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Statistical Brief

Persons Needing Assistance With Everyday Activities

Many persons need help performing everyday activities because of a health problem or condition lasting 3 months or longer. An estimated 8 million persons aged 15 and over required such assistance in 1986. These people needed help with activities such as dressing, eating, personal hygiene, meal preparation, getting around outside the home, housework, and keeping track of bills and/or money. The most common form of help needed was aid with housework; 7 in 10 needing assistance needed this kind of help.

This brief provides the latest information from the U.S. Census Bureau on the need for personal assistance with everyday activities. The data come from the Survey of Income and Program Participation.

With advancing age comes more of a need for assistance.

Elderly persons (65 years and older) were more likely to need assistance. The percentage who needed assistance increased sharply from 9 percent of those 65 to 69 years of age to 45 percent of those 85 years and older. The elderly who needed help were more likely than those under 65 to need help getting around outside the house and keeping track of money and bills.

Among persons under the age of 65, a small percentage (slightly over 2 percent) needed assistance. While persons under 65 years of age were relatively unlikely to need assistance, they make up such a large percentage of the total population that they accounted for a large proportion (3.8 million or 46 percent) of persons who needed assistance.

Persons who need assistance often live alone.

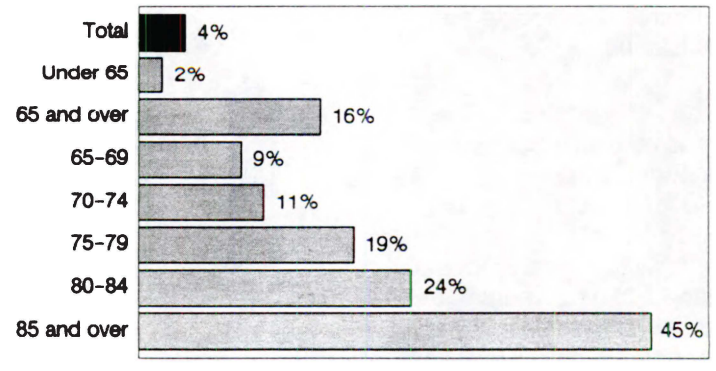
Slightly more than 1 in 4 persons who needed assistance lived alone, while only just over 1 in 10 persons who did not need help lived alone. This pattern was observed within different age groups: among persons under 65 who needed help, 14 percent lived alone, compared with 8 percent of those who did not need help. For the elderly, 40 percent of those needing help lived alone, compared with 30 percent of those who did not need help.

Those needing help were more likely to live in households with lower incomes and to receive government benefits.

Persons who needed assistance were slightly less than 3 times as likely as those who did not need assistance to live in a household with a monthly income under $600. Among the nonelderly, 18

The need for personal assistance increases with age.

Percentage of persons 15 and over needing assistance: 1986



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percent of those who needed help lived in households with monthly income under $600, compared with 7 percent of those who did not need assistance. The comparable percentages for elderly persons were 28 and 14 percent, respectively.

Those who needed help were also more likely to receive benefits from government programs. Persons under 65 who needed assistance were about 6 times more likely to receive government means-tested cash benefits as those who did not need help (24 versus 4 percent). Elderly persons who needed help were also more likely than those who did not need assistance to receive these benefits (16 versus 6 percent). Means-tested cash programs require beneficiaries to demonstrate economic need and include Supplemental Security Income, Veteran's pensions, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, General Assistance, Indian, Cuban, or Refugee Assistance, and other welfare.

Many persons who paid for the help they received spent a significant proportion of their income on the assistance.

About 1.5 million or 1 in 5 persons who received help reported that they or their family paid for their assistance. On average, persons who paid for the assistance spent $234 a month for this care. Approximately one-fifth of those who paid for assistance spent at least 15 percent of their family income on paid assistance.

The burden of paid assistance was associated with the level of family income. Of those persons who paid for assistance, approximately 30 percent of persons with relatively low family incomes (less than $1,250 per month) spent 15 percent or more of their family income on paid assistance; only 5 percent of those with relatively high family incomes ($2,500 and over per month) spent 15 percent or more for assistance.

Most caregivers are relatives and are female.

About 5.8 million persons provided care to a household member; 15 million provided care to a member of another household. Nearly all persons (94 percent) caring for a household member were related; two-thirds helping someone outside the household were related to the recipient. Spouses were the most frequent caregivers to household members. Children and other relatives were the most frequent caregivers to people outside the household.

Most caregivers were female: 56 percent of those aiding a household member and 67 percent of those helping a non-household member.

For information on the need for personal assistance:

See
The Need for Personal Assistance with Everyday Activities: Recipients and Caregivers, Current Population Reports, Series P-70, No. 19. For sale by U.S. Government Printing Office.

Stock no. 803-044-00007-4. $3.25. For telephone orders, call (202) 783-3238.

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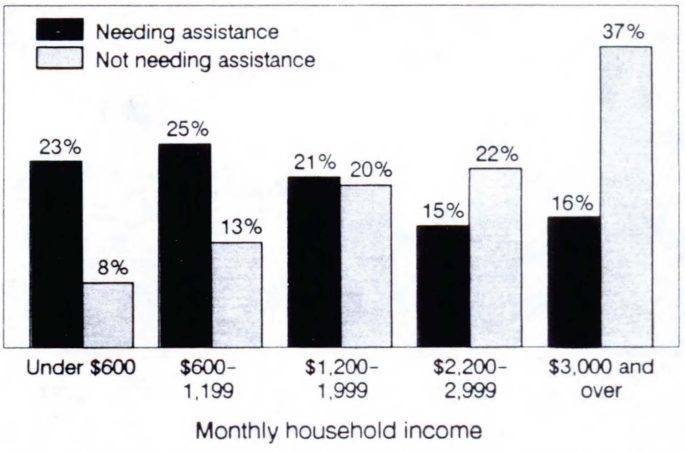
This is one of a series of occasional reports providing timely data on specific policy-related issues. The Bureau of the Census conducts various demographic surveys of the U.S. population; this brief presents data from one or more such surveys. The data are subject to various errors such as undercoverage 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 and conform to the Bureau's statistical standards. Caution should be used when comparing these data to other data sets.

Persons needing assistance tend to live in low income households.

Proportion of all persons 15 years old and over needing assistance and not needing assistance contained within each income group



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