

# Living Alone in the U.S., 2011

Breana Wilson & Esther Lamidi

The percentage of households containing only one person has more than doubled since 1960 from 13% to 27% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), representing a 108% increase. One-person households are currently the second most common household type after married-couple households (Lofquist et al., 2012) with the majority of solo dwellers living in large metropolitan areas such as Washington D.C., Dallas, San Francisco, and New York City (Klinenberg, 2012). As the median age of first marriage and first birth continues to rise, adults are delaying family formation (FP-12-03), and some are choosing to live alone as a result. Other factors contributing to this increase include longer life expectancies (Eshbaugh, 2008), better financial security especially for older adults (Klinenberg, 2012), and increasing divorce rates among middle-aged to older adults (FP-12-05). This profile uses the ACS 2011 one-year estimates to explore the demographic characteristics of adults in the U.S. aged 18 and older who are living alone.

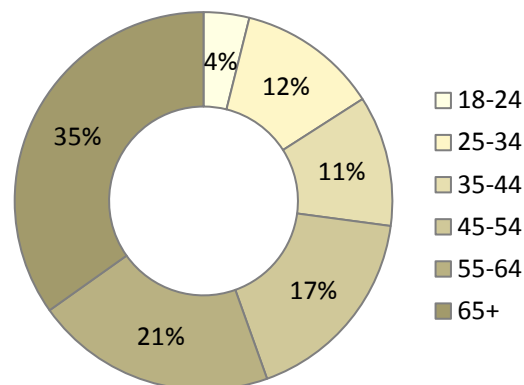
- In 2011, 13.4% of all adults in the U.S. were living alone (Figure 3).
  - Among adults living alone, women were over-represented at 56% (figure not shown).
  - Women experience solo living more often than men: 15% of women and 12% of men were living alone in 2011.

## Percentage Living Alone by Age, 2011

On average, the percentage of adults living alone increases with successive age cohorts.

- The majority (56%) of adults who live alone are older (55+). Moreover, seniors (65 and older) comprise more than one-third (35%) of adults living alone.
- In contrast, only 16% of adults living alone are under 35. Specifically, a mere 4% of adults living alone are under age 25.

Figure 1. Age Distribution of Adults Living Alone, 2011

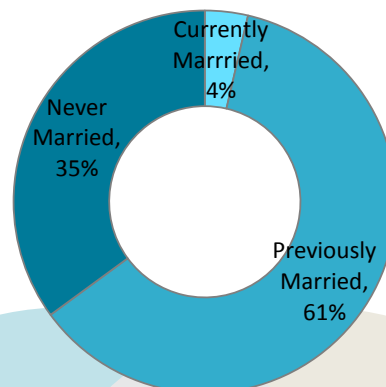


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011

## Percentage Living Alone by Marital Status, 2011

- The vast majority (97%) of adults living alone are currently single.
- Some married individuals do not live with their spouse for reasons such as military deployments, incarceration, or work—they are considered “married, spouse absent.” Only 4% of solo dwellers are married, spouse absent.
- Three-fifths (61%) of those living alone were previously married (i.e., currently separated or divorced), and slightly more than one-third (36%) have never married.

Figure 2. Percentage Living Alone by Marital Status, 2011



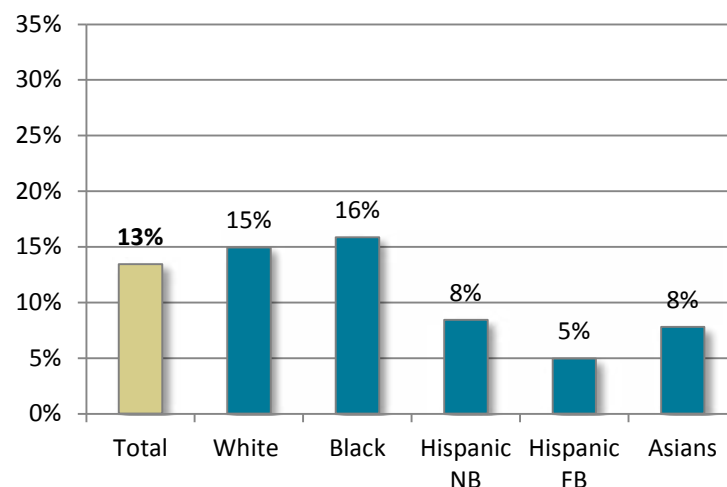
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011

*Family Profiles examine topics related to NCFMR's core research themes. Data are presented at both the national and state levels using new data sources. Written for both researchers and broad communities, these profiles summarize the latest statistics on U.S. families.*

## Percentage Living Alone by Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity, 2011

- White and Black adults have the highest percentage living alone (15% and 16%, respectively).
- Native-born Hispanic and Asian adults are similar in percentages living alone (8%). They are about half as likely as White and Black adults (15% and 16%, respectively) to be living alone.
- Meanwhile, only 1 in 20 (5%) foreign-born Hispanic adults are living alone, the smallest percentage among all racial and ethnic groups examined.

Figure 3. Percentage of Adults (age 18+) Living Alone by Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity, 2011

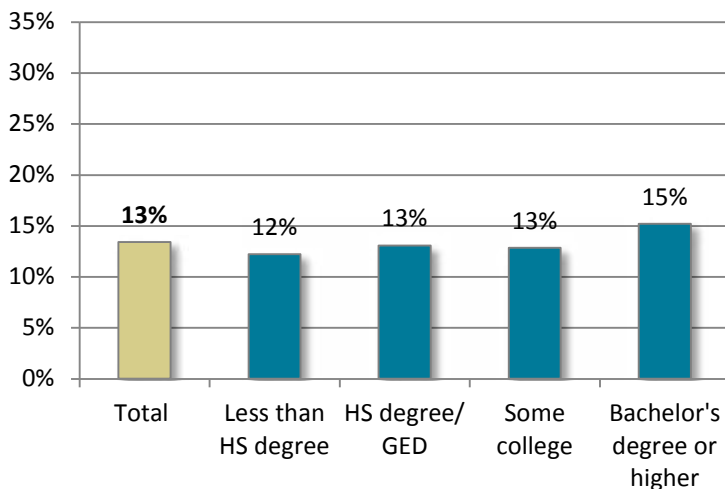


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011

## Percentage Living Alone by Educational Attainment, 2011

- A slightly higher percentage of adults with at least a Bachelor's degree were living alone (15%) when compared to those with lower levels of educational attainment.
- Adults with a high school diploma or some college, that is they have received some education after high school but have not earned a Bachelor's degree, are equally likely to be living alone (13%).
- Those with less than a high school diploma are the least likely to live alone (12%).

Figure 4. Percentage of Adults (age 18+) Living Alone by Educational Attainment, 2011



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011

## References

- Eshbaugh, E. (2008). Perceptions of living alone among older adult women. *Journal of Community Health Nursing*, 25(3), 125-137.
- Klinenberg, E. (2012). *Going solo: The extraordinary rise and surprising appeal of living alone*. New York, NY: The Penguin Press.
- Lofquist, D., Lugaila, T., O'Connell, M., & Feliz, S. (2012). *Households and families: 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-14.pdf>.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2012). Table HH-4. Households by Size: 1960 to Present. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/households.html>.

Suggested Citation:  
Wilson, B. & Lamidi, E. (2013). *Living Alone in the U.S., 2011*. (FP-13-18). National Center for Family & Marriage Research. Retrieved from [http://ncfmr.bgsu.edu/pdf/family\\_profiles/file138254.pdf](http://ncfmr.bgsu.edu/pdf/family_profiles/file138254.pdf)



This project is supported with assistance from Bowling Green State University. From 2007 to 2013, support was also provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the state or federal government.