

Single baby boomers facing increased challenges as they age

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Nick and Bobbi Ercoline, the couple depicted on the "Woodstock" soundtrack album cover, have now been happily married for over 40 years. However, a new special issue of *The Gerontologist* showing the Ercolines as they look today — a portrait of successful aging — finds that their unmarried baby boomer counterparts generally fare much poorer in terms of economic, health, and social outcomes.

In 2011, the first of the 79 million American [baby boomers](#) (those born between 1946 and 1964) reached [age](#) 65. Among this population, approximately one in three people are unmarried; the vast majority are either divorced or never-married, while only 10 percent are widowed.

Study authors I-Fen Lin, PhD, and Susan L. Brown, PhD — using data from the 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census and the 2009 American Community Survey to measure marital status trends over time — found that the number of boomers that are unmarried has grown by more than 50 percent since 1980, and that these singles also face increasing difficulties.

"Unmarried boomers are disproportionately women, younger, and non-white," the authors state in their article. "They tend to have fewer economic resources and poorer health. The prevalence of disability is twice as high among unmarrieds and marrieds."

And despite this higher rate of disability, single boomers are less likely to have health insurance.

Among women, widows appear to be the most disadvantaged as they enjoy fewer economic resources and have poorer health than divorced and never-married women. In contrast, those who never married are the least advantaged among men. Despite having relatively high levels of education, never-married men have poorer economic circumstances and are most likely to live alone.

Overall, 19 percent of unmarried boomers said they received food stamps, public assistance, or supplemental security income, while only six percent of married boomers indicated they used these services.

The article on marriage related disparities, "Unmarried Boomers Confront Old Age: A National Portrait," is one of several in the latest issue of *The Gerontologist*, which is titled, "Not Your Mother's Old Age: Baby Boomers at Age 65." Other studies within this installment address caregiving issues, concerns among minority boomers, and intergenerational relationships.

More information: [gerontologist.oxfordjournals.org/doi/full/10.1093/geron/52/2/153](https://www.oxfordjournals.org/doi/full/10.1093/geron/52/2/153)

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