

# Recipients of Old-Age Assistance: Their Housing Arrangements

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*As part of a nationwide study of recipients of old-age assistance sponsored by the Bureau of Public Assistance in early 1953, the State agencies administering the assistance programs collected information on the housing arrangements of the recipients. No attempt was made to measure adequacy; only objective elements—space, for example, and the number of persons in the household—were considered.*

IN 1953 the Bureau of Public Assistance sponsored a nationwide study of the requirements, incomes, resources, and social characteristics of recipients of old-age assistance. All but four jurisdictions—Alaska, Puerto Rico, Vermont, and the Virgin Islands—made such a study on a sample basis and in accordance with the plan developed by the Bureau.<sup>1</sup>

In response to many requests, data about the housing characteristics of recipients were included in the study plan. Subjective judgments about the adequacy of housing were not attempted. It was considered feasible, however, to secure information re-

garding the number of rooms in the home, number of persons in the household, and the absence or presence of such facilities as electricity, running water, and telephone, as well as some data on the availability of cooking, refrigeration, and sanitary facilities.

Other aspects of the study have indicated that recipients of old-age assistance are, on the average, not only past the minimum age of 65 required for eligibility but that they are about 10 years older. Women outnumber men in the group by almost 3 to 2, and, as might be anticipated, a great many of the women are widowed. It was also found that the recipients of old-age assistance live to a greater extent in small towns and rural areas than does the total population or the general aged population. All these basic characteristics affect the kinds of housing occupied by recipients.

For a comparison to be most meaningful, the housing of aged recipients of assistance would be considered in relation to that of the total aged population. Such a comparison is not possible, however, because only limited information is available regarding the housing of the total aged population. For this reason, the following analysis is based on comparisons of the housing characteristics of recipients of old-age assistance not in institutions with those of the general population of the continental United States, as recorded in the 1950 Census of Housing. The regions for which comparisons are made correspond with the geographic divisions used by the Bureau of the Cen-

sus.<sup>2</sup> The data on recipients' housing are for old-age assistance recipients not in institutions in 47 of the jurisdictions in the continental United States; Vermont did not participate in the study, and data on recipients' housing were not available in Maryland.

## Size of Households

Recipients of old-age assistance live alone much more frequently than persons in the general population. At the time of the study, nearly a third of the recipients (31 percent) lived in one-person households, compared with 9 percent of the general population.<sup>3</sup> Both proportions showed considerable variation among different parts of the country, but they were lowest in the South Atlantic and East South Central States. In general, the data indicate that recipients live alone most frequently in the regions where income levels of the general population are relatively higher and assistance payments are relatively closer to adequacy.

Households consisting of two per-

<sup>2</sup> These divisions and the States comprising them are as follows—New England: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont; Middle Atlantic: New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania; East North Central: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin; West North Central: Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota; South Atlantic: Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia; East South Central: Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee; West South Central: Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas; Mountain: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming; Pacific: California, Oregon, and Washington.

<sup>3</sup> In 1953 about a sixth of the general aged population lived alone or with non-relatives only. The greater frequency of one-person households among aged recipients probably reflects the greater extent of widowhood among aged recipients and the fact that childless aged individuals have a higher probability of receiving assistance than do aged parents.

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<sup>1</sup> For study data reported in earlier issues of the *Social Security Bulletin*, see Charles E. Hawkins, "Recipients of Old-Age Assistance: Income and Resources" (April 1956); Charles E. Hawkins, "Recipients of Old-Age Assistance: Their Requirements" (February 1957); Frank J. Hanmer, "Recipients of Old-Age Assistance: Personal and Social Characteristics" (April 1957); and Saul Kaplan, "Old-Age Assistance: Children's Contributions to Aged Parents" (June 1957). For tabular data by State and highlights from the study, see *Recipients of Old-Age Assistance in Early 1953 (Part I—State Data)*, Public Assistance Report No. 26, June 1955; cross tabulations for the Nation and analysis of national data are to be published as Part II of the same report.

**Table 1.—Households of old-age assistance recipients<sup>1</sup> and of the general population<sup>2</sup>; Median number of persons in household and median number of rooms in home**

Geographic region	Median number of persons in household		Median number of rooms in home	
	Old-age assistance recipients	All households	Old-age assistance recipients	All households
Total.....	2.0	3.1	3.9	4.7
New England.....	2.0	3.1	4.4	5.2
Middle Atlantic.....	1.8	3.1	3.8	5.0
East North Central.....	2.0	3.0	4.2	5.0
West North Central.....	1.8	2.9	3.8	4.9
South Atlantic.....	2.4	3.3	4.0	4.6
East South Central.....	2.4	3.3	3.6	4.2
West South Central.....	2.1	3.0	3.9	4.2
Mountain.....	1.8	3.0	3.4	4.1
Pacific.....	1.8	2.7	3.8	4.4

<sup>1</sup> Continental United States, except for Maryland and Vermont, for which 1953 study data are not available.

<sup>2</sup> Continental United States; based on data for occupied dwelling units from 1950 Census of Housing.

sons were nearly a third again as frequent among old-age assistance recipients as among the general population, but households with three or more persons were substantially less frequent. Though fully two-thirds of the recipients lived in households consisting of one or two persons, only slightly more than one-third of the general population lived in such households. Appreciable numbers of recipients of old-age assistance, however, were members of relatively large households. About 10 percent of the recipients lived in a household of five or more members and nearly 2 percent in households with eight or more members. These two proportions were approximately doubled in the South Atlantic and East South Central States and were less than half as large in the Pacific region.

Nationally, the median number of persons in households in which old-age assistance recipients lived was 2.0, or slightly less than two-thirds the median size (3.1 persons) of all households in the general population (table 1).

### Number of Rooms in Home

In the Nation as a whole, the median size of homes in which old-age assistance recipients lived was approximately four rooms. One-room

establishments were occupied by approximately 1 out of 10 recipients—a finding that strongly suggests the furnished room or similar accommodation as a common type of housing for the relatively high proportion of recipients living alone. The proportion of recipients living in one room was higher in the Middle Atlantic States than in any other section of the country. At the other end of the scale, more than 5 percent of the recipients lived in homes with seven or more rooms and more than 15 percent in homes with six or more rooms. The sizable proportion of old-age assistance recipients living in larger homes reflects the fact that relatively more recipients than persons in the general population live in rural areas and in small towns, where homes tend to be somewhat larger, in terms of the number of rooms, than homes in urban areas. Larger homes were most frequent in New England, and they were least frequent in the East South Central region—one of the two regions where the median number of persons in recipients' households was found to be largest.

The median number of rooms in the recipients' homes was 3.9, or approximately 80 percent of the median of 4.7 rooms for all households (table 1.) When the median number of persons in the household (2.0 for recipients and 3.1 for the general population) is related to the median number of rooms, old-age assistance recipients had somewhat more space—more rooms per person—than did the general population.

### Electricity

Electricity is today generally available in the homes both of the general population and of old-age assistance recipients (table 2). For the country as a whole, data from the 1950 Census indicate that 92 percent of all households had electricity. Among old-age assistance recipients early in 1953, 88 percent were reported to have this utility. The 4-point difference between these national percentages is attributable almost entirely to the South Atlantic and East South Central regions. Both for the recipients and for the general population, electricity was available to a lesser extent in these regions

than elsewhere in the country. Moreover, in these regions the assistance recipients fared substantially less well in relation to the availability of electricity than did their neighbors. In the East South Central region, 80 percent of all households but only 68 percent of old-age assistance recipients had electric power. In the South Atlantic States the percentage for all households was 87, and for the assistance recipients it was 79. In all other sections of the country the proportions were about the same.

The type of community in which a recipient of old-age assistance lives affects the likelihood of his having electric power. In 1953 the percentage of recipients having electric power in urban areas (communities of 2,500 or more) was 96. At the other extreme, on farms, it was 68 percent. In smaller towns and villages and other rural-nonfarm areas the percentage was 83.

A marked difference was found in the extent to which white and nonwhite recipients had electric power. For 93 percent of the white recipients, electricity was available; the proportion rose to 98 percent for those in communities of 2,500 or more and dropped only to 79 percent for those living on farms. In contrast, for the nonwhite recipients the overall percentage was 67, with 86 percent of those who lived in urban communities but only 41 percent of those living on farms having electricity. These differences may reflect the generally

**Table 2.—Households of old-age assistance recipients<sup>1</sup> and of the general population<sup>2</sup>; Percent with electricity**

Geographic region	Percent with electricity	
	Old-age assistance recipients	All households
Total.....	88	92
New England.....	97	96
Middle Atlantic.....	95	97
East North Central.....	94	96
West North Central.....	90	90
South Atlantic.....	79	87
East South Central.....	68	80
West South Central.....	86	86
Mountain.....	90	90
Pacific.....	98	97

<sup>1</sup> Continental United States, except for Maryland and Vermont, for which 1953 study data are not available.

<sup>2</sup> Continental United States; based on data for occupied dwelling units from 1950 Census of Housing.

lower level of living of the nonwhite population; they may also be in part attributable to the geographic location of the nonwhite recipients, since they were concentrated in the two regions where electricity was least often available for both recipients and the general population.

### Refrigeration

Electrical, gas, or other mechanical refrigeration has become common among households in the general population. In the 1950 Census, 79 percent of all households were reported to have such refrigeration, 10 percent used ice, and a slightly smaller proportion had some other type of cooling or had no refrigeration available. Although mechanical refrigeration was less frequently found in the homes of recipients of old-age assistance, the extent to which it was found was substantial. In the country as a whole, 55 percent of the recipients had mechanical refrigeration. Percentages were again low in the South Atlantic and East South Central regions, 44 percent and 30 percent, respectively (table 3). In all other regions a majority of the recipients had mechanical refrigeration; the proportion was largest in the West South Central region—62 percent. Ice was used as a means of refrigeration by a somewhat larger proportion of the assistance recipients (16 percent) than of households in the general population. Re-

cipients used other types of refrigeration or had no refrigeration of any kind about twice as often as did the population in general; the proportions were 21 percent for all recipients and ranged from 11 percent in the West South Central States to 36 percent in the East South Central States.

Some kind of refrigeration was more common for the recipients in urban areas than for those in rural areas. The range was from 65 percent of the recipients on farms to 81 percent of those in urban communities. There was relatively little difference, however, between white and nonwhite recipients in the extent to which they had this facility.

### Telephone

The 1950 Census of Housing did not provide information on the extent to which households in the general population had telephones, but information on the availability of telephone service to old-age assistance recipients was secured in the 1953 study.

Many States recognize the need for a telephone as a requirement of recipients only in special circumstances, such as illness. It is therefore not surprising that telephones are much less frequently found among recipients than such facilities as electricity and refrigeration. More than a third of the recipients of old-age assistance, however, either had a telephone of their own or had access to a telephone in the building in which they lived. The prevalence of telephone service among recipients varied widely by place of residence, with 49 percent of the recipients in urban areas but only 14 percent of those living on farms having telephones. Telephones were more than twice as common among the white recipients as among the nonwhite—40 percent and 18 percent, respectively. A majority of the white recipients living in urban communities (52 percent) had a telephone. At the other extreme, only 1 percent of the nonwhite recipients living on farms had telephone service.

### Cooking Facilities

Of all recipients of old-age assistance who were not in institutions, 95 percent had some type of cooking fa-

Table 4.—Households of old-age assistance recipients<sup>1</sup> and of the general population<sup>2</sup>: Percent with cooking facilities

Geographic region	Percent with cooking facilities	
	Old-age assistance recipients	All households
Total.....	95	98
New England.....	92	98
Middle Atlantic.....	88	98
East North Central.....	94	98
West North Central.....	94	98
South Atlantic.....	98	98
East South Central.....	97	98
West South Central.....	98	98
Mountain.....	96	98
Pacific.....	94	98

<sup>1</sup> Continental United States, except for Maryland and Vermont, for which 1953 study data are not available.

<sup>2</sup> Continental United States; based on data for occupied dwelling units from 1950 Census of Housing.

ilities; for all households in the general population the percentage was 98. The recipients with cooking facilities included 9 percent who shared them with other households and 5 percent who had only the facilities provided in light-housekeeping rooms. At least 4 out of every 5 recipients, however, had the exclusive use of cooking facilities in quarters other than light-housekeeping rooms.

Cooking facilities tended to be available slightly more often in smaller communities and on farms, probably because there were fewer places outside the home where cooked food might be obtained, and they were found slightly more often among nonwhite than among white recipients. The proportion of old-age assistance recipients with cooking facilities varied from 88 percent in the highly urbanized Middle Atlantic region, where larger proportions of recipients lived in roominghouses, boardinghouses, or hotels, to 98 percent in the South Atlantic States (table 4).

### Running Water

The 1950 Census indicated that approximately 82 percent of all households had piped running water inside the structures in which they lived (table 5). The range in this percentage among different parts of the country was wide—from 52 percent in the East South Central region to

Table 3.—Households of old-age assistance recipients<sup>1</sup> and of the general population<sup>2</sup>: Percent with mechanical refrigeration

Geographic region	Percent with mechanical refrigeration	
	Old-age assistance recipients	All households
Total.....	55	79
New England.....	61	85
Middle Atlantic.....	57	88
East North Central.....	61	85
West North Central.....	60	77
South Atlantic.....	44	98
East South Central.....	30	59
West South Central.....	62	68
Mountain.....	58	76
Pacific.....	58	83

<sup>1</sup> Continental United States, except for Maryland and Vermont, for which 1953 study data are not available.

<sup>2</sup> Continental United States; based on data for occupied dwelling units from 1950 Census of Housing.

**Table 5.—Households of old-age assistance recipients<sup>1</sup> and of the general population<sup>2</sup>: Percent with running water in home**

Geographic region	Percent with running water in home	
	Old-age assistance recipients	All households
Total.....	68	82
New England.....	94	94
Middle Atlantic.....	92	94
East North Central.....	73	86
West North Central.....	62	73
South Atlantic.....	49	70
East South Central.....	31	52
West South Central.....	61	69
Mountain.....	79	81
Pacific.....	96	95

<sup>1</sup> Continental United States, except for Maryland and Vermont, for which 1953 study data are not available.

<sup>2</sup> Continental United States; based on data for occupied dwelling units from 1950 Census of Housing.

94 percent in New England and the Middle Atlantic States and 95 percent in the Pacific region. In the country as a whole, the old-age assistance recipients do not fare as well as all households; the percentage with running water available was 68.

Differences between recipients and the general population with respect to the availability of running water varied greatly among different sections of the country. In the New England, Middle Atlantic, Mountain, and Pacific regions the percentages of recipients and all households reported to have running water were approximately the same. In other regions the differences were substantial. The greatest differences were found in the East South Central and South Atlantic States. In the former States fewer than a third of the old-age assistance recipients had running water, while more than half of all households had this facility. In the South Atlantic region, 49 percent of the recipients and 70 percent of all households were reported as having running water.

The prevalence of this facility in homes is related in substantial degree, of course, to available community facilities. In urban communities more than 9 out of 10 assistance recipients had running water in their homes. Among recipients living on farms, the percentage was only 19. White recipients as a group

had running water more than half again as often as the nonwhite recipients, and white recipients living on farms had running water six times as frequently as nonwhite recipients who lived on farms. As in the case of electricity, these latter differences may reflect the generally lower level of living of the nonwhite population and may also reflect in part the concentration of the nonwhite recipients in regions where running water was generally less available for both recipients and the general population.

### Sanitary Facilities

Though the possibility of having flush toilets and bathtubs is directly related to the availability of running water, by no means all households with running water have these additional facilities. Nearly 68 percent of the old-age assistance recipients had running water in their homes, but only about 50 percent had both a flush toilet and a bathtub. An additional 5 percent had a flush toilet but no bathtub. Eight percent of the recipients who had water faucets in the house had no other sanitary facilities. The proportion of recipients with flush toilets and bathtubs varied greatly according to the size of the community in which they lived. Only 8 percent of the recipients living on farms in nonmetropolitan areas but 82 percent of the recipients living in cities of 100,000 or more had both.

A substantially larger proportion of households in the general population (74 percent) than of the assistance recipients' households (56 percent) had flush toilets (table 6). Approximately 90 percent of all households had flush toilets in the New England, Middle Atlantic, and Pacific States but only 43 percent in the East South Central region. The percentage was nearly as high for the recipients as for the general population in the New England, Middle Atlantic, and Pacific regions, exceeding 85 in each of these three sections of the country, and dropped to the low figure of 20 percent for the East South Central region.

Some differences in the availability of flush toilets and bathtubs were found between recipients who maintained their own households and

**Table 6.—Households of old-age assistance recipients<sup>1</sup> and of the general population<sup>2</sup>: Percent with flush toilets**

Geographic region	Percent with flush toilets	
	Old-age assistance recipients	All households
Total.....	56	74
New England.....	86	90
Middle Atlantic.....	85	90
East North Central.....	64	79
West North Central.....	47	64
South Atlantic.....	36	61
East South Central.....	20	43
West South Central.....	47	59
Mountain.....	64	69
Pacific.....	85	89

<sup>1</sup> Continental United States, except for Maryland and Vermont, for which 1953 study data are not available.

<sup>2</sup> Continental United States; based on data for occupied dwelling units from 1950 Census of Housing.

those who lived in the households of other persons. Recipients who lived in the household of a son or daughter, other relative, or a nonrelative had such facilities more frequently than those who were still maintaining their own homes.

### Sleeping Rooms

An indication of crowded living quarters is the extent to which several persons are obliged to share a sleeping room. Accordingly, data were collected in the 1953 study on the extent to which old-age assistance recipients shared sleeping rooms with others. Of all recipients, nearly three-fifths (58 percent) were the sole occupants of the room in which they slept. More than a fourth (28 percent) shared the sleeping room with the spouse only. Among 6 percent of the recipients, a second person other than the spouse shared the sleeping room; 2 percent shared the sleeping room with two other persons; and 1 percent of the recipients slept in the same room with three or more other persons. The presence in the sleeping room of a second person other than the spouse occurred most frequently when the recipient maintained his own home with relatives other than a spouse or children as members of his household. It was found that the use of one sleeping room by three or four or more persons was most frequent

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**Table 2.—Contributions and taxes collected under selected social insurance and related programs, by specified period, 1941-57**

[In thousands]

Period	Retirement, disability, and survivors insurance				Unemployment insurance		
	Federal insurance contributions <sup>1</sup>		Federal civil-service contributions <sup>2</sup>	Taxes on carriers and their employees	State unemployment insurance contributions <sup>4</sup>	Federal unemployment taxes <sup>5</sup>	Railroad unemployment insurance contributions <sup>6</sup>
	Retirement and survivors	Disability <sup>3</sup>					
<b>Fiscal year:</b>							
1941-42.....	\$895,619		\$190,498	\$170,012	\$1,093,900	\$119,944	\$84,738
1942-43.....	1,130,495		334,278	208,795	1,217,737	158,361	102,710
1943-44.....	1,292,122		445,951	267,065	1,353,272	179,909	131,518
1944-45.....	1,309,919		486,719	285,038	1,251,958	184,544	131,993
1945-46.....	1,238,218		528,049	282,610	1,009,094	179,930	129,126
1946-47.....	1,459,492		481,448	380,057	1,001,504	184,823	141,750
1947-48.....	1,616,162		482,585	557,061	1,007,087	207,919	145,148
1948-49.....	1,690,296		563,461	568,833	988,965	222,850	9,816
1949-50.....	2,106,388		662,262	550,172	1,094,406	226,308	18,855
1950-51.....	3,120,404		684,343	577,509	1,364,590	253,537	24,681
1951-52.....	3,594,248		722,850	734,900	1,431,997	258,945	25,734
1952-53.....	4,096,602		744,646	619,959	1,367,806	276,557	25,006
1953-54.....	4,589,182		464,363	603,042	1,246,230	285,135	27,656
1954-55 <sup>7</sup> .....	5,087,154		469,856	600,106	1,142,009	279,986	23,720
1955-56 <sup>8</sup> .....	6,442,370		808,207	634,323	1,328,722	324,656	34,043
1956-57 <sup>9</sup> .....	6,639,887		1,170,998	616,013	1,537,127	330,031	77,894
<b>1956</b>							
June <sup>7</sup> .....	552,091		45,109	53,751	12,140	1,294	2,698
July.....	351,031		560,769	23,376	148,138	1,719	434
August.....	818,806		60,862	81,404	295,588	742	9,833
September.....	412,743		49,785	53,453	10,879	621	8,783
October.....	218,116		51,738	24,959	109,393	598	617
November.....	606,322		53,677	74,806	208,899	865	10,352
December.....	248,790		52,326	54,580	12,033	699	7,731
<b>1957</b>							
January.....	291,274		63,435	21,165	80,086	40,242	386
February.....	775,301	\$52,079	45,449	82,796	152,570	269,886	7,133
March.....	572,293	65,796	66,966	49,861	15,165	10,166	11,402
April.....	632,911	31,249	45,650	14,939	169,528	1,511	562
May.....	1,141,249	122,338	67,658	83,134	322,447	1,400	12,048
June <sup>8</sup> .....	471,051	65,699	53,280	52,040	12,409	1,583	8,613

<sup>1</sup> Represents contributions of employees, employers, and the self-employed in employments covered by old-age, survivors, and disability insurance (beginning December 1952, adjusted for employee-tax refunds); from May 1951, includes deposits in the trust fund by States under voluntary coverage agreements; beginning January 1951, on an estimated basis.

<sup>2</sup> Under the 1956 amendments to Title II of the Social Security Act.

<sup>3</sup> Represents employee and Government contributions to the civil-service retirement and disability fund; Government contributions are made in 1 month for the entire fiscal year.

<sup>4</sup> Represents deposits in State clearing accounts of contributions plus penalties and interest collected from employers and, in 3 jurisdictions, contributions from

employees; excludes contributions collected for deposit in State temporary disability insurance funds. Data reported by State agencies.

<sup>5</sup> Represents taxes paid by employers under the Federal Unemployment Tax Act.

<sup>6</sup> Beginning 1947, also covers temporary disability insurance.

<sup>7</sup> Except for State unemployment insurance, as shown in the *Final Statement of Receipts and Expenditures of the U.S. Government*.

<sup>8</sup> Preliminary.

<sup>9</sup> Includes contributions from the Federal Government.

Source: *Monthly Statement of Receipts and Expenditures of the U.S. Government* and other Treasury reports, unless otherwise noted.

**OAA RECIPIENTS**

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when the spouse, among other persons, was a member of the household. At least 1 recipient out of 6 who lived in the home of a son or daughter or other relative shared a sleeping room with persons other than a spouse. In general, evidence of crowding, as reflected by the proportion of recipients sharing a sleeping room with a person other than a spouse or with two or more persons, was most frequently found in Southern States.

**Summary**

Old-age assistance recipients generally live in households containing

fewer persons than do households in the general population. The median size of households in which the recipients live is 2.0 persons, and for the general population the median household size is 3.1. The number of rooms in the home is also smaller for old-age assistance recipients than for all households, but the difference is less than that in the number of persons per household. For recipients the average number of rooms is 3.9; for all households, 4.7. The number of rooms per person is actually greater for households of old-age assistance recipients than for households in the general population.

In most sections of the country, old-age assistance recipients have elec-

tricity and running water to about the same extent as the general population. Relatively fewer recipients are in households with mechanical refrigeration and flush toilets, and telephones are probably far less generally available to them than to the general population. In southern sections of the country the facilities are less available to the general population than they are elsewhere; and in the same sections the households of old-age assistance recipients fare substantially less well than those of the general population. Several facilities are less generally available to the nonwhite recipients of old-age assistance than to the white recipients.