

Women and Social Security: Key Facts

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- Social Security is virtually the only source of income for one in four women 65 and older.
- The average Social Security benefit for women 65 and older is about \$12,000 per year.
- Without Social Security, half of women 65 and older would be poor.
- Social Security provides benefits to 3.1 million children and lifted 1.1 million children out of poverty in 2009.

➤ **Women rely more on income from Social Security than men do.**

- For more than one in four women 65 and older (26 percent), Social Security is virtually the only source of income (90 percent or more). Fewer than one in five men (19 percent) rely on Social Security for 90 percent or more of their income.¹
- The percentage of women who rely on Social Security for virtually all of their income doubles as they age: from 18 percent for women 65-69 to 35 percent for women 80 and older. Men's reliance on Social Security increases with age to a lesser extent: from 14 percent for men 65-59 to 23 percent for men 80 and older.²
- On average, women 65 and older receive more than half of their family income (54 percent) from Social Security, compared to slightly less than half (48 percent) for men 65 and older.³

➤ **Social Security benefits are lower for women than for men.**

- The average Social Security benefit for women 65 and older is about \$12,000 per year, compared to nearly \$16,000 for men 65 and older.⁴

➤ **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.
 - Nearly one in four African-American women and other women of color who receive Social Security receive benefits as disabled workers (25 percent and 23 percent, respectively). In comparison, about one in seven white men (14 percent) and one in nine white women (11 percent) who receive Social Security receive benefits as disabled workers.⁵
- Social Security provides a lifeline to families when a worker is disabled or dies.
 - 3.1 million children receive Social Security benefits
 - Children of color disproportionately rely on Social Security. While 6 percent of all beneficiaries are children, 12 percent of African American beneficiaries, and 16 percent of other beneficiaries of color, are children.⁶

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

- Social Security lifted 20.5 million people out of poverty in 2009:⁷
 - 13.9 million people 65 and older, including 8.5 million women;
 - 5.4 million adults ages 18-64, including nearly 2.9 million women; and
 - 1.1 million children.⁸
- Social Security dramatically reduced poverty rates for older women in 2009:
 - from one half (49 percent) to 11 percent for all women 65 and older; and
 - from two-thirds (66 percent) to 17 percent for women 65 and older living alone.⁹

➤ **Despite Social Security, older women remain at greater risk of poverty and economic insecurity than older men.**

- Among people 65 and older, more than twice as many women (2.3 million) as men (1.1 million) lived in poverty in 2009.
- The poverty rate for women 65 and older was 11 percent, 4 percentage points higher than the poverty rate for men 65 and older (7 percent).
- The poverty rate for women 65 and older living alone was 17 percent, compared to 12 percent for men 65 and older living alone.
- Poverty rates were particularly high, at over one in five, for Black (22 percent), Hispanic (21 percent), and Native American (22 percent) women 65 and older. The poverty rate was 8 percent for White, non-Hispanic women 65 and older and 15 percent for Asian women 65 and older.¹⁰

¹ U.S. Social Security Administration, *Income of the Population 55 or Older, 2008* (April 2010), available at http://www.socialsecurity.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/income_pop55/2008/. Table 8.B1 “Percentage distribution, by source of family income, sex and age, 2008”. (SSA “Income of the Population 55 or Older, 2008”)

² *Id.* at Table 8.B2 “Percentage distribution, by income source, sex and age, 2008”.

³ *Id.* at Table 8.B1 “Percentage distribution, by source of family income, sex and age, 2008”.

⁴ The average monthly benefit for all female beneficiaries 65 and older was \$999.20, or \$11,990.40 per year as of December 2009, compared to \$1,320.80 per month, or \$15,849.60 per year for all male beneficiaries 65 and older. Benefits are slightly higher for both women and men receiving benefits as retired workers. U.S. Social Security Administration, *Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, 2010* available at <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2010/5a.html#table5.a16>. Table 5.A16. (last visited Jan. 18, 2010)

⁵ NWLC calculations based on U.S. Social Security Administration, *Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, 2009* (February 2010), available at <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2009/supplement09.pdf> at 5.1, 5.6, 5.27 & 5.28, Tables 5.A1, 5A1.2, 5.A6 & 5.A7. (SSA “Annual Statistical Supplement, 2009”). Data reported for “White,” “Black” and “Other.”

⁶ *Id.* at Table 5.A6. “Children” refers to children under 18.

⁷ NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement* (2010) (using CPS Table Creator II, available at http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstc/apm/cpstc_altpov.html). The anti-poverty impact of Social Security was boosted in 2009 by an unusually large 5.8 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to Social Security payments because the COLA for this year was calculated during a spike in oil prices in 2008. The \$250 Economic Recovery Payments provided to recipients of Social Security and certain other programs in 2009 as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act are not included in these calculations.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009 – Report and Detailed Tables* (last visited January. 16, 2010), available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/incpovhlth/2009/index.html>.