

## Fact Sheet

# Social Security: A Lifeline for Older Women and Minorities

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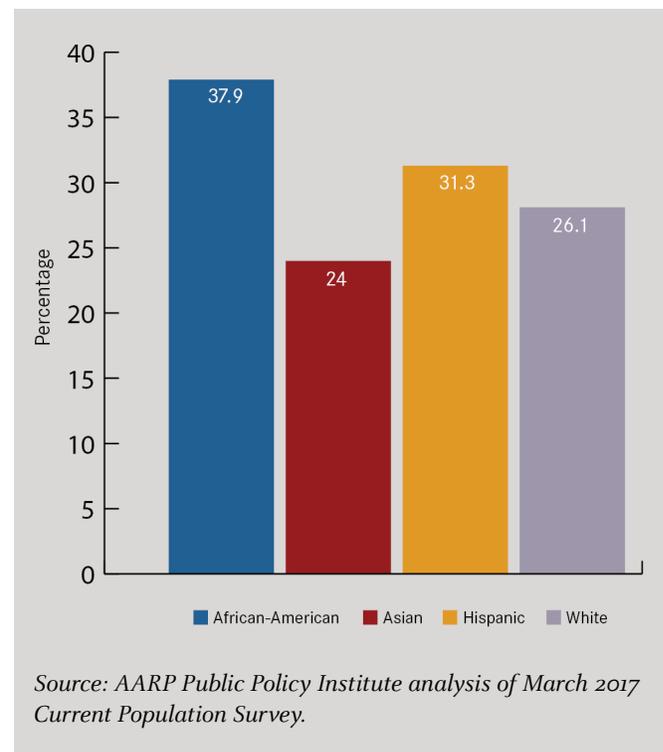
Social Security provides older Americans an important source of reliable income during retirement. This is especially true for African Americans, Hispanics, and women, who often lack access to income from pensions or savings and rely more heavily on Social Security.

### Older African American and Hispanic Women Rely Heavily on Social Security

Nearly 1 out of 4 (24 percent) women ages 65 and over live in families that receive at least 90 percent of their income from Social Security, while fewer than 1 in 5 men (18.9 percent) do so. Almost a third (31.2 percent) of all older African American women depend on Social Security for nearly all of their income, far higher than women in other racial and ethnic groups.

For older African-American women living in families receiving Social Security, reliance is even greater (figure 1). Nearly 4 out of 10 (37.9 percent) African American women in beneficiary families rely on Social Security for nearly all of their income, a rate that is 45 percent higher than that of White women. Among older Hispanic women in beneficiary families, nearly 1 in 3 (31.3 percent) relies on Social Security for nearly all of their income.

**FIGURE 1**  
Percentage of Women Who Rely on Social Security for 90 Percent or More of Their Income among Beneficiary Families, Ages 65 and Older, 2017



### Social Security Is a Key Income Source for Older Americans

For most Americans, Social Security income alone is not enough to maintain their standard of living in retirement. People without income sources other than Social Security, especially minorities, may be less able to cope financially and face greater financial risk.

Figure 2 examines access to three common sources of family income—Social Security, Pensions and Retirement Savings, and Asset Income—for people ages 65 and over within various demographic groups.

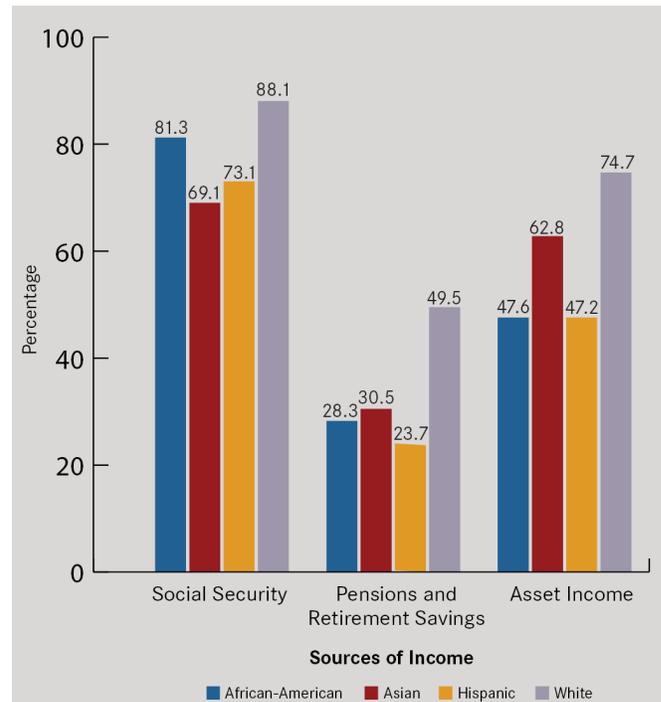
Overall, older White individuals live in families that are most likely to receive Social Security (88.1 percent), and they enjoy considerably greater access to income from pensions and retirement savings and assets. Meanwhile, older African Americans receive Social Security at somewhat lower rates (81.3 percent) and are much less likely to receive income from other sources. In fact, African Americans are 43 percent less likely to have income from pensions and retirement savings and 36 percent less likely to have asset income than White individuals.

Older Hispanic individuals live in families that receive income from pensions and retirement savings and assets at about the same rate as African Americans, but they are less likely to receive Social Security income. Less than 1 in 4 (23.7 percent) older Hispanic individuals receive income from pensions and retirement savings and less than half (47.2 percent) have asset income.

### A Crucial Piece of the Income Equation

Millions of older Americans with limited savings, pensions, or other retirement income rely on the stability of Social Security benefits. Social Security is especially important to women and minorities because they have less access to other forms of retirement income and savings that can both support them and cushion the impact of unforeseen expenses. For them—and many others—Social Security provides considerable peace of mind in a very uncertain world.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Percentage of People 65 and Older with Any Family Income, by Income Source, Race, and Ethnicity, 2017**



Source: AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of March 2017 Current Population Survey.

Note: Pensions and retirement savings include retirement, disability, and survivor pensions from government, military, railroad, union, and private employers; and payments from individual retirement accounts, 401(k)s, Keoghs, paid-up insurance policies, and annuities. Asset income includes interest, dividend, and rental income.

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