

# KEEPING UP WITH OLDER ADULTS:

## Older Adults, 1999

The characteristics of the older population are heavily influenced by the fact that women live longer than men.

A child born in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century might expect to live 47 years.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the century, life expectancy increased to 74 for men and 79 for women.<sup>2</sup> Futurists debate whether the rapidly growing older population<sup>3</sup> will burden the health care system or trick it by becoming the healthiest generation ever. Today's older adults — those aged 55 and older — are an important consumer market, as well as an influential political force.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau plays an essential role in getting the facts on this dynamic population of older adults.

In 1999, 25 million men and 31 million women were aged 55 and older.

For every 100 women aged 55 and older in 1999, there were only 81 men. This sex ratio dropped steadily with

age, according to the March 1999 Current Population Survey (CPS). For the group aged 55 to 64, there were 92 men for every 100 women. But among people aged 85 and older, there were only 49 men for every 100 women.

Women's longer life span is one reason why older women are more likely to be widowed than older men. Among the population aged 55 and older, 32 percent of women and only 9 percent of men were widowed in 1999. The likelihood that a woman was widowed rose rapidly with age: 13 percent for those aged 55 to 64, 41 percent for those aged 65 to 84, and 77 percent for women aged 85 and older.

Men aged 55 and older were more likely than women that age to be married and living with their spouses in 1999. Among those aged 55 to 64, 77 percent of men and 64 percent of women were married. The gap widened among the older groups. Although 76 percent of men aged 65 to 84 were married, just 46 percent of women that age were. The percent married among the population aged 85 and older was lower for both sexes, 49 percent for men and 12 percent for women.

### Words That Count

- **Life expectancy at birth** is the average number of years that a person would live if he or she experienced the mortality rate at each year of age experienced by the actual population in a specific year.
- **The sex ratio** is the number of men per 100 women. The ratio was about 96 for the United States as a whole in 1999.

College graduation rates, labor force participation rates, and poverty rates differ significantly among older men and women.

For most age groups above age 55, there was no significant difference between the share of men and women who had completed high school. However, older men were more likely than older women to have completed a bachelor's degree or higher. Among people aged 55 to 64, 27 percent of men and 19 percent of women held a bachelor's degree. College graduates accounted for 21 percent of men and 11 percent of women aged 65 to 84 and 17 percent of men and 12 percent of women aged 85 and older.

<sup>1</sup> The average life expectancy at birth in 1900 was 46 for men and 48 for women.

<sup>2</sup> Source: U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics of the United States*, annual, and *National Vital Statistics Reports* (NVSR).

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 2 for population growth rates by age.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 11 for voting by age.

The proportion of older people working or looking for work decreased with age. In 1999, 79 percent of men aged 55 to 59 were in the civilian labor force, compared with 62 percent of women in this age group. By age 60 to 64, the shares dropped to 56 percent and 39 percent, respectively. Among people aged 65 and older, only 16 percent of men and 10 percent of women were labor force participants.

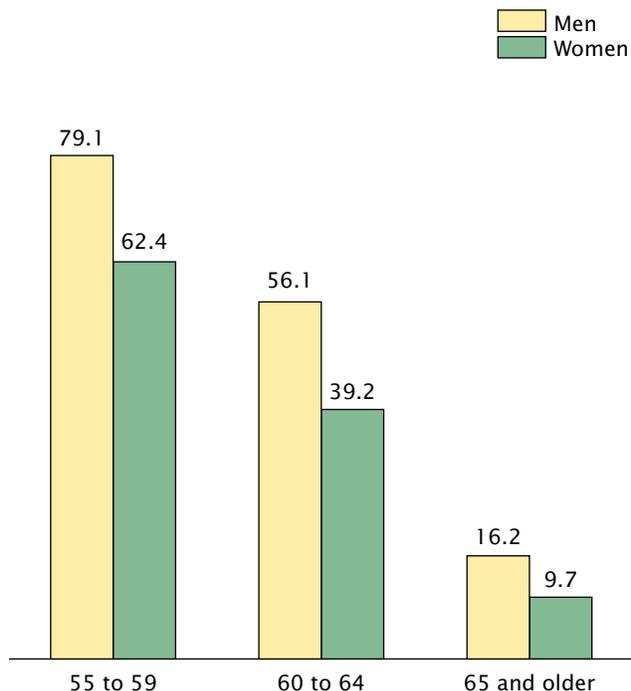
Of the 55 million people aged 55 and older, 10.1 percent were poor in 1998. The poverty rates were 9.6 percent for people aged 55 to 64 and 9.1 percent for people aged 65 to 74, but it was 12.2 percent for those aged 75 and older.<sup>5</sup> In general, older women had higher poverty rates than older men.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>There is no statistical difference between the percent of people in poverty aged 55 to 64 and the percent in poverty aged 55 and older and the percent in poverty aged 65 to 74.

<sup>6</sup>The 1999 Current Population Survey collects poverty statistics for 1998. See Chapter 13 for more information on the 1999 poverty rates by age.

Figure 18-1.  
**Labor Force Participation Rates for Men and Women Aged 55 and Older by Age: 1999**

(Percent of population in each age group)



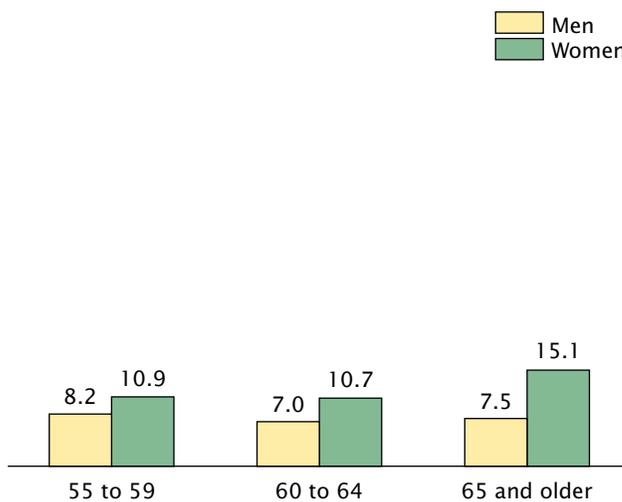
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 1999.

## The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

- For more detailed information consult, the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Report: 2000. *Older Adults in the United States: March 1999* by Denise Smith and Hava Tillipman.
- Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau's World Wide Web site ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). Click on "E" and select "Elderly (65+)/Older (55+) Population Data."
- Contact the Special Populations Staff of the U.S. Census Bureau at 301-457-2378 or e-mail [pop@census.gov](mailto:pop@census.gov).
- For information on publications and other resources, see Appendix A.

Figure 18-2.  
**Poverty Rates for Men and Women Aged 55 and Older by Age: 1998**

(Percent of population in each age group)



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