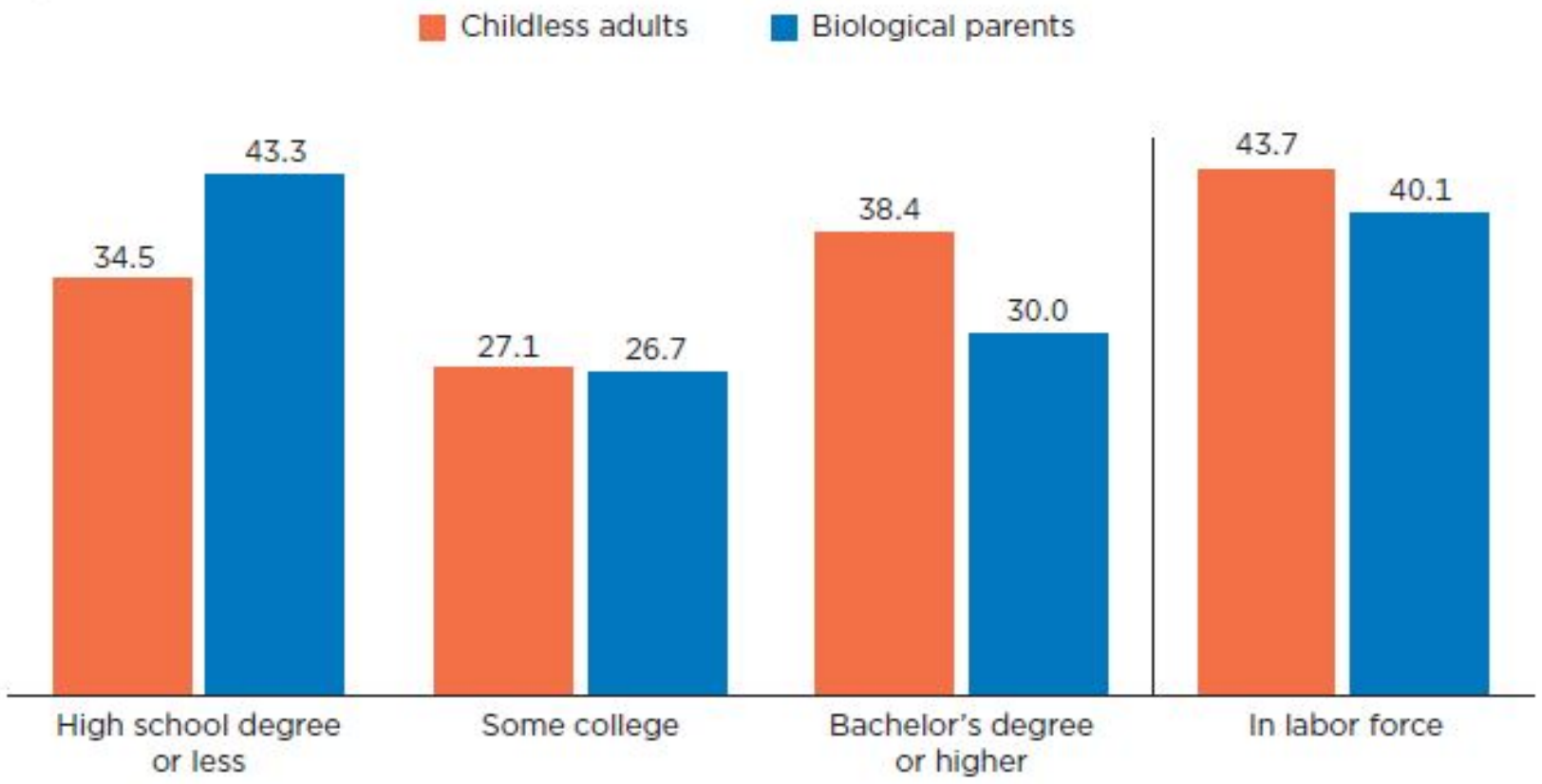
Socioeconomic Characteristics

Childless older adults are more educated than parents

Educational Attainment and Labor Force Participation of Childless Adults and Biological Parents Aged 55 and Older: 2018
(In percent)



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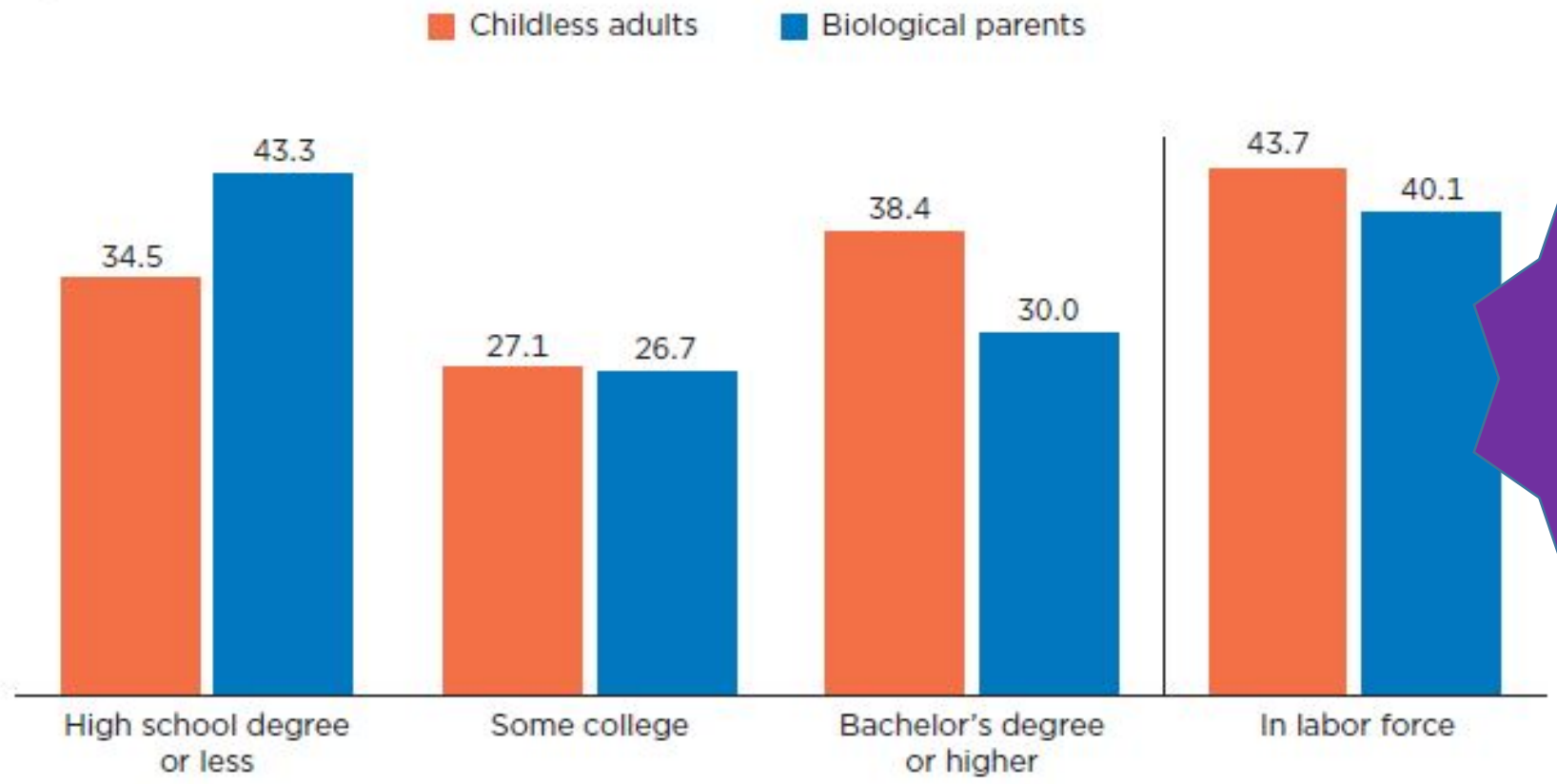
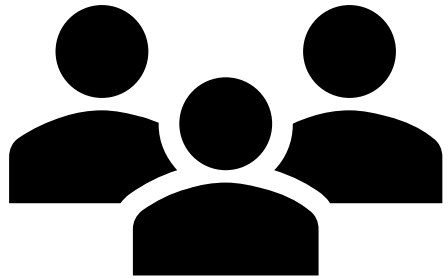


A greater share of childless older adults are currently in the labor force

Note: Childless adults are those who reported having zero biological children.
Source: Valerio et al., 2021.

Available Supports for Childless Older Adults



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Compared to older parents, older childless adults…

67.9% of childless adults have ever been married, compared to 97.4 percent of parents

Marital Histories and Monetary Transfers			
Ever Married	↓	Married Twice	↓
Currently Married	↓	Widowed	↓
Divorced	N.S.	Received money from friends or family in last year	↑

Note: Green arrow denotes a positive significant difference compared to parents, while a red arrow denotes a negative significant difference compared to parents. Statistical significance = $p < .05$. N.S. = not significant.
Source: Valerio et al., 2021.

Compared to older parents, older childless adults…

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Ever Married	↓	Married Twice	↓
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About 2.5 percent of childless adults, but only 1.5 percent of parents, received money from friends or family in the last year

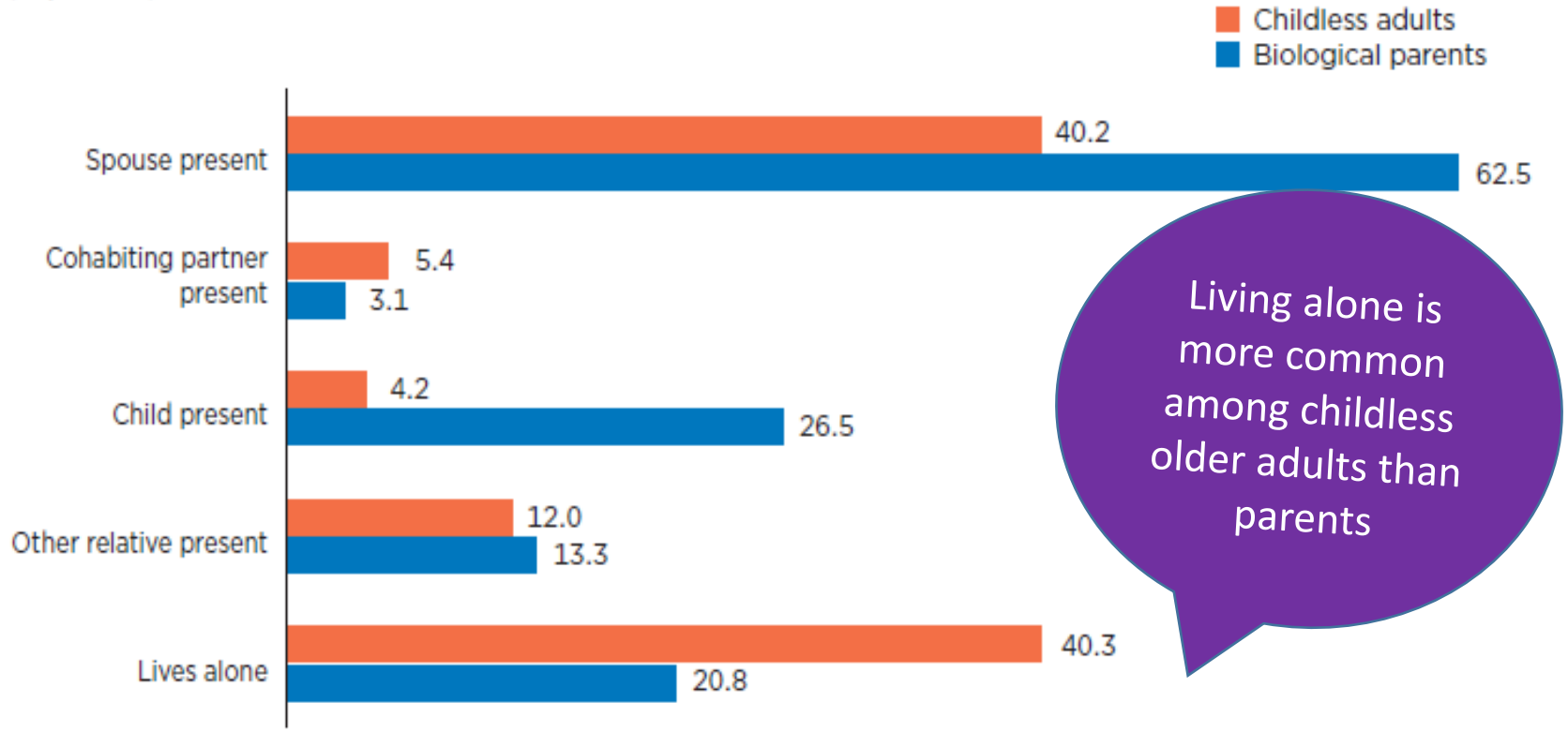
Note: Green arrow denotes a positive significant difference compared to parents, while a red arrow denotes a negative significant difference compared to parents. Statistical significance = $p < .05$. N.S. = not significant.
Source: Valerio et al., 2021.

Living Arrangements

Figure 5.

Household Composition of Childless Adults and Biological Parents Aged 55 and Older: 2018

(In percent)



Note: Childless adults are those who reported having zero biological children. "Child present" includes step or adopted children of childless adults, and biological, step, or adopted children of biological parents. The children may be of any age.

Source: Valerio et al., 2021.

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Childlessness Among Adults Aged 55 and Older by Living Arrangement, Age, and Sex

(Numbers in thousands)

Age	Older adults who live alone			
		Childless adults[2]		
	Total[1]	Number	Percent	Margin of error (±)
Total	**22,100**	**6,114**	**27.7**	**1.0**
55–64	7,747	2,815	36.3	1.9
65–74	6,979	2,081	29.8	1.9
75 and older	7,375	1,219	16.5	1.5
Women	**13,710**	**3,235**	**23.6**	**1.2**
55–64	3,980	1,270	31.9	2.6
65–74	4,380	1,158	26.4	2.2
75 and older	5,348	807	15.1	1.7
Men	**8,394**	**2,879**	**34.3**	**1.9**
55–64	3,767	1,545	41.0	3.0
65–74	2,599	922	35.5	2.9
75 and older	2,027	412	20.3	3.2

About 28% of older adults who live alone are childless

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Source: Valerio et al., 2021.

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Childlessness is more common among older men living alone than older women

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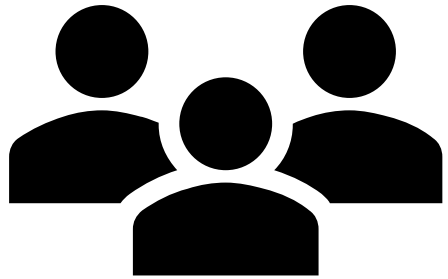
Source: Valerio et al., 2021.

Health and Well-Being



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Compared to older parents, older childless adults…

Have a disability		Family income below poverty line	
Median personal net worth		Experienced food insecurity in the last year	N.S.

About 10.5 million older adults live in households that experienced food insecurity in 2017

Note: Green arrow denotes a positive significant difference compared to parents, while a red arrow denotes a negative significant difference compared to parents. Statistical significance = $p < .05$. N.S. = not significant.
Source: Valerio et al., 2021.

Compared to older childless men, older childless women…

- Have higher median personal net worth than childless men
- Are more likely to consider themselves in excellent, very good, or good health than childless men

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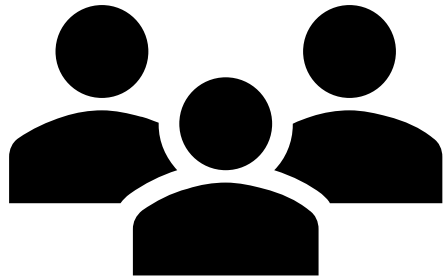
Source: Valerio et al., 2021.

Conclusion

- One in six older adults in the United States is childless (15.2 million)
- Childless older adults have fewer potential supports within their household, but also higher levels of personal net worth and education
- Childless older adult population is multifaceted



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SEHSD
Social, Economic, and Housing Statistics Division

Thank You

Tayelor Valerio

Tayelor.Valerio@census.gov

Fertility and Family Statistics Branch

Social, Economic, and Housing Statistics Division

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Additional Census Bureau Products on Step and Adoptive Families

- Adopted Children and Stepchildren: 2010
- Adopted Children More Likely to Live in Highly Educated Home (census.gov)
- Adoptive Single Parents and Their Children: 2000 (census.gov)
- Comparison of Black and White Adoptive Parents of Black Children (census.gov)
- Contexts of Racial Socialization: Are Transracial Adoptive Families More Like Multiracial or White Monoracial Families? (census.gov)

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