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Home Alone in 1989

More of us live alone these days. According to the Census of Population, there were 11.2 million one-person households in 1970. The 1989 American Housing Survey (AHS) shows this figure doubled to 22.4 million. As a result, almost 1 in 4 (24 percent) of the Nation's 94 million householders lived by themselves in 1989. Why this rise? Some possible contributing factors:

- The desire for privacy.
- Young adults delaying marriage.
- Older persons who have either never married or live alone following a divorce or death of a spouse.

This Brief uses data from the 1989 AHS to focus on one facet of one-person householders—their housing characteristics. It looks particularly at the differences and similarities between men and women who live alone. The AHS is sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and conducted by the Bureau of the Census.

Most living alone are women.

Women living alone outnumbered males 13.5 million to 8.9 million—a 3 to 2 ratio. These women represented 14 percent of all households; men, 10 percent.



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More women than men who live alone are homeowners.

The majority of women living alone owned their homes (53 percent, or 7.1 million). By comparison, fewer than half of lone males were homeowners (38 percent, or 3.4 million).

Women living alone are older.

The median ages of female and male homeowners who lived alone were 69 and 52 years, respectively. Renters were younger: 56 and 37 years old, respectively. Three in 5 female homeowners who lived alone were at least 65 years old, compared with 1 in 3 men. Among renters, 40 percent of women and 13 percent of men were 65 or older.

Women who live by themselves are most often widows; men most likely have never married.

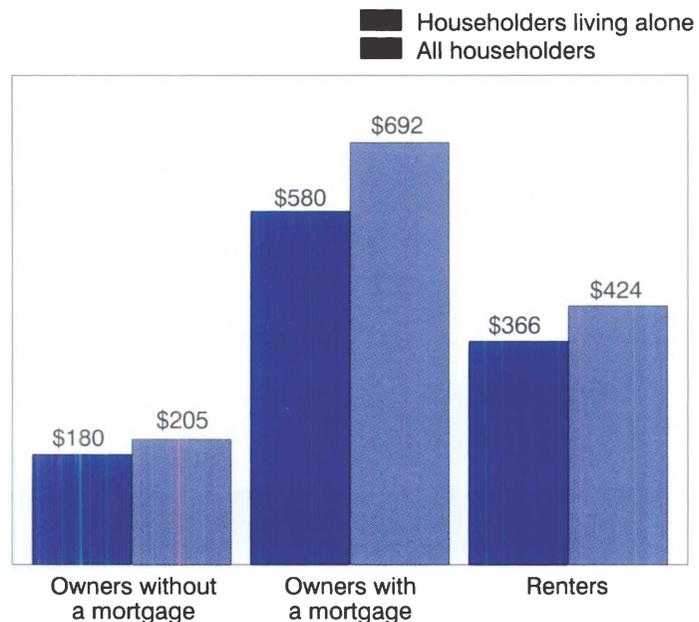
One-half (51 percent) of women living alone were widowed. The remainder were either divorced, separated, or married with their spouses absent from the household (26 percent) or had never married (23 percent). Among male householders, nearly half (48 percent) had never married. Another 38 percent were divorced, separated, or married with absent spouses. Just 14 percent were widowed.

Homeownership the norm among widowed householders, a rarity among those who never have married.

Two in three widows and widowers living by themselves

Persons Living Alone Have Lower Housing Costs

Median monthly housing costs: 1989



were owners. By comparison, less than a third of men and women who had never married owned their homes.

Women own older homes.

The median ages of homes owned by women and men were 33 years and 28 years, respectively.

Lone men have higher incomes than lone women.

Among those who were homeowners, women who lived alone had a median household income 51 percent lower than that of male owners (\$11,910 compared with \$24,450). Among renters living by themselves, women had a median income of \$11,120—39 percent lower than that of men (\$18,340). Why the gap? Mainly because men were less likely to be elderly and therefore likelier to be in the paid labor force.

Most living alone own their homes free and clear.

Seventy-seven percent of lone women and 55 percent of men who owned their homes didn't

have mortgages on their properties. Lone elderly homeowners were especially likely to own their homes free and clear—9 in 10 women and men didn't have mortgages.

Lone women spend a greater portion of their incomes on shelter.

Among owners, women living alone spent a median of 24 percent of their income on housing, compared with 20 percent for lone men. The corresponding figures for renters were 32 and 25 percent, respectively. As a matter of comparison, all owners, whether they lived alone or not, spent a median of 18 percent of their income on housing; all renters typically spent between 27 and 28 percent.

Women living alone own lower-valued homes.

The median value of homes owned by women living alone was \$58,400, about \$4,000 lower than those men owned (\$62,600). The median value of all owner-occupied properties, in contrast, was \$75,400.

More information:

Home Alone in 1989, Current Housing Reports, Series H121/92-4. For sale by the U.S. Government Printing Office. Stock No. 003-024-08616-6. \$4.50. Call 202-783-3238 for telephone orders.

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This Brief is one of a series that presents information of current policy interest. It may include data from businesses, households, or other sources. All statistics are subject to sampling variability, as well as survey design flaws, respondent classification errors, and data processing mistakes. The Census Bureau has taken steps to minimize errors, and analytical statements have been tested and meet statistical standards. However, because of methodological differences, use caution when comparing these data with data from other sources.

Owners Living Alone Have Lower-Valued Homes

Median value of owner-occupied homes, by region: 1989

