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COMMUNITY SERVICE CONVENIENCE AND SATISFACTIONS OF
THE ELDERLY IN NONMETROPOLITAN AREAS OF THE NORTHEAST*

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Introduction

The elderly in the Northeast^{1/} are increasing in both relative and absolute numbers.^{2/} Research on the delivery of services to rural

*This paper is based on continuing research conducted under Northeast Regional Research Project NE-77, Community Services for Nonmetropolitan People in the Northeast.

^{1/} For purpose of this research the Northeast was defined as (1) New England: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island; (2) Middle Atlantic States: New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania; and (3) part of the South Atlantic Region: Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia.

^{2/} During the period 1960 to 1970 the total population of the Northeast Region increased from 50.1 million to 55.2 million or by 10 percent; the population 60 to 64 years of age increased from 2.2 million to 2.5 million or by 14 percent; and the population 65 years of age and over increased from 4.9 million to 5.7 million or by 16 percent [7, Table 8; 8, Table 52; 9, Table 8; and 11, Table 11]. In 1970, persons 65 years of age and over constituted 10.3 percent of the Northeast population compared with 9.8 percent of the United States population. By the year 2000, the estimated population 65 years and over will comprise one-eighth of the United States population [10]. The proportion of the population 65 years of age and over made up of individuals 75 years of age and over is also expected to increase. In 1900 the proportion 75 and over was 29 percent of all those 65 years of age and over; by 1975 this proportion had increased to 38 percent; and is projected to reach 44 percent by 2000 [12, p. 9].

people in the Northeast and their satisfaction with services has been given a high priority [6]. Among community services, research on services for the elderly has been given the highest priority [1]. This article documents the opinions about community services of non-institutionalized, nonmetropolitan people 60 years of age and over.

Data Source

This article is based upon a subset of data from Regional Research Project NE-77, Community Services for Nonmetropolitan People in the Northeast. For purposes of the regional study, nonmetropolitan people were defined as residents of counties with a 30 percent or greater non-urbanized population in 1970. In the Northeast, 245 counties met this 30 percent criterion. These 245 counties were classified on the basis of changes in population and median family income between 1960 and 1970 in order to identify "more developing", "average" counties and "less developing" counties. Counties located in the first, third and fifth quintiles for both arrays (population and income) were identified.^{3/}

After the site counties had been selected, the New England states and New Jersey delineated smaller areas for study since in these states the political entity which provided directly or was responsible for decisions about providing public services (control unit) is the minor civil division (MCD). ^{4/} A random area sample design was used in each control unit. A total of 2,141 completed and useable interviews from 15 counties provide the data for regional analysis.^{5/}

3/ For the nine northeastern states participating in the household survey phase of the project, 40 counties were in the first, third, and fifth quintiles. Researchers at the participating Agricultural Experiment Stations selected site counties from the 40 counties meeting the selection criteria. Three additional counties were added to the 40 specifically identified using the selection criteria. One county in Massachusetts and one county in West Virginia were added to the "average" or "stable" category, and one county in West Virginia was added to the "less developing" or "declining" category to accommodate research interests in those states. For a detailed statement of data sources, procedures and other dimensions of the regional project see: [3].

4/ In order to select the areas to be surveyed, given budget constraints, additional data were collected on the 65 counties. These data included: (1) size of area, (2) topographic features, (3) economic base, (4) 1970 population below the poverty level, (5) residents employed outside county, (6) dominant cultural characteristics, and (7) other factors regarding communities that would affect site selection.

5/ Data for all control sites except those in Massachusetts and New York were collected during the summer 1974. The Massachusetts and New York data were collected in late 1974 and early 1975.

Procedure

Previous research on the social and economic characteristics of non-metropolitan counties [2 and 4] concluded that age and sex composition of a population has implications for labor force characteristics, for family formation and childbearing, for the demand for housing units, and for the delivery of community health and social services. "Perhaps the most important difference between growing and declining counties is the age composition of their populations" [2, p. 22]. Since age and sex are important demographic variables, the analysis is based to a large degree on these variables.

The unit of analysis for this phase of the study is households in which the head was 60 years of age or older in 1974.^{6/} Of the 2,141 households in the regional sample, 662 or 31 percent met this criterion.^{7/} Comparative data will be presented for the population 60 to 64 years of age and the older age groups 65-74 and 75 years and over. The group 60 to 64 years of age is included since it contains persons who will soon become elderly and some who are retired. Individuals 60 to 64 years of age are referred to as pre-elders, those 65 to 74 as young elders, and those 75 years of age and over as later maturity elders.

Throughout, the analysis will be testing the null hypothesis that there are no differences in service convenience and satisfaction by age and sex of the household head. The Chi-square Test was used to determine the significance of differences in distributions among male and female headed households holding age constant, and for each age grouping, holding sex of head constant. The 5 percent level was accepted as the level of significance throughout the paper.

^{6/} The elderly population is frequently defined as the population 65 years old and over. A number of factors over the years have combined to make attainment of age 65 important. For example, it is a time for: (1) retirement, (2) the beginning of Social Security benefits, (3) Medicare coverage, (4) special consideration in income tax reporting, and (5) other factors [10].

^{7/} In the study sample of 2,141 households, 76 were households with a head less than 60 years of age and with elderly members. The research design provided for obtaining convenience and satisfaction data from the head of the household or spouse when possible. Since these data are not available for elderly living in households with a head under 60 years of age, this group has been excluded from this phase of the analysis. If the head of the household or the spouse was unable to respond, another household member served as respondent. Of the 662 households included in the present analysis, 19 were elderly households where the respondent was less than 60 years of age and not the spouse of the head.

Results of Analysis

Household characteristics. -- Of the 662 Northeast households studied, 24 percent contained only one person, 57 percent two persons, and 19 percent three persons or more (Table 1). Only nine percent of the elderly male household heads lived alone compared with 65 percent of the female household heads. For the three groupings studied, pre-elders, young elders, and later maturity elders, a significantly higher proportion of females than males lived alone. Household size differences were significant among the three male age groupings but not significant among the female age groupings.

Six out of ten male and female household heads had not completed high school. Educational attainment differences between male and female household heads of the same age group and among the three female age groups were not significant. Differences between the three male age groups were significant. Males in the younger age groupings had a significantly higher educational attainment than those in the older age groupings. However, even among the pre-elder males, 53 percent had not completed high school. The pre-elder female household heads reported the highest proportion (24 percent) with some college training.

One in five of the households had before tax incomes of less than \$3,000 in 1973. Female household heads in the age group 75 years and over had the highest proportion with incomes under \$3,000 (45 percent). However, households with a male head age 60 to 64 had the highest proportion (47 percent) with incomes of \$10,000 or more. In general, male headed households had higher incomes than those that were female headed and the older age grouping had lower income than the younger age grouping. Differences among the male headed household age groupings were significant as were the differences between male and female headed households in the 60 to 64 and 65 to 74 age groups. Differences were not significant between male and female later maturity elderly and among the three age groupings of households with a female head.

Convenience. -- Respondents were asked, "How convenient is it for you to get from your home to the following places -- friends and family in community, food shopping, drug store, other shopping, hospitals, family doctor, place of worship, public transportation, and banks."^{8/} Respondents generally expressed little inconvenience with "getting to" these services and contacts with the exception of public transportation (Table 2). Ninety-three percent of all households reporting indicated

^{8/} A 6 item numerical scale was utilized to differentiate between convenient and not convenient. Responses were recorded as (1) very inconvenient, (2) moderately inconvenient, (3) just a little inconvenient, (4) just a little convenient, (5) moderately convenient, and (6) very convenient. For purposes of this analysis, codes 1, 2 and 3 were combined and considered as not convenient and codes 4, 5 and 6 were combined and considered as convenient.

Table 1
Selected Characteristics of Elderly Households and Sex and
Age (in years) of Household Head, Northeast United States, 1974-75

Characteristic	Total	Male Head						Female Head					
		Total	to 60	to 65	75 and over	Total	to 60	to 65	75 and over	Total	to 60	to 65	75 and over
		No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
Household size (number of persons)			N=490 ^{1/}	N=169	N=226	N=95	N=172	N=34	N=84	N=54			
1 person - - - - -	:156	23.6	9.2	4.1	7.5	22.1	64.5	64.7	66.7	63.0			
2 persons - - - - -	:378	57.1	68.8	65.1	73.5	64.2	23.8	20.6	21.4	27.8			
3 or more persons - -	:128	19.3	22.0	30.8	19.0	13.7	11.6	14.7	11.9	9.3			
Total ^{2/}	:662	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0			
Educational attainment of household head			N=468	N=165	N=216	N=87	N=163	N=33	N=81	N=49			
Less than high school	:382	60.5	60.9	52.7	62.0	73.6	59.5	48.5	58.0	69.4			
High school graduate	:131	20.8	21.2	29.7	17.6	13.8	19.6	27.3	18.5	16.3			
Some college - - - -	:118	18.7	17.9	17.6	20.4	12.6	20.9	24.2	23.5	14.3			
Total ^{2/ 3/}	:631	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0			
Household income ^{4/} (dollars)			N=429	N=155	N=199	N=75	N=135	N=28	N=65	N=42			
Less than 3,000 - - -	:118	20.9	15.9	8.4	15.6	32.0	37.0	28.6	35.4	45.2			
3,000 to 4,999 - - -	:119	21.1	18.6	10.3	22.1	26.7	28.9	28.6	29.2	28.6			
5,000 to 9,999 - - -	:183	32.4	36.4	34.2	39.7	32.0	20.0	21.4	20.0	19.0			
10,000 and over - - -	:144	25.5	29.1	47.1	22.6	9.3	14.0	21.4	15.4	7.1			
Total ^{1/ 5/}	:564	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0			

Table 1

Selected Characteristics of Elderly Households and Sex and
Age (in years) of Household Head, Northeast United States, 1974-75--Continued

Household size	Degree of		Household income:	Degree of	
	Chi-square	Freedom		Chi-square	Freedom
<u>Age with sex held constant:</u>			<u>Age with sex held constant:</u>		
Male age categories	33.75***	4	Male age categories	58.78***	6
Female age categories	1.22	4	Female age categories	3.99	6
<u>Sex with age held constant:</u>			<u>Sex with age held constant:</u>		
Male and female:			Male and female:		
60 to 64 years	79.15***	2	60 to 64 years	19.26***	3
65 to 74 years	120.71***	2	65 to 74 years	17.12***	3
75 years and over	25.09***	2	75 years and over	3.12	3
Educational attainment of household head:					
<u>Age with sex held constant:</u>					
Male age categories	15.44**	4			
Female age categories	4.27	4			
<u>Sex with age held constant:</u>					
Male and female:					
60 to 64 years	0.80	2			
65 to 74 years	0.45	2			
75 years and over	0.28	2			

1/ N is the number of households in each category.

2/ Totals may not add to 100.0 percent due to rounding.

3/ Educational attainment not available for 31 household heads.

4/ Household income includes wages or salaries, self-employment income, rent, interest, dividends, royalties, pensions, alimony, regular contributions including scholarships and fellowships, social security and other retirement or disability income, veterans payments, unemployment compensation, and public assistance.

5/ Household income not available for 98 households.

* p < .05

** p < .01

*** p < .001

Table 2

Distribution of Elderly Households by Percent Reporting Home Location Convenient for Selected Activities or Services and Sex and Age (in years) of Household Head, Northeast United States, 1974-75

Convenient to go from : home to selected activities or services	Male Head												Female Head												
	Total		Total		60 to 64		65 to 74		75 and over		Total		Total		60 to 64		65 to 74		75 and over		:		:		
	:		:		:		:		:		:		:		:		:		:		:		:		
	No.	Pct.	Percent												:		:		:		:		:		
Friends and family in community (N=635) ^{1/}	574	90.4	92.4	94.0	94.5	84.4	84.3	84.8	91.0	72.9															
Shopping:																									
Food (N=649)	599	92.3	94.2	97.0	92.9	92.3	86.7	81.8	90.0	84.9															
Drug Store (N=647)	589	91.0	92.7	93.5	93.7	88.9	86.1	85.3	88.8	82.7															
Other (N=640)	571	89.2	92.3	93.5	92.3	89.8	80.2	75.0	89.9	68.6															
Hospital (N=646)	565	87.5	89.2	91.0	89.3	85.7	82.3	87.5	87.3	71.7															
Family doctor (N=637)	566	88.8	91.4	91.5	91.0	92.1	81.4	90.3	84.0	71.4															
Place of worship (N=613)	570	93.0	94.8	96.3	94.4	92.9	87.4	89.7	90.7	80.9															
Bank (N=642)	600	93.4	95.8	96.4	96.4	93.3	86.7	84.8	91.3	80.8															
Public Transportation (N=422)	215	50.9	52.9	50.0	56.0	50.0	45.5	36.4	49.1	45.2															

Friends and family: Age with sex held constant:	Degree of		Food Shopping: Age with sex held constant:	Degree of	
	Chi-square	Freedom		Chi-square	Freedom
Male age categories	10.18**	2	Male age categories	3.79	2
Female age categories	7.36*	2	Female age categories	1.59	2
Sex with age held constant:			Sex with age held constant:		
Male and female:			Male and female:		
60 to 64 years	2.11	1	60 to 64 years	9.56**	1
65 to 74 years	0.66	1	65 to 74 years	0.33	1
75 years and over	1.96	1	75 years and over	1.25	1

Table 2

Distribution of Elderly Households by Percent Reporting Home Location Convenient for Selected Activities or Services and Sex and Age (in years) of Household Head, Northeast United States, 1974-75--Continued

	Degree of			Degree of	
	Chi-square	Freedom		Chi-square	Freedom
Drug store:			Family doctor:		
Age with sex held constant:			Age with sex held constant:		
Male age categories	2.42	2	Male age categories	0.10	2
Female age categories	0.99	2	Female age categories	5.18	2
Sex with age held constant:			Sex with age held constant:		
Male and female:			Male and female:		
60 to 64 years	3.92*	1	60 to 64 years	0.02	1
65 to 74 years	1.58	1	65 to 74 years	2.39	1
75 years and over	1.43	1	75 years and over	8.96**	1
Other shopping:			Place of worship:		
Age with sex held constant:			Age with sex held constant:		
Male age categories	1.10	2	Male age categories	1.43	2
Female age categories	9.52**	2	Female age categories	2.69	2
Sex with age held constant:			Sex with age held constant:		
Male and female:			Male and female:		
60 to 64 years	8.61**	1	60 to 64 years	1.82	1
65 to 74 years	0.20	1	65 to 74 years	0.72	1
75 years and over	8.40**	1	75 years and over	3.27	1
Hospital:			Bank:		
Age with sex held constant:			Age with sex held constant:		
Male age categories	1.72	2	Male age categories	1.77	2
Female age categories	6.07*	2	Female age categories	3.11	2
Sex with age held constant:			Sex with age held constant:		
Male and female:			Male and female:		
60 to 64 years	0.04	1	60 to 64 years	4.93*	1
65 to 74 years	0.07	1	65 to 74 years	2.33	1
75 years and over	3.35	1	75 years and over	3.92*	1

Table 2

Distribution of Elderly Households by Percent Reporting Home Location Convenient for Selected Activities or Services and Sex and Age (in years) of Household Head, Northeast United States, 1974-75--Continued

Public Transportation	Chi-square	Degree of Freedom
<u>Age with sex held constant:</u>		
Male age categories	1.25	2
Female age categories	1.04	2
<u>Sex with age held constant:</u>		
Male and female:		
60 to 64 years	0.87	1
65 to 74 years	0.53	1
75 years and over	0.04	1

1/ N is the number of households in each category.

* p < .05

** p < .01

that it was convenient to go from their home to their place of worship and for banking, 92 percent for food shopping, 91 percent for drug store shopping, 90 percent for visiting friends and relatives in the community, 89 percent for other shopping, 89 percent for family doctor, 88 percent for hospital, and only 51 percent for public transportation.

In general, differences among the age groupings and between the male and female headed households were not significant. Of all the household situations studied, the later maturity female household heads expressed the greatest degree of inconvenience -- shopping other than food and drug store (31 percent), family doctor (29 percent), and banking (19 percent) where differences were significant.

Satisfaction. -- The elderly people surveyed indicated a high degree of satisfaction with two of the basic services studied -- housing and medical, and less satisfaction with two others -- local road maintenance and public transportation (Table 3). Ninety-seven percent of all households reported satisfaction with their general housing situation, 85 percent with medical services, and 80 percent with housing costs but only 75 percent were satisfied with local roads and 55 percent with public transportation. In general, differences between the male and female headed households and among the three age groupings were not significant. The two exceptions were: (1) households with a later maturity male head had a relatively high general housing dissatisfaction rate and (2) households with a pre-elder male head had a relatively high local road maintenance dissatisfaction rate.

Conclusions

Although differences were noted in household size, household income, and educational attainment of the household head, the null hypothesis that there are no differences among male and female headed households, holding age constant, and for each age grouping, holding sex of the household head constant is not rejected by the data on convenience to and satisfaction with the community services analyzed. The population studied appears to be relatively homogeneous concerning service convenience and satisfaction.

The general lack of public transportation^{9/} in the nonmetropolitan areas of the Northeast Region has been documented by hearings before the Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate [14 and 15]. Lack of public transportation and transportation costs have emerged as one of the major problems faced by the elderly [13, pp. 23-25 and 16, p. 173].

^{9/} In this section public transportation is defined as purchased inter-community transportation (bus, rail, air) and purchased local modes (bus, trolley and taxi). Excluded is paying a friend or neighbor for transportation in a privately owned vehicle.

Table 3
 Distribution of Elderly Households by Percent Satisfied With Selected Facilities
 and Services and Sex and Age (in years) of Household Head,
 Northeast United States, 1974-75

Facility or service	Male Head												Female Head												
	Total		Total		to		to		and		Total		to		to		and								
					64		74		over						64		74		over						
	No.	Pct.																							
General housing																									
Situation (N=657) ^{1/}	635	96.6		97.1		99.4		97.3		92.6		95.3		94.1		95.1		96.3							
Housing costs (N=640) ^{2/}	513	80.2		79.7		82.7		77.4		79.6		77.7		84.4		76.5		75.5							
Local road maintenance (N=639)	479	75.0		75.9		70.1		77.6		82.6		72.0		75.8		72.7		68.1							
Medical services (N=632)	540	85.4		85.7		84.9		85.8		87.0		84.7		74.2		85.2		90.2							
Public Transportation (N=399)	218	54.6		52.9		50.0		58.0		44.9		59.8		44.4		67.3		56.3							

General housing situation:	Degree of		Housing costs:	Degree of	
	Chi-square	Freedom		Age with sex held constant:	Chi-square
Age with sex held constant:					
Male age categories	10.20**	2	Male age categories		
Female age categories	0.23	2	Female age categories		
Sex with age held constant:			Sex with age held constant:		
Male and female:			Male and female:		
60 to 64 years	2.39	1	60 to 64 years		
65 to 74 years	0.36	1	65 to 74 years		
75 years and over	0.07	1	75 years and over	0.14	1

Table 3
 Distribution of Elderly Households by Percent Satisfied With Selected Facilities
 and Services and Sex and Age (in years) of Household Head,
 Northeast United States, 1974-75--Continued

	Degree of			Degree of	
	Chi-square	Freedom		Chi-square	Freedom
Local road maintenance:			Public transportation:		
<u>Age with sex held constant:</u>			<u>Age with sex held constant:</u>		
Male age categories	5.73*	2	Male age categories	3.05	2
Female age categories	0.61	2	Female age categories	1.81	2
<u>Sex with age held constant:</u>			<u>Sex with age held constant:</u>		
Male and female:			Male and female:		
60 to 64 years	0.20	1	60 to 64 years	0.03	1
65 to 74 years	0.50	1	65 to 74 years	1.01	1
75 years and over	2.99	1	75 years and over	0.59	1
Medical services:					
<u>Age with sex held constant:</u>					
Male age categories	0.20	2			
Female age categories	3.84	2			
<u>Sex with age held constant:</u>					
Male and female:					
60 to 64 years	1.43	1			
65 to 74 years	3/	1			
75 years and over	0.09	1			

1/ N is the number of households in each category

2/ Includes rent, taxes, and upkeep.

3/ Less than 0.005

*p < .05

**p < .01

Improvement of intercommunity public transportation is beyond the ability of a single nonmetropolitan community in the region. Improvement will require subregion and regional efforts. Possible measures to alleviate the local public transportation problems include: (1) demand-responsive (door-to-door) service with radio dispatch, prior reservation, or monthly subscription service; (2) use of school buses, postal and other public vehicles; (3) carpools; (4) improved or initiation of taxi and jitney service and shared motor vehicles [16, pp. 187-191].

The homogeneity of the elderly population with respect to satisfaction with community services might result from one or more of the following reasons: (1) selective out migration of those who were dissatisfied; (2) elderly with problems may not have been able to maintain independent living arrangements and thus were not in the sample population; (3) the sample population has adjusted to the level of service delivery available; (4) the present level of services is improved over past levels and thus the expectations of the elderly have been met or the level available was consistent with their expectations, needs, and desires; or (5) given the frequency of need and possible increased taxes that might be required to change the situation, they felt no adjustment was necessary.^{10/11/} These observations are clearly speculative and provide a basis for further research on patterns of service use and satisfaction and perceived need for change in service delivery for the pre-elderly and the elderly.

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^{10/} The authors are indebted to an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on an earlier version of this section.

^{11/} Kuehn [5] in analyzing NE-77 data, found that age of household head was one of the most important variables affecting satisfaction with satisfaction increasing with age. The lowest levels of satisfaction were reported by the under 25 and 25 to 34 years of age groupings. Thus, although the elderly population is relatively homogeneous with respect to satisfaction with community services, the total population is not.

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