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With Children or by Themselves? New Trends on Older Americans' Living Arrangement

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Abstract (150 words):

A majority of the public (56%) considers it a "family responsibility" for adult children to take into their home an elderly parent, according to a 2005 Pew Research Center survey. Using data from the decennial census and American Community survey, we track changes in older Americans' living arrangements starting in last century. The recent trends since 1990 suggest an INCREASE in older Americans living with their adult children, and a DECREASE in the share of older Americans living alone. This represents a departure from the trend that dominated most of the 20th Century. We present the trend by demographic characteristics such as gender, age and race/ethnicity, and also try to shed some light on what factors might account for the recent trend. These findings have implications for the demands of the Social Security system, especially when the Baby Boomers start to hit 65 next year (2011).

With Children or by Themselves? New Trends on Older Americans' Living Arrangement

The U.S population is aging rapidly and individuals are living longer. As the Baby Boomers start to hit 65 next year (2011), whether or not our current Social Security system could provide for the older population going forward is questionable. At the same time, the traditional role of the family as a support network is weakened by the increase in the rate of divorce and remarriage in past few decades (Pezzin and Schone 1999, Cherlin 2009). A critical question is...who could older Americans rely on when they get to a point where they are no longer able to live independently?

This poster touches on this issue from the perspective of older Americans' living arrangement. According to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2005, a majority of the public (56%) considers it a "family responsibility" for adult children to take into their home an elderly parent. The recent Census data since 1990 suggest an INCREASE in older Americans living with their adult children, and a DECREASE in the share of older Americans living by themselves. This is a departure from the trend that dominated most of the 20th Century and therefore needs special attention.

Data for this study come from two sources. We use data from the decennial census and American Community survey to track changes in older Americans' living arrangements, and we also draw an earlier Pew research center survey's finding about how people view older parents living with children and will update the findings through an upcoming survey. We will update the Census trend with the 2009 ACS between now and next March before the PAA meeting. In addition to presenting the overall trend of older Americans' living arrangements, we take a look of the recent trend by demographic characteristics such as gender, age and race/ethnicity.

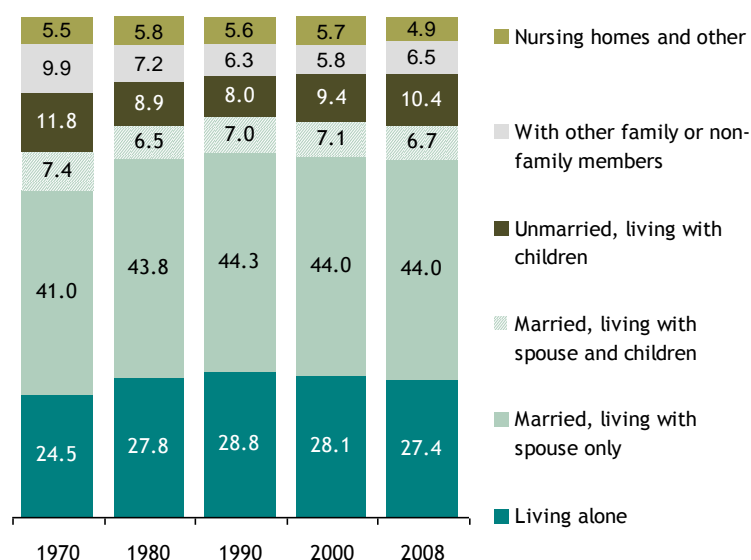
Although it is not our focus, we attempt to shed some light on which factor or combination of factors might account for the recent trend, and therefore point to the potential direction for future trends.

Recent trends on older Americans' living arrangement

The changes in living arrangements of older adults mark a stunning departure from the trends that dominated most of the 20th Century. Census data suggest that after a steady rise in share of older adults living alone, the proportion of older adults living

Living Arrangements of Adults 65 and Older, 1970-2008

% of older adults living in each arrangement ...



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Decennial U.S. Census data, 1970-2000, and 2008 American Community Survey. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

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by themselves dropped from 28.8% in 1990 to 27.4% in 2008. On the other hand, the share of older adults living with their children increased from 1990 to 2008 (8.0 % to 10.4%). Further, the share of older adults in nursing homes and other group quarters have slightly declined in the recent decade.

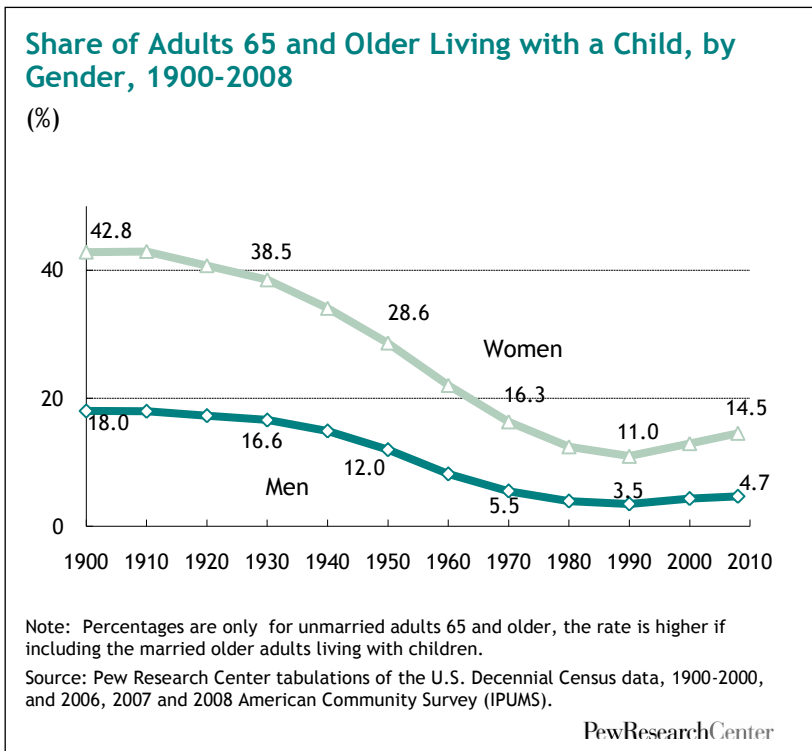
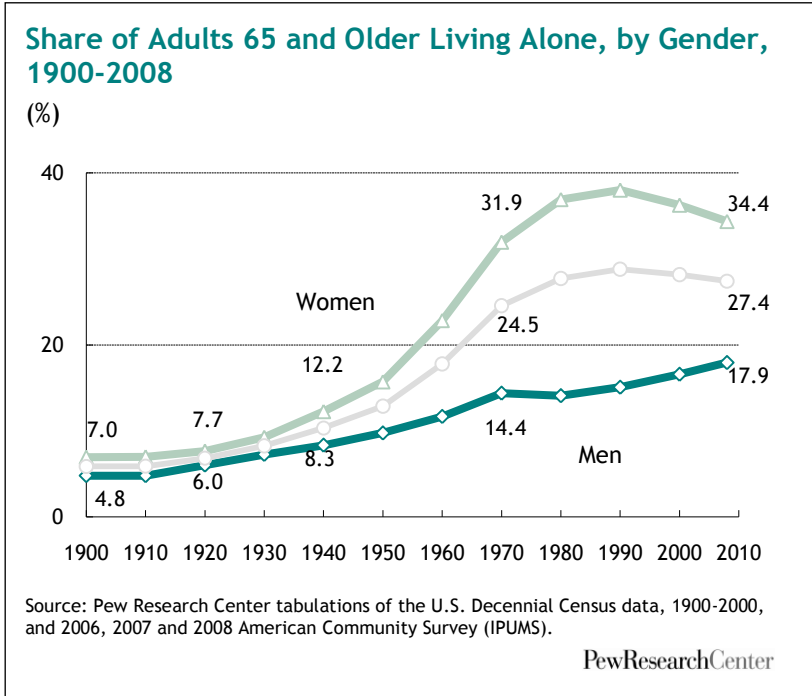
Roughly half of the older adults live with their spouse, and this number has been stable since 1990. For older adults living with relatives or non relatives (e.g., roommates), their share has gradually dropped since the 70s, although with a slight increase in the recent decade.

Living alone versus living with children

The share of older adults living alone has gone down since the 90s, after a continuous increase since the beginning of the century. As of 2008, some 27.4% did so, down slightly from 28.8% in 1990 but way up from just 5.9% in 1900.

Gender

A wide gender gap exists when it comes to living alone in old age. Older women are nearly twice likely as older men to live by themselves—34.4% versus 17.9% in 2008. Nevertheless, this gap is not as wide as it once was. The share of women 65 and older who live alone has declined in the past two decades (from a peak of 38% in 1990), while the share of older men living alone



has continued its century-long ascent.

After declining for nine decades, the share of older adults living with their children has started to increase since 1990. This trend is especially pronounced among older women. About 16.3% older women lived with their adult children in 1970, this number dropped to 11% in 1990, but increased in the decades that followed and reached 13% in 2000 and 14.5% in 2008.

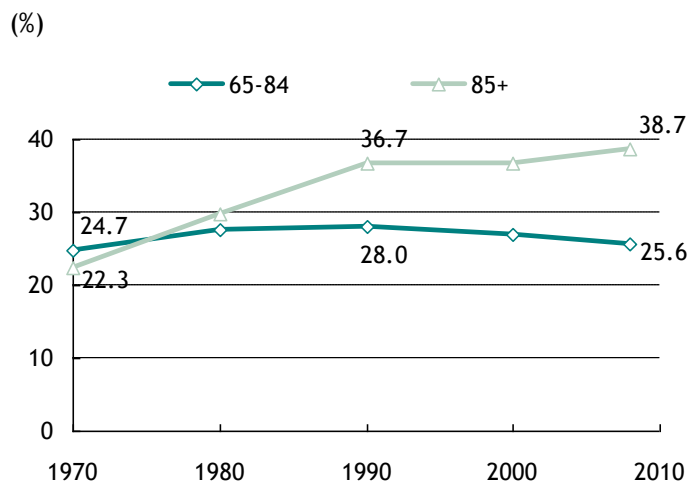
For older men who live with their adult children, the proportion is much smaller than their female counterparts. Older men follows a similar pattern of seeing a rise in living with their children after 1990, although it was a relatively mild change from 3.5% to 4.7%, a 1.2 percentage points increase in almost two decades.

Age

Since 1980, the “oldest old”—85 and older—have been more likely to live alone than those ages 65 to 84. Overall, the proportion of the oldest old living alone has grown sharply from 22.3% in 1970 to 36.7% in 1990 and continued rising to 38.7% in 2008. Yet among the younger group (65-84), the share who live alone has declined in the past two decades, from 28.0% in 1990 to 25.6% in 2008.

Many reasons likely contribute to the growing numbers of the oldest old

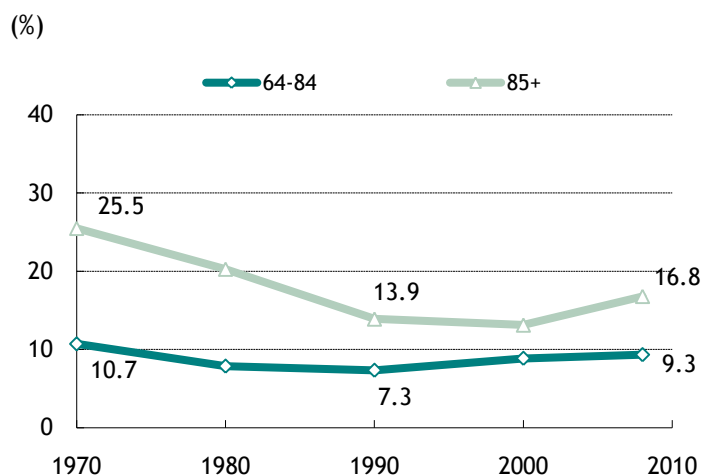
Share of Adults 65 and Older Living Alone, by Age, 1970-2008



Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the U.S. Decennial Census data, 1970-2000 and 2008 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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Share of Adults 65 and Older Living with a Child, by Age, 1970-2008



Note: Percentages are only for unmarried adults 65 and older, the rate is higher if including the married older adults living with children.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the U.S. Decennial Census data, 1970-2000, and 2008 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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who live alone. Americans are living longer and healthier. Those born in 2006 can expect to live at least into their mid-70s; those born in 1900 could expect to live only into their mid-40s.¹ Life expectancies at both age 65 and 85 have also increased, particularly among men. Nowadays Americans who live to age 85 are expected to live 6.8 more years (6.1 years for men and 7.2 years for women).²

For the group ages 65 to 84, the share living with their spouses has increased since the 1970s, reflecting the fact that both spouses are living longer. A growing share of this age group also lives with one or more adult children (9.3% in 2008 vs. 7.3% in 1990). These changes help explain why the share of older adults who live alone has declined in this age group since 1990.

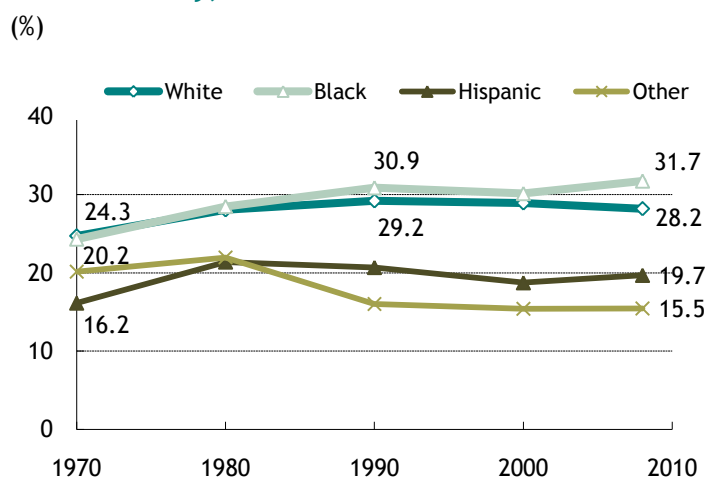
The oldest old are more likely than those ages 65 to 84 to live with their children, and the recent increase in the share of living with children is also more pronounced among the oldest old group. There was a near 3 percentage points increase among the oldest old and a 2 percentage points increase among those ages 65 to 84 between 1990 and 2008. There is a gender gap in the living arrangements of the oldest old. About one-in-five (20.2%) women in this age group live with a child or children, compared with about one-in-ten (9.5%) of older men.

Race/Ethnicity

Compared with older whites and blacks, older Hispanic adults are the less likely to live by themselves. In 2008, about one-in-five Hispanics ages 65 or older (19.7%) live alone, compared with 28.2% of white and 31.7% of black older adults.

The recent decline in the rate of living alone is more salient among the white older Americans. Their rate goes down one percentage point from 1990 to 2008. However, the rate of living alone among black older Americans actually continues to go up slightly, despite the

Share of Adults 65 and Older Living Alone, by Race/Ethnicity, 1970-2008



Note: Hispanics are of any race. Whites, Blacks and Other include only Non-Hispanics.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the U.S. Decennial Census data, 1970-2000, and 2008 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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¹ See the Pew Social & Demographic Trends report, "Growing Old in America: Expectations vs. Reality," released June 29, 2009 (<http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/736/getting-old-in-america>).

² See "Older Americans 2008: Key Indicators of Well-Being," Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 2008).

fact that all other groups are either going down or keeping flat.

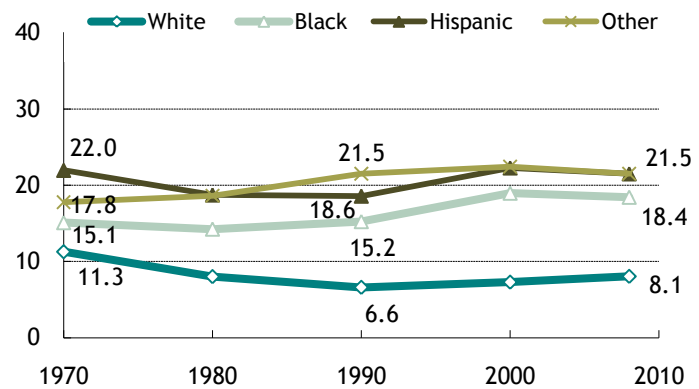
On the other hand, older Hispanics and adults of other races are more likely than white older adults to live with their children. In 2008, over one-in-five(21.5%) of older Hispanics or adults of other races live with their children, compared to 18% of older blacks and only 8% of their white counterparts.

It appears that the recent increase in the rate of living with children is universal to all racial and ethnic groups. Between 1990 and 2008, the rate goes up about 1.5 percentage points for whites, 3.2 percentage points for blacks, and about 3

percentage points for Hispanics from 1990 to 2008. Older Americans of other racial groups saw their rate of living with children started earlier in the 80s and have stayed at about same level in the recent two decades.

Share of Adults 65 and Older Living with a Child, by Race/Ethnicity, 1970-2008

(%)



Note: Percentages are only for unmarried adults 65 and older, the rate is higher if including the married older adults living with children.

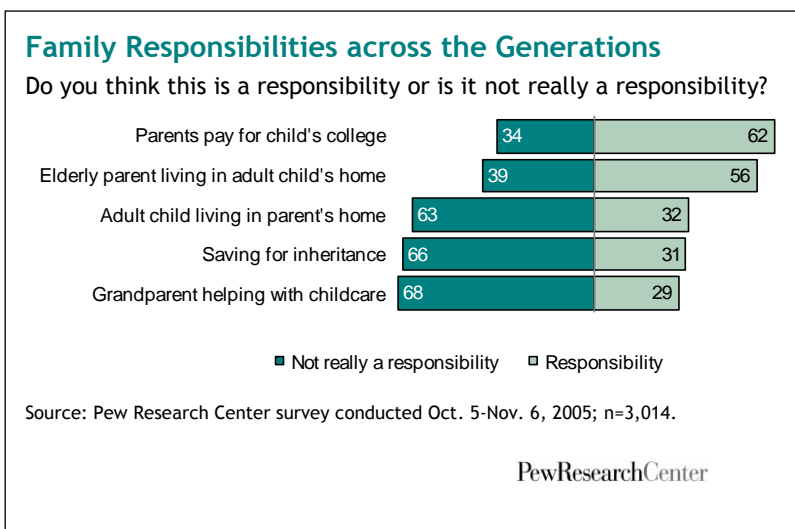
Note: Hispanics are of any race. Whites, Blacks and Other include only Non-Hispanics.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the U.S. Decennial Census data, 1970-2000, and 2008 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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Public opinion on older parents living with children

A Pew Research survey taken in 2005 found that a majority of the public (56%) considers it a “family responsibility” for adult children to take into their home an elderly parent who wants to live with them. A sizable minority—39%—said this isn’t really a family responsibility. Attitudes varied sharply by the age of the respondent. Two-thirds of adults ages 40 and under said it was a family responsibility, compared with just 38% of adults ages 60 and over.³



³ See Pew Research Center Social & Demographic Trends report, “Baby Boomers Approach Age 60: From the Age of Aquarius to the Age of Responsibility,” Dec. 8, 2005 (<http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/306/baby-boomers-from-the-age-of-aquarius-to-the-age-of-responsibility>).

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