

research in brief

Older Rural Poor

In a study of rural households in Wisconsin, with heads of households over 62 years of age, it was found that 39% had annual incomes of less than \$2,000. Another 34% were near the poverty level and the remaining 27% averaged about \$7,300 yearly. The older the household head, the more likely he was to be poor. Thirty percent in the 63-70 age bracket, 60% in the over 74 years of age were poorer. About 80% of the households were composed of single adults or a husband and wife.

There apparently is a relationship between being poor and disabled. Forty-four percent of the poor household heads considered themselves disabled compared to 30% of the near poor and 23% of the above-average group. Wives of poor household heads also had a higher degree of disability than those in other income groups.

About 90% of the aged rural dwellers owned their own homes. One-third of all dwellings in the sample were sub-standard. The author feels that many may not be able to make needed house repairs because of sickness or lack of money. Fifty percent of the poor and near poor did not have life insurance. Only 10% of these two groups had more than \$5,000 in protection.

Most had radio or television and 70% received daily newspapers. The only frequent contact for the elderly were visits from relatives and friends. Over 80% belonged to a

church but very few were members of clubs, fraternal organizations, or had other outside contacts.

Editor's Note:

Saupe says: "Many of the poor people in rural Wisconsin are over age 62 and their numbers are increasing faster than any other age group." What is or should be our response to the needs of the aged in rural America? How similar is the situation to that where you live? Getting those over 60 involved as teachers and learners in Extension programs seems a challenge—it's not likely that a meeting in the county center will do the job.

"Wisconsin's Older Rural Poor." William E. Saupe and Bernard McCabe. Research Report R2663, December, 1974, Agriculture Bulletin Building, 1535 Observatory Drive, Madison, Wisconsin, 53706.

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