

Elderly Poverty in the Region

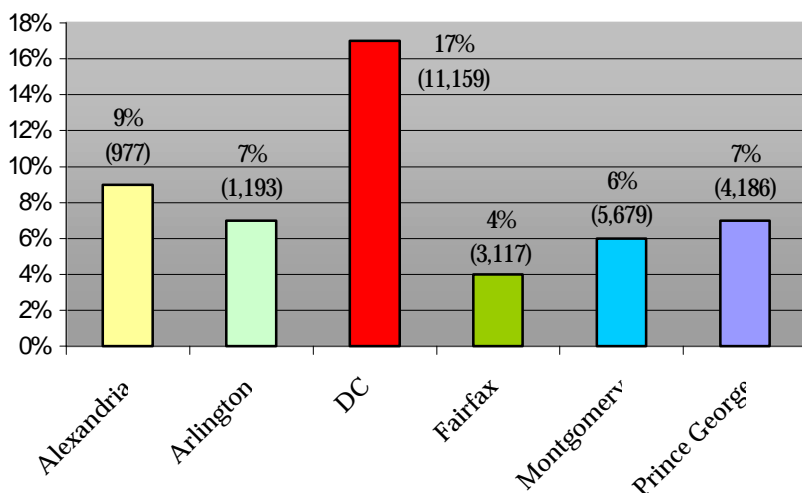
The national poverty rate among the elderly has changed considerably over time. In past decades the elderly were more likely to be poor and remain poor than any other age group because of limited income in their old age. In 1959, the elderly represented 35.2% of all people in poverty (Ropers, 1991). Since that time a number of federal programs such as Social Security, Medicare, the Older Americans Act and senior housing have helped reduce poverty among older Americans. Likewise, many elderly have taken advantage of private pension plans to help secure their later years. As a consequence of these government and private programs, the poverty rate of the elderly has dropped over the past three decades to 9.7% in 1999.

Though the overall poverty rate for the elderly has improved, the financial future of the elderly is not necessarily stable or secure. The elderly are living longer, medical costs are rising, and the prospects of the elderly needing long term medical care are threatening to their financial security. Finally, some groups of elderly still suffer from high rates of poverty.

This month's "Where We Live" research note identifies various demographic characteristics of the elderly in Metropolitan Washington's "Inner Region": DC, Montgomery and Prince George's County, Fairfax City and County, Alexandria and Arlington County.

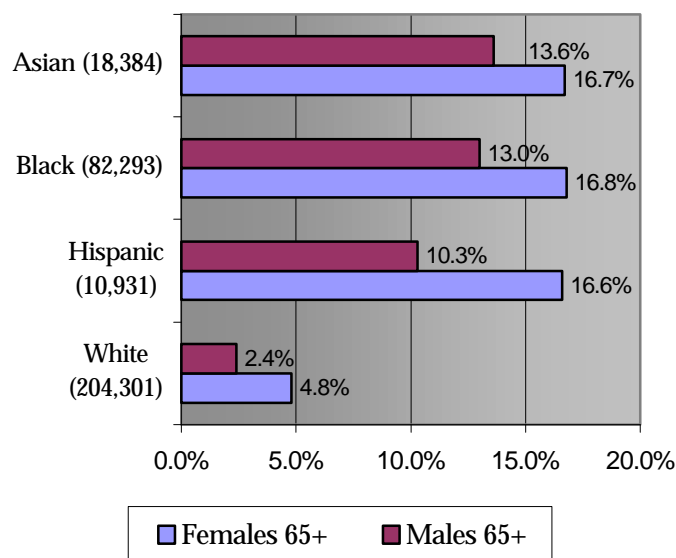
- As of 2000, there were over 26,000 elderly poor identified in Washington and the inner suburbs. The overall poverty rate for elderly men and women over 65 years of age is 10.8%.
- More than two thirds (69%) of the elderly poor in the Inner Region are women; totally 17,159 poor women over 65 years of age.

Percent of Elderly (65+) Living Below Poverty By Jurisdiction



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Census 2000, Urban Institute.

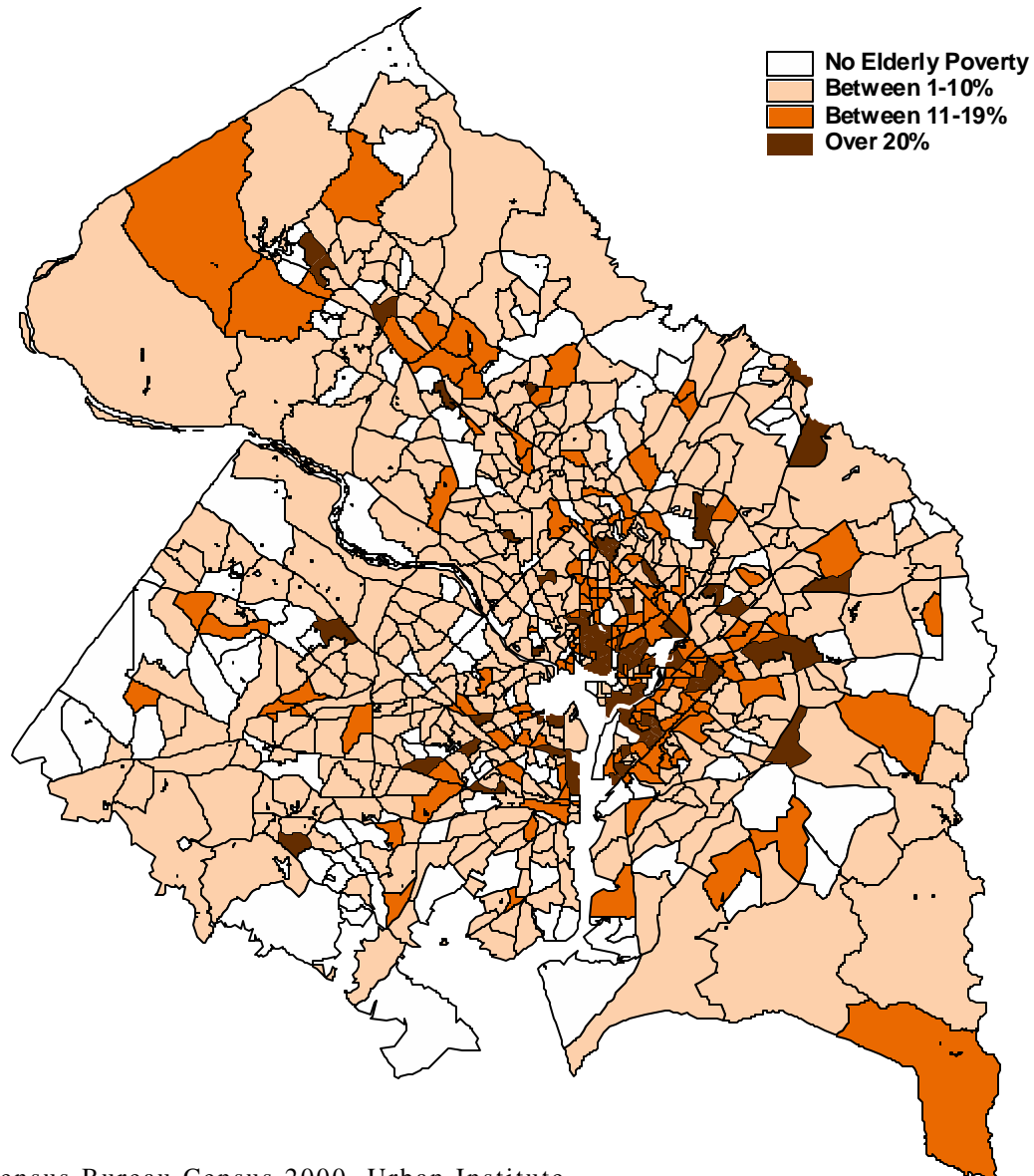
Percent of Elderly (65+) Living Below Poverty by Race/Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Census 2000, Urban Institute.
Note: Numbers by racial/ethnic group represent total elderly 65 and over in the Inner Region.

- Minority women have the highest poverty rates in the area. Over 16% of Asian, African-American and Hispanic elderly women live in poverty.
- More than half (51%) of all elderly poor in the Inner Region were African-American. Thirty-one percent of the elderly poverty are white.
- Elderly poor are found throughout the inner region, though Alexandria and the District of Columbia are the only municipalities that meet or exceed the national average for poverty among the elderly.

Percent of Elderly (65+) Living Below Poverty by Tract



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Census 2000, Urban Institute.

The Data

Figures for elderly population were obtained from the 2000 U.S. Census of Population and Housing. The Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is poor. The [poverty thresholds](#) do not vary geographically, but they are updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition counts money income before taxes and does not include capital gains and noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps).

The Author

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