



Older Women and Poverty: Single & Minority Women

Since the 1970’s, the number of people over the age 65 who are poor has decreased dramatically – from more than 1 in 4 to fewer than 1 in 10 today. Unfortunately, these numbers do not provide the whole picture. For single older and minority women, the reduction in poverty has not been nearly as positive.

What is Poverty? When we say someone is “poor” or falls below the “poverty threshold,” it means that person’s annual income is below the amount considered to be the annual minimum of cash required to support a family of a given size. For a single person age 65 or older in 2017, the poverty threshold was \$11,756. For individuals under the age of 65, the threshold was \$12,752ⁱ.

What are the Poverty Rates for Women? While the poverty rate for all women age 65 and older is 10.6%ⁱⁱ (or just over 1 in 10), the poverty rate for single women living alone is almost twice as high at 19%ⁱⁱⁱ. Older persons living alone are much more likely to be poor (15%) than older persons living with families (6%)^{iv}. The highest poverty rates are experienced among older Hispanic women (41%) who live alone^v. When the measure is raised to 150% or 200% of the poverty threshold—what some call the “near poor”—the data for single older women remains striking.

While Social Security benefits have helped keep many older women out poverty, many immigrants are not eligible for benefits or, if they are eligible, receive lower benefits because they have fewer years of work and lower lifetime earnings in the United States than native-born people. Unfortunately, older Hispanic and Asian women are the least likely to be kept out of poverty because of Social Security because they are less likely eligible for Social Security income^{vi}.

Portion of Older Women Who Are Poor and Near Poor

	Below 100% of Poverty (Threshold \$11,511)	Below 150% of Poverty (Threshold \$17,267)	Below 200% of Poverty (Threshold \$23,022)
Age			
65+	10.6%	23%	35%
65-70	9%	19%	29%
75+	12%	28.4%	42.9%

Source: CPS, Current Population Survey, 2016 Annual Social & Economic Supplement

Minority Women and Retirement Income: Statistics

- By the year 2050, 42% of the 65 and older population will be a minority.^{vii}
- Minority women are less likely to work in jobs covered by pensions. 82% of Hispanic, 68.3% of African American, and 74.2% of Asian American and Pacific Islander women 65 and older received none of their family income from private pension or annuities^{viii}.
- In 2016, the poverty rate for African American women over age 65 was 15%, for Hispanic women it was 20%, for Asian American/Pacific Islander women it was 18%, and for white women, it was 7%.^{ix}
- In 2016, the average Social Security income received by minority women 65 years and older was just at or below the poverty threshold of \$11,511: \$12,640 for African American women, \$11,172 for Hispanic women and \$11,748 for Asian American/Pacific Islander women^x.
- 46% of all elderly unmarried women receiving Social Security benefits relied on Social Security for 90% or more of their income.^{xi}
- For every dollar a white male earns, a Hispanic woman earns 54 cents, an African American woman earns 64 cents, and a White woman earns 79 cents.^{xii} Lower pay means lower likelihood of pension coverage, lower Social Security benefits, and less in savings.
- Social Security is the only source of family income for 45% of Hispanic women and 53% of African American women over age 65.^{xiii}

ⁱ US Department of Commerce; Bureau of the Census, 2017 Poverty Threshold

ⁱⁱ US Census Bureau, 2016 Current Population Survey, Annual Social & Economic Supplement

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Administration on Aging, "A Profile of Older America: 2016"

^v Ibid

^{vi} Caldera, Selena, AARP Public Policy Institute, 2012 Social Security: A Key Retirement Resource for Women

^{vii} U.S. Census Bureau, Profile America Facts for Features 2012

^{viii} National Institute on Retirement Security, "Shortchanged in Retirement" Study, 2016

^{ix} U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, American Community Survey, 2016

^x U.S. Social Security Administration; Social Security is Important for Women Fact Sheet, September 2016

^{xi} Ibid

^{xii} U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

^{xiii} U.S. Social Security Administration, Social Security is Important for Women Fact Sheet, September 2016

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