

Centenarians in the United States: Information from Census 2000

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The oldest old, and centenarians in particular, are of interest to researchers because studying these very old populations can help us to understand the biological and social factors associated with such exceptional longevity. Although the oldest old comprise a small proportion of the total population, their numbers are growing quickly.

This poster uses Census 2000 data to examine the centenarian population in the United States. We present information on the centenarian population enumerated in Census 2000, as well as information on the octogenarian and nonagenarian populations. Social and economic characteristics of these oldest-old populations are analyzed and presented. Special attention is given to data quality issues, including age misreporting and alternative sources of data that can be used to calculate the number of centenarians.

Population Characteristics

The number of centenarians grew rapidly between 1990 and 2000, from 37,000 to over 50,000. The centenarian population is expected to continue to grow quickly over the next several decades. By 2010, the number of centenarians is projected to more than double, and by 2050, projections indicate there could be over a million people aged 100 and over in the United States.

In 2000, non-Hispanic White accounted for 78 percent of the centenarian population and Blacks made up just less than 15 percent. The centenarian population is projected to become somewhat

more diverse in the 21st century.

Not surprisingly, in 2000, the majority of centenarians were aged 100 to 104 (90 percent). As with the older population as a whole, women outnumber men in the centenarian population. In 2000, women accounted for 80 percent of the centenarian population.

Social and Economic Characteristics

Census 2000 provides us with a unique snapshot of the population at the very old ages. Using these data we examine the marital status and living arrangements of these very old populations. Data on education, income, and poverty status are also presented.

Data Quality

Although Census 2000 enumerated over 50,000 centenarians, as in past censuses, this number probably exceeds the true number of people aged 100 and over. In this poster we will discuss some of the data quality issues surrounding centenarians.