

PewResearchCenter Publications

The Return of the Multi-Generational Family Household

March 18, 2010

Summary of Findings

This report documents major changes in family household living arrangements that have unfolded over the past three decades and accelerated during the Great Recession.

Its principal focus is on the revival since 1980 of the multi-generational family household.

It also chronicles a range of recent trends in the living arrangements of older adults, and it explores the correlation between living alone at an older age and various life experiences, including health, happiness and depression.

The report is based on the Pew Research Center's analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data as well as our own public opinion surveys. For details on our methodology, see ["About the Data" in the full report](#). Key findings:

Multi-Generational Family Households

- In 2008, an estimated 49 million Americans, or 16% of the total U.S. population, lived in a family household that contained at least two adult generations or a grandparent and at least one other generation. In 1980, this figure was just 28 million, or 12% of the population.
- This 33% increase since 1980 in the share of all Americans living in such households represents a sharp trend reversal. From 1940 to 1980, the share of Americans living in such households had declined by more than half (from 25% in 1940 to 12% in 1980).
- The growth since 1980 in these multi-generational households is partly the result of demographic and cultural shifts, including the rising share of immigrants in the population and the rising median age of first marriage of all adults.
- But at a time of high unemployment and a rising foreclosures, the number of households in which multiple generations of the same family double up under the same roof has spiked significantly. Our report finds that from 2007 to 2008, the number of Americans living in a multi-generational family household grew by 2.6 million.
- This trend has affected adults of all ages, especially the elderly and the young. For example, about one in five adults ages 25 to 34 now live in a multi-generational household. So do one-in-five adults ages 65 and older.

Living Arrangements of Older Adults

- After rising steeply for nearly a century, the share of adults ages 65 and older who live alone flattened out around 1990 and has since declined a bit. It currently stands at 27% -- up from 6% in 1900.
- Older adults who live alone are less healthy and they more often feel sad or depressed than their counterparts who live with a spouse or with others. These correlations stand up even after controlling for demographic factors such as gender, race, age, income and education.

Read the [full report at pewsocialtrends.org](#).

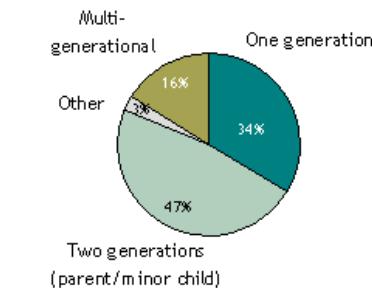
Share of U.S. Population Living in Multi-Generational Family Households, 1940-2008



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the U.S. Decennial Census data, 1940-2000, and 2006, 2007, 2008 American Community Surveys, based on IPUMS samples.

PewResearchCenter

Share of Population in Various Generational Household Types, 2008

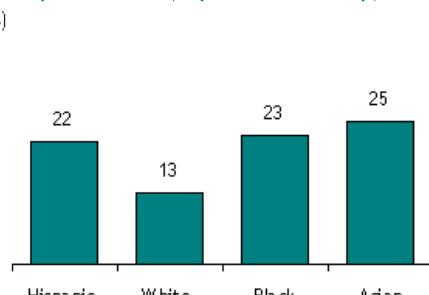


Note: "Other" refers to living in group quarters.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2008 American Community Survey (IPUMS). Based on total U.S. population of 304 million.

PewResearchCenter

Share of Population in Multi-Generational Family Household, by Race/Ethnicity, 2008



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2008 American Community Survey (IPUMS). Hispanics are of any race. White, black and Asian include only non-Hispanics.

PewResearchCenter