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Worldwide Gains in Life Expectancy Pose Health-Care Challenges,
Especially for Older Women, U.S. Census Bureau Says

Major increases in life expectancy in many parts of the world during the past 100 years have set the stage for health-care challenges in the 21st century for both developed and developing countries, according to a study released today by the Commerce Department's Census Bureau.

The International Brief, [Gender and Aging: Mortality and Health, IB/98-2](#), is the second in a series of four international profiles focusing on gender and aging.

"Countries around the world are confronting the challenges posed by aging populations," said Census Bureau analyst Kevin Kinsella, co-author of the brief with Yvonne Gist. "While the pace of aging varies, all nations are, or soon will be, facing important issues regarding health care for their expanding older populations. Most issues will affect elderly women who greatly outnumber elderly men in most nations."

In more than half of all developed countries, women's life expectancy at birth is at least 80 years, which is seven years higher on average than men. In developing countries, the average gender gap in life expectancy at birth is only three years.

The study said cardiovascular disease is the primary killer at older ages in developed countries and more recently has become the top cause of death in developing countries.

Other highlights from the report:

- Practically all nations have shown continued improvement in life expectancy, with recent exceptions in Africa, due to the impact of HIV/AIDS.
- The gender gap in life expectancy is widening in most of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, but tends to be narrowing in other countries.

- Life expectancy at age 60 in Japan rose nine years for women and nearly seven years for men between 1950 and 1990.
- Women who reach older age can expect to live more disability-free years than their male counterparts.
- The number of widows is rising rapidly in most parts of the world, as is the number of never-married older women.

The brief, produced with financial support from the Office of the Demography of Aging at the U.S. National Institute on Aging, uses statistics from the International Database in the Census Bureau's International Programs Center. A brief on demographic dimensions was published earlier this year, and upcoming profiles will focus on caregiving and the economic status of elderly women.

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The U.S. Census Bureau, pre-eminent collector and disseminator of timely, relevant and quality data about the people and the economy of the United States, conducts a population and housing census every 10 years, an economic census every five years and more than 100 demographic and economic surveys every year, all of them evolving from the first census in 1790.

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau
Public Information Office*
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