U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Policy Development and Research
Washington, D.C. 20410

HOW WELL ARE WE HOUSED?

4. The Elderly

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Under a contract with HUD, Professor Anthony Yezer of George Washington University did the original research leading to these findings and wrote the as-yet-unpublished report from which this summary was prepared. The data were compiled from the 1976 *Annual Housing Survey* and from the following 1976 *Current Population Reports:* Series P-60, No. 107, 114, and 115, and Series P-20, No 311, published by the Bureau of the Census. Donald Fowles of the National Clearing House on Aging generously provided assistance.

DISCLAIMER

The research findings in this summary are those of the contractor, who is solely responsible for the accuracy and completeness of all information herein.

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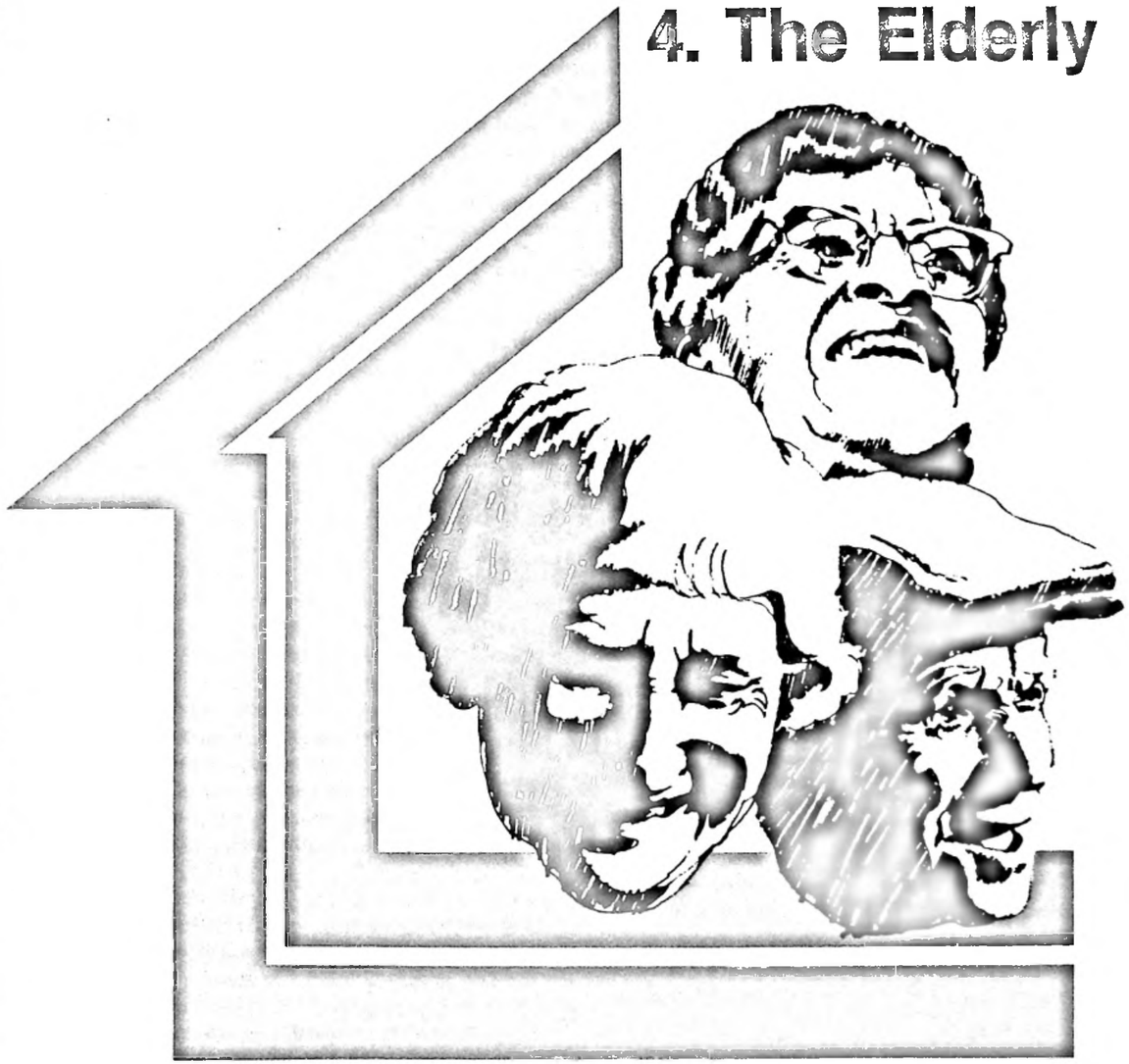

Foreword

Previous summaries in this series have been published to mark an occasion: Hispanic Heritage Month, Afro-American History Month, the anniversary of the First Women's Conference in Houston in 1977. . . .

The appearance of the present volume, describing the housing conditions of the elderly, celebrates Older Americans' Month in May. But even had the elderly no month or day of their own, we would have timed the report to arrive in the spring, the season of growth and renewal, because it is appropriate to a group not only increasing very much faster than the total population but also developing a new voice and a vigorous group identity.

We salute senior citizens everywhere and greet them with the heartening news that their housing is as least as good, physically, as that of the Nation's as a whole. And soberly emphasizing what the elderly already know from experience, we direct the Nation's attention to the fact that adequate housing can cost the elderly a larger proportion of their incomes than it costs most of the other groups we have considered.

One of HUD's jobs is to make it possible for the elderly to live in decent, safe housing. We are doing that with very considerable success in our Section 202 program: Low-Income Housing for the Elderly and Handicapped. If this summary explains to all Americans why that program is necessary, it will have fulfilled one of its goals.

Like other volumes in our series HOW WELL ARE WE HOUSED? this one on the elderly has come under the overall direction of Katharine Lyall, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs in the Office of Policy Development and Research, and Duane McGough, director of its Division of Housing and Demographic Analysis. It was written by Ruth Limmer of its Division of Product Dissemination and Transfer.

Donna E. Shalala
Assistant Secretary for Policy
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How Well Are the Elderly Housed?

The answer is that they are housed no differently from all Americans. The housing of the elderly is adequate or flawed in almost exactly the same proportion as the housing of the total population.

In general, the housing fate of the elderly differs from that of the total population only in the difficulty they have in affording their housing. Whereas only 20 percent of all Americans need to spend more than a quarter of their incomes to live in unflawed, uncrowded housing, we estimate that over 40 percent of the elderly would have to spend that much for comparable housing.

As we will see later, these estimates vary somewhat depending on whether people rent or own their accommodations; neverless, the crunch remains severe on a number of the elderly. Given their incomes, their housing is very expensive.

Who Are the Elderly?

As everyone knows, one's perception of "elderly" is highly subjective, depending largely on one's own age. Here, following the *Annual Housing Survey,* anyone who is 65 years of age or older is defined as elderly.

Regrettably, this summary does not describe how all of America's 23 million* elderly people live. Our housing data, the most complete and detailed available, are derived from the *Annual Housing Survey,* which categorizes households according to who heads them. (A household is, by definition, one or more people living together. Unlike a family, a household need not contain related members.) So our tables and projections refer only to the 20 percent of U.S. households *headed* by people 65 or more years old.

The elderly men and women living in households whose heads are younger than 65, and the elderly men and women who reside in nursing homes, hospitals, or other group quarters. . . none of them are included in our discussion of the housing conditions of the elderly.

*Except as noted, all figures are for 1976.

Nevertheless, our figures on the elderly describe the housing conditions of a great many households – all told, 14.8 million. Of these households:

- 6.65 million (45 percent) consist of two people: a husband (who is at least 65 years old) and a wife (who may be of any age).
- 465,000 (3 percent) consist of families where the wife is absent;
- 1.36 million (9 percent) consist of families where the husband is absent;
- 1.43 million (10 percent) consist of men living alone;
- 4.92 million (33 percent) consist of women living alone.

As for the economic situation:

- the median income of elderly families is $8,720 (as against $14,960 for all families). But the percentage of elderly-headed families living below the poverty line is the same as for all families – approximately 9 percent.

Table 1
THE TOTAL HOUSING PICTURE/1976*

	SMSA	Non-SMSA	All Locations
A. Geographic Distribution			
Percentage	68%	32%	100%
Number	50,534,000	23,546,000	74,080,000
B. Tenure			
Homeowner	30,969,000	17,003,000	47,972,000
Cash Rent	18,862,000	5,513,000	24,375,000
No Cash Rent	703,000	1,030,000	1,773,000
C. Physical Characteristics			
1. Year Structure Built			
After March 1970	7,611,000	3,928,000	11,539,000
1965-1970	6,121,000	2,947,000	9,069,000
1960-1964	5,643,000	2,054,000	7,696,000
1950-1959	9,720,000	3,574,000	13,294,000
1940-1949	5,227,000	8,680,000	7,590,000
1939 or Earlier	16,212,000	8,680,000	24,892,000
2. Units in Structure			
1	31,922,000	18,725,000	50,647,000
2-4	7,441,000	1,807,000	9,248,000
5 or More	9,562,000	944,000	10,506,000
3. Mobile Home	1,609,000	2,070,000	3,679,000
4. Hotel, Rm. House	220,000	56,000	276,000
5. Number of Bathrooms			
None or Shared	681,000	1,265,000	1,946,000
1 Bath but Separated	196,000	80,000	276,000
1	30,228,000	14,945,000	45,273,000
1.5	7,521,000	3,068,000	10,589,000
2	8,188,000	3,213,000	11,401,000
More than 2	3,620,000	975,000	4,595,000
6. Type of Heating Equip.			
Central	27,119,000	11,698,000	38,818,000
Steam	11,314,000	2,287,000	13,602,000
Electric	2,768,000	2,011,000	4,779,000
Floor, Wall	4,561,000	1,888,000	6,450,000
Room Heater	2,162,000	2,432,000	4,593,000
Other/Inad.	2,609,000	3,229,000	5,839,000
7. Air Conditioning	27,571,000	11,248,000	38,818,000
8. Alterations During Year			
($100 or more)	4,877,000	2,059,000	6,936,000
9. Water Source			
Public or Private	46,448,000	15,421,000	61,869,000
Individual Well	3,818,000	7,231,000	11,049,000
Other	267,000	894,000	1,161,000
10. Electricity			
Yes	50,456,000	23,491,000	73,947,000
No	77,000	55,000	133,000
11. Type of Sewage Disposal			
Public Sewer	42,463,000	11,712,000	54,174,000
Septic Tank/Cesspool	7,904,000	11,041,000	18,945,000
Chemical Toilet	8,000	7,000	15,000
Privy	129,000	674,000	803,000
Other	30,000	112,000	143,000

* These figures are derived from computer tapes and may vary from those published in *Annual Housing Survey* reports.

Table 2
ELDERLY HOUSEHOLDS AND HOW THEY LIVE/1976*

	SMSA	Non-SMSA	All Locations
A. Geographic Distribution			
Percentage	63%	37%	100%
Number	9,301,000	5,525,000	14,827,000
B. Tenure			
Homeowner	6,118,000	4,352,000	10,469,000
Cash Rent	2,990,000	923,000	3,913,000
No Cash Rent	194,000	251,000	445,000
C. Physical Characteristics			
1. Year Structure Built			
After March 1970	721,000	421,000	1,142,000
1965-1970	820,000	498,000	1,318,000
1960-1964	708,000	401,000	1,109,000
1950-1959	1,583,000	815,000	2,399,000
1940-1949	1,224,000	653,000	1,876,000
1939 or Earlier	4,245,000	2,737,000	6,983,000
2. Units in Structure			
1	5,431,000	4,519,000	9,951,000
2-4	1,441,000	464,000	1,905,000
5+	2,027,000	216,000	2,243,000
3. Mobile Home	402,000	327,000	729,000
4. Hotel, Rm. House	59,000	17,000	76,000
5. Number of Bathrooms			
None or Shared	221,000	459,000	680,000
1 Bath, But Separated	76,000	18,000	93,000
1	6,532,000	3,859,000	10,390,000
1.5	1,123,000	637,000	1,760,000
2	1,060,000	451,000	1,511,000
More than 2	290,000	102,000	392,000
6. Type of Heating Equip.			
Central	4,155,000	2,295,000	6,450,000
Steam	2,554,000	509,000	3,063,000
Electric	523,000	368,000	890,000
Floor, Wall	874,000	520,000	1,394,000
Room Heater	578,000	827,000	1,405,000
Other/Inad.	618,000	1,007,000	1,625,000
7. Air Conditioning	4,565,000	2,349,000	6,914,000
8. Alterations During Year			
($100 or more)	441,000	258,000	699,000
9. Water Source			
Public or Private	8,612,000	3,733,000	12,385,000
Individual Well	644,000	1,544,000	2,188,000
Other	45,000	209,000	253,000
10. Electricity			
Yes	9,291,000	5,505,000	14,795,000
No	10,000	21,000	31,000
11. Type of Sewage Disposal			
Public Sewer	7,935,000	2,913,000	10,848,000
Septic Tank/Cesspool	1,302,000	2,319,000	3,622,000
Chemical Toilet	4,000	3,000	7,000
Privy	45,000	249,000	294,000
Other	15,000	42,000	57,000

*These figures are derived from computer tapes and may vary from those published in *Annual Housing Survey* reports.

In thinking about these income figures, however, we must remind ourselves that they refer to *families* – related people living together. The 1.4 million men and the 4.9 million women living alone, who together make up some 43 percent of all elderly *households*, have a median income of $3,640. The percentage living in poverty changes too: 24.4 percent of the men and 30.7 of the women live below the poverty line.

Finally, we might also note that, as a group, the elderly are increasing at a much faster rater than the total population is. Instead of the 5 percent growth rate experienced by the Nation as a whole, the elderly grew by 18 percent between 1970 and 1977. Today, one out of nine Americans is at least 65 years old.

Table 3
INADEQUATE HOUSING SUFFERS FROM ONE OR MORE OF THESE DEFECTS*

Plumbing
unit lacks or shares complete plumbing (hot and cold water, flush toilet, and bathtub or shower inside the structure)

Kitchen
unit lacks or shares a complete kitchen (installed sink with piped water, a range or cookstove, and mechanical refrigerator – not an icebox)

Sewage
absence of a public sewer, septic tank, cesspool, or chemical toilet

Heating**
there are no means of heating, *or*
unit is heated by unvented room heaters burning gas, oil, kerosene, *or*
unit is heated by fireplace, stove, or portable room heater

Maintenance
it suffers from any two of these defects:
leaking roof
open cracks or holes in interior walls or ceiling
holes in the interior floor
broken plaster or peeling paint (over 1 square foot) on interior walls or ceilings

Public Hall
it suffers from any two of these defects:
public halls lack light fixtures
loose, broken, or missing steps on common stairways
stair railings loose or missing

Toilet Access
access to sole flush toilet is through one of two or more bedrooms used for sleeping (applies only to households with children under 18)

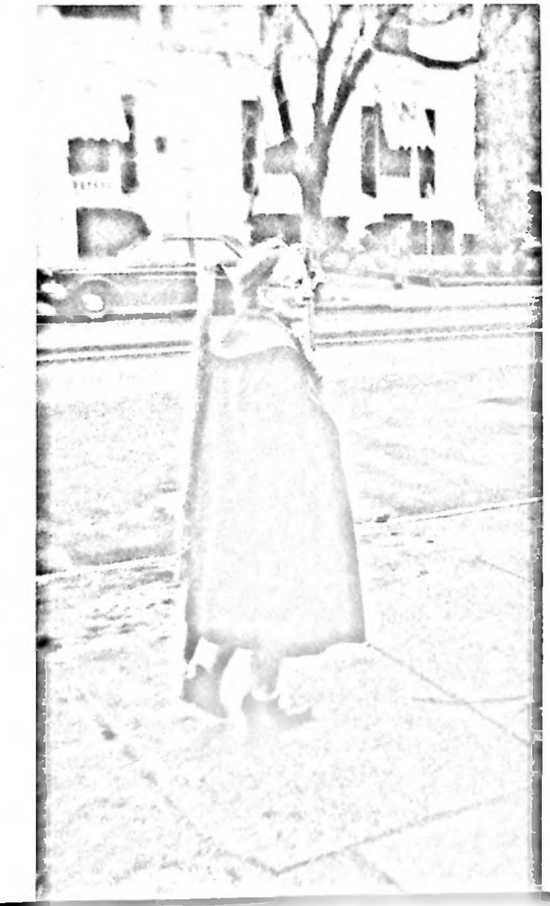
Electrical
unit has exposed wiring *and*
fuses blew or circuit breakers tripped 3 or more times in last 90 days *and*
unit lacks working wall outlet in 1 or more rooms

*The defects listed here are selected from those enumerated in the *Annual Housing Survey*.
** Does not apply in the South Census Region.

What Are We Measuring?

Physical adequacy. The physical adequacy of housing is concerned with the availability of heating and plumbing, with structural soundness, with the availability of sewage-disposal systems, with the maintenance of the living unit, its design, its electrical system, and its kitchen.

Affordability. The measure of affordability used here is the ability of a family to pay for adequate housing, given the space it needs for its size. It is computed as a ratio of the total cost of adequate housing (which for renters includes utilities and property insurance, as well as rent; and, for owners, utilities, property insurance and tax, mortgage, and interest costs) to the household's total cash income. (Data on non-cash income such as food stamps are not available from the *Annual Housing Survey*.)



What Have We Learned?

In an almost exact match with the total population, 28 percent of elderly households live in rural areas. But elderly households are less likely than the general population to live in standard metropolitan statistical areas (SMSAs). The elderly average is 63 percent; the national average is 68 percent.

Nearly three-quarters (71 percent) of elderly heads of household own their own homes, ownership being highest for couples (83 percent) and lowest for men living by themselves (52 percent). In comparison, 65 percent of all households are owner-occupied, but the greatest percentage of owners (75 percent) fall into the 35- to 64-year-old age bracket.

One would expect that the elderly, a group having a larger proportion of owners than the general population, would also live proportionately more often in single-family structures. That is not borne out here. The elderly and the general population live in multifamily housing and in mobile homes in about equal proportions.

Where the elderly do exceed the general population is in the proportion who live in housing built before World War II. Almost half of elderly households (47 percent) live in such older units; for all households this figure is 34 percent.

But these figures tell us nothing about the adequacy of the housing in which elderly households live. For that, we must examine Tables 3 through 8.

Table 3 lists and defines the physical deficiencies that determine flawed housing. Table 5 specifies the flaws – the physical inadequacies – in the elderly's 14.8 million housing units. Of them, 1.3 million, or 9 percent, have flaws. Given the margin for error, that figure is just about the same as the 9.7 percent for all occupied housing (Table 4).

Table 4
NEARLY 10% OF ALL HOUSING WAS FLAWED IN 1976

Type of Flaw	Units Without Flaw	Units With Flaw	% Of All Units With Flaw	Inadequate Units By Number of Flaws				
				1 Flaw	2 Flaws	3 Flaws	4 Flaws	5+ Flaws
Plumbing	72,134	1,946	2.6%	522	656	504	238	26
Kitchen	72,738	1,342	1.8%	311	356	421	228	26
Maintenance	71,034	3,046	4.1%	2,243	456	137	185	26
Public Hall	73,777	303	0.4%	199	84	14	60	0
Heating	72,924	1,156	1.6%	864	149	62	64	19
Electrical	74,012	68	0.1%	19	26	13	2	8
Sewage	73,135	945	1.3%	0	242	445	233	26
Toilet Access	72,728	1,352	1.8%	1,126	201	23	2	0
Totals (in thousands)	66,906	7,174	9.7%*	5,283	1,085	540	239	26

*Because the data in this and other tables are based on samples rather than on a count of all households in the country, the figures given are estimates. Thus, for example, once in ten times the true figure for the summarizing average (9.7%) will vary by 0.3 percentage points. Statistically speaking, the confidence interval for this figure is plus or minus 0.3 percentage points at the 90 percent confidence level.

Table 5
THE HOUSING OF THE ELDERLY CLOSELY MATCHED THE NATIONAL AVERAGE IN 1976

Type of Flaw	Units Without Flaw	Units With Flaw	% Of All Units With Flaw	Inadequate Units By Number of Flaws				
				1 Flaw	2 Flaws	3 Flaws	4 Flaws	5+ Flaws
Plumbing	14,146	680	4.6%	181	214	189	88	7
Kitchen	14,391	435	2.9%	86	92	165	84	7
Maintenance	14,336	490	3.3%	325	59	30	69	7
Public Hall	14,792	34	0.2%	21	8	3	3	0
Heating	14,588	238	1.6%	170	26	14	22	7
Electrical	14,812	14	0.1%	7	4	1	2	1
Sewage	14,475	351	2.4%	0	84	175	85	7
Toilet Access	14,814	12	0.1%	11	2	0	0	0
Totals (in thousands)	13,494	1,332	9.0%*	801	244	192	88	7

*The 90% confidence interval for the summarizing average (9.0%) is plus or minus 0.7 percentage points. The 90% confidence interval for the percentage of units with individual flaws is smaller. What this means is that, in theory, we can say with 90% certainty that the results differ by no more than 0.7 in either direction – if we had surveyed *every* household.

But if we compare Table 4 with Table 5 in a more detailed way, we can see how the patterns of deficiencies differ. Even allowing for sampling errors, elderly housing has a higher proportion of PLUMBING, KITCHEN, and SEWAGE flaws than does the housing of the general population, and a lower proportion of flaws in MAINTENANCE and TOILET ACCESS.

The latter is understandable. TOILET ACCESS is considered a deficiency only in households having children under 18. The lower proportion of MAINTENANCE flaws may be explained by the considerable number of elderly who own the housing they live in. Owner-occupied units tend to be better maintained than rental units.

Perhaps the higher rates of PLUMBING, KITCHEN, and SEWAGE flaws can be explained by the generally older housing stock inhabited by elderly households.

Possibly, too, a significant proportion of KITCHEN flaws may be the result of choice. Nine percent of elderly households are headed by men living alone. For many of these men, a complete or unshared kitchen may not be a priority. Certainly we find in Table 8 that their housing has a remarkably high rate of KITCHEN flaws – 11.9 percent as against the 2.9 percent for all elderly households. A similar distance separates their rates of PLUMBING flaws.

In Tables 6 and 7, we can see the variations between rental and owned units occupied by the elderly. Again PLUMBING flaws rank first, followed by MAINTENANCE and KITCHEN, but typically the rates themselves are considerably higher for the rental units.

When we turn to the data shown more visually on the bar graph, what becomes especially noticeable is that comparable groups of the elderly and the total population are in most respects remarkably alike. Indeed, the elderly differ more among themselves than they do from the general population against which they are compared.

Only a statistically insignificant 1.3 percentage points, for example, separate the flaws of elderly and all rental units. But nearly 12 points separate the flaws in the housing of all elderly-headed households and those of elderly men who live alone.

We can sum up our data with the observation that the elderly and the total population live in housing that is comparably good – approximately 90 percent of the housing is unflawed.

Table 6
HOUSING RENTED BY THE ELDERLY SHOWED A 16% RATE OF FLAWS IN 1976

Type of Flaw	Units Without Flaw	Units With Flaw	% Of All Units With Flaw	Inadequate Units By Number of Flaws				
				1 Flaw	2 Flaws	3 Flaws	4 Flaws	5+ Flaws
Plumbing	4,021	337	7.7%	89	110	81	54	2
Kitchen	4,093	265	6.1%	71	68	72	51	2
Maintenance	4,081	277	6.4%	169	38	22	45	2
Public Hall	4,327	31	0.7%	17	8	3	3	0
Heating	4,271	87	2.0%	62	7	4	12	2
Electrical	4,351	7	0.2%	2	4	0	1	0
Sewage	4,207	151	3.5%	0	28	70	51	2
Toilet Access	4,355	3	0.1%	2	2	0	0	0
Totals (in thousands)	3,673	685	15.7%*	412	132	84	54	2

*The 90% confidence interval for the summarizing average (15.7%) is plus or minus 1.4 percentage points. The 90% confidence interval for the percentage of units with individual flaws is smaller. What this means is that, in theory, we can say with 90% certainty that the results differ by no more than 1.4 in either direction – if we had surveyed *every* household.

Table 7
HOUSING OWNED AND OCCUPIED BY THE ELDERLY WAS LESS FLAWED THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE IN 1976

Type of Flaw	Units Without Flaw	Units With Flaw	% Of All Units With Flaw	Inadequate Units By Number of Flaws				
				1 Flaw	2 Flaws	3 Flaws	4 Flaws	5+ Flaws
Plumbing	10,125	344	3.3%	92	104	108	34	5
Kitchen	10,299	170	1.6%	15	24	94	32	5
Maintenance	10,256	213	2.0%	156	21	7	24	5
Public Hall	10,465	4	0.1%	4	0	0	0	0
Heating	10,317	152	1.4%	108	19	10	10	4
Electrical	10,462	7	0.1%	4	0	1	1	1
Sewage	10,270	199	1.9%	0	56	104	34	5
Toilet Access	10,460	9	0.1%	9	0	0	0	0
Totals (in thousands)	9,821	648	6.2%*	389	112	108	34	5

*The 90% confidence interval for the summarizing average (6.2%) is plus or minus 0.5 percentage points. The 90% confidence interval for the percentage of units with individual flaws is smaller. What this means is that, in theory, we can say with 90% certainty that the results differ by no more than 0.5 in either direction – if we had surveyed *every* household.

WHEN WE COMPARE RATES OF PHYSICAL DEFICIENCIES, HOUSING OF THE ELDERLY COMPARES VERY FAVORABLY WITH THAT OF THE TOTAL POPULATION

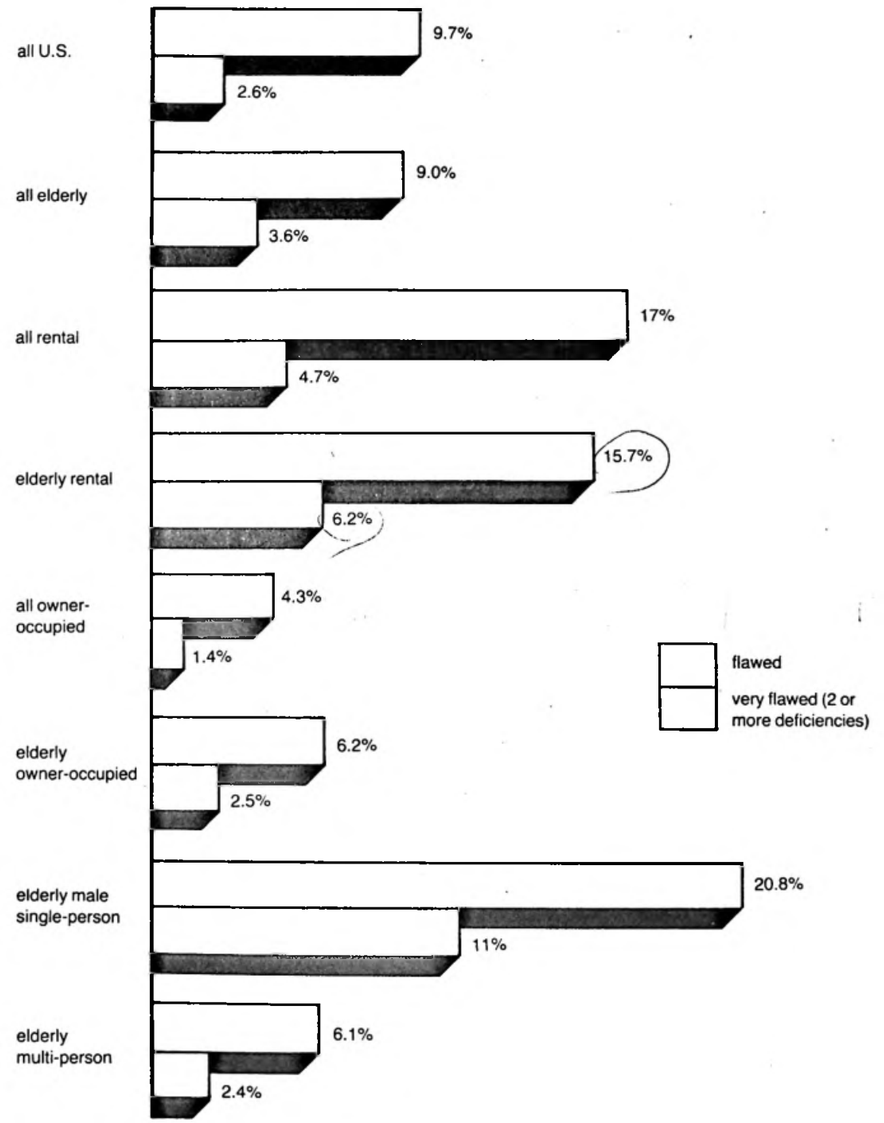


Table 8
THE HOUSING OF ELDERLY MEN WHO LIVE ALONE HAD HIGH RATES OF PLUMBING AND KITCHEN FLAWS. WHY?

Type of Flaw	Units Without Flaw	Units With Flaw	% Of All Units With Flaw	Inadequate Units By Number of Flaws				
				1 Flaw	2 Flaws	3 Flaws	4 Flaws	5+ Flaws
Plumbing	1,250	171	12.0%	26	72	48	23	2
Kitchen	1,251	169	11.9%	46	52	46	23	2
Maintenance	1,341	79	5.6%	38	13	11	15	2
Public Hall	1,414	6	0.4%	0	3	2	2	0
Heating	1,373	47	3.3%	25	5	7	7	2
Electrical	1,415	5	0.3%	2	2	0	1	0
Sewage	1,342	78	5.5%	0	16	39	21	2
Toilet Access	1,420	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	1,125*	295	20.8%*	138	81	51	23	2

*The 90% confidence interval for the summarizing average (20.8%) is plus or minus 2.6 percentage points. The 90% confidence interval for the percentage of units with individual flaws is smaller. What this means is that, in theory, we can say with 90% certainty that the results differ by no more than 2.6 in either direction – if we had surveyed *every* household.

Table 9
INCOME DETERMINES ONE'S CHANCES FOR ADEQUATE HOUSING*

	Census Region			
	Northeast	North Central	South	West
Adjusted Income Level				
Less than $2,499	.22	.20	.22	.24
$2,500 to 2,999	.16	.14	.16	.18
$3,000 to 3,999	.11	.10	.12	.14
$4,000 to 5,999	.10	.08	.10	.12
$6,000 to 7,999	.06	.04	.06	.08
$8,000 to 9,999	.04	.02	.04	.06
$10,000 to 11,999	.02	.01	.03	.05
$12,000 to 14,999	.01	.00	.02	.04
$15,000 to 19,999	.01	.00	.01	.03
Over $20,000	.01	.00	.01	.03

*Adjusted income is the household's cash income divided by the square root of the number of persons in the household. $3,000 in adjusted income represents an approximation of poverty for any household size. The probabilities presented refer to a household located in an SMSA with population under 250,000 in 1976.

The standard error of the estimates used to construct this table is such that the 90% confidence level for differences in probabilities is always less than plus or minus .02.

Who Among the Elderly Are Poorly Housed?

Although more than 90 percent of elderly households live in physically adequate housing, well over a million elderly households do not. The crucial factor may be income. So let us now look at Table 9, which shows precisely how income determines a household's chance for adequate housing. (The higher the decimal number, the greater the chance of flawed housing.)

Using location as a proxy for the price of housing, Table 9 shows that for a given region, a household's chance of being inadequately housed declines steadily as its income rises.

Let us see how that works. Consider a family or a household of four with a cash income of $6,000. Adjusted for family size, the income would appear on Table 9 as $3,000, which represents an approximation of poverty.

If this family were located in the North Central area – Michigan, for example, or Missouri – it would have a .10 probability of living in an inadequate housing unit. That is, there'd be 1 chance in 10 that the household would live in a unit having one or more physical flaws.

The same family, now with double the adjusted income – $6,000 – would have only a .04 or 1 chance in 25 of living in inadequate housing if it remained in a North Central State. Again double this adjusted income – $12,000 – and the probability drops to zero.

Move the poverty-level household to the West, and the odds increase; they would have 1 chance in 7 (.14) of living in inadequate housing.

Table 10 is based on an adjusted income of less than $2,500. It shows how a household in that income bracket would fare with housing in cities of various sizes across the country. (Here too the higher the decimal number, the greater the probability of inadequate housing.)

According to Table 10, the likelihood of being inadequately housed is greatest in the rural West and in the New York City area (better than 1 in 3). It is smallest in the North Central region in an SMSA of 1.5 million – Cincinnati, for example, or Milwaukee.

Now let us add the factor of age. What happens if, in addition to having an income of under $2,500 and living in a North Central SMSA of less than 250,000 people in 1976, the household is elderly?

Table 10
CITY SIZE AND LOCATION ALSO AFFECT ONE'S CHANCES OF BEING ADEQUATELY HOUSED*

	Census Region			
	Northeast	North Central	South	West
City Size				
Rural	.26	.25	.26	.28
Urban Area outside SMSA	.23	.21	.23	.25
SMSA under 250,000	.21	.20	.22	.24
SMSA of 250,000	.21	.19	.21	.23
SMSA of 500,000	.21	.20	.22	.24
SMSA of 1,000,000	.20	.19	.20	.22
SMSA of 1,500,000	.19	.17	.19	.21
SMSA of 2,000,000	.25	.23	.25	.27
SMSA of 3,000,000	.21	.19	.21	.23
SMSA of 11,000,000	.29	.28	.30	.31

*The probabilities refer to a household with an adjusted income of less than $2,500, or poverty level, in 1976. In general, the confidence interval for these figures is plus or minus .02 at the 90% confidence level.

Table 11
THE PROBABILITY OF BEING INADEQUATELY HOUSED IS HIGH FOR MEN WHO LIVE ALONE*

Demographic Characteristics

			Age of Household Head		
Sex of Head	Race/Ethnicity of Head	Household Size	65+	30-64	Under 30
Female	White	1 person	0.13	0.15	0.19
		2-5 Persons	0.16	0.17	0.18
	Black	1 Person	0.27	0.31	0.25
		2-5 Persons	0.33	0.26	0.28
	Hispanic	1 Person	0.18	0.30	0.27
		2-5 Persons	0.24	0.24	0.29
Male	White	1 Person	0.27	0.29	0.25
		2-5 Persons	0.13	0.17	0.20
	Black	1 Person	0.43	0.38	0.34
		2-5 Persons	0.27	0.25	0.27
	Hispanic	1 Person	0.56	0.37	0.40
		2-5 Persons	0.21	0.25	0.23

*Probabilities refer to a household with an adjusted income of less than $2,500 living in a North Central SMSA of under 250,000 in 1976. In general the confidence interval for these figures is .03 at the 90% confidence level.

If we read across Table 11, we find – with a few remarkable exceptions – only small differences among the age groups. Just as our previous material has demonstrated, in general age is not a factor in ill-housing. For the poor and elderly, what counts most appears when we read *down* the 65+ column, moving from white to black to Hispanic, from one-person to multiperson households, and from female- to male-headed households.

Race, ethnicity, sex. . . these are the factors that, far more than age, affect the chances of a poor household living in physically deficient housing. (On the basis of what we have learned in earlier summaries in this series, household size should also count, but because large households headed by the elderly are necessarily few in number, the category of large households is omitted from the table.)

Now we must face the exceptions noted above. According to Table 11, it appears that elderly Hispanic men who live alone have the highest chance of being ill-housed.

To appreciate how poorly housed these men are, we must understand that elderly households, like all U.S. households, have approximately 1 chance in 10 of living in physically inadequate housing. Black and Hispanic families have approximately 1 chance in 5. But a poor Hispanic man, if he is at least 65 years old and living alone, has 1 chance in less than 2 – that is, he has better than a 50-50 chance of being ill-housed.

Why that is so remains open to speculation. As previously suggested, choice may explain things. The elderly unattached man, whatever his race or ethnic background, may be relatively uninterested in having complete unshared kitchen and plumbing facilities, for example. Or his location in a rural area may mean that a complete kitchen and adequate plumbing facilities are unavailable.

But in addition, part of the explanation must rest directly on a combination of age and ethnicity. For although all poor men are regularly less well housed when living by themselves than when they head multiperson households, when living alone is combined with age and Hispanic identity, the probability (.56) is too high to be justified only by choice or minority status. (The probability for poor elderly black men is .43.)

Louise Farrax

How Many of the Elderly Can Afford Adequate Housing?

The traditional rule of thumb makes 25 percent of one's current income the "proper" amount to spend on housing. In fact, in 1976, 53 percent of all those who rented spent under 25 percent of income on their living accommodations. Among the elderly, however, almost 65 percent of renters and 23 percent of homeowners paid 25 percent or *more*. For all the elderly, regardless of whether they rent or own, the proportion paying a fourth or more of their incomes for housing was 35 percent.

The first column of Table 12 shows that 80 percent of all U.S. households are estimated to be able to find unflawed, uncrowded living accommodations for 25 percent or less of their incomes. For 30 percent of income, 84 percent can get adequate housing.

But the picture for the elderly is different. Barely 59 percent of elderly households can be expected to find adequate housing for 25 percent of income, and only 66.5 percent can find adequate housing for 30 percent of income.

Table 12
80% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION – BUT ONLY 59% OF THE ELDERLY – CAN AFFORD ADEQUATE HOUSING FOR ONE-FOURTH OF THEIR INCOMES

			Renters		Owners	
Ratio of Adequate housing cost to Income	% of all U.S. house-holds	% of all elderly house-holds	% of renters all U.S. house-holds	% of Elderly house-holds	% of owners all U.S. house-holds	% of Elderly house-holds
under 10%	44.0%	21.4%	33.1%	12.6%	49.8%	25.0%
under 20%	74.3	49.1	64.8	37.3	79.4	53.9
under 25%	80.3	58.7	72.8	50.1	84.3	62.2
under 30%	84.4	66.5	78.7	61.9	87.4	68.4
under 35%	87.5	73.1	84.0	74.8	89.4	72.4
under 40%	89.9	78.2	88.4	84.4	90.8	75.7
under 50%	92.9	84.8	92.5	93.1	93.0	81.4
under 60%	94.7	89.0	94.6	96.1	94.6	86.0
under 70%	96.0	92.2	95.7	97.2	95.9	90.1

The columns showing affordability for renters and owners demonstrate a continued disparity. Only half of elderly renters can afford adequate housing for 25 percent of their incomes. In comparison, nearly three-quarters of all renters (72.8 percent) can afford adequate housing for the same proportion of income.

The elderly who own their own homes are also disadvantaged in this sense. For one-quarter of their cash incomes only 62 percent could afford adequate housing if they had to go out to look for it on the market. For the same proportion of income, 84 percent of all households could afford equivalent housing.

What we are seeing in this table of affordability is that, whether the elderly rent or own, unflawed, uncrowded housing would cost them a much larger proportion of their incomes than it costs the total population. And that is precisely what we would expect, given the precipitous fall in most people's incomes at age 65.

What we might not realize is that adequate housing would cost the elderly more, proportionate to their incomes, than it costs the two minority groups – Hispanics and blacks of all ages – we have already examined in this series.

On the other hand, housing costs of over 25 percent of income do not necessarily mean that the same level of economic hardship falls on each of these groups. When people pass 65, their incomes typically fall, but they may by that time have accumulated substantial assets. Although our data do not include information about assets, we know, for example, that nearly three-quarters of the elderly own their own homes – a major asset – and 84 percent of these homeowners have paid off their mortgages. Thus 54 percent of all elderly households have reduced a major proportion of their housing expenses below the market average. Given such percentages, the elderly as a group may not be in quite the economic bind that Table 12 suggests. And certainly we know that the great majority of elderly households live in unflawed housing – as blacks and Hispanics do not.

We highlight these affordability figures to shed light on a situation that might otherwise be overlooked by all except those who are experiencing it: housing absorbs an extraordinarily large proportion of the cash incomes of *at least* the 3.9 million elderly households that rent their dwelling units.

For the Record, 1976

As a group, more of the elderly live outside metropolitan areas than the total population. They live in older housing. They more often own the housing they occupy, and over half have paid-up mortgages. The physical adequacy of their housing matches almost exactly that of the total population: only about a tenth of these living units are physically deficient.

There is, however, a difference in the housing flaws of the two groups:

- The housing of the elderly has a higher rate of PLUMBING, SEWAGE, and KITCHEN flaws than all households;
- It has a lower rate of flaws in MAINTENANCE and TOILET ACCESS.

Another way to estimate how well households live is to estimate how much of their incomes they must spend for adequate housing. We estimate that 42 percent of the elderly (but only 20 percent of the total population) would have to spend over a quarter of their cash incomes to obtain unflawed, uncrowded housing in the market.

The probability of the elderly living in inadequate housing depends on:

- income
- sex and household size (men living alone have a substantial chance of residing in flawed housing)
- ethnicity (poor Hispanic men who live alone have the highest chance of being ill-housed)
- whether they own or rent their housing

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