Six Key Facts on Women and Social Security

As research by IWPR and others show, the current Social Security program is a mainstay for women. Women are 57% of all adult beneficiaries, including retirees, the disabled, and the survivors of deceased workers. Twenty-five million adult women receive Social Security checks every month.

FACTS:

- For both men and women 65 and older, Social Security is their largest source of income, compared with other sources including earnings, pensions, and income from assets such as savings accounts.
- Women rely on Social Security for a larger part of their income in retirement than do men, because women are less likely to have income from their own pensions than men (21% of women vs. 43% of men) and their pension benefits are less than half of men's on average.
- Social Security provides more generous benefits to lower earners for the amount of taxes paid, as compared with higher earners. Because women have lower earnings on average than men, they benefit from this distribution toward lower earners.
- Since women's life expectancy is nearly 5 years longer than men (80 for women vs. 75 for men), women rely disproportionately on survivors' benefits and on the full cost of living adjustment in Social Security, which protects them from inflation as they age.
- Nearly 20% of unmarried women 65 and older live below the poverty line, compared with 5% of married elderly women. Without Social Security benefits, more than two-thirds of unmarried elderly women would live in poverty.
- Social Security provides benefits to living and surviving spouses. Despite women's increasing employment and improved lifetime earnings, 34% of women aged 62 and older still rely on spousal benefits (based on their husbands' or ex-husbands' earnings records) for their retirement security; another 28% also rely on benefits partly based on their husbands' or ex-husbands' earnings records and partly on their own earnings records.