
About This Report

This biennial report presents detailed statistical information on the major sources and amounts of income for people aged 55 or older. The tabulations focus on the major sources of total income by age, sex, marital status, race, and Hispanic origin. Several tables describe the economic situation of the aged with varying levels of Social Security benefits. Their poverty status is presented in terms of the income of the families they live with.

Source of Data

Data for this series are from the March Current Population Survey (CPS) of the U.S. Census Bureau.¹ The CPS samples a large cross section of households in the United States each year (approximately 97,000 in March 2009). The March supplement gathers detailed information on income and labor force participation of each

¹ For a detailed description of the basic CPS sample design, see U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey: Design and Methodology*, Technical Paper No. 63RV (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, March 2002).

person 15 years of age or older in the sample households. For this series, the Social Security Administration (SSA) creates a subsample of persons 55 or older arranged in aged units. A separate data record is made for each married couple living together—at least one of whom is 55 or older—and for each nonmarried person 55 or older. Married persons living apart are classified as nonmarried persons.

From time to time, changes have been made in the survey. Although the changes have improved the measurement of income and labor force participation, they have reduced the comparability of estimates made in different years.²

A recent working paper by Alexander, Davern, and Stevenson (NBER Working Paper 15703, January 2010) uncovered age and sex data discrepancies resulting from changes in disclosure avoidance protocols used in some Census Bureau public use datasets, including the 2004–2009 Current Population Survey.

² These changes are discussed in some detail in U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P60, various years.

They conclude that errors in the public use data could significantly impact studies of people ages 65 and older, which includes this publication.³ SSA is currently working to assess the degree to which our statistics are affected; preliminary results for 2004 income data confirm that age is less accurately reported after the change in disclosure protocol. Age discrepancies between survey and administrative data appear to be more prevalent for persons age 65 or older, increase with survey age, and are more likely for men than women. The weighted means and medians of total money income in 5-year age categories for the 65 or older group using administrative age are generally within 5 percent of the means and medians generated using the survey age; the magnitude of the differences vary by age and sex, with estimates for men 75–79 typically affected the most.

³ Alexander, J. Trent, Michael Davern, and Betsey Stevenson. 2010. Inaccurate age and sex data in the Census PUMS files: Evidence and implications. NBER Working Paper No. 15703. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Available at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w15703>.