Chapter One:
The Older Population in the USA

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Changing Demographics of U S  Population

- Senior boomers changing demographics—characteristics of population & our country
- **Demographic trends** describe changes in characteristics: size, age distribution, & location
- **Population aging**: increase in size of population age 65 & older; gain in average age of population (one of most dramatic demographic changes in U S  & worldwide)
- **Individual aging process**: physiological, psychological, & social changes of aging
Changes in Life Expectancy

- Older population growing rapidly because of *increasing life expectancy*
  - In 1900, average life expectancy at birth in U.S. was 47 years old
  - Today, more than 78 years
  - It will be in mid-80s by 2050

- Increase in life expectancy & *declining birth-rate* with a rise in median age of U.S. population—from 28 in 1970 to 37 today

- Median age will rise by 2030 as even more Americans live into their 80s & 90s

- U.S. life expectancy lags behind that of 51 other countries
Causes of Increased Life Expectancy

Three factors drive the increase in life expectancy:

- **AGE DYNAMICS** - Past variations in birth and death rates affect the evolution of a country's age structure (i.e., the 1946-1964 baby boom in the United States).

- **DECLINING FERTILITY RATES** - A declining share of young people within the general population causes the population's share of older people to rise automatically.

- **LONGLIVTY INCREASE** - As the population ages, there is general agreement that an increase in life expectancy will continue.
Gender Differences in Life Expectancy

- **Men & women differ in how long they live**
  - Females born today will live 5-6 years longer than men; 80.8 years compared to 75.7
  - Even at age 85, female life expectancy is an additional 6.8 years compared to 5.7 for males. Why do women live longer than men?

- **Biological factors**, such as genetic theory that female’s two X chromosomes make her physiologically more robust

  **Lifestyle factors**, such as women’s greater likelihood of preventive health behaviors & their lower rates of smoking, substance abuse, & lower high-risk behaviors across life course

- As a result of differences in life expectancy:
  - Women represent 58% of population 65 & older, & nearly 70% of those over age 85
  - Women at age 85 & over outnumber male counterparts by five to two & among centenarians by three to one
Racial Differences in Life Expectancy

- Elders of color in U.S. have lower expectancy than whites
  - Healthcare disparities play a role
  - Inequities in class, education, & healthcare intensified in old age
  - Women of color live longer than male counterparts
  - More Latino men to women over age 65 than among white older population, even though Latina women live longer & outnumber men
  - Asian-Pacific Islander men outnumber female counterparts until they reach age 75
Maximum Life Span

- Maximum life span is the length of years a given species could expect to live if all environmental hazards were eliminated.
- Longest documented human life is that of Jeanne Calment, a Frenchwoman who lived until age 122 (1875-1997).
- “Rectangular survival curve” is the ideal situation where all people would survive to maximum life span.
Population Pyramids

- These pyramids capture changing age distribution of American population—shift in proportion of older adults to younger persons in 2010 and projected 2050.
Support & Dependency Ratios

- **Dependency Ratio** refers to number of people age 65 & older to every 100 people of traditional working ages. Measured in the US in 2012: 49.84. It was 50.07 in 2011. Over the past 51 years, the value for this indicator has fluctuated between 67.05 in 1962 and 48.80 in 2006.

- **Support Ratio** indicates relationship between proportion of population that is employed. This ratio has decreased steadily over past 100 years.

- **Potential Support Ratio**: As a population ages, the potential support ratio tends to fall. Between 1950 and 2009, the potential ratio decline from 12 to 9 potential workers per person aged 65 or over.

- **Projection**: By 2050, the potential support ratio is projected to reach 4 potential worker per older person.

- Reduction of potential support ratio has important implications for social security schemes, particularly for pay-as-you-go pension systems under which taxes on current workers pay the pensions of retirees.
Rapid Growth of Old-Old & Oldest-Old

- Anyone between 75 & 84 is considered *old-old*
- Anyone 85 or older is among *oldest-old*
- Average personal income of oldest old is lower than rest of older population
- Fastest-growing segment of the total population is oldest-old. Growth rate is twice that of those 65 and over and almost 4-times that for the total population.
- In the United States, this group now represents 10% of the older population and will *more than triple* from 5.7 million in 2010 to over 19 million by 2050.
Who Are Oldest-Old?

- 66% are women
- Nearly 76% are widowed women
- 38% are widowed men
- Approximately 55% of men are married, compared to only 15% of women
- 15% are foreign born
- Have fewer years of education compared to those ages 65-74
- Higher proportion lives below or near poverty, compared to those age 65
- Are disproportionately represented in hospitals & in long-term care settings
- Do you want to live to be 100?
Centenarians & Super-Centenarians

- **Facts about centenarians:**
  - In 2010, almost 72,000 Americans reached 100 years, a 72% increase from 1990
  - By 2025, one in 26 baby boomers can expect to live to 100
  - By 2050, 600,000-800,000 centenarians are likely to be alive
  - Most centenarians are healthy, mentally alert, free of major disability, able to perform most daily activities, & are engaged in their communities

- **Super-centenarians:** Those who have reached 110 or more
  - Super-centenarians have fewer chronic diseases & physical disabilities
  - Only 34% of this group have cardiovascular disease, compared to 49% of those younger than 110

- Do you think their longevity is primarily due to genetics? What research can you find? (Check out “hardiness”)
Role of Environment

- Environmental & lifestyle factors play a role in living to be 100 or older

- *Okinawa Lifestyle* includes high levels of physical activity, social integration, deep spirituality, adaptability, & optimistic attitudes
Increasing Diversity Among Older Population

- **Elders of Color**: Slightly more than 20% of population over age 65 is composed of persons of color

- **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender (LGBT) Elders**: older population is also becoming more diverse in terms of those who identify as LGBT

- **Geographic Distribution**: Elders are not evenly distributed worldwide
Geographic Distribution Among Elders of Color

- African American population is distributed more evenly in U.S. than other elders of color.
- Those from other historically disadvantaged groups tend to be concentrated in Northeast, Southwest, Florida, & California, & American Indians, along Canadian border.
Educational & Economic Status

- In 1960, less than 20% of older population had a high school degree.

- By 2010, slightly over 79% of cohort age 65 & older had completed high school & slightly over 22% held a bachelor’s degree or more.

- Because of gender inequities in previous generations, only 15% of white women age 65 & older compared to 25% of white men have more than a high school education.
Longevity in Health or Disease? What Does the Future Hold?

- Fries suggests more people will achieve maximum life span because of healthier lifestyles & better healthcare during youth & middle years

- **Compression of morbidity**: Premature death is minimized because disease & functional decline are compressed into brief period of 3-5 years before death

- **Dependent life expectancy**: People will live longer but with chronic illness & dependence on others

- **Active life expectancy**: Varies by sex, race, & social class