

Notes and Brief Reports

Money Income Sources for Orphans and Young Widows, December 1956*

Public income-maintenance programs in the United States are as important a source of income for paternal orphans as for the aged population. At the end of 1956 they provided some or all of the support for more than 70 percent of the children of deceased fathers—the same proportion as among persons aged 65 and over. Unlike the aged, a majority of the young widows rely on their own earnings.

Orphaned Children

At the end of 1956, it is estimated, there were 1,940,000 children in the continental United States whose natural father had died. Of these, fewer than 60,000 had lost their mother also. There were about 780,000 other children whose mother had died but whose father was still living.¹ Al-

* Prepared by Lenore A. Epstein, Division of Program Research, Office of the Commissioner.

¹ These estimates were developed by the Division of the Actuary on the basis of the most recent appropriate data on mortality rates, adjusted for the fact that married persons have a lower mortality rate than others of the same age. For children of each single age 0 to 17, inclusive, in the continental United States at the end of 1956, an average age for each parent was determined, and the number of such children whose mother, father, or both would have died before January 1, 1957, was calculated. The calculation was performed separately for white persons and nonwhite persons to take account of race differences in mortality or survival rates. In estimating the number of full orphans, an allowance was made for any correlation between the mortality of mothers and fathers because of such factors as environment and possibility of death in a common accident. Finally, to these figures were added the estimated number of children who had lost a father through death in military service overseas, based on information from the Veterans Administration and the Department of Defense. The estimates for December 1956 are not entirely consistent with those published for 1954 and 1955 in previous issues of the *Bulletin* because the earlier estimates were derived by extrapolating the changes in parental survival rates between 1950 and 1953 and applying those rates to the child population in 5-year age groups.

though the orphanhood problem in the United States had diminished spectacularly between 1920 and 1950, the rapid rise in the child population in recent years and the slowing down in the rate of improvement in mortality rates for persons of child-bearing age have resulted in a leveling off in the actual number of orphans.

As would be expected, the older the child, the greater the risk of orphanhood—that is, the greater the likelihood of his having lost one or both parents by death. Almost one-third of the 2,720,000 orphans in the United States at the end of 1956 were aged 15–17; only 1 in 13 were under age 5 (table 1).

Included in the estimate are orphaned children who had gained new parents by adoption or had acquired a stepparent by remarriage of the surviving parent. The numbers adopted, however, are not so large as might be expected. While the total number of adoptions has increased in recent years, the proportion of adopted children who are orphans has declined. According to studies conducted by the Children's Bureau, about 50,000 adoption petitions were filed in 1944, 80,000 in 1951, 90,000 in 1953, and 93,000 in 1955. Of all the children for whom adoption petitions were filed, however, the proportion with one or both parents dead was about 13 percent in 1944, barely 10 percent in 1951, and only 8 percent in 1955.² Thus it may be estimated that, as of December 1956, of the total number of children under age 18 who had lost one or both natural parents, the number who had acquired new parents by adoption may have been less than 100,000 and undoubtedly was less than 150,000. The number who had acquired a stepparent (who did not file an adoption

² See Joseph L. Zarefsky, "Children Acquire New Parents," *The Child*, March 1946; *Adoption of Children in 1951* (Children's Bureau Statistical Series, No. 14), 1953; *Adoptions in the United States and Its Territories, 1955* (Children's Bureau Statistical Series, No. 39), 1957; and I. Richard Perlman and Jack Wiener, "Adoption of Children, 1953," *Iowa Law Review*, 1955 (winter issue).

petition) is undoubtedly much larger, since remarriage rates are relatively high for widowed persons—higher than marriage rates for single persons in the same age groups, beginning at age 30.

Table 1.—Estimated number of orphans under age 18, by type and age, January 1, 1957¹

[Continental United States; numbers in thousands]

Age	Total	Father dead			Mother only dead
		Total	Father only dead	Both parents dead	
Total...	2,715	1,935	1,880	55	780
0-4 years...	205	155	155	(²)	50
5-9 years...	570	410	405	5	160
10-14 years...	1,060	755	735	20	305
15-17 years...	880	615	585	30	265

¹ For method of estimation, see text, footnote 1. Estimates rounded to the nearest 5,000.

² Fewer than 2,500.

In general, a child's rights to survivor benefits based on the employment or military service of a parent are unaffected by the remarriage of the surviving parent. Moreover, under the old-age, survivors, and disability insurance program, at least, a child may continue to receive benefits if he is adopted by a stepparent, grandparent, aunt, or uncle after the natural parent's death.³ Furthermore, adopted children and stepchildren generally acquire new rights to benefits on the death of the adopting or stepparent, subject to certain time limitations and safeguards to prevent payment of dual benefits under one program.

The problem of support for paternal orphans is, of course, of particular concern because the father is typically the family breadwinner. It is therefore of great importance that 9 out of 10 children now under age 18 would receive benefits under the old-age, survivors, and disability insurance program in the event of the father's death. In December 1956, almost three-fifths of the 1,940,000 paternal orphans in the continental United States were receiving monthly

³ In 1951 and 1953, the only years for which such information is now available, more than three-fourths of the petitions filed for adoption of orphaned children were filed by relatives.

Table 2.—Estimated number of children under age 18 with father dead and of widows under age 65 receiving money income from employment and public income-maintenance programs, December 1956

[Continental United States]

Source of money income ¹	Number (in thousands)				Percentage distribution			
	Children under age 18 with natural father dead	Widows under age 65 ²			Children under age 18 with natural father dead	Widows under age 65 ²		
		Total	With 1 or more children under age 18	Other		Total	With 1 or more children under age 18	Other
Total in population.....	1,940	3,470	690	2,780	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Employment ³	(4)	1,920	360	1,550	(4)	55.3	52.2	55.8
Social insurance and related programs ⁵	1,280	900	360	540	66.0	25.9	52.2	19.4
Old-age and survivors insurance.....	1,140	420	300	120	58.8	12.1	43.5	4.3
Veterans' compensation and pension programs.....	270	410	90	320	13.9	11.8	13.0	11.5
Railroad and government employees' retirement programs.....	90	130	30	100	4.6	3.7	4.3	3.6
Aid to dependent children ⁶	190	70	70	0	9.8	2.0	10.1	0

¹ Persons with no money income and income solely from sources other than those specified are included in the total but are not shown separately because of lack of data. Some persons received income from more than one of the specified sources; some with income from sources specified also received income from sources not specified.

² Excludes widows who have remarried.

³ Includes only persons working for pay or profit and not those supported by the earnings of a relative.

⁴ Data not available.

⁵ Estimated number of persons with income from one or more of the programs. ⁶ An estimated two-fifths of this group also received old-age, survivors, and disability insurance benefits.

Source: Estimated in the Division of Program Research on the basis of published and unpublished data from the Division of the Actuary and from the Bureau of the Census, the National Office of Vital Statistics, and agencies administering income-maintenance programs.

benefits under this program (table 2). About 14 percent were on the Veterans Administration rolls as survivors of veterans and an additional 5 percent received benefits as survivors of railroad or government employees. Many survivors of veterans were entitled to benefits under the Social Security Act as well, because of the free wage credits granted to members of the Armed Forces for service in World War II and the Korean campaign. Consequently, the unduplicated number of paternal orphans receiving benefits under one or more of the insurance or veterans' programs was about two-thirds of all paternal orphans.

Barely 6 percent were dependent on public assistance for their main support and another 4 percent received assistance payments to supplement an insurance benefit that did not meet their needs. It is probable that most of the orphans for whom aid to dependent children is the sole or major source of income lost their father some years ago, before old-age, survivors, and disability insurance coverage became almost universal, and that few "new" orphans are on the assistance rolls except for those whose benefits require supplementation.

With the growing tendency of mar-

ried women to join the labor force, survivor protection for children in the event of the mother's death is of increasing importance. In April 1956, of the women with children under age 18, one-fourth were in the labor force when the husband was present in the home, and considerably more than half when he was absent or the mother was widowed or divorced. The social insurance programs generally provide for monthly annuities for unmarried children under age 18 on the death of either parent, if the child was actually dependent on that parent. Under the 1950 amendments to the Social Security Act a child is deemed to have been dependent upon his mother, and therefore eligible for a benefit, if she was currently insured at the time of her death.

In December 1956, about 50,000 children were receiving monthly benefits under the old-age, survivors, and disability insurance program on the basis of the earnings record of the deceased mother. The number receiving survivor annuities under programs for railroad and government employees undoubtedly did not exceed 3,000 and was probably considerably smaller; few women are employed in the railroad industry, and relatively few of the State and

local government programs, except those for policemen and firemen, provide benefits for young survivors. Maternal orphans seldom appear on the rolls of the aid to dependent children program. Thus, fewer than 7 percent of the maternal orphans with father living were receiving payments under a public income-maintenance program at the end of 1956. Possibly foster care and homemaker and other services may be provided more often for maternal than for paternal orphans.

Widows Under Age 65

Of the widows under age 65 with children under age 18 in December 1956, about three-fifths received income from social insurance or aid to dependent children (table 2). If those women were included who could have received benefits under old-age, survivors, and disability insurance or the veterans' programs had it not been for their earnings, the total would probably have been about two-thirds. Of the childless widows under age 65—four times as numerous as those with children—only about one-fifth were receiving benefits under social insurance or related programs at the end of 1956, despite the lowering of the eligibility age for women to 62 (effective November 1956) un-

der the 1956 amendments to the Social Security Act.⁴

More than half of all widows under age 65 had some earnings in December 1956. The proportion was only slightly larger for those without children than for those with children in their care. It is likely, however, that part-time or intermittent work was more common among the latter group because women with children usually seek jobs that are conveniently located, with convenient hours, or other special requirements. Perhaps 35,000-45,000 widows under age 65 were receiving unemployment insurance benefits in December 1956.

Apparently almost all widows with children in their care had some income from earnings and/or social insurance or aid to dependent children in December 1956, but about 30 percent of the other widows under age 65 were without income from these sources.

Old-Age Benefits in Current-Payment Status, December 31, 1956

Old-age insurance benefits under the Social Security Act were being paid on December 31, 1956, to about 5.1 million persons; a year earlier—in December 1955—almost 4.5 million had been receiving benefits. The accompanying table shows the average monthly benefit amount at the end of 1956 and gives a percentage distribution of the number of beneficiaries according to the size of their benefit. The data are classified by the beneficiaries' State of residence at the close of the year.

The average old-age benefit of \$63.09 being paid in December 1956 was about \$1.19 higher than the average in December 1955. One reason for the higher average was the increasing proportion of benefits computed on the basis of earnings after 1950. Beginning in 1955 the maximum amount of annual earnings that can be used in benefit computa-

tions was raised from \$3,600 to \$4,200. A second factor in the increase was the progressively rising proportion of beneficiaries whose benefits were computed under the provision that permits up to 5 years of lowest earnings to be excluded in calculating the average monthly wage. The

average old-age benefit being paid went up each month, from \$61.90 in December 1955 to \$63.31 in October 1956. The average dropped to \$63.09 in November, however, when a large number of women aged 62-64 were awarded monthly old-age benefits that, because of the actuarial reduc-

Number and average monthly amount of old-age insurance benefits in current-payment status and percentage distribution by amount of benefit,¹ by State, December 31, 1956

Percentage distribution based on sampling ratios that vary inversely with the number of beneficiaries in the State]

State ² (ranked by size of average benefit)	Average old-age benefit	Number of old-age beneficiaries	Percent of old-age beneficiaries receiving—								
			Total	\$24.00- 29.90	\$30.00	\$30.10- 44.90	\$45.00- 59.90	\$60.00- 74.90	\$75.00- 89.90	\$90.00- 108.40	\$108.50
Total.....	\$63.09	5,112,430	100.0	0.5	15.1	12.1	16.4	22.7	15.6	16.4	1.2
Connecticut.....	70.01	89,868	100.0	.3	8.3	8.1	13.7	24.3	21.5	22.3	1.5
Michigan.....	68.98	210,847	100.0	.3	11.5	9.9	14.7	18.8	16.7	25.8	2.3
New Jersey.....	68.95	201,964	100.0	.4	8.9	9.6	15.1	23.3	18.9	22.0	1.8
Pennsylvania.....	66.66	394,110	100.0	.4	10.9	10.2	15.6	24.9	18.6	18.2	1.2
Ohio.....	66.66	287,493	100.0	.3	13.0	10.2	15.2	21.4	16.3	21.8	1.8
Massachusetts.....	66.35	219,373	100.0	.2	9.4	9.8	17.2	27.8	18.3	16.3	1.0
Illinois.....	66.33	311,318	100.0	.4	12.8	9.8	15.7	23.1	17.0	19.9	1.3
New York.....	65.93	604,607	100.0	.3	11.3	10.4	15.6	24.9	18.4	17.7	1.4
Rhode Island.....	65.26	37,460	100.0	.5	8.5	9.9	18.0	28.7	19.1	14.4	.9
Florida.....	64.22	157,680	100.0	.5	14.6	11.9	16.0	21.1	17.0	17.7	1.2
Washington.....	63.61	99,739	100.0	.5	14.2	11.0	18.9	21.5	14.7	18.0	1.2
Wisconsin.....	63.50	129,560	100.0	.5	16.6	11.5	15.1	20.7	15.2	19.0	1.4
Delaware.....	63.35	12,074	100.0	.5	12.3	11.8	17.4	26.2	15.6	15.1	1.1
Utah.....	63.16	17,288	100.0	.4	16.4	12.0	15.5	20.4	16.4	17.1	1.8
California.....	63.10	441,566	100.0	.3	13.8	12.9	18.8	22.1	14.4	16.3	1.4
Indiana.....	62.73	147,923	100.0	.5	15.9	12.6	15.8	20.8	15.1	18.1	1.2
Nevada.....	62.69	5,575	100.0	0	15.4	15.4	21.3	20.2	11.4	15.4	.9
Arizona.....	62.61	22,588	100.0	.8	18.1	11.9	16.3	19.8	16.3	16.1	.7
Oregon.....	62.55	69,293	100.0	.4	14.8	12.1	20.1	21.0	14.6	15.7	1.3
Alaska.....	61.82	2,303	100.0	.3	15.6	13.7	18.8	22.0	11.4	17.2	1.0
West Virginia.....	61.72	55,400	100.0	.4	17.8	13.0	15.2	26.3	14.0	12.5	.8
Maryland.....	61.72	69,037	100.0	.5	15.8	12.9	16.2	24.6	15.2	13.9	.9
New Hampshire.....	61.46	27,208	100.0	.2	14.1	14.2	18.0	27.9	12.4	12.2	1.0
District of Columbia.....	61.24	19,860	100.0	.3	14.0	13.3	19.4	23.7	15.1	13.2	1.0
Wyoming.....	61.20	7,617	100.0	.4	14.3	12.1	16.6	25.4	16.0	13.8	1.4
Colorado.....	61.19	43,397	100.0	.6	17.9	14.2	16.0	21.8	14.1	14.7	.7
Minnesota.....	60.85	99,605	100.0	.5	18.8	12.9	15.9	21.4	14.2	15.2	1.1
Montana.....	60.58	18,693	100.0	.1	18.2	12.2	17.2	22.3	12.2	15.7	2.1
Missouri.....	60.56	141,927	100.0	.5	17.3	14.4	15.9	22.7	14.1	14.2	.9
Hawaii.....	59.78	10,397	100.0	.6	19.0	13.4	18.3	22.4	17.7	8.0	.6
Vermont.....	58.80	15,336	100.0	.5	17.4	15.2	17.0	25.9	14.3	9.0	.7
Iowa.....	58.70	88,027	100.0	.7	20.5	14.1	16.1	22.3	12.6	13.2	.5
Maine.....	58.66	43,188	100.0	.4	18.5	14.9	18.5	23.4	14.1	9.5	.7
Idaho.....	58.03	17,638	100.0	.4	19.5	14.9	16.2	21.9	13.2	13.2	.7
Nebraska.....	57.98	41,271	100.0	.3	20.8	15.8	15.6	22.5	12.5	11.5	1.0
Kansas.....	57.86	62,727	100.0	.5	19.6	15.7	16.8	20.7	13.8	12.4	.5
Virginia.....	57.34	77,973	100.0	.6	21.9	15.6	16.7	21.4	13.7	9.5	.6
Kentucky.....	56.73	74,050	100.0	.8	22.6	15.4	16.8	22.0	10.9	10.9	.6
Oklahoma.....	56.53	55,613	100.0	.6	23.1	14.3	16.6	21.9	11.4	11.4	.7
Texas.....	56.35	163,416	100.0	1.0	22.4	14.7	17.5	20.9	11.4	11.5	.6
New Mexico.....	56.04	11,097	100.0	.9	24.0	17.0	15.6	20.2	10.6	10.6	1.1
South Dakota.....	55.96	16,405	100.0	.2	22.0	15.6	15.8	23.5	13.2	9.2	.5
Louisiana.....	55.69	49,913	100.0	1.1	23.0	14.9	18.1	21.3	9.9	10.6	1.1
North Carolina.....	55.46	70,564	100.0	.9	21.3	15.8	18.5	23.3	11.8	7.6	.8
South Carolina.....	55.04	33,057	100.0	1.3	22.6	14.9	19.2	20.5	12.8	8.3	.4
Alabama.....	54.86	60,068	100.0	.8	24.4	14.9	18.2	21.3	10.4	9.2	.8
North Dakota.....	54.23	11,471	100.0	.5	26.6	16.5	16.0	22.9	10.8	6.0	.7
Georgia.....	53.84	64,248	100.0	1.0	23.3	17.5	18.3	21.2	10.3	7.9	.5
Tennessee.....	53.82	69,110	100.0	1.0	25.2	16.5	18.1	20.3	10.3	8.1	.5
Arkansas.....	51.49	44,500	100.0	.8	30.0	16.3	17.2	19.9	8.3	7.2	.3
Mississippi.....	49.78	34,502	100.0	1.2	32.1	19.3	15.4	19.2	7.0	5.4	.4
Virgin Islands.....	44.69	264	100.0	.8	31.8	32.6	12.5	13.6	3.8	4.9	0
Puerto Rico.....	41.34	19,150	100.0	.8	38.6	32.0	12.5	11.1	2.8	2.1	.1
Foreign.....	65.22	33,072	100.0	.1	10.4	9.9	16.6	33.2	16.7	12.6	.5

⁴ For a summary of available data relating to the income sources of women approaching age 65, see the *Bulletin*, June 1957, pages 9-10.

¹ For persons receiving both an old-age benefit and a widow's, widower's, or parent's secondary benefit or a wife's or husband's secondary benefit that was awarded, reinstated, or adjusted after Sept. 13, 1956, the amount of the reduced secondary benefit is combined with the amount of the

old-age benefit. Actuarially reduced benefits payable to women aged 62-64 at entitlement may be represented in all the amount-of-benefit intervals except that for \$108.50 and account for all the cases in the \$24.00-\$29.90 interval.

² Beneficiary's State of residence.