

Fact Sheet



Social Security Reform and Women

Social Security is a women's issue.

On average, women earn less and live longer than men. Because of these characteristics, older women are more dependent on Social Security. Without Social Security, more than half of women aged 65 or older would be poor. For 25 percent of unmarried elderly women (widowed, divorced, separated, or never married), Social Security is their *only* source of income. Sixty percent of Social Security beneficiaries are women.

- ◆ *Women earn less than men.* Women who work full-time earn less than men who are employed full-time. The average woman college graduate earns little more than the average male high school graduate. Women earn 74 cents for every dollar men earn.
- ◆ *Women are less likely to work full-time.* Seventy-five percent of men between the ages of 25-44 were employed full-time for all of 1999, compared to 49 percent of women in the age group.¹
- ◆ *Women are more likely to spend time out of the paid labor force.* Twenty-three percent of women between the ages of 25-44 were not in the labor force in 1999 compared to only 8.5 percent of men.² Many of these women are mothers of young children.
- ◆ *Most women do not receive employer-sponsored pensions.* Only 27 percent of women age 65 and older received these pension benefits compared to 47 percent of older men.³ This is especially problematic for women of color, who are less likely to have employer-provided pension plans than either white men, white women, or non-white men. Twenty-eight percent of older White women, 21 percent of older Black women, and only 10 percent of older Hispanic women had income from pensions.⁴
- ◆ *Women are more likely to live alone in their retirement years.* Women spend more retirement years living alone, receiving just one Social Security benefit, either their own or a widow's benefit. Older men are more likely to be married. Because men tend to be older than their wives and because women live longer than men, women are more likely to be single and more likely to be single for longer periods of time during retirement. Unmarried women are at much higher risk for poverty than married women. About 19 percent of unmarried women age 65 and older (including widows) had incomes below the poverty level compared with 14 percent of unmarried men and only 5 percent of couples.