



POVERTY & ECONOMIC SECURITY

WOMEN AND SOCIAL SECURITY

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KEY FACTS

- **Nearly two in three Social Security beneficiaries 65 and older are women.**
- **The average Social Security benefit for women 65 and older is about \$14,270 per year.**
- **Social Security is virtually the only source of income for more than one in four female beneficiaries 65 and older.**
- **Without Social Security, more than two in five women 65 and older would have been poor in 2017.**
- **Social Security lifted more than 1.1 million children out of poverty in 2017.**

- For more than one in four women beneficiaries 65 and older (27 percent), Social Security is virtually the only source of income (90 percent or more). Just over two in ten men beneficiaries 65 and older (21 percent) rely on Social Security for 90 percent or more of their income.⁴
- The percentage of women beneficiaries who rely on Social Security for virtually all of their income increases sharply with age: from about 20 percent for women 65-69 to 36 percent for women 80 and older. Men beneficiaries' reliance on Social Security also increases with age, but to a lesser extent: from 16 percent for men 65-69 to 28 percent for men 80 and older.⁵

Most Social Security beneficiaries are women.

- Women make up more than half (55.6 percent) of Social Security beneficiaries 62 and older and nearly two in three (65 percent) of beneficiaries 65 and older.¹

Social Security benefits are lower for women than for men.

- The average Social Security benefit for women 65 and older is about \$14,270 per year, compared to about \$18,375 for men 65 and older.²

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

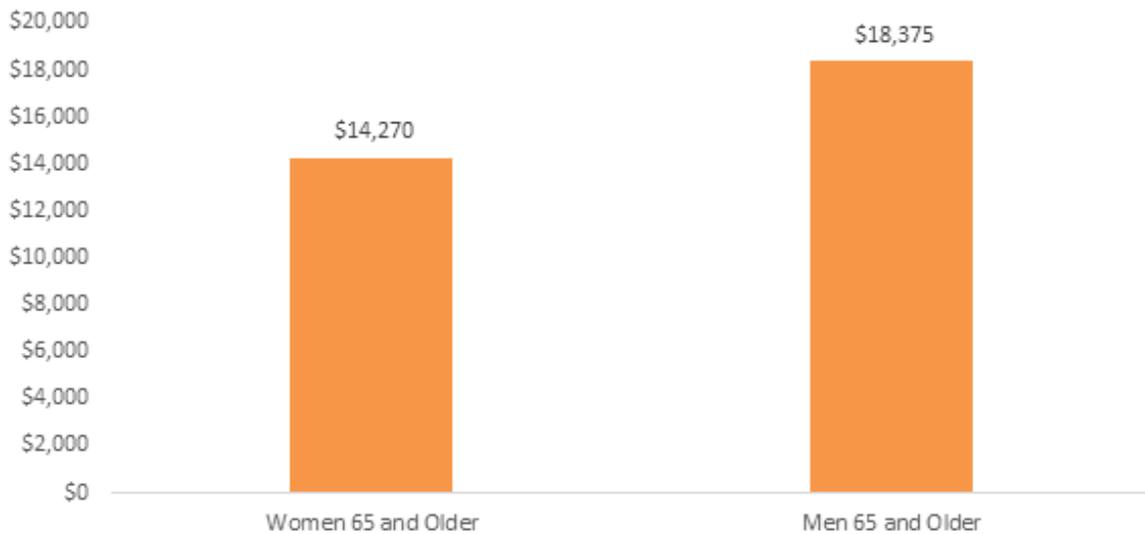
- On average, women beneficiaries 65 and older receive 58 percent of their family income from Social Security, compared to 53 percent for men beneficiaries 65 and older.³

Social Security income is particularly important to unmarried women.

- On average, unmarried women beneficiaries 65 and older, including beneficiaries who are widowed, divorced, or never married, receive 63 percent of their family income from Social Security, compared to 53 percent of married women beneficiaries.⁶
- For 34 percent of unmarried women beneficiaries 65 and older, Social Security is virtually the only source of income (90 percent or more), compared to 20 percent of married women beneficiaries 65 and older.⁷



Average Annual Social Security Benefit, December 2016



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

- Social Security lifted more than 22 million people out of poverty in 2017, including:
 - More than 15.3 million people 65 and older, including more than 9 million women;
 - More than 5.6 million adults 18-64, including more than 2.9 million women; and
 - More than 1.1 million children.¹⁰
- Social Security dramatically reduced poverty rates for older women in 2017:
 - From more than two in five (42.9 percent) to 10.5 percent for all women 65 and older; and
 - More than six in ten (62.3 percent) to 18.3 percent for women 65 and older living alone.¹¹

Poverty Rates With and Without Social Security Income, 2017



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

- Women made up nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of all people in poverty 65 and older in 2017.
- The poverty rate for women 65 and older was 11 percent, compared 8 percent for men 65 and older.⁸
- The poverty rate for women 65 and older living alone was 18 percent, compared to 15 percent for men 65 and older living alone.⁹



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- ¹ U.S. Social Security Administration, Social Security is Important to Women factsheet (Aug. 2018), available at <https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/factsheets/women-alt.pdf>.
 - ² NWLC calculations based on U.S. Social Security Administration, Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, 2017 (Mar. 2018), Table 5.A16- Number and average monthly benefit for adult beneficiaries, by sex, type of benefit, and age, December 2016, available at <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2017/5a.html>. The average monthly benefit for all female beneficiaries 65 and older was \$1,188.91, or about \$14,267 per year as of December 2016, compared to \$1,531.18 per month, or \$18,374 per year for all male beneficiaries 65 and older. Benefits are slightly higher for both women and men receiving benefits as retired workers.
 - ³ U.S. Social Security Administration, Income of the Population 55 or Older, 2014 (April 2016), 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, 2014.
 - ⁴ Id. At Table 9.B1 Percentage distribution of persons in beneficiary families, by source of family income, sex and age, 2014.
 - ⁵ Id. At Table 9.B2 Percentage distribution of persons in beneficiary families, by income source, sex and age, 2014.
 - ⁶ Id. At Table 9.B3 Percentage distribution of persons in beneficiary families, by sex and marital status, 2014.
 - ⁷ Id. At Table 9.B3 Percentage distribution of persons in beneficiary families, by sex and marital status, 2014.
 - ⁸ NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2018 Annual Social and Economic Supplement using Table Creator, <http://www.census.gov/cps/data/cpstablecreator.html> (last visited Apr. 12, 2019).
 - ⁹ Id.
 - ¹⁰ In addition, the poverty rate for white, non-Hispanic women 65 and older was 8 percent, and the rate for Asian women 65 and older was 12 percent.
 - ¹¹ Meika Berlan & Morgan Harwood, NWLC, National Snapshot: Poverty Among Women & Families, 2017 (Sept. 2018), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/national-snapshot-poverty-among-women-families-2018/>.

