

SOCIAL SECURITY

FACT SHEET

Women and Social Security

April 2014

Joan Entmacher and Katherine Gallagher Robbins

KEY FACTS

- **The average Social Security benefit for women 65 and older is about \$13,100 per year.**
- **Social Security is virtually the only source of income for nearly three in ten female beneficiaries 65 and older.**
- **Without Social Security, nearly half of women 65 and older would be poor.**
- **Social Security provides benefits to over 3.2 million children and lifted over 1.0 million children out of poverty in 2012.**

Social Security benefits are lower for women than for men

- The average Social Security benefit for women 65 and older is about \$13,100 per year, compared to about \$17,200 for men 65 and older.¹

Women rely even more on income from Social Security than men do

- On average, female beneficiaries 65 and older receive 61 percent of their family income from Social Security, compared to 56 percent for male beneficiaries 65 and older.²
- For three in ten female beneficiaries 65 and older (30 percent), Social Security is virtually the only source of income (90 percent or more). Just over two in ten male beneficiaries (23 percent) rely on Social Security for 90 percent or more of their income.³
- The percentage of female beneficiaries who rely on Social Security for virtually all of their income almost doubles with age: from 20 percent for women 65-69 to 39 percent for women 80 and older. Male beneficiaries' reliance on Social Security increases with age to a lesser extent: from 16 percent for men 65-69 to 30 percent for men 80 and older.⁴

Unmarried women rely more on income from Social Security than married women do

- For 36 percent of unmarried female beneficiaries 65 and older, including beneficiaries who are widowed, divorced, or never married, Social Security is virtually the only source of income (90 percent or more), compared to 21 percent of married female beneficiaries 65 and older.⁵

Social Security provides disability and life insurance benefits that are especially important to women of color and their families

- Minority women disproportionately rely on Social Security disability benefits.
 - More than one in four black women (26 percent) and more than one in five other women of color (21 percent) who receive Social Security receive benefits as disabled workers. In comparison, 12 percent of white women who receive Social Security receive benefits as disabled workers.⁶
- Social Security provides a lifeline to families when a worker is disabled or dies.
 - More than 3.2 million children receive Social Security benefits.⁷
 - Children of color disproportionately rely on Social Security. While children are six percent of all beneficiaries, children are 12 percent of black beneficiaries and 14 percent of other beneficiaries of color.⁸

Social Security is a critical anti-poverty program for women and their families

- Social Security lifted nearly 22.2 million people out of poverty in 2012:
 - Nearly 15.3 million people 65 and older, including 9.0 million women;

- Almost 5.9 million adults 18-64, including over 3.1 million women; and
- 1.0 million children.
- Social Security dramatically reduced poverty rates for older women in 2012:
 - From nearly one half (49 percent) to 11 percent for all women 65 and older; and
 - From two-thirds (67 percent) to 19 percent for women 65 and older living alone.⁹

Despite Social Security, older women remain at greater risk of poverty than older men

- Among people 65 and older, more than twice as many women (over 2.6 million) as men (nearly 1.3 million) lived in poverty in 2012.
- The poverty rate for women 65 and older was 11 percent, compared to seven percent for men 65 and older.
- The poverty rate for women 65 and older living alone was 19 percent, compared to 12 percent for men 65 and older living alone.
- Poverty rates were particularly high, at about one in five, for black (21 percent) and Hispanic (22 percent) women 65 and older and more than one in four (27 percent) for Native American women 65 and older. Poverty rates were nine percent for white, non-Hispanic women 65 and older, and 12 percent for Asian women 65 and older.¹⁰

1 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Social Security Administration, Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, 2013 (Feb. 2014), Table 5.A16-Number and average monthly benefit for adult beneficiaries, by sex, type of benefit, and age, December 2012, *available at* <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2013/5a.html>. The average monthly benefit for all female beneficiaries 65 and older was \$1,090.82, or about \$13,090 per year as of December 2012, compared to \$1,431.23 per month, or \$17,175 per year for all male beneficiaries 65 and older. Benefits are slightly higher for both women and men receiving benefits as retired workers.

2 U.S. Social Security Administration, Income of the Population 55 or Older, 2012 (April 2014), *available at* http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/income_pop55/ at Table 9.B1 Percentage distribution of persons in beneficiary families, sex and age, 2012.

3 *Ibid.* at Table 9.B1 Percentage distribution of persons in beneficiary families, by source of family income, sex and age, 2012.

4 *Ibid.* at Table 9.B2 Percentage distribution of persons in beneficiary families, by income source, sex and age, 2012.

5 *Ibid.* at Table 9.B3 Percentage distribution of persons in beneficiary families, by sex and marital status, 2012.

6 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Social Security Administration, Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, 2010 (February 2011), *available at* <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2010/5a.html> at Table 5.A7 Number and average monthly benefit for women, by type of benefit, basis of entitlement, and race, December 2009. Data reported for "White," "Black" and "Other." Data for people of different racial or ethnic groups were not updated in the Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, 2013.

7 *Supra* note 1 at Table 5.A6 Number and average monthly benefit, by age, type of benefit, and sex, December 2012. "Children" refers to children under 18.

8 *Supra* note 6 at Table 5.A6 Number and average monthly benefit, by age, sex, type of benefit, and race, December 2009. "Children" refers to children under 18. Data for people of different racial or ethnic groups were not updated in the Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, 2013.

9 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2013 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (using CPS Table Creator), *available at* <http://www.census.gov/cps/data/cpstablecreator.html>.

10 NWLC, Insecure and Unequal: Poverty and Income Among Women and Families, 2000-2012 (Sept. 2013) *available at* http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/final_2013_nwlc_povertyreport.pdf.