

More baby boomers facing old age alone

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Startling new statistics from Bowling Green State University's National Center for Family and Marriage Research (NCFMR) paint a bleak future for the largest generation in history, the baby boomers, as they cross into old age.

Using data from the 1980, 1990 and 2000 censuses and the 2009 round of the American Community Survey, Dr. I-Fen Lin, an associate professor of sociology, and Dr. Susan Brown, a professor of sociology and co-director of the NCFMR, found one-third of adults aged 45-63 are unmarried. This represents a more than 50 percent increase since 1980, when just 20 percent of middle-aged Americans were unmarried.

Most single boomers are divorced or never married. In fact, one in three single baby boomers has never been married. Just 10 percent of unmarried boomers are widowed.

"The shift in marital composition of the middle-aged suggests that researchers and [policymakers](#) can no longer focus on [widowhood](#) in later life and should pay attention to the vulnerabilities of the never-married and divorced as well," said Lin.

According to Brown, one in five single baby boomers is living in poverty compared to one in 20 for their married counterparts. Single boomers are twice as likely to be disabled, but they are also less likely to have [health insurance](#).

The previous marital status of unmarried [baby boomers](#) also has

significant [repercussions](#). In general, divorced boomers have more [economic resources](#) and [better health](#) than their widowed or never married counterparts.

Of particular concern is the large share of unmarried boomers who have never been married. According to the researchers, the probability of marrying for the first time during [middle age](#) is extremely low, meaning that nearly all of the never married boomers will remain unmarried.

"The economic and health vulnerabilities of single boomers are concerning because boomers are now moving into old age when failing health becomes even more common and severe," said Brown.

"In the past, family members, particularly spouses, have provided care to infirm older adults. But a growing share of older adults aren't going to have a spouse available to rely on for support. Our figures indicate one in three boomers won't have a spouse who can care for them. And, unmarrieds are less likely to have children who might provide care. These shifting family patterns portend new strains on existing institutional supports for the elderly. As more singles enter older adulthood, we as a society may have to reconsider how we care for frail elders. The family may no longer be a viable option for an increasing segment of older adults."

Provided by Bowling Green State University

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