

OLDER ADULTS IN 2005

Today's older adults—those aged 55 and older—are an important consumer market, as well as an influential political force.¹ The U.S. Census Bureau plays an essential role in getting the facts on this dynamic population. Data on the older population in this chapter come from the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program and the Current Population Survey's Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC).

On average, boys born in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century could expect to live 46 years, while girls born at the same time could expect to live 48 years. Sex differences in life expectancy peaked in 1979 at 7.8 years but have been narrowing ever since. In 2003, life expectancy at birth was 75 years for boys and 80 years for girls. A person who reached age 55 in 2003 could expect to live another 26 years.²

Population Growth

Between 2000 and 2005, the resident population aged 55 and older increased 13 percent—to 67.1 million.³ This rate of growth was more than four times the rate for residents under age 55 (3 percent). Within the older population, certain segments grew faster while others grew slower, as shown in Figure 1.

Fueled by the aging of the Baby Boom generation, the growth rate was especially rapid among the population aged 55 to 64.⁴ In 2005, the oldest members of the Baby Boom turned 59, and the number of people aged 55 to 64 increased 25 percent—to 30.4 million.

Although the total population aged 65 and older increased by 5 percent between 2000 and 2005, there were sharp differences in the rate of growth for

¹ See chapter on voting and registration for information on voting by age.

² Source: U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics of the United States*.

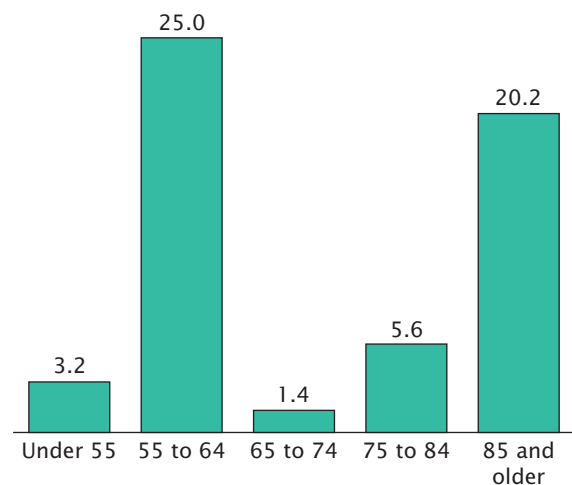
³ The resident population includes all people living in the United States.

⁴ The Baby Boom generation is the large cohort of people born from 1946 to 1964.

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.

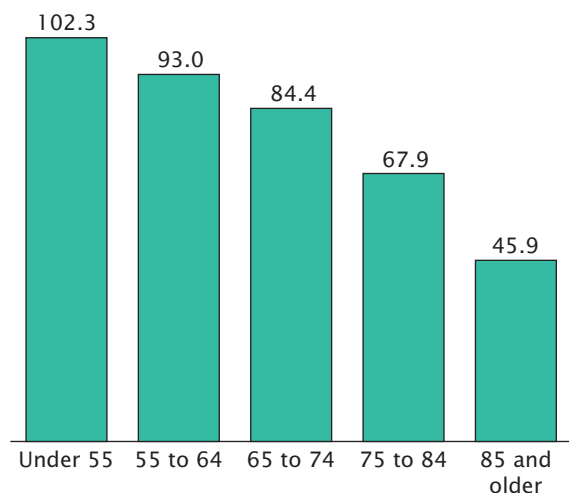
Figure 1.
Percent Change in the Resident Population by Age: 2000 to 2005



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, April 1, 2000, and July 1, 2005.

populations aged 65 to 84 and those aged 85 and older. Slower growth among the groups aged 65 to 74 and aged 75 to 84 was largely the result of lower birth rates during the late 1920s and 1930s. The population aged 65 to 74 increased 1.4 percent to 18.6 million, while the population 75 to 84 increased 5.6 percent to 13.1 million. As lifespan increased, rapid growth was also evident among the group aged 85 and older. This group expanded 20 percent—to 5.1 million.

Figure 2.
Sex Ratios by Age: 2005
 (Number of male residents per 100 female residents)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2005.

Sex Ratios

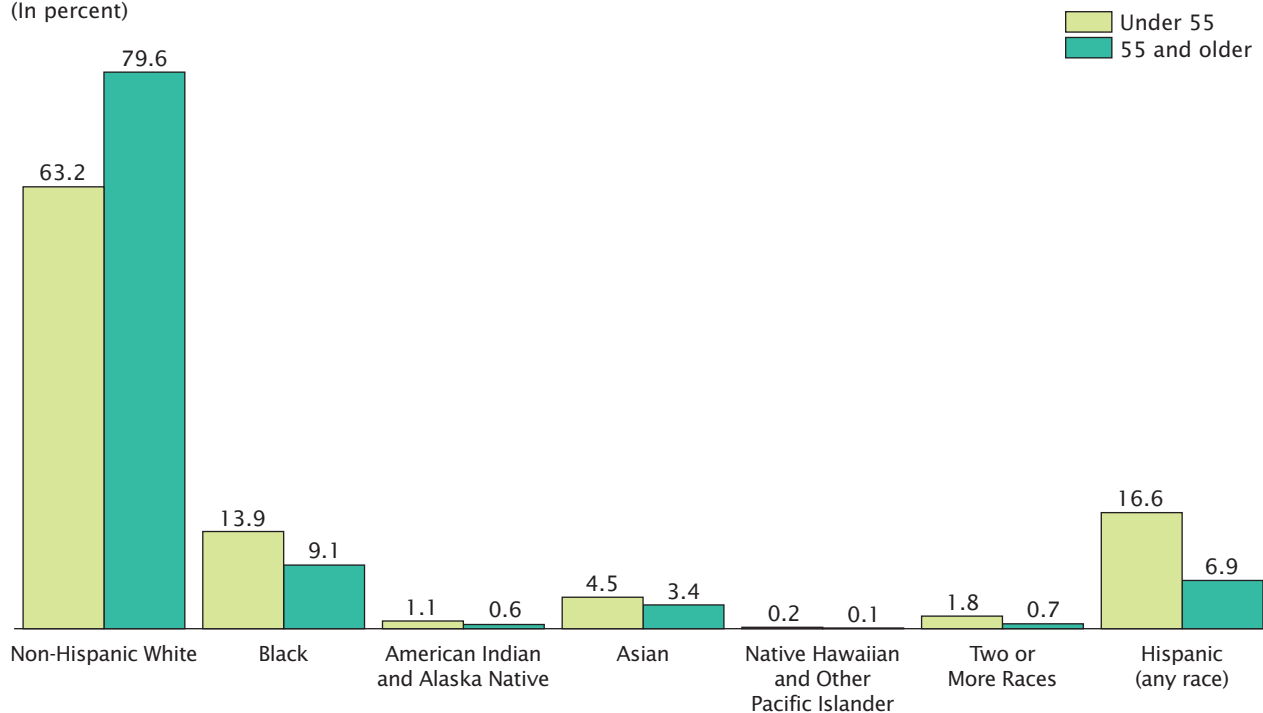
In 2005, 30.0 million men and 37.1 million women in the resident population of the United States were aged 55 and older. Among this older population, there were 81 males for every 100 females, compared with 102 male residents for every 100 female residents in the group under age 55. The sex ratio decreased as the population aged.⁵ While the ratio was 93 for people aged 55 to 64, it was 46 for those aged 85 and older, as shown in Figure 2.

Diversity

In 2005, the non-Hispanic White population accounted for 63 percent of residents under age 55 and 80 percent of residents aged 55 and older. While the proportion of non-Hispanic Whites was larger in the older population than in the younger population, the proportion of other

⁵ The sex ratio is the number of males per 100 females. See the chapters on age and sex and on women and men for more information on sex ratios.

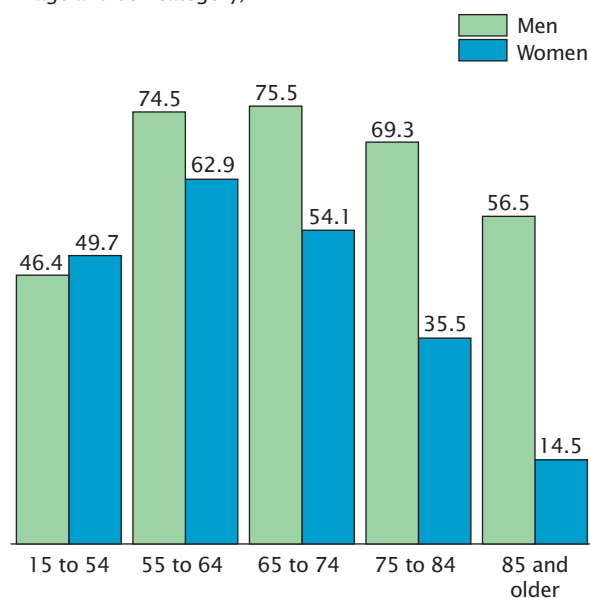
Figure 3.
Race and Hispanic Origin for the Resident Population by Age: 2005
 (In percent)



Note: All racial categories are single-race categories, except for the Two or More Races category.
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2005.

Figure 4.
Percent Married and Living With a Spouse by Age and Sex: 2005

(As a percent of total civilian noninstitutionalized population in age and sex category)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2005.

racial and ethnic groups was smaller in the older population than in the younger population, as shown in Figure 3. Among the population aged 85 and older, 85 percent were non-Hispanic White.

Marital Status

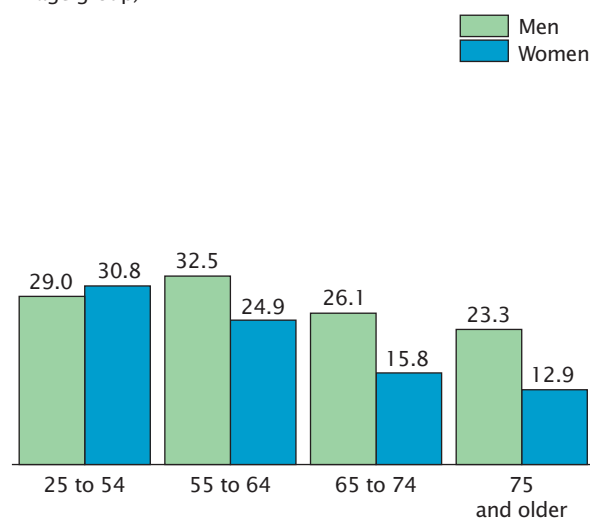
Among people aged 15 to 54, a larger proportion of women (50 percent) than men (46 percent) were married and living with their spouse in 2005, according to data on the civilian noninstitutionalized population from the ASEC. The situation reversed among those aged 55 and older—with 51 percent of women and 74 percent of men living with their spouse. This marriage gap widened as people aged, as shown in Figure 4. For those aged 55 to 64, 63 percent of women and 75 percent of men lived with their spouse.⁶ Among those aged 85 and older, 15 percent of women and 57 percent of men lived with their spouse.

Because women have longer life expectancies than men, it is not surprising that they were more likely to be widowed than men. Among all people aged 55 and

⁶ The percentage of men aged 55 to 64 living with their spouse is not statistically different from the percentage of men aged 55 and older living with their spouse.

Figure 5.
Adults With a Bachelor's Degree or More Education by Age and Sex: 2005

(Percentage of the civilian noninstitutionalized population in age group)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2005.

older in 2005, 28 percent of women and 8 percent of men were widowed. Twelve percent of men and 14 percent of women were divorced or separated. About 5 percent of both men and women in this age group had never married.⁷

Education

Eighty-two percent of the population aged 55 and older were high school graduates, compared with 88 percent of those aged 25 to 54, according to the 2005 ASEC. Graduation rates were lowest among the oldest population. While 86 percent of people aged 55 to 64 were high school graduates, the percentage dropped to 78 percent among those aged 65 to 74 and 70 percent among those aged 75 and older.

Among the older population age groups, differences in high school graduation rates between the sexes were small and not always statistically significant.⁸ In contrast, women aged 25 to 54 were more likely than men that age to have a high school diploma—89 percent and 87 percent, respectively.

⁷ The percentage of older men and women this age who had never been married is statistically different, with 5.4 percent of men and 4.9 percent of women in this category.

⁸ The apparent difference between the high school graduation rates for men and women aged 65 to 74 (78 percent and 77 percent, respectively) was not statistically different.

Older men were more likely than older women to have a bachelor's degree or more education, as shown in Figure 5. Among the population aged 25 to 54, women (31 percent) were more likely to have a bachelor's degree or more than men (29 percent).

Economic Indicators

In 1959, 35 percent of the population aged 65 and older lived in poverty. In 2005, the poverty rate for people aged 65 and older remained 10 percent, statistically unchanged from the previous year, according to the 2006 ASEC. This rate was lower than the rates for adults aged 18 to 64 (11 percent) and children under age 18 (18 percent).

Since the 1950s, the labor force participation rate for men aged 65 and older has fallen, while the rate for women this age has changed little over the decades. Between 1950 and 1985, the labor force participation rate for men in this age group fell from 46 percent to 16 percent. The rate remained statistically unchanged from 1985 to 1993 and then began to rise to 19 percent in 2003. In 2003, the labor force participation rate for women aged 65 and older, 11 percent, was not statistically different from the rate in 1950.

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

Consult the following Census Bureau Current Population Reports: *The Older Population in the United States: March 2002* (P20-546) by Denise Smith and *65+ in the United States: 2005* (P23-209) by Wan He, Manisha Sengupta, Victoria A. Velkoff, and Kimberly A. DeBarros.

Look for complete reports and updated detailed tables on the Census Bureau's Web site <www.census.gov>. Click on "Subjects A to Z," then click on "O" and select "Older (55+) Population Data."

Contact the Census Bureau's Demographic Call Center (toll-free) at 1-866-758-1060.

E-mail <ask.census.gov>.

See Appendix A for information on the accuracy of the estimates.