

Census: Childless older women better off than older men

August 31 2021, by Mike Schneider



In this Thursday, April 16, 2015, file photo, a couple watches the sunset over Biscayne Bay from a beach in Key Biscayne, Fla. Older adults who are childless in the U.S. are more like to be college educated, in the workforce at a greater rate and are more readily non-Hispanic white than those with children, and their numbers are growing, according to a new Census Bureau report released Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Lynne Sladky, File

Older adults who are childless in the U.S. are more likely to be college educated, working and white than those with children, and their numbers are growing.

About 1 in 6 adults age 55 and older are childless, and childless older women appear to be better positioned than men when it comes to health and wealth, according to a first-of-its-kind report released Tuesday by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The study was executed by the statistical agency to get a better understanding of childless adults because their numbers are growing due to declining marriage rates and an aging population. Although having children outside of marriage has become more common for young adults, marriage traditionally was considered a precursor to parenthood for the older generation, the Census Bureau said.

More than 19% of people between ages 55 and 64 were childless, while that figure was 15.9% for those between ages 65 and 74 and 10.9% for those age 75 and older.

"This suggests that childless adults will make up a greater share of the older adult population in the future and underscores the importance of research such as this study," said the report based on a 2018 survey.

A greater share of childless older adults were non-Hispanic white compared with biological parents, 79% versus 72.8%, and they were overwhelmingly born in the U.S.—90%, compared with 84.7% for parents—according to the report.

When it came to physical health, about three-quarters of men and women with children, as well as childless women, said they had excellent, very good or good health. But that figure was lower for childless men, more than 71%.

Those older adults with children were more likely to be living with a spouse compared with childless older adults, while the childless were more likely to be living alone than parents, suggesting childless older adults have fewer sources of potential support in their homes, according to the report.

"As spouses and children are the primary sources of informal care in the United States ... these discrepancies are concerning," the report said.

Net worth varied by sex among older adults. Childless women had the highest net worth, at \$173,800, followed by biological fathers at \$161,200, while the median net worth for everyone over age 55 was \$133,500, the report said.

The higher net worth of childless older women may put them at a greater advantage to hire paid care, the report said.

"Childless older women appear to be in a more advantageous position than their male counterparts in later life," the report said. "They have better self-rated health scores and higher personal net worth than childless men."

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