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Statistical Brief

From the Bureau of the Census
Survey of Income and Program Participation

Who's Helping Out? Support Networks Among American Families

In 1985, Americans gave almost \$19 billion in regular support payments to persons living in other households.

About 7 million children and 3 million adults were the recipients of these regular cash payments, which were provided mainly by relatives. The payments included court-ordered alimony and child support payments, regular voluntary cash payments, and lump-sum payments for living expenses to persons living outside the provider's household.

Excluded are cash gifts, cash to pay for the educational expenses of children living temporarily away from home at school, and noncash items such as food, clothing, and other types of help. The data presented here were collected in the Survey of Income and Program Participation for the first time in 1985.

The majority of persons giving financial assistance to others were fathers supporting their children.

Among the 6.3 million Americans (3.7 percent of the population 18 and over) who provided financial assistance to others, 6 out of 10 were fathers helping to support children, and most of the rest were persons helping other adults, primarily parents. A small proportion of providers assisted spouses, ex-spouses, grown children, or others. Persons supporting spouses living elsewhere were usually separated but not yet divorced although some were supporting spouses living away from home for reasons other than marital

discord, for example, in nursing homes. About 366,000 persons helped support both children and adults; most of these providers were men.

Most of the 7 million children receiving financial support from an absent parent needed help because of their parents' divorce or separation.

Altogether 4 million fathers and 324,000 mothers helped support their

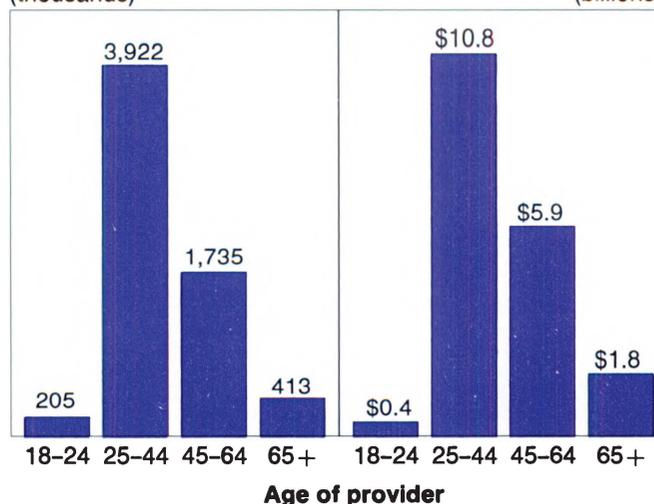
own children (under 21 years old) living outside their households. About 3.5 million children were getting financial help from parents who were currently separated or divorced, and another 3.2 million were helped by parents who were currently married but not living with the child they supported.

The average payment per child was \$1,600 annually. Since parents helped

The majority of persons helping to support someone outside their households were young adults.

Number of providers
(thousands)

Aggregate annual
amount provided
(billions)



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The amount of money each person received varied depending on their relationship to the person who provided it.

Relationship	Mean annual amount received per person
Children under 21	\$1,600
Children 21 or older	\$3,755
Parents	\$1,484
Spouses	\$7,847
Ex-spouses	\$4,665
Other relatives	\$1,076

support an average of 1.6 children each, the average amount each parent actually paid out was higher, \$2,607. Parents who provided support for their children spent about 8 percent of their family income.

Eight of ten adults who received financial assistance from someone outside their households were related to their benefactors.

Most, at an earlier stage in their lives, would have been members of the same household as their provider: about one-third were parents, 7 percent were current spouses living elsewhere, and 15 percent were former spouses. About 1 in 5 was an adult child not living in the parents' home and a similar proportion was more distantly related. Only about 5 percent of recipients were unrelated to their benefactors. Although the average amount received by adults was \$2,649, that amount varied considerably depending on the relationship to the provider. Spouses received the largest payments (\$7,847), while parents received an average of \$1,484 annually, and adult children received an average of \$3,755.

The majority of parents receiving assistance from their children received it from their sons.

However, there was no difference in the amount of the payments made by either sons or daughters. Data from another source, the 1982 Long-Term Care Survey, showed that daughters were more likely to provide other kinds of noncash assistance to elderly disabled parents.

Most dependent parents lived in private homes (83 percent), and only 9 percent lived in nursing homes. About one-half of persons living in nursing homes who depended on others for some financial assistance were helped by their children. However, old people often support other old people: about one-half of all dependent persons in nursing homes received support from persons who were themselves 65 years or older.

An individual's sex, age, and marital status are good predictors of their likelihood of supporting some non-household member.

By extrapolating from the survey data, we are able to determine who is most likely to provide support to others outside their households. Men and persons who have experienced marital disruption were more likely to be

providers of financial assistance than were women and persons who were not currently separated or divorced—by a 6 to 1 ratio. Young adults 25 to 44 years old were also twice as likely as persons 65 years and over to provide financial assistance to anyone. The evidence from this survey suggests that demographic characteristics are more important predictors than are socioeconomic factors, particularly in predicting the likelihood of helping children.

Socioeconomic factors do play a strong role in determining the amount of payments. In fact, a 1-percent increase in the provider's family income resulted in a 0.4-percent increase in support payments. The sex, marital status, age, education, and family income of the provider affected the size of the support payment to children. Family income was consistently found to be related to the payment level for parents and ex-spouses.

High rates of separation and divorce and the inevitable aging of the population will continue to place many persons in need of financial assistance.

Even if divorce rates were to decline somewhat, the number of children touched by divorce would remain substantial. At the other end of the age distribution, aging Baby Boomers will increase the elderly proportion of the

population from 12 percent in 1988 to 17 percent in 2020. For those fortunate enough to have family or friends to help out, that help may mean the difference between independence and reliance on public programs for support. For others, government programs may be the only alternative.

For Further Information

See: Current Population Reports, Series P-70, No. 13, *Who's Helping Out? Support Networks Among American Families.*

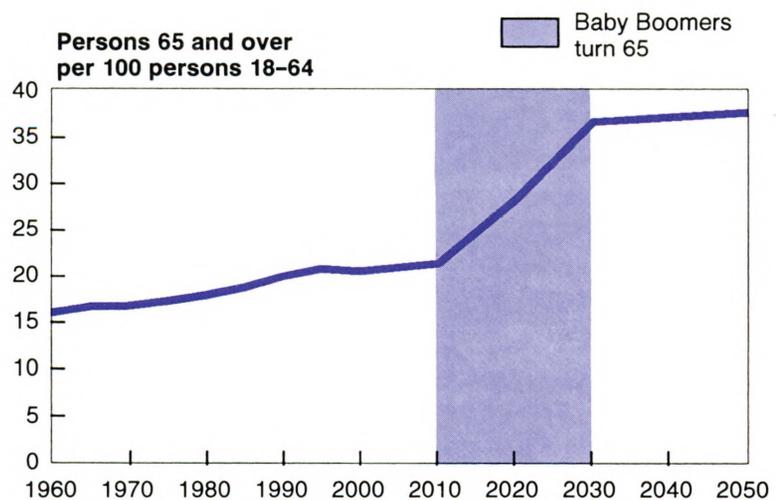
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This is one of a series of occasional reports providing timely data on specific policy-related issues. The Bureau of the Census conducts various demographic surveys of the U.S. population; this Brief presents data from one or more such surveys. The data are subject to various errors such as under-coverage of the population, processing errors, and respondent reporting errors. Certain measures, such as quality control programs, are implemented to reduce these errors. In addition, if each of the surveys was repeated with different samples of respondents, the results would vary from sample to sample. The results in this Brief have been tested to conform to the Bureau's statistical standards. Caution should be used when comparing these data to other data sets.

The ratio of elderly persons to other adults will begin to increase sharply in 22 years.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 952. (Middle series).

