

Report reveals varying lifestyles of older people (June 2004)

A new statistical report on the lives of older people shows wide variations in their lifestyles. *Focus on Older People*, produced by the Office for National Statistics, paints a picture of people aged 50 and over in contemporary Britain. It includes information on older people's characteristics, lifestyles and experiences, placing particular emphasis on changes with increasing age. Some of the key findings from the report follow:

_There were 19.8 million people aged 50 and over in the United Kingdom in 2001, an increase of 24 per cent over four decades from 16 million in 1961. This number is expected to increase by a further 41 per cent to about 28 million people aged 50 and over by 2031.

_One in six people from non-white minority ethnic groups are aged 50 and over, compared with a third of the overall population and 35 per cent of the white population. The black Caribbean population has the oldest age structure of all the non-white ethnic groups, with just under a quarter aged over 50.

_Seven out of ten women aged 85 and over live alone, compared with just over four in ten men of the same age. Nearly half (45 per cent) of men aged 85 and over live in a married couple family, compared to just one in ten women. While the number of older people cohabiting is increasing, the proportion is still very small among the oldest age groups.

_Over the last decade, there has been an increase in employment among older people. Nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) of men aged 50-64

and over two-thirds (67 per cent) of women aged 50-59 are in employment, as are 8 per cent of men aged 65 and over and 10 per cent of women aged over 60.

_Older pensioners are more likely to be found towards the bottom of both the single pensioner and pensioner couples' income distributions. In 2002/03, nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of couples, where the head was aged

75 and over, were in the bottom fifth. The proportion of single pensioners of the same age in the bottom fifth was also 24 per cent.

_The number of trips taken and the distance travelled decline with increasing age. During 2002, people aged 70 and over each made an average of 700 trips, compared with 1,100 trips made by people aged 50-59. Shopping and other personal business are the most common reasons for travel by older people.

In addition, older people are more reliant than younger people on public transport, especially buses. Older people are also more likely to report difficulties travelling to local shops, banks and hospitals.

_While women can expect to live longer than men, they are also more likely to have more years of poor health. Healthy life expectancy for women averages 69 years compared with 67 years for men. Many older people still consider themselves to be in good health, even if they have a long-term illness which restricts daily activities. The proportion of people with a long-term illness or disability increases with age, with nearly three-quarters of women aged 85 and over reporting a disability compared with two-thirds of men.

_The majority of older people are owner occupiers and six out of ten people aged 65 and over own their homes outright. One in ten people over 50 experience problems with their housing, including rising damp, insects, rats or mice, or dark houses. Twelve per cent said their home was too cold in winter.

_People aged 65 and over watch television for an average of three and three-quarter hours daily. They also spend an average of one-and-a-quarter hours per day reading and another three-quarters of an hour resting or 'doing nothing special'. Over three-quarters (79 per cent) of people over 65 living in private households see a relative or friend at least once a week and a similar proportion (78 per cent) chat to neighbours at least weekly. However, 2 per cent have no contact at all with relatives or friends and 14 per cent report no contact with neighbours.

_Three local authority districts contain more

than three in ten people above state pension age: Christchurch in Dorset (33 per cent), Rother in East Sussex (32 per cent) and East Devon (30 per cent).

The report shows that the blurring of the various stages in the lifecycle mean that older people are as varied as any other group in society. However, for the oldest age groups, there may be financial, health or transport barriers that prevent them from participating in a wide variety of activities.

Focus on Older People is only available via the Internet and can be downloaded from the National Statistics website at www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/olderpeople
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