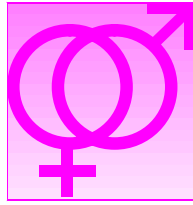


International Brief Gender and Aging



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Caregiving

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The typical image of caregiving and the elderly is one of an older person who is ill or infirm receiving care from a younger person. In many instances this image is correct. However, older women and men are not only the recipients of care; in many cases they are caregivers themselves. Another assumption about caregiving is that the person giving the care is a woman. Again, this is generally true but many men also provide care. In this profile we will examine gender differences in both aspects of caregiving and the elderly—as recipients and as givers of care.

Historically, when an older person was in need of care, most often it was provided by the family. Past levels of high mortality meant that the proportion of population that reached older ages and needed care was relatively small. Also, past levels of high fertility ensured that there were plenty of family members to share the responsibility of care. However, as fertility and mortality have declined, the proportion of population at older ages has expanded and the number of younger family members available to care for these older people has decreased.

In 1950, 12 percent of the population in developed¹ countries was aged 60 and older compared with 19 percent in 1998. By 2025, 28 percent of the population in developed countries will be older.² Although the proportional change

in the population aged 60 and older in developing countries between 1950 and 1998 is not dramatic, the growth in absolute numbers is, rising from just over 100 million to 355 million. By

¹ The “developed” and “developing” country categories used in this brief correspond to the “more developed” and “less developed” classification employed by the United Nations. Developed countries comprise all nations in Europe and North America, plus Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. The remaining nations of the world are considered to be developing countries.

² The term “older” is an arbitrary concept used only for cross-national comparative purposes. In this brief, “older” generally refers to ages 60 and over.

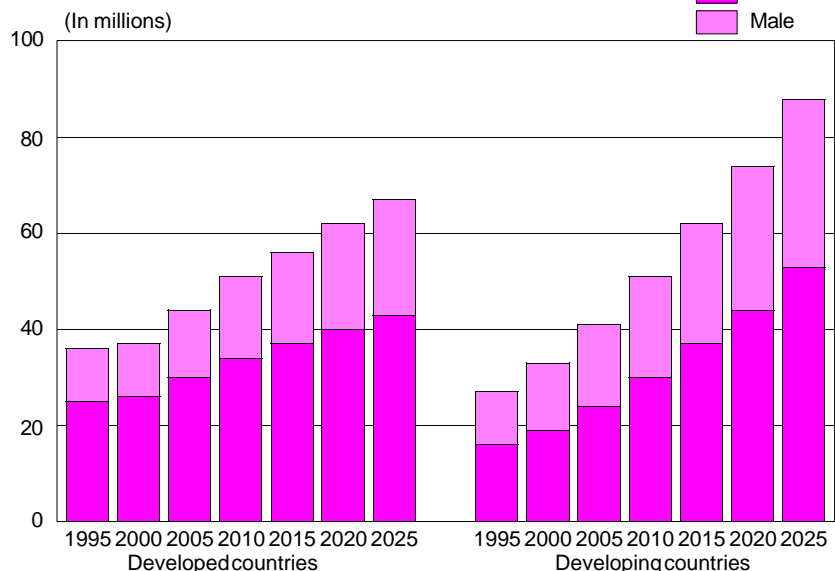
2025, there will be 839 million older people living in developing countries, 500 million more than will be living in developed countries.

Older Population Itself is Aging

Not only are populations aging, the older population itself is aging, with increasing proportions in the oldest-old age group (defined in this report as aged 80 and older). The oldest-old population is often the fastest growing segment of the older population. While this is true in both the developed and the developing world, the number of oldest old is growing more rapidly in developing countries (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Growth of the Oldest-Old Population (80+): 1995 to 2025



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998.

Currently, developed countries are home to the majority of the oldest old. However, by 2015, the balance will switch and the majority of the oldest old will reside in developing countries.

Women account for the majority of the oldest old in most countries of the world and will continue to do so in the future. However, there are opposite trends in the sex composition of the oldest old in developed and developing nations. The proportion of oldest old who are women is expected to decrease in developed countries and increase in developing countries. The changing sex composition is due to differences in the projected gender gap in life expectancy in the two regions; in developed countries the gap in life expectancy is projected to decrease while in developing countries the gap is projected to increase (Kinsella and Gist, 1995).

One consequence of population aging and the concomitant aging of the elderly is an expanding need for health care and service provision, because the oldest-old population is more likely than their younger counterparts to have health problems which require care.

Spouse Most Likely to Give Care

Although the stereotypical view of caregiving for the elderly is that of children caring for their aged parents, for many older people the main person who provides care is their spouse (Shuman, 1994). This is true in both developed and developing nations and for both men and women. Because of the sex difference in longevity, older women are more likely than older men to find themselves without a spouse. Thus, if they need care, they have to turn to other family members or to institutions. A

recent survey in Spain found that 74 percent of older men who were receiving assistance with one or more instrumental activities of daily living³ had their wife as the caregiver. Only 33 percent of older women relied on their husband as the caregiver, while 58 percent were aided by a daughter (Béland and Zunzunegui, 1996).

Sandwich Generation a Developed Country Phenomenon

One aspect of caregiving that has received a great deal of attention is the so-called "sandwich generation," that is, people who find themselves caring for elderly parents while also caring for their own children. The increases in life expectancy experienced in most countries have enhanced the likelihood that middle-aged adults will find themselves caring for older parents. When the sandwich generation has to care for parents who are aged 80 and older, the demands of caregiving are likely to increase as parents in this age group often have more pressing needs than their younger counterparts.

One measure of the pressure the sandwich generation may experience in caring for elderly parents is the parent support ratio, defined as the number of oldest old (aged 80 and over) per 100 people aged 50 to 64. This ratio is higher in developed countries than in developing countries (Figure 2). In 1998, ratios in developed countries ranged from around 10 to over 25. Projected increases in parent support ratios are quite large in some developed countries; for example, Japan's ratio is expected to increase from 17 in 1998 to 42 by 2025. In contrast, parent support ratios and their

³ Instrumental activities of daily living include preparing meals, shopping for personal items, managing money, using the telephone and doing light housework.

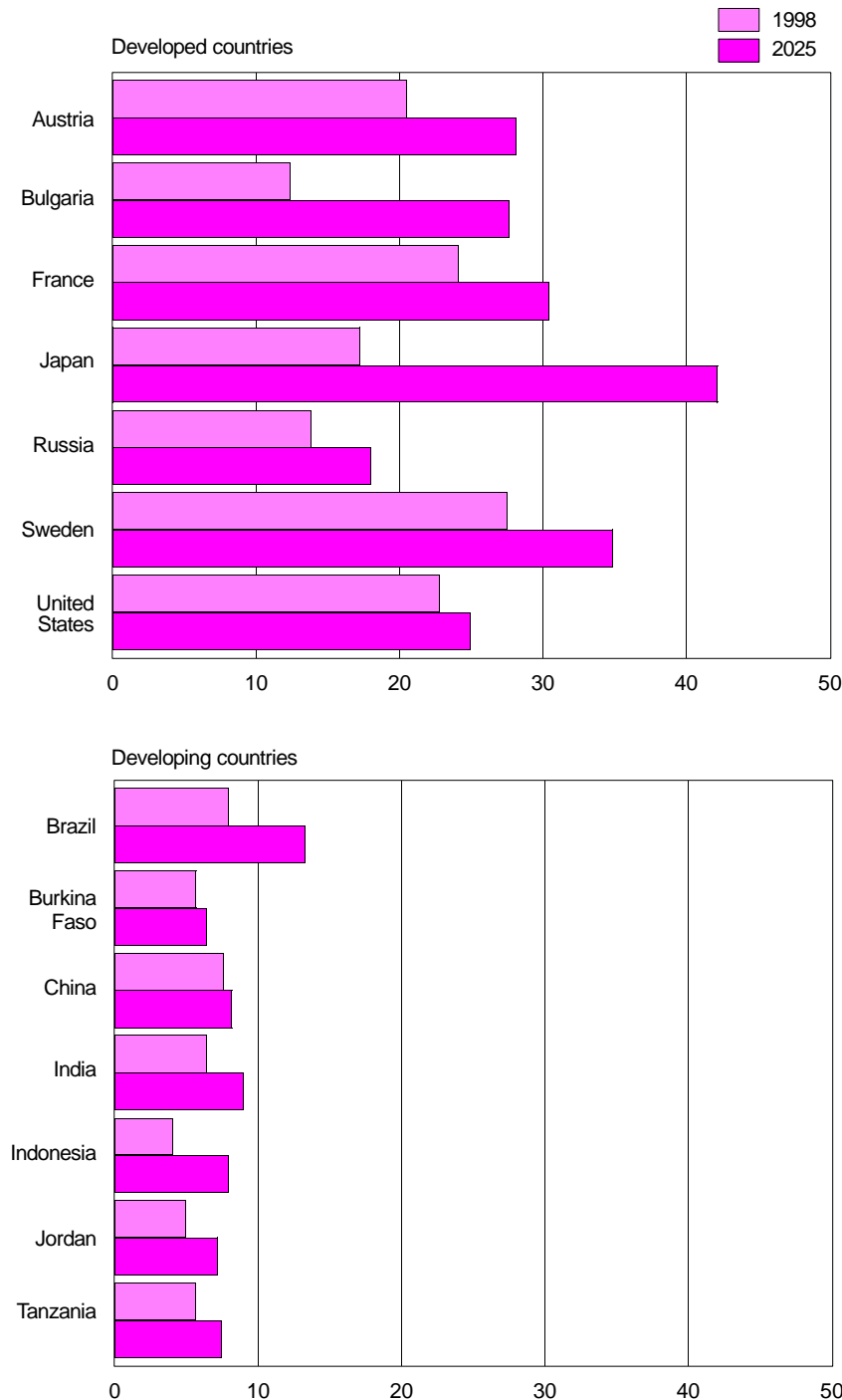
projected increases are much smaller in developing countries; most such countries have parent support ratios under 10 in both 1998 and 2025.

The difference in projected parent support ratios between developed and developing countries reflects different trends in fertility. People who will be aged 50 to 64 (the potential support-givers) in 2025 were born between 1961 and 1975. In most developing countries, fertility was still high during this period, or just beginning to decline. Hence, this age group will be fairly large, resulting in low parent support ratios. In developed countries, fertility was relatively low during this period, producing small birth cohorts which will result in higher parent support ratios in 2025.

Female Employment Does Not Deter Caregiving

Women in most societies, whether they be wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, nieces, or granddaughters, traditionally have been the family members who care for the elderly. In many countries, the proportion of women in the labor force is increasing. This is particularly true for women in mid-life who are often responsible for caring for aging parents (Figure 3). A concern is that increasing labor force participation of women will shrink the pool of potential female caregivers, but many studies have found that employment does not preclude women from assuming caregiving roles (Moen, Robison, and Fields, 1994; Sundström, 1994). In fact, research has shown that working women are just as likely to become caregivers as are their nonworking counterparts, although working women who do take on caregiving tasks may reduce their work hours (Pavalko and Artis, 1997).

Figure 2.
Parent Support Ratio: 1998 and 2025



Note: Ratio = Number of people aged 80+ per 100 people aged 50 to 64.
 Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998.

Older Women Likely to Live Alone in Developed Countries

Living arrangements of the elderly differ greatly by country and culture and, obviously, have implications for caregiving. In many Western developed countries, a substantial proportion of older women live alone (Figure 4). Older women are much more likely to live alone than are older men, in part because of the large differences in marital status between the sexes—older women are much more likely to be widowed than are older men. For instance, 44 percent of older Dutch women lived alone in 1995 compared with 17 percent of older men. The corresponding percents widowed were 40 percent for older women and 11 percent for older men.

In many developing countries, a strong tradition of filial piety is often expressed by coresidency of older people and their adult children. Traditionally, the family has provided support for older members. Today a concern is that, as countries become more developed, the family's role in support will decrease. However, recent surveys in several Asian countries found that the norm is still for older people to live with their children (Figure 5). Most older people who do not live with their children live near one of their children and usually have daily contact with them. Coresidency facilitates support systems between the elderly and their adult children (Chan, 1997; Knodel and Chayovan, 1997). Typically, the flow of support is not unidirectional from adult child to older parent, but rather, there are reciprocal exchanges.

Elders as Givers of Care

Another important component of older people's lives is their role as the givers of care. Older people provide care for many others (older parents, spouses, siblings, children, and grandchildren), and

for a variety of reasons (illness of a family member, increased number of single-parent families, increased female labor force participation, orphaned grandchildren). Often the care provided by older family members is essential to the well-being of the family.

The Importance of Grandparents

In some countries, nontrivial proportions of older women and men are providing care to their grandchildren. This ranges from occasional babysitting to being a custodial grandparent. In the United States in 1997, 3.9 million children (5.5 percent of all children under age 18) lived in a household maintained by their grandparents (Casper and Bryson, 1998). Since 1990, the number of children living in households headed by grandparents has increased, especially for children in households with only grandparents and grandchildren. Various factors (divorce, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, child abuse) may have contributed to the increase in these types of families.

Many grandparents in developed countries also provide day care for grandchildren so the grandchildren's parents can work. In the United States in 1994, 16 percent of preschool children with working mothers were cared for by a grandparent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997), typically the grandmother. Grandmothers also play an important role in many Eastern European countries and the Newly Independent states. Because of the lack of adequate day care in many of these countries, the care that grandmothers provide for their grandchildren may be integral to family functioning.

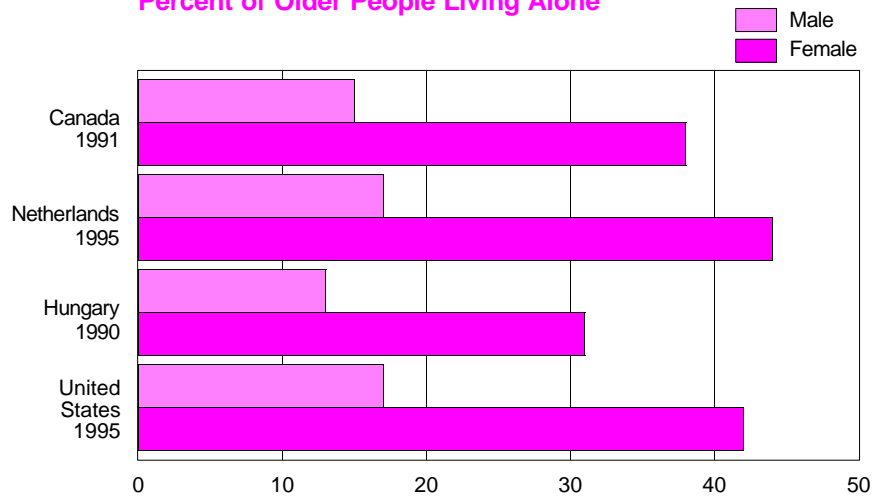
In many Asian countries, where coresidency of older parents and an adult son or daughter is the norm, proportions of grandparents providing care for grandchildren is

Figure 3.
Percent of Women Aged 50 to 54 Who Are in the Labor Force: 1986 and 1996



Source: ILO, 1987 and 1997.

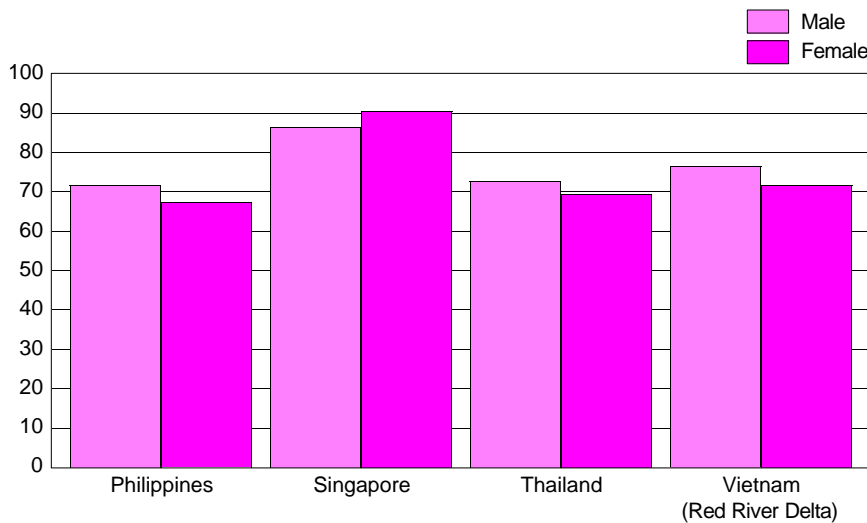
Figure 4.
Percent of Older People Living Alone



Note: Older refers to people aged 65 years and older in Canada and the United States and 60 years and older in other countries.

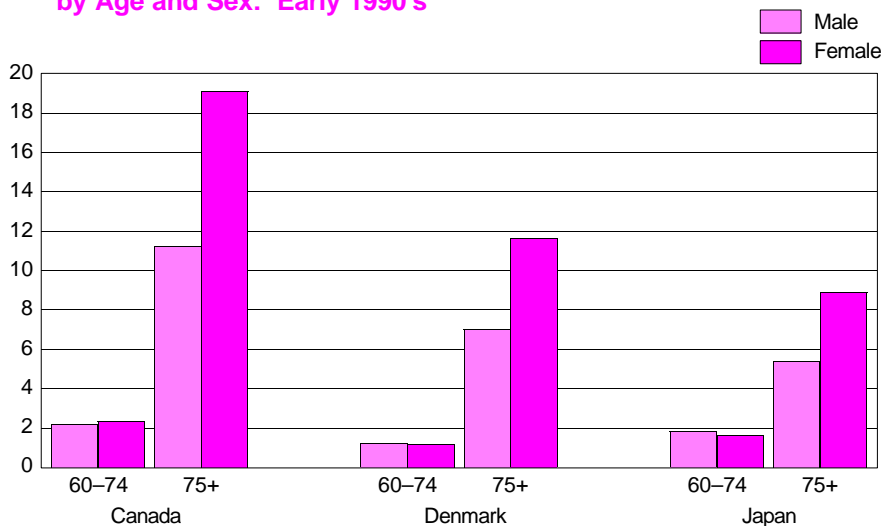
Source: Various statistical yearbooks.

Figure 5.
Percent of Older People Living With Children in Four Asian Countries: Circa 1996



Source: Anh et al., 1997; Chan, 1997; Knodel and Chayovan, 1997; Natividad and Cruz, 1997.

Figure 6.
Percent Older Population in Institutions by Age and Sex: Early 1990's



Source: United Nations, 1997.

substantial. In the Philippines, Thailand, and Taiwan, around 40 percent of the population aged 50 and older lived in a household with a minor grandchild (under 18 years of age). In these same countries, approximately half or more of those aged 50 and older who had a coresident grandchild aged 10 or younger provided care

for the child (Hermalin, Roan, and Perez, 1998). As in the United States, Asian grandmothers are more likely than grandfathers to provide care for grandchildren (Chan, 1997; Uhlenberg, 1996).

Many grandparents find themselves in the position of going beyond providing occasional care

to becoming the sole providers of care for their grandchildren. One reason for this situation is the migration of the middle generation to urban areas to work. Past research has found that this is not unusual in Afro-Caribbean countries (Sennott-Miller, 1989). These "skip generation" families are found in all regions of the world and may be quite prevalent. One study in rural Zimbabwe found that over 35 percent of households were skip generation households (Hashimoto, 1991).

Effect of AIDS Epidemic on Grandparents

The AIDS epidemic has affected the number of grandparents who are caring for grandchildren in most countries of the world. The effects of the epidemic are particularly devastating in Sub-Saharan Africa where it is estimated that 7.4 percent of the entire population aged 15 to 49 is infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. High rates of adult infection and AIDS deaths leave many children in need of care. It is estimated that the cumulative number of AIDS orphans⁴ in Sub-Saharan Africa is 7.8 million (UNAIDS/WHO, 1997). For many of these children, grandparents have become the main caregiver (Levine, Michaels, and Back, 1996). One study in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) found that the principal guardian for 35 percent of AIDS orphans was a grandparent (Ryder et al., 1994).

Institutionalization of the Elderly Not Widespread

Very small proportions of older people reside in institutions in most countries, both developed and developing. Rates of institutionalization range from 1 to 10 percent in developed nations

⁴ AIDS orphans are defined as HIV-negative children who lost their mother or both parents to AIDS when they were under age 15.

and less than 1 percent in most developing nations. The proportion of the elderly who are institutionalized increases with age so that the oldest old are much more likely to be in institutions than their younger counterparts. The sexes differ very little in institutionalization rates, except among the oldest age groups; higher proportions of oldest-old women reside in institutions than do oldest-old men (Figure 6).

The sex difference in institutionalization for the oldest age group is influenced by at least two factors. One is that older men are much more likely to be married and, therefore, able to rely on their wives for care. A second factor is that the proportion of women in the open-ended age group (e.g., aged 75 and older) who are at the very oldest ages (e.g., aged 90 and over) is higher than the corresponding proportion of men. Because the need for care increases with age and proportionately more women are at the oldest end of the age spectrum, the proportion of women in the age group 75 and older who are institutionalized is greater than the proportion of men.

One reason for the low levels of institutionalization is that family members typically provide care for older people who are unable to care for themselves. Therefore, future rates of institutionalization will be influenced by the number of kin available to provide care. Modeling of kin availability has shown that in many developed and some developing countries, kin support networks for older people will shrink (Kinsella, 1996). Despite the fact that the number of biological kin may be decreasing, there is evidence that families are adapting to changing demographic circumstances (Anderson et al., 1998).

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(Many of the data in this report are based on or taken from sources not included in the following reference list. These unnamed sources consist mainly of primary census and survey volumes of individual countries).

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Table 1.
Population Indicators by Age and Sex

Country	Population aged 80 and over (000's)				Percent change aged 80 and over 1998 to 2025		Aged 80 and over as percent of 60 and over				Percent widowed aged 60 and over		Parent support ratio	
	1998		2025		1998 to 2025		1998		2025		aged 60 and over		1998	2025
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Afghanistan	35	27	100	94	183.5	250.4	6.0	5.1	7.0	7.0	N/A	N/A	4	5
Algeria	75	86	178	257	138.0	199.0	9.0	9.2	7.7	10.3	7	55	8	7
Argentina	278	492	555	1044	99.6	112.5	12.9	17.1	15.4	22.2	12	46	17	23
Australia	188	348	482	727	155.9	109.0	13.8	20.9	17.7	22.8	11	39	20	28
Bangladesh	220	127	457	431	107.6	240.6	6.2	4.2	5.3	5.0	7	68	4	4
Brazil	429	854	1531	2982	257.1	249.4	7.9	11.4	11.0	15.8	13	47	8	13
Canada	311	596	746	1187	139.9	99.1	14.0	21.1	15.4	20.9	10	39	20	26
China	3866	6595	10152	15805	162.6	139.6	6.5	10.4	7.7	10.8	24	52	8	8
Colombia	85	119	300	576	252.2	381.8	7.2	8.4	8.5	12.6	13	43	6	10
Egypt	99	142	253	500	156.5	251.3	5.6	6.7	5.9	9.2	12	60	4	6
Ethiopia	69	94	129	224	85.8	137.2	5.8	6.8	8.2	10.1	N/A	N/A	4	7
France	679	1519	1330	2352	95.9	54.9	13.3	21.8	17.1	23.8	15	51 ^a	24	30
Germany	789	2206	2195	3785	178.1	71.6	10.7	20.4	18.4	26.6	18	56 ^a	19	32
India	2956	2790	8309	9674	181.1	246.7	8.5	8.4	10.2	11.0	20	51	6	9
Indonesia	313	473	1351	2314	330.9	389.2	4.9	6.1	7.9	11.2	11	58	4	8
Italy	746	1498	1466	2622	96.6	75.0	13.2	19.6	19.1	27.0	11	43	22	32
Japan	1439	2899	3936	6734	173.5	132.3	11.9	18.4	22.5	30.5	10	44	17	42
Kenya	43	57	99	184	132.1	224.0	8.2	8.7	11.8	14.8	5	36	6	11
Malaysia	44	69	146	271	233.6	294.8	7.4	9.5	8.3	11.9	12	51	6	9
Mexico	245	371	830	1428	238.9	285.0	8.7	11.1	11.1	14.3	12	37	8	11
Morocco	82	97	201	325	145.2	235.2	9.1	9.2	9.0	12.2	7	62	8	9
Nepal	36	39	126	172	248.3	338.0	5.6	6.1	8.8	10.8	18	48	4	7
Pakistan	342	353	670	933	96.0	164.2	8.2	8.5	8.1	9.9	12	47	7	7
Peru	71	102	265	377	274.2	268.6	8.5	10.8	11.7	14.8	17	43	8	12
Philippines	166	210	419	644	152.8	206.1	8.5	9.0	8.2	9.8	15	42	6	7
Poland	223	532	519	1103	132.6	107.2	8.9	14.1	11.8	18.7	14	50	14	23
Romania	147	262	347	661	136.1	151.8	8.2	11.1	15.6	21.9	15	47	12	23
Russia	593	2427	1213	3561	104.5	46.7	6.7	14.1	9.5	16.6	12	55	14	18
South Africa	110	227	226	469	104.6	106.9	9.0	13.3	10.4	14.4	12	50	9	12
South Korea	105	289	642	1189	512.7	311.0	5.4	10.5	11.1	17.1	12	62	7	15
Spain	461	928	884	1593	91.7	71.6	12.8	19.3	17.8	25.0	15	46 ^a	22	27
Sri Lanka	89	94	210	340	135.4	261.8	10.7	10.6	11.6	14.1	11	42	9	13
Sudan	48	36	129	154	169.3	327.9	6.8	6.2	8.0	7.8	N/A	N/A	4	5
Taiwan	126	140	416	625	229.6	346.9	9.4	11.6	13.9	18.2	12	34	11	20
Tanzania	48	60	88	165	81.8	172.7	7.5	8.0	8.8	10.7	8	45	6	7
Thailand	188	319	646	1220	243.9	282.4	7.5	10.5	10.6	15.1	17	53	7	13
Turkey	218	352	810	1256	272.0	256.7	8.4	12.0	12.3	17.1	11	45	9	14
Ukraine	261	894	461	1290	76.6	44.3	7.4	13.9	11.0	18.6	13	54	14	19
United Kingdom	730	1627	1278	2208	75.1	35.7	14.1	23.6	16.6	23.7	18	49 ^a	24	29
United States	2881	5835	5631	8766	95.5	50.2	15.2	22.8	14.8	19.7	13	47 ^a	23	25
Uzbekistan	55	126	118	223	116.0	77.0	8.0	13.2	7.7	10.9	15	58	11	8
Venezuela	84	116	231	345	175.7	197.9	11.9	14.4	11.0	13.7	10	35	11	12

N/A Data not available.

^a Data refer to ages 65+.

Data for percent widowed represent the latest available data from the period 1985 to 1997.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998.