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Were They Prepared for Retirement?
Financial Status at Advanced Ages in the HRS and AHEAD Cohorts

James M. Poterba, Steven F. Venti, and David A. Wise

Many analysts have considered whether households approaching retirement age have accumulated enough assets to be well prepared for retirement. Various methods have been used to evaluate retirement preparedness, and the range of studies that apply these methods have yielded a diverse set of conclusions. Some studies are based on comparisons between observed saving or consumption and the predictions of the life cycle model. Others measure the ability of households to replace pre-retirement levels of income or consumption, or compare post-retirement income to poverty thresholds. Many recent studies have been based on the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), with emphasis on the original HRS cohort that was between the ages of fifty-one and sixty-one in 1992. Other studies use the Survey of Consumer Finances or the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Employee Beneficiary Survey. A partial list of recent studies of retirement preparedness would include Bernheim (1992); Mitchell and Moore (1998); Engen, Gale, and Uccello (1999); Haveman et al. (2005); Scholz, Seshadri, and Khitatrakun (2006); Munnell, Webb, and Golub-Sass (2007); Love, Smith, and McNair (2008); Hurd and Rohwedder (2008); VanDerhei and Copeland (2010).

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In this chapter, we shift from studying household finances at the start of the retirement period, an ex ante measure of retirement preparation, to studying the asset holdings of households in their last years of life. We focus on nonannuitized assets and income. Virtually all households have a Social Security annuity, and many have a defined-benefit (DB) pension annuity as well. We examine nonannuitized assets held at the end of life, in addition to income, because they can provide an ex post indicator of whether households were well-prepared for retirement. If there are substantial numbers of very old households with very low asset levels, relative to the number of households with low asset levels at the start of retirement, then many households exhausted their retirement resources. If most households still hold substantial assets at very advanced ages, or in the last few years before their death, the pattern is more difficult to interpret. It is difficult to determine whether such households had what they would have considered "sufficient" resources for retirement, and did not need to reduce their consumption outlays in late life, or if they conserved the (insufficient) resources they had throughout the retirement period.

We study the level of assets that households hold in the last survey wave preceding their death. In parts of the analysis we make use of all of the cohorts that are now part of the Health and Retirement Study. We give special attention, however, to the older Asset and Health Dynamics Among the Oldest Old (AHEAD) cohort. We calculate the level of wealth at death and offer several metrics for determining the proportion of households that may be thought of as having "insufficient assets" for their retirement. In addition to summarizing the level of assets, we also study how assets at the end of life depend on family status pathways prior to death. We are particularly interested in the strong relationship between health and assets near the end of life. We also give special attention to the relationship between assets and longevity after the 1993 first wave of the AHEAD cohort. We find a strong relationship between health status and wealth at death.

Our chapter is divided into six sections. In the first, we show detailed balance sheets in 2008 for households by five-year age intervals—sixty-five to sixty-nine, seventy to seventy-four, seventy-five to seventy-nine, eighty to eighty-four, and eighty-five and older, respectively. These balance sheets are based on households in all HRS cohorts—HRS, AHEAD, Children of Depression (CODA), War Baby (WB) and Early Baby Boomer (EBB). We find that the change in assets with age, as well as the level of assets, differs greatly between single households and married couples.

We explore this pattern further by considering the evolution of assets of the AHEAD as well as the HRS cohorts, distinguishing two-person households, one-person households, and households that transition from two- to one-person households. We emphasize the distinction between the evolution of assets between survey waves for persons who are alive in adjacent waves, and the evolution of assets with age that can be attributed to "mortality

selection effects" and the progressive selection over time of households with greater financial assets and lower mortality risk. We are also careful to distinguish between death and attrition as separate reasons why persons do not remain in the sample through 2008. The selection effects we calculate are due to death and not due to sample attrition.

In the second section, we present greater detail on the evolution of wealth for AHEAD households. We distinguish three family status pathways based on family status in 1993 (the first year observed) and family status when last observed: (1) original one-person households in 1993 who were also single at death; (2) original two-person households in 1993 in which one spouse is deceased in the last year observed; and (3) original two-person households in 1993 in which both spouses remain alive in the last year observed. A fourth group—those who were single in 1993 and who later remarried—is not analyzed because of its small sample size. Within each of these groups we show the evolution of wealth by the last year observed (LYO), which is the last wave prior to death for those who die, or 2008, the most recent survey wave available, for those who are still alive in that year. We highlight the strong relationship between wealth in 1993 and subsequent longevity. We consider several components of wealth—total wealth, financial assets including personal retirement accounts, housing wealth, and annuity wealth, including both Social Security benefits and defined-benefit pension benefits. We also report information on an indicator variable for whether the household owns a home.

In the third and fourth sections, we present results for the single-person family pathway group. We focus attention on this group because it is the largest of the three pathway groups and because it is the group most likely to have low wealth prior to death. In section three, we present estimates of the relationship between wealth and age, and between wealth and health, with separate estimates of the health and age effects for each LYO. The health measure we use is similar to the index developed in Poterba, Venti, and Wise (2010a, 2010b). Using the regression estimates we predict assets by health and age interval and by LYO. In section four, we show the distribution of assets by asset category within each health quintile and age interval. We also suggest metrics to help to put the results in context.

In the fifth section, we present data for all family pathway groups combined and we compare results across all three family pathways. The last section summarizes and concludes.

1.1 Balance Sheets and Evolution of Nonannuity Wealth by Family Status

Table 1.1 summarizes information in the HRS on household balance sheets for three age groups and for five aggregated asset categories—financial assets (balances in taxable financial assets as well as balances in IRA plans, Keogh plans, 401(k) and similar plans), equity in the primary home,

Table 1.1 **Balance sheets for households in 2008, by age and marital status**

	Single-person households			Two-person households		
Asset category	Percent of households with asset	Median holding	Mean holding	Percent of households with asset	Median holding	Mean holding
		Aged 65 to 69 in 2008				
Financial assets	84.2	12,500	130,156	92.6	111,600	354,455
Home equity	65.9	52,000	107,483	91.1	150,000	232,300
Other nonannuity assets	18.8	0	96,357	38.8	0	171,441
PV of Social Security and DB pension benefits	90.5	268,766	315,165	92.3	571,575	617,767
Net worth	99.1	414,435	649,161	99.6	1,015,317	1,375,963
		Aged 75 to 79 in 2008				
Financial assets	86.4	13,000	128,522	93.9	112,500	331,901
Home equity	65.7	60,000	123,144	88.9	151,000	228,371
Other nonannuity assets	15.2	0	47,447	31.7	0	198,979
PV of Social Security and DB pension benefits	99.0	200,303	243,304	99.9	460,509	525,772
Net worth	99.4	336,058	542,416	100.0	858,331	1,285,024
		Aged 85 or older in 2008				
Financial assets	88.6	22,000	152,958	91.8	125,000	332,631
Home equity	54.1	35,000	101,728	84.8	125,000	210,917
Other nonannuity assets	13.3	0	45,294	28.2	0	155,145
PV of Social Security and DB pension benefits	99.0	82,855	108,582	99.7	224,317	284,348
Net worth	99.7	214,371	408,562	100.0	674,965	983,042

other nonannuity assets (the net value of other real estate, equity in second homes and business assets less nonhousing debt), the expected present discounted value of Social Security and defined-benefit pension benefits, and net worth (total wealth). These balance sheets are based on households in all HRS cohorts—HRS, AHEAD, Children of Depression (CODA), War Baby (WB), and Early Baby Boomer (EBB). The data on 401(k) balances in these tables are incomplete because respondents in the two oldest cohorts, CODA and AHEAD, were not asked for their 401(k) balances. However, these cohorts were unlikely to have substantial accumulations because they left the labor force before or shortly after 401(k) accounts became available in 1982. Members of the CODA cohort were age sixty-eight to seventy-four when first surveyed in 1998 and members of the AHEAD cohort were age seventy and older when first surveyed in 1993. Appendix tables 1A.1 through 1A.5 show detailed balance sheets in 2008 for households by five-year age intervals—sixty-five to sixty-nine, seventy to seventy-four, seventy-five to seventy-nine, eighty to eighty-four, and eighty-five and older, respectively.

Separate panels are shown for all households as well as for one-person and two-person households. Data are shown for both means and medians.

Several features of the summary data in table 1.1 warrant comment. First, whether measured by medians or means, the net worth of older households, even those aged eighty-five and older, seems rather large. The net worth of two-person households is more than twice as large as the net worth of one-person households. Median (mean) total net worth for households aged sixty-five to sixty-nine is $414,435 ($649,161) for singles and $1,015,317 ($1,375,963) for couples in 2008. Net worth is lower at older ages, in large part because of the decline in expected present value of benefits from Social Security and defined-benefit pensions. Wealth from these sources is lower for older households than for younger households because expected payments from these sources are weighted by survival probabilities.

We do not focus on cross-age comparisons in the balance sheets. The pattern of levels across ages depends on at least two competing effects: assets are lower for older households because of "cohort effects" (older generations had lower lifetime earnings, on average, than younger generations), and assets are higher for older households because of "mortality effects" (on average, within each cohort, poorer households die at younger ages). We give special attention to mortality effects in the subsequent analysis.

The largest components of nonannuity net worth are housing wealth and financial assets (including personal retirement accounts). Of single-person households, 66 percent of those aged sixty-five to sixty-nine own homes and this rate remains about the same for nearly twenty years; for the group aged eighty-five and older, the rate drops to 54 percent. About 91 percent of married couples aged sixty-five to sixty-nine own homes. Thereafter the rate drops gradually to about 89 percent for ages seventy-five to seventy-nine and 85 percent for those aged eighty-five and older.

Table 1.2 shows selected percentiles of the distribution of assets. It demonstrates that a large proportion of households have very few, or no, liquid financial assets. This is especially true for single-person households. The twenty-fifth percentile of financial assets for singles is less than $1,300 for all age groups. Many single-person households also have no home equity. The twenty-fifth percentile is zero for all age groups. In addition, a large fraction of both single- and two-person households have no other nonannuity assets. The seventy-fifth percentile is zero for single-households at all ages and the fiftieth percentile is zero for two-person households at all ages.

Recall that the balance sheets pertain to the wealth of those who survive to each age. In contrast, Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show the evolution of assets by family status—two-person households, one-person households, and households that transition from two- to one-person households during the interval between survey waves—for HRS and AHEAD households, respectively. The figures exclude persons in households that transitioned from one-person

Table 1.2 **Selected percentiles of the distribution for households in 2008, by age and marital status**

		Single-person households			Two-person households		
Asset category	Percentile	Age 65 to 69	Age 75 to 79	Age 85 or older	Age 65 to 69	Age 75 to 79	Age 85 or older
Financial assets	10	0	0	0	300	450	750
	25	300	500	1,300	13,500	11,000	27,000
	50	12,500	13,000	22,000	111,600	112,500	125,000
	75	110,721	110,000	133,500	442,000	355,715	402,000
	90	380,000	408,000	430,000	878,000	839,000	927,200
Home equity	10	0	0	0	7,000	0	0
	25	0	0	0	63,000	75,000	46,000
	50	52,000	60,000	35,000	150,000	151,000	125,000
	75	150,000	175,000	140,000	290,000	275,000	240,000
	90	300,000	345,000	300,000	450,000	475,000	438,000
Other nonannuity assets	10	–7,000	–5,000	0	–7,000	–3,700	0
	25	–1,000	0	0	–100	0	0
	50	0	0	0	0	0	0
	75	0	0	0	80,000	42,000	20,000
	90	80,000	60,000	80,000	450,000	400,000	500,000
PV of Social Security and DB pension benefits	10	37,796	97,040	38,288	128,811	257,448	118,705
	25	173,114	141,069	56,932	353,873	344,486	160,940
	50	268,766	200,303	82,855	571,575	460,509	224,317
	75	410,707	276,711	124,659	789,737	620,279	350,825
	90	610,166	410,850	196,096	1,155,331	840,320	478,903
Net worth	10	157,921	123,191	56,266	346,946	388,174	223,847
	25	237,154	193,157	93,411	609,949	566,980	350,801
	50	414,435	336,058	214,371	1,015,317	858,331	674,965
	75	778,662	662,494	470,768	1,660,631	1,443,753	1,177,966
	90	1,291,336	1,155,530	1,051,622	2,582,332	2,279,724	1,821,628

to two-person because the sample sizes for this group were too small to give reliable results. Wealth includes all assets reported in table 1.1 except Social Security wealth, defined-benefit pension wealth, and 401(k) balances. For the HRS cohort, 401(k) balances are not included because of missing data in some of the early years, as discussed in Venti (2011). Balances in 401(k) accounts were not collected in the AHEAD.

Figure 1.1 shows the wave-to-wave change in median nonannuity wealth in the three family status groups for HRS households. All values are converted to 2008 dollars using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). For example, the median wealth of persons who remained in two-person households between 1992 and 1994 (labeled as "2 to 2") increased from about $184,000 to $213,000. For those who remained in two-person households between 1994 and 1996, median wealth increased from about $223,000 to $231,000. In all intervals, wealth increased for persons in continuing two-person households.

It is important to distinguish between the within-interval changes in wealth shown by the line segments in the figure and the effect of differential mortality indicated by the vertical height of the "gaps" between segments. To illustrate this point, note that persons in two-person households present in both the 1996 and 1998 waves had $243,706 in wealth in 1998, but that persons in two-person households present in both the 1998 and 2000 waves had $254,419 in 1998. This difference is circled in the figure. The difference between $243,706 and $254,419 is the "selection" effect—two-person households that dissolved because of death of a spouse, divorce, or separation

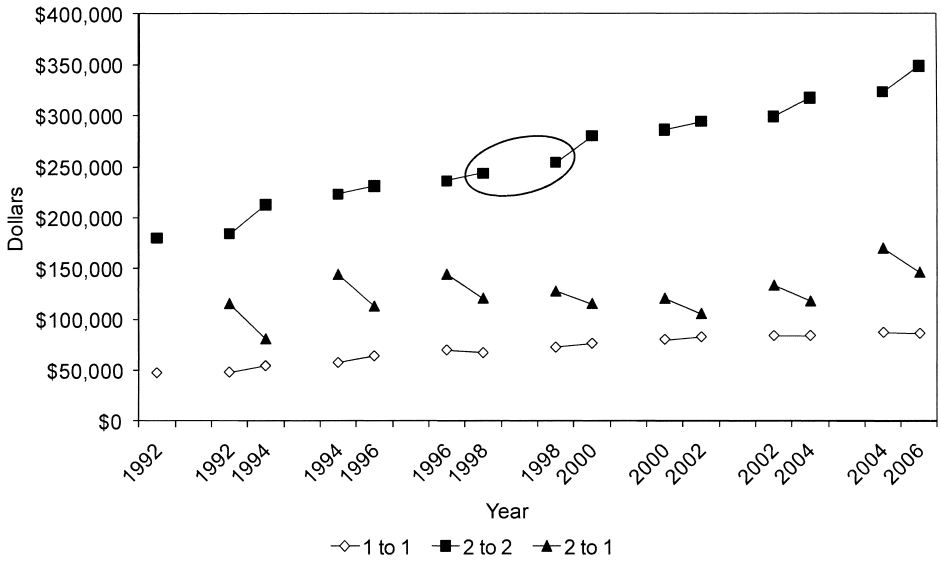

Fig. 1.1 Median nonannuity wealth of persons in the HRS, by family status

between 1998 and 2000 had lower wealth in 1998 than those who continued as two-person households through the 1998 to 2000 period.

To understand the evolution of wealth with age, as distinct from the selection effect, it is important to focus on the wave-to-wave changes (segment slopes). For two-person households in the HRS who were between the ages of fifty-one and sixty-one in 1992, the wave-to-wave changes are positive in all intervals. The increase in wealth for persons in continuing two-person households can be seen by tracking the assets in the first year of each interval. Some component of this increase is due to the progressive selection of households with greater wealth. For one-person households wealth increased in all but two wave-to-wave intervals. The mortality selection effects are not so apparent for single-person households, in part because a large fraction of one-person households had relatively low wealth, with median levels between $50,000 and $100,000 over the 1992 to 2008 period.

Figure 1.1 also shows that the nonannuity wealth of persons in two-person households that dissolve between waves declines substantially. This is observed in each of the intervals. The assets of persons in two- to one-person households were also much lower at the beginning of an interval than the assets of persons in continuing two-person households. After dissolution, however, the wealth of the surviving single persons was still larger than the wealth of continuing one-person households.

Figure 1.2 shows the evolution of nonannuity wealth for persons in AHEAD households. The data for 1993 are omitted from the figure because, as Rohwedder, Haider, and Hurd (2006) explain, financial assets were underreported in AHEAD in that year. For the AHEAD households, the mortality selection effects are extremely important (circles in the figure). Persons who continued in two-person households from one interval to the next typically held much greater wealth balances than those who did not. For AHEAD households, the within-interval change in wealth for persons in continuing two-person households was negative in all but the first interval, 1995 to 1998. The wealth of continuing one-person households declined in each period. For AHEAD households the decline in the wealth for persons in two-person households that dissolved during an interval is similar in magnitude to the decline for persons in continuing two-person households. For these households dissolution was primarily the consequence of mortality, whereas for HRS households dissolution was more often the consequence of divorce or separation. As with the HRS cohort, the level of wealth of persons in two-person households that dissolved during an interval was much lower than the level of wealth of persons in continuing two-person households. Among persons in households that dissolved in an interval the wealth of the surviving spouse remained much higher than the wealth of continuing one-person households.

In short, the figures show the within-interval change in the wealth of households that survive over the interval, but they also make clear that

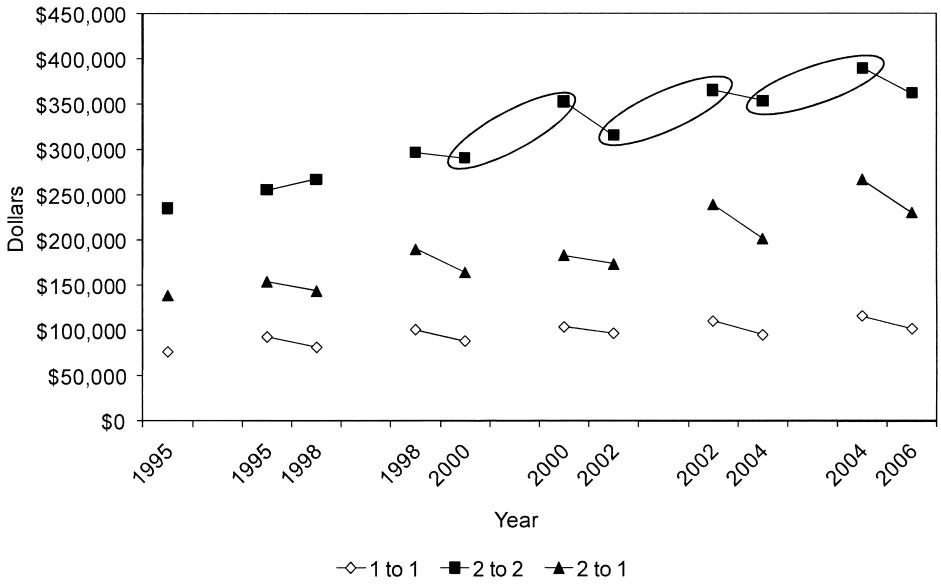

Fig. 1.2 Median nonannuity wealth of persons in the AHEAD, by family status

some of the change from interval to interval is due to the progressive selection of households with greater wealth. This effect plays a key role in the subsequent analysis.

1.2 The Evolution of Wealth for AHEAD Households

The remainder of the chapter focuses on AHEAD households. The goal is to describe the evolution of wealth by family pathway group and by asset category from 1993 to 2008 and to consider the wealth of persons in the last year observed (LYO). All persons last observed in years before 2008 are known to be deceased—persons who leave the sample but are not known to be deceased are excluded from the analysis. Persons whose last year observed is 2008 are not deceased. Most waves are spaced two years apart, with the exception of a three-year gap between the 1995 and 1998 waves. Thus for persons who have an LYO before 2008, the last observation may be up to two years before the actual date of death (or three years if the LYO is 1995.)

We begin by dividing the AHEAD respondents into three groups defined by family status when first observed in 1993 and family status in the LYO. These groups, which we call "family pathway groups," are: (1) original one-person households in 1993, (2) persons in two-person households in 1993 with a deceased spouse in the last year observed before death, and (3) persons in two-person households in 1993 with the spouse alive when last observed. For shorthand we sometimes refer to the groups as one-person, two-person

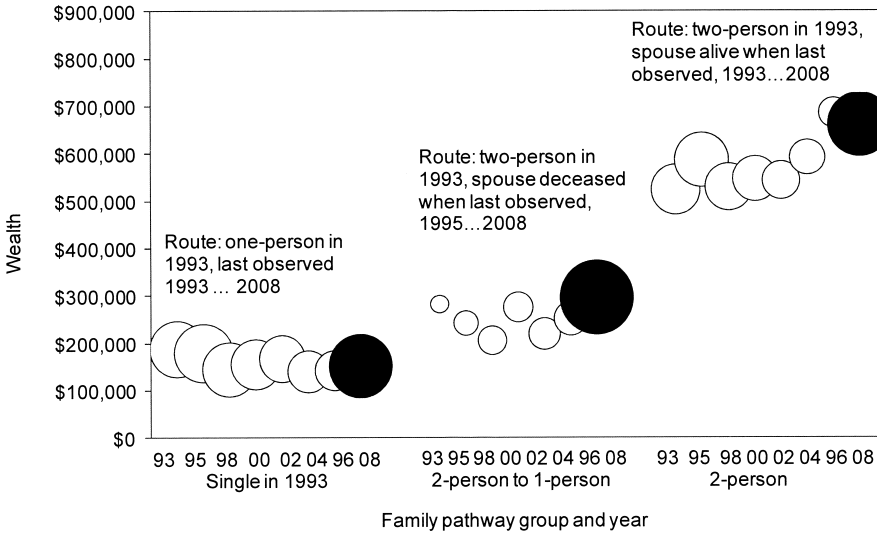

Fig. 1.3 Total wealth in year last observed by route to death and percentage of observations (circle size)

to one-person, and two-person, respectively. A fourth group of persons, in a one-person household in 1993 and in a two-person household when last observed, is excluded because this group is too small for meaningful analysis. Also, all persons who joined the AHEAD sample after 1993 are excluded. Some persons in one-person households in 1993 may have been in two-person households prior to 1993. Figure 1.3 is a graphical description of the total wealth (including the present values of Social Security and DB pension benefits) and the relative size of each of these groups in each LYO. For each family progression group, the location of each circle indicates the level of median wealth (shown on the vertical axis) and the associated LYO (shown on the horizontal axis). The size of each circle indicates the percent of the total sample in each LYO group accounted for by the particular subgroup.

In each family progression group, the wealth and the percent of persons last observed in 2008 (not deceased) is represented by the black circles. The other circles indicate wealth in the last wave prior to death. One-person households in 1993 died with the least wealth, between $142,000 and $188,000 at the median. Those in two-person households in 1993 with a spouse alive when they died had the greatest wealth in the wave prior to death, between $585,000 and $685,000. Those in two-person households in 1993 whose spouse was deceased when last observed had median wealth in the wave prior to death between $206,000 and $286,000.

A general feature of the data is the strong and consistent relationship between wealth in 1993 and survival, the year a person is last observed in the data. Among persons first observed in 1993, those who will die the earliest begin with the lowest assets in 1993. The relationship holds for all

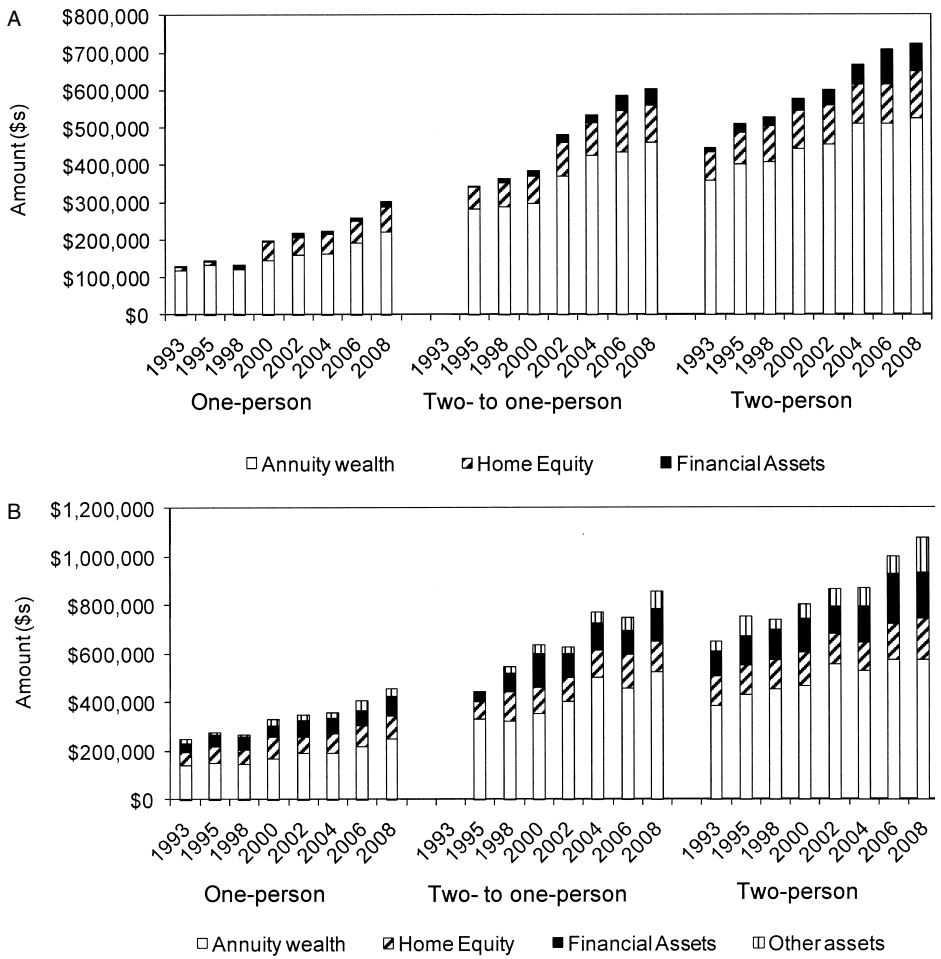

Fig. 1.4 ***A*, Median annuity wealth, home equity, and financial assets in 1993 by family route and last year observed; *B*, Mean annuity wealth, home equity, financial assets, and other wealth in 1993 by family route and last year observed**

asset categories. Figure 1.4, panel A, shows the relationship for three of the four asset categories shown in table 1.1—annuity wealth, home equity, and financial assets—for each of the family progression groups. The figure shows medians for each asset category in 1993. The fourth category in table 1.1, other nonannuity assets, is not shown because the median is zero in all years for all groups. Because medians are used in the figure, the stacked vertical height of the bars in the figure is not equal to median total wealth. Panel B of figure 1.4 shows means for all four categories. In the subsequent discussion we often show medians and not means.

For each of the groups, Social Security and defined-benefit pension wealth

is by far the largest wealth holding. The relationship between wealth when first observed and subsequent mortality is striking. For example, the rising profiles within each group shows that annuity wealth in 1993 is higher for persons who die prior to the 2000 wave (whose LYO is 1998) than for persons who die prior to the 1998 wave (whose LYO is 1995). Similarly, persons who die prior to the 2002 wave have higher annuity wealth in 1993 than persons who die prior to the 2000 wave, and so forth. Similar patterns are evident for the home equity and financial assets. The wealth-mortality gradient that has been widely observed by others is strongly evident in these data. Examples of previous studies that have found strong positive correlation between wealth and longevity include Smith (1999, 2004, 2005); Adams et al. (2003); Wu (2003); Michaud and van Soest (2008); Case and Deaton (2005); Attanasio and Emmerson (2003); and Hurd, McFadden, and Merrill (2001).

We do not address the direction of causality between health and wealth or between wealth and mortality, although here and elsewhere in the chapter we often implicitly assume that health is given and subsequent outcomes follow. This assumption is consistent with the findings of Smith (1999, 2004, 2005); Adams et al. (2003); Wu (2003); Michaud and van Soest (2008); and Case and Deaton (2005). The general consensus is that causation from health to wealth is the dominant pathway, at least in the United States, but there is no universal agreement.

Figure 1.4 shows that persons "closer" to death in 1993 have lower assets in 1993 than those who will live longer. We can see the same pattern over time by showing how assets evolve over time for groups of persons identified by the last year observed in the sample. Again, an LYO of 2006 or earlier indicates that the person died in the two-year interval following the LYO. An LYO of 2008 indicates that the person is still alive in 2008, the last year of our sample. The next series of figures show the evolution of assets for several wealth subcategories—total wealth, financial assets (including IRA and Keogh accounts), home equity, Social Security wealth, and defined-benefit pension wealth. We also show the percentage of households who own their homes and the evolution of total income. There is one figure for each wealth category, with data for each of three family pathway groups. For each figure the evolution of median wealth is shown by LYO.

Figure 1.5 shows median total wealth for the three family pathway groups. Total wealth in 1993 is lowest for the first family pathway group (one-person households) and highest for the third pathway group (two-person households with a spouse alive when last observed). In each of the groups, total wealth in 1993 is very strongly related to the LYO. Those who live longer have higher wealth. In addition, total wealth typically declines as persons get "closer" to death for each of the groups, largely because of the mechanical decline in annuity wealth. But the decline is much slower for the persons in two-person families who have a spouse alive when last observed, a group that also has much greater wealth in 1993.

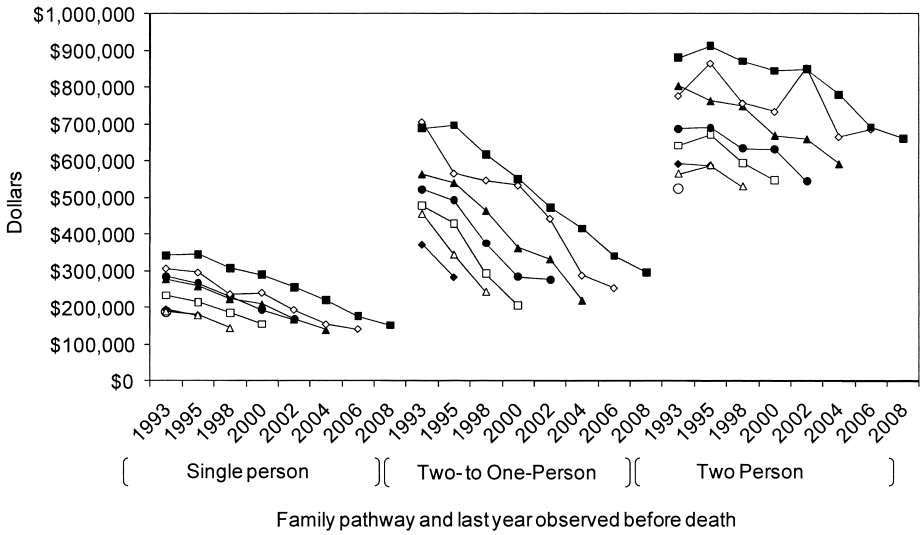

Fig. 1.5 Median total wealth by family pathway and by last year observed before death

Figure 1.6 shows the evolution of financial assets (including IRA and Keogh accounts) for the three pathway groups. The vertical line between 1993 and 1995 is a reminder that some financial assets were underreported in 1993, although we present the data because IRA and Keogh assets are not underreported. Again, the financial assets of the first group decline quite systematically after 1995 and the financial assets of the second group typically decline as well, at least after 1998. The decline is in part induced by the minimum distribution requirement for 401(k) and non-Roth IRA accounts. Nonetheless, there is much less decline in the financial assets of the third pathway group.

Figure 1.7 shows the evolution of home equity. For one-person households the data show a very sharp decline in median home equity beginning two or three years before death. Indeed, for each LYO, median home equity in the wave prior to death was zero for all but those whose LYO was 1993. For original two-person households with the spouse deceased at the LYO, a sharp decline near the end of life is also apparent, although the median at death is zero only for those whose LYO was 2002 or 2004. For original two-person households with the spouse alive at the LYO, there is a decline in home equity in the year or two before death, but it is more modest than that for the previous two groups. Home equity declines relatively little in prior years for this group. The results are consistent with the findings of Venti and Wise (2002, 2004) who emphasize that home equity tends to be husbanded until a precipitating shock such as entry to a nursing home or death of a spouse.

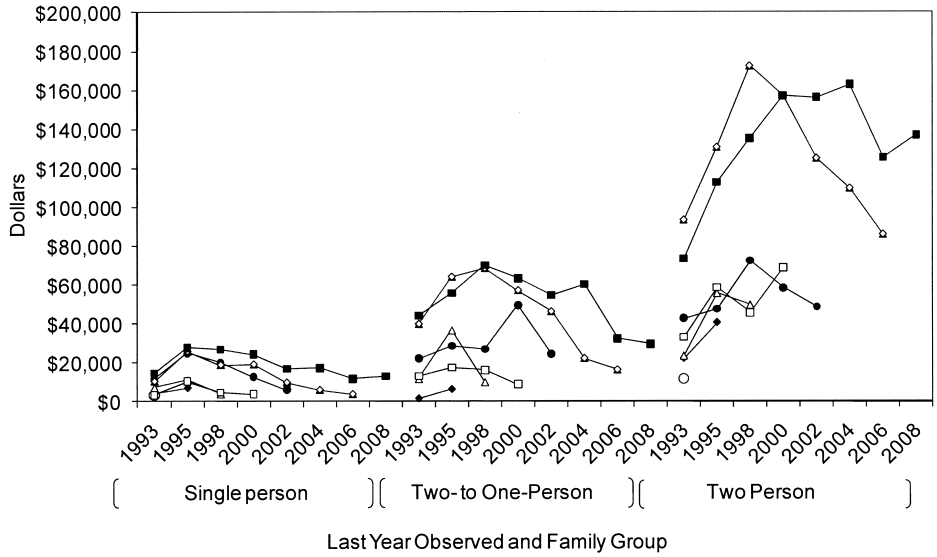

Fig. 1.6 Median financial wealth by family progression group and last year observed

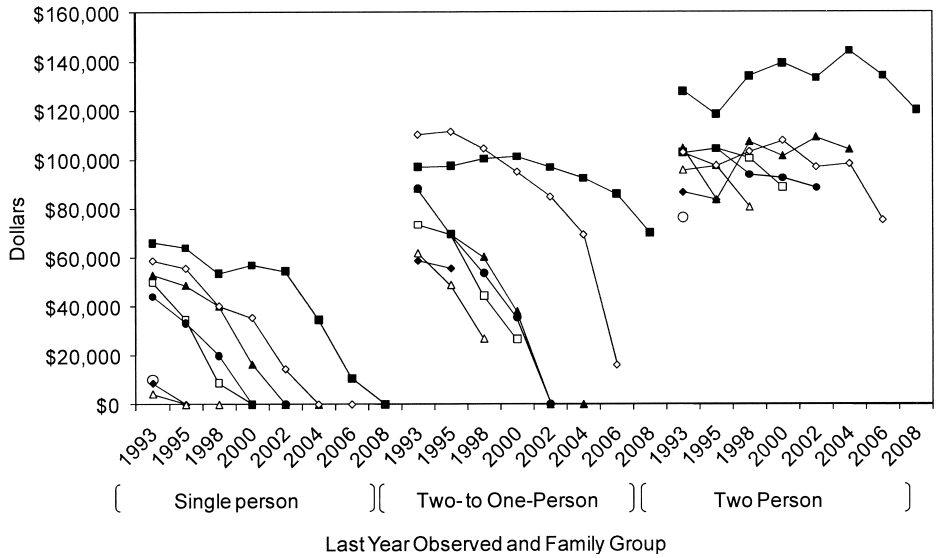

Fig. 1.7 Median housing wealth by family progression group and last year observed

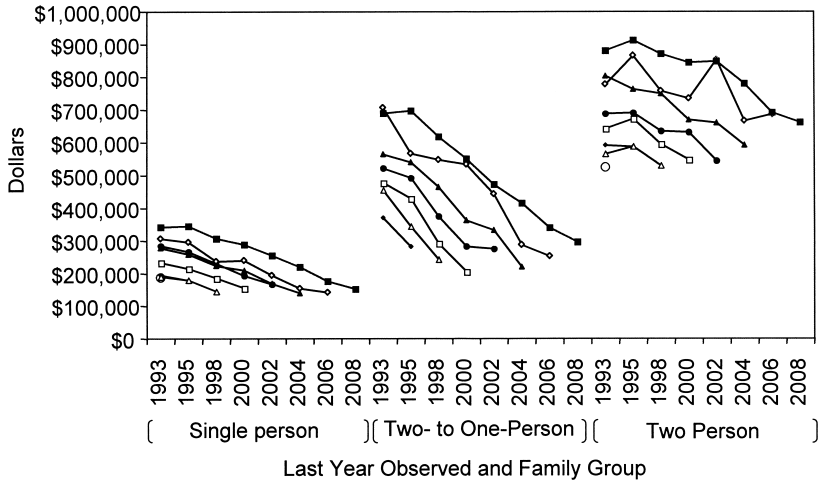

Fig. 1.8 Home ownership rate by family progression group and last year observed

Figure 1.8 shows the evolution of home ownership rates. The decline in ownership seems more consistent over time than the decline in housing wealth for all family pathway groups. Housing wealth typically declined sharply near the end of life. The decline in ownership between 1993 and the year last observed was greatest for the one-person and the two- to one-person family groups. For the one-person group the decline ranged from –3.4 percent for persons whose LYO was 1995 to –39.9 percent for persons whose LYO was 2006. For the two- to one-person group, the decline ranged from –0.1 percent for persons whose LYO was 1995 to –31.6 percent for persons whose LYO was 2006. For the two-person group, however, the decline was less than 3 percent through 2000 and then ranged from –6.9 percent for persons whose LYO was 2002 to –11.5 percent for persons whose LYO was 2006.

The evolution of Social Security wealth is shown in figure 1.9. The pattern of decline for each group is a mechanical feature of the way annuity wealth is calculated: benefits in each future year are weighted by the probability of survival. As an individual ages, the present value of remaining benefits declines because the probability of surviving for any number of years declines. Like each of the other wealth categories, the Social Security wealth data show that wealth in 1993 is very strongly related to year of death. The data also show that one-person households have substantially less Social Security wealth in 1993 than persons in the second pathway whose spouse had died before the LYO, who in turn have less wealth than the third pathway group—persons in two-person households whose spouse is alive when last observed. These data are consistent with the large literature cited earlier showing the strong relationship between measures of SES such as life-

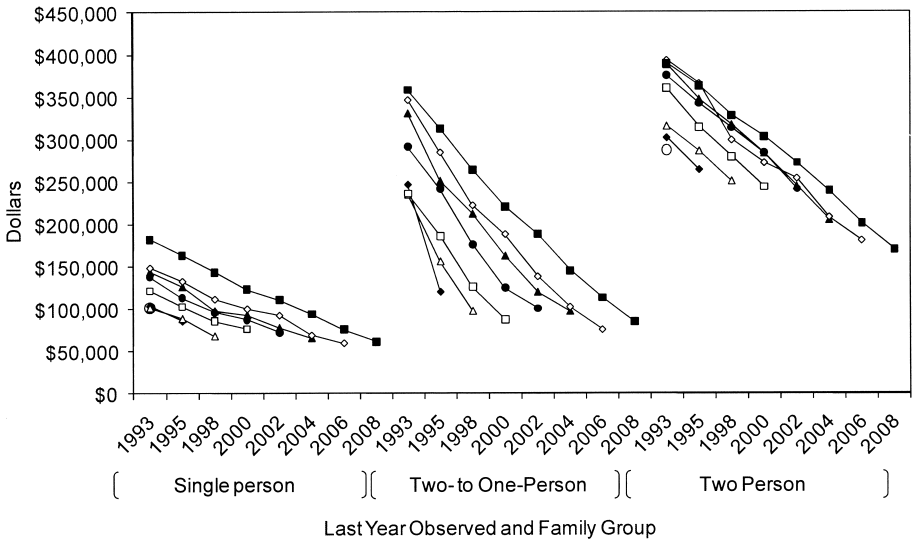

Fig. 1.9 Median Social Security wealth by family progression group and last year observed

time earnings (the primary determinant of Social Security benefits) and mortality.

Figure 1.10 shows the evolution of defined-benefit pension wealth. Single persons in the first pathway group essentially have no DB pension wealth. The median is zero for all one-person households except for those who survive to 2008. But persons who were in two-person households in 1993 with the spouse deceased by the LYO do have substantial median DB wealth in 1993, and persons in two-person households in 1993 with the spouse alive in the LYO had even more DB wealth. Most of the persons in the second group had zero or close to zero DB wealth at death, but persons in the third group still had noticeable DB wealth at death. Part of the explanation for the very low level of DB wealth among persons in the two-person to one-person group apparently lies with the waiver of survivorship benefits. The Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA, 1974) requires employers to offer joint and survivor annuities as the default option, and the Retirement Equity Act (1984) requires written consent to waive survivor benefits. Nonetheless, Johnson, Uccello, and Goldwyn (2005) report that in 2000, 28 percent of men and 69 percent of women covered by DB plans had waived survivor benefits. Even if survivor benefits are not waived, the surviving spouse's benefit is often less than 100 percent of the deceased's benefit. The implications of the husband's death for the finances of widows is discussed further in Hurd and Wise (1989); Weir and Willis (2000); and Sevak, Weir, and Willis (2003).

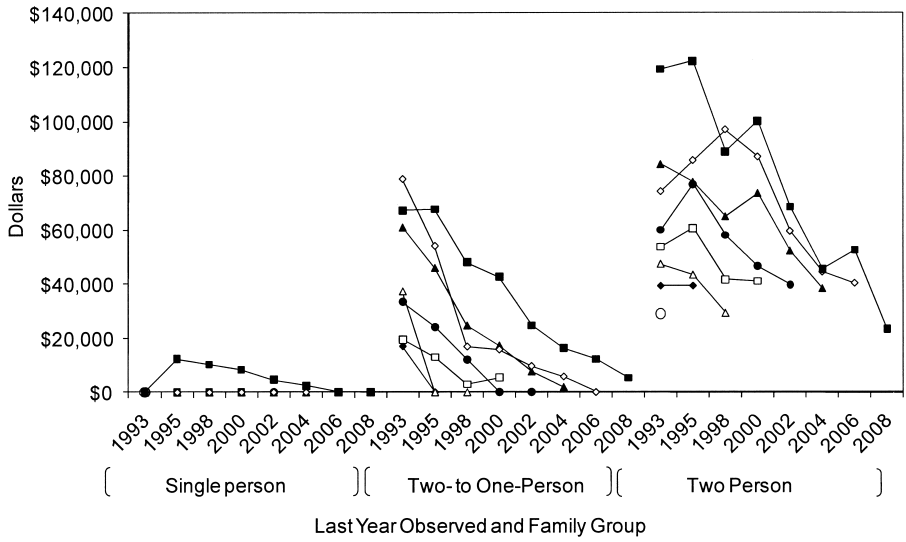

Fig. 1.10 Median DB wealth by family progression group and last year observed

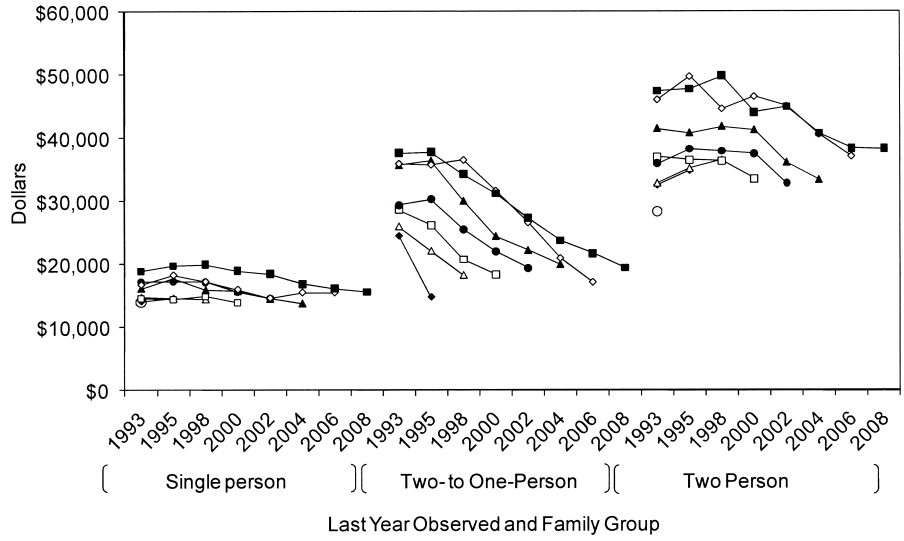

Fig. 1.11 Median total income by family progression group and last year observed

Finally, Figure 1.11 shows the evolution of total household income for persons in each of the three pathway groups. We will discuss the level and path of total income in more detail in the next section, but we include the pathway figure here because it is in the same format as the figures for asset categories. The figure shows little decline for the one-person group, a mod-

Table 1.3 **Percent change in total income from 1993 to year last observed by family pathway group and by YLO**

	Year last observed						
Family pathway group	1995 (%)	1998 (%)	2000 (%)	2002 (%)	2004 (%)	2006 (%)	2008 (%)
One-person	4.4	5.7	0.5	–2.3	–10.8	–14.5	–17.6
Two- to one-person	0.4	–8.9	–17.1	–27.4	–36.9	–42.4	–48.5
Two-person	0.6	5.0	–7.2	–5.3	–14.0	–19.1	–19.2

est decline for the two-person group, and a substantial decline for the two- to one-person group. The percent decline between 1993 and the year last observed is shown in table 1.3. As might be expected, the decline is especially large for persons in the two- to one-person family pathway group. For persons last observed in 2008 the decline is –48.5 percent.

1.3 The Effect of Health and Age: The Single-Person Pathway

In the previous section we emphasized the strong relationship between wealth in 1993 and the time until death. In this section we emphasize the relationship between wealth and health, given the year last observed, and we draw attention to the strong relationship between health and wealth just prior to death.

We begin by using a simple median regression framework to describe how the level of assets in the last year observed depends on age and health. For each person we construct an index of health based on the first principal component of responses to twenty-seven health-related questions contained in AHEAD. These questions asked about functional limitations, the presence of health conditions, and other indicators of overall health. The list of questions used to construct the index and a discussion of the properties of the index are reported in Poterba, Venti, and Wise (2010a). There are two differences between our approach in the current chapter and that in our past work. First, the earlier paper constructed an index for each wave using information from the contemporaneous and all preceding waves. The index used here only uses contemporaneous wave information. Many of the questions are of the form "have you ever experienced" a health condition, so there is little extra information obtained by using prior wave information. Second, the principal component estimates varied little from wave to wave, so in the present analysis we have pooled the waves.

In the median regression estimates following, we use percentiles of the index where the first percentile is the poorest health and the one hundredth percentile corresponds to the best health. The index used pertains to health in the last year observed. We present estimates of the effect of health and

age on wealth in the LYO, with separate estimates of the health and age effects for each LYO.

Table 1.4 shows median regression estimates for the single-person pathway group. The age and health effects are statistically significant for all LYOs. The estimated effect of a 10 percentile increase in health and the effect of an additional year of age are graphed in figure 1.12. The effect of health on wealth in the last year observed is substantial. The estimated effect of an increase of 10 percentile points in health ranges from $7,530 in 1993 to $28,004 in 2006. Thus, persons who have better health when last observed prior to death have much more wealth. Recall that these estimated effects are conditional on LYO, which is also related to health. For persons last observed in 2008, the estimated health effect is $17,340. The effect of an additional year of age on wealth ranges from –$10,596 in 1993 to –$5,570

Table 1.4 **Median regression estimates of the effect of health and age on wealth in the last year observed for single-person households**

Variable	Coefficient	Std. error	*t*-stat
	Last year observed		
1995	–157,361	132,956	–1.18
1998	–147,607	142,618	–1.03
2000	–361,097	163,023	–2.22
2002	–342,259	172,101	–1.99
2004	–301,661	202,467	–1.49
2006	–463,905	232,967	–1.99
2008	39,185	188,511	0.21
	Effect of health in each year		
1993	753	324	2.32
1995	1,109	310	3.58
1998	1,730	371	4.67
2000	1,412	355	3.98
2002	1,738	425	4.09
2004	1,390	436	3.19
2006	2,800	508	5.51
2008	1,734	267	6.49
	Effect of age in each year		
1993	–10,596	1,096	–9.66
1995	–8,811	1,120	–7.87
1998	–9,236	1,252	–7.38
2000	–6,652	1,528	–4.35
2002	–6,737	1,636	–4.12
2004	–7,275	1,986	–3.66
2006	–5,570	2,377	–2.34
2008	–11,125	1,810	–6.14
Constant	1,046,502	91,989	11.38

Note: $N = 3{,}003$ and pseudo $R^2 = 0.0562$.

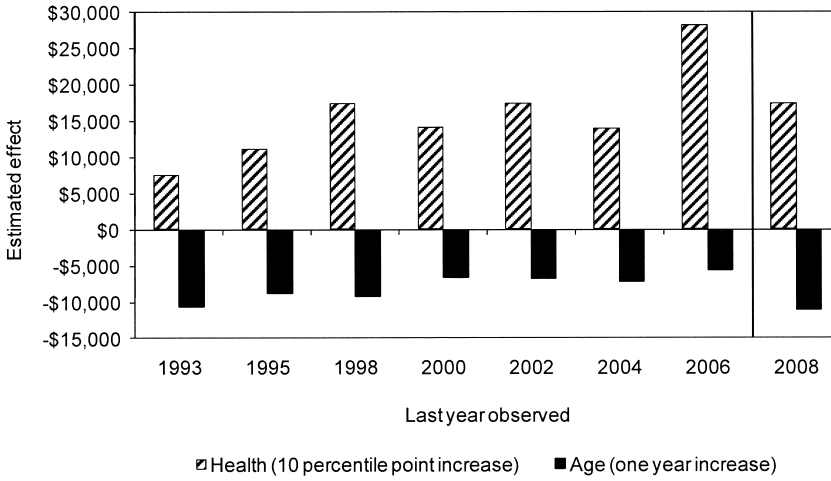

Fig. 1.12 Estimated effect of health and age on total wealth for original single-person households, by last year observed

in 2006. The age effect is –$11,125 for those who are last observed in 2008. Those who are last observed in 2008 have substantially more wealth than those who die before 2008.

To get an idea of how much wealth in the LYO varies by health and age, we use the estimated effects from the median regression to predict total wealth for selected health percentiles and for selected ages. Table 1.5 shows predicted total wealth for every other LYO between 1993 and 2006. The estimates show the very large effects of health, as well as age, on wealth in the LYO. The pattern is quite similar in each of the LYO panels.

These results suggest that persons who die at older ages and in poorer health are likely to die with less wealth than persons who die young and in good health. We are particularly interested in the proportion of people that die with little wealth. Without trying to define what "little" is, we begin by calculating selected percentiles of total wealth and selected categories of wealth in the last year observed by health quintile and by age interval. Unlike the previous table, these percentiles are based on actual data rather than predictions from the median regression.

Table 1.6 shows the percentiles combining all LYOs between 1993 and 2006 (the LYOs associated with death) for original single-person households. One cell in the lower left is blank because it contains fewer than ten observations. The small cell size reflects the fact that the young and healthy are least likely to die. The shaded cells help to identify cell entries with less that $100,000 of wealth. There are twenty-five such cells. All are for persons older than age eighty and twenty-one of the twenty-five are for persons eighty-five and older. Seventeen of the twenty-five are for persons in the

Table 1.5 **Predicted wealth by last year observed, health, and age for original single-person households**

	Age				
Health percentile	70	75	80	85	90
	Last year observed: 1993				
10	312,294	259,313	206,331	153,349	100,368
30	327,362	274,380	221,399	168,417	115,436
50	342,429	289,448	236,466	183,485	130,503
70	357,497	304,515	251,534	198,552	145,571
90	372,565	319,583	266,602	213,620	160,638
	Last year observed: 1998				
10	269,706	223,528	177,350	131,172	84,994
30	304,316	258,138	211,960	165,781	119,603
50	338,926	292,747	246,569	200,391	154,213
70	373,535	327,357	281,179	235,001	188,823
90	408,145	361,967	315,789	269,611	223,433
	Last year observed: 2002				
10	250,069	216,387	182,704	149,021	115,339
30	284,837	251,154	217,472	183,789	150,106
50	319,605	285,922	252,239	218,557	184,874
70	354,372	320,690	287,007	253,324	219,642
90	389,140	355,457	321,775	288,092	254,409
	Last year observed: 2006				
10	220,711	192,861	165,012	137,163	109,314
30	276,718	248,868	221,019	193,170	165,321
50	332,725	304,876	277,026	249,177	221,328
70	388,732	360,883	333,033	305,184	277,335
90	444,739	416,890	389,041	361,191	333,342

bottom three health quintiles and twelve of twenty-five are for persons in the bottom two quintiles. Only eight are for persons in the top two health quintiles. Thus, dying with "little" wealth is clearly concentrated among older persons who are also less healthy.

Table 1.7 shows the distribution of annuity wealth in the last year observed before death by health quintile and age interval. Levels less than $50,000 are highlighted. The decline in annuity wealth by age is largely mechanical and is reflected in the concentration of low annuity wealth among persons who are aged ninety or older. But the differences across health quintiles indicate the large differences in percentiles by health status. For example, over all age intervals, the twenty-fifth percentiles range from $49,795 for persons in the lowest health quintile to $119,704 for persons in the top quintile.

Table 1.8 shows the distribution of nonannuity wealth by health quintile and by age interval. A large fraction of single-person households have essentially no nonannuity wealth, particularly those in the bottom two health quintiles. In these health groups, the twenty-fifth percentile is zero or close

Table 1.6 Selected percentiles of the distribution of total wealth by age interval and health quintile for original single-person households, based on actual data

		Age interval					
Health quintile	Percentile	70–74	75–79	80–84	85–89	90+	All
1st	10	146,504	113,251	76,147	45,965	30,435	41,245
	25	226,187	140,603	105,001	64,086	43,329	68,885
	50	289,289	190,574	169,315	111,297	74,131	141,767
	75	400,516	325,225	263,544	225,118	215,388	271,178
	90	611,455	634,392	412,432	468,717	491,710	489,875
2nd	10	151,751	122,305	83,788	50,762	22,337	42,682
	25	198,163	178,408	126,530	84,101	41,995	84,109
	50	259,629	268,122	194,964	148,420	97,552	169,308
	75	430,948	422,380	295,601	282,716	205,091	295,601
	90	529,604	957,304	441,308	467,657	400,654	484,527
3rd	10	151,813	170,324	83,137	53,708	33,517	59,240
	25	173,241	205,106	115,090	80,575	66,561	103,906
	50	265,021	298,352	232,848	135,976	130,760	194,578
	75	376,713	499,910	512,820	284,931	364,276	394,142
	90	441,416	897,024	847,482	545,362	770,434	763,727
4th	10	151,281	104,359	82,397	73,714	33,549	62,765
	25	310,036	177,720	121,934	89,622	56,037	113,915
	50	393,199	308,350	238,307	196,087	117,708	211,847
	75	501,495	461,537	425,897	334,731	241,294	398,834
	90	659,133	690,508	560,694	615,394	718,681	618,513
5th	10		113,930	181,567	51,116	30,700	86,427
	25		137,305	228,253	101,239	82,943	137,305
	50		419,738	331,494	154,716	178,331	297,729
	75		589,394	643,717	297,729	307,344	592,381
	90		1,728,930	1,035,252	876,750	580,655	1,122,089
All	10	151,281	116,460	80,674	50,234	28,603	44,509
	25	198,785	159,336	117,758	75,127	44,509	81,537
	50	293,117	250,722	189,450	133,062	90,477	166,904
	75	442,282	428,277	320,667	264,543	230,651	311,081
	90	610,956	735,176	532,784	508,185	520,890	580,655

to zero for all age intervals. Even for the higher health quintiles the tenth percentile is zero averaged over all age intervals.

Perhaps a better way to judge whether persons have "low" resources at death is to look at resources immediately available for day-to-day expenses. Table 1.9 shows the distribution of total income in the last year observed before death by health quintile and age interval.

Total income includes benefits from Social Security and defined-benefit pension plans, government transfer income, and dividends, interest payments, rent received, and other income from assets. Again, the relationship between health and income is quite pronounced. Even controlling for age

Table 1.7 **Selected percentiles of the distribution of annuity wealth by age interval and health quintile for original single-person households, based on actual data**

		Age interval					
Health quintile	Percentile	70–74	75–79	80–84	85–89	90+	All
1st	10	146,504	84,462	67,373	39,226	19,763	32,939
	25	182,397	119,670	87,452	53,120	33,127	49,795
	50	216,478	156,883	122,644	75,127	46,334	84,024
	75	282,159	200,956	172,217	104,866	65,745	140,074
	90	377,282	261,551	222,440	157,881	95,294	210,203
2nd	10	148,035	119,461	68,332	39,576	16,836	32,194
	25	162,059	133,168	95,812	55,257	31,063	49,626
	50	220,464	204,342	139,005	87,861	43,734	90,542
	75	287,001	303,756	181,787	115,311	63,601	152,832
	90	447,557	390,558	243,032	165,576	86,446	232,899
3rd	10	119,705	126,846	53,078	48,710	25,754	35,450
	25	148,999	160,141	81,537	64,803	35,450	62,783
	50	173,241	202,302	120,631	87,226	51,376	103,906
	75	287,228	267,148	183,379	112,799	90,138	175,249
	90	338,406	374,556	255,310	175,742	150,621	261,526
4th	10	149,020	78,089	54,787	47,065	26,932	42,615
	25	198,785	137,287	102,542	59,469	38,403	62,909
	50	264,892	193,126	126,194	83,256	53,681	108,879
	75	388,554	224,004	189,339	113,048	74,544	177,660
	90	422,514	262,745	297,670	149,315	131,100	262,745
5th	10		94,456	64,562	35,307	25,417	37,543
	25		115,549	104,903	58,256	30,690	86,713
	50		182,547	129,124	89,660	52,569	119,704
	75		223,477	192,981	128,086	93,537	197,206
	90		416,116	363,229	192,280	139,621	307,168
All	10	137,815	100,415	64,540	39,576	20,482	33,407
	25	171,467	132,378	90,512	55,968	33,348	53,120
	50	219,310	176,458	126,979	81,725	46,697	92,262
	75	284,306	231,936	178,023	110,868	67,334	154,082
	90	408,161	345,033	243,032	164,827	101,357	228,345

and health, total income varies considerably within each cell. The ninetieth percentile is typically at least four times as large as the tenth percentile. Of particular interest is the association between health and total income summarized in the last column. The tenth percentile of total income is surprisingly similar across all levels of health—between $7,342 for persons in the lowest health quintile and $8,718 for persons in the top health quintile. However, health has a more depressive effect at higher percentiles. The ninetieth percentile of total income for persons in the poorest health quintile is only $32,541, but the ninetieth percentile for persons in the top health quintile is $61,494.

Table 1.8 **Selected percentiles of the distribution of nonannuity wealth by age interval and health quintile for original single-person households, based on actual data**

		Age interval					
Health quintile	Percentile	70–74	75–79	80–84	85–89	90+	All
1st	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
	25	51	0	184	73	115	56
	50	45,844	11,021	20,259	16,692	16,165	16,692
	75	136,583	126,857	101,098	122,901	148,621	126,579
	90	337,745	401,714	206,677	322,781	394,736	310,659
2nd	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
	25	1,391	1,669	605	3,464	0	848
	50	38,180	58,738	42,985	47,293	24,338	44,511
	75	125,188	199,710	138,035	164,180	160,536	155,743
	90	161,530	340,609	243,986	329,213	338,341	326,323
3rd	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
	25	4,405	8,811	5,564	670	6,695	3,027
	50	43,259	110,155	88,401	37,986	53,690	70,272
	75	161,530	186,494	316,551	166,327	276,853	211,569
	90	232,292	572,698	685,591	417,742	584,826	584,826
4th	10	1,028	727	1,717	506	190	506
	25	2,261	33,506	23,495	10,279	4,405	10,279
	50	88,034	113,819	63,310	96,362	70,969	87,631
	75	170,728	225,384	214,759	290,754	151,311	225,384
	90	273,867	528,644	344,849	561,945	682,263	487,412
5th	10	27,819	734	18,163	0	0	734
	25	120,514	22,792	63,504	18,242	57,579	27,819
	50	199,465	177,683	174,076	81,037	151,312	145,613
	75	393,645	308,796	506,481	192,525	235,284	365,620
	90	4,384,988	1,523,115	671,987	365,620	441,034	696,237
All	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
	25	1,391	556	693	974	462	644
	50	58,052	58,560	44,188	37,558	26,163	39,648
	75	160,657	186,494	142,440	154,188	155,789	158,007
	90	325,488	468,666	354,847	365,620	404,116	382,018

We next consider summary measures of financial resources that focus on the joint distribution of annuity income and liquid financial assets. The top panel of table 1.10 shows the selected points on the bivariate cumulative distribution of annuity income and liquid financial assets (including IRA accounts) in the LYO (again combining all LYO between 1993 and 2006). For convenience, the diagonals are shown in bold. The upper-left entry in the table shows, for example, that 12.1 percent of single-person households have less than $10,000 in annuity income and no financial assets in the last year observed. The entry below it shows that 23.9 percent of households have less than $10,000 in annuity income and less than $10,000 in financial assets.

Table 1.9 **Selected percentiles of the distribution of total income by age interval and health quintile for original single-person households, based on actual data**

		Age interval					
Health quintile	Percentile	70–74	75–79	80–84	85–89	90+	All
1st	10	8,847	7,730	7,597	6,992	7,177	7,342
	25	11,684	9,648	9,251	9,214	9,422	9,480
	50	16,353	12,791	14,071	13,219	13,040	13,341
	75	23,648	19,197	20,441	19,505	19,973	19,935
	90	31,225	36,968	29,344	33,890	33,487	32,541
2nd	10	8,179	9,715	7,979	7,177	6,534	7,597
	25	10,978	11,965	11,084	9,876	9,498	10,332
	50	18,862	18,077	15,877	15,452	13,440	15,012
	75	28,758	30,250	21,808	24,665	20,390	23,931
	90	83,614	51,954	34,577	39,745	36,232	38,631
3rd	10	8,482	10,978	6,510	8,000	8,421	8,179
	25	9,075	13,810	9,898	10,555	10,662	10,662
	50	13,353	21,525	15,802	14,253	14,264	15,802
	75	21,699	29,463	28,376	23,009	24,264	26,651
	90	26,705	49,487	47,586	37,734	44,434	42,780
4th	10	10,749	7,628	8,838	8,112	7,785	8,124
	25	17,621	10,610	12,353	10,623	10,680	10,783
	50	22,432	16,904	17,809	14,840	15,814	16,887
	75	27,272	33,481	29,057	22,623	27,672	26,009
	90	33,994	72,054	35,681	40,342	54,600	47,314
5th	10	8,936	8,346	11,087	6,911	8,718	8,718
	25	13,320	12,335	13,798	10,015	11,102	12,335
	50	20,586	21,146	22,342	18,483	19,472	20,586
	75	47,216	43,383	30,410	30,518	28,329	33,283
	90	341,744	79,189	46,596	33,383	47,215	61,494
All	10	8,413	8,282	7,774	7,177	7,265	7,634
	25	11,219	10,916	10,516	9,560	9,641	10,059
	50	16,952	15,935	15,423	14,097	13,440	14,344
	75	26,009	27,255	23,123	21,849	21,018	22,806
	90	32,692	51,625	34,194	36,390	36,513	37,209

More than half of all households (57 percent) have less than $10,000 in financial assets in the last year we observe them. As a point of reference, the 2008 poverty threshold for single persons aged sixty-five and older is about $10,000. The table also shows that 52.0 percent of single-person households have annuity income less than $20,000 (about twice the poverty level) and financial assets less than $10,000. Although not shown in the table, the percentage of single-person households with annuity income less that $15,000 (about one and one-half times the poverty level) and financial assets less than $5,000 is 39.6 percent. Over all financial asset levels, 31.9 percent have annuity income less than $10,000 and 82 percent of households have less

Table 1.10 **Selected characteristics of single-person households, by annuity income and financial assets in the last year observed before death**

	Annuity income ($000s)				
Financial assets ($000s)	<$10	<$20	<$30	<$40	All
	Percentage distribution				
Zero	**12.1**	23.0	24.2	24.7	24.9
<$10	23.9	**52.0**	55.7	56.4	57.0
<$25	26.3	58.8	**64.5**	65.7	66.5
<$50	27.9	65.5	72.8	**74.4**	75.4
All	31.9	82.0	94.1	97.7	100.0
	Annuity income interval ($000s)				
Financial asset interval ($000s)	$0–$10	$10–$20	$20–$30	$30–$40	All
	Percent of households with zero home equity				
Zero	**76.3**	69.8	74.8	63.6	73.1
$0–$10	62.9	**63.3**	57.8	53.8	61.2
$10–$25	49.8	46.8	**52.2**	53.5	50.0
$25–$50	48.6	47.2	48.3	**47.0**	47.7
All	63.7	57.7	53.9	47.6	57.1
	Mean health percentile				
Zero	**24.1**	24.8	22.4	28.3	24.5
$0–$10	23.4	**28.2**	24.3	26.2	25.6
$10–$25	28.5	33.3	**38.3**	35.6	33.5
$25–$50	26.6	25.3	26.8	**43.3**	30.2
All	25.1	28.4	29.5	33.4	28.5

than $20,000 of annuity income. Of this latter group, 23 percent also has no financial assets.

Home equity is an illiquid asset that households tend to hold through late life. Venti and Wise (2004) and several other studies find that households typically sell their homes only when confronted with a precipitating shock to family structure, like death of a spouse or entry into a nursing home. By the time single-person AHEAD households approach the last year observed, many have divested their housing wealth, as shown earlier in figure 1.7.

The middle panel of table 1.10 shows the proportion of single-person households with zero housing wealth (including persons with negative home equity) by annuity income and financial asset *intervals* that are comparable to the cumulative levels in the first panel. For example, of persons with annuity income less than $10,000 and no financial assets, 76.3 percent have no housing wealth. Of persons with $30,000 to $40,000 in annuity income and $25,000 to $50,000 in financial assets, 47.0 percent have no housing equity. Overall, 57.1 percent of persons in the single-household family pathway have no housing equity in the last year observed before death. The bottom panel of table 1.10 shows the mean health percentile of persons in each of

the annuity income/financial asset intervals. For example, the mean health percentile of persons with annuity income less than $10,000 and no financial assets is 24.1. For those with annuity income between $30,000 and $40,000 and financial assets between $25,000 and $50,000 the median health percentile is 43.3. Thus again the strong relationship between health and wealth is evident.

In short, we find that a large fraction of original single-person households has no housing wealth and very limited financial assets in the last year observed before death. This suggests that the sole source of wealth for many persons is the value of annuity benefits. Most persons receive Social Security benefits (either directly or as a survivor) and about half receive income from a DB pension (again, either directly or as a survivor).

1.4 Compared to What?

It is not clear how we should judge what constitutes a "low" or "sufficient" level of either assets or income. In table 1.9 we highlighted the distribution of total income by health quintile and age, showing the level of income for persons at the tenth, twenty-fifth, fiftieth, seventy-fifth, and ninetieth percentiles with wealth below given levels. At all ages and for all levels of health, total income at the tenth percentile was between $7,000 and $10,000. In table 1.10 we showed the percentage of single-person households with annuity income below levels that were chosen to approximate multiples of the poverty threshold in 2008 (about $10,000).

We will now provide some rough benchmarks to give context to these income levels just before death. First, we compare total income in the year last observed with total income in 1993 when these persons were first observed in AHEAD. The top panel of table 1.11 shows median total income by age interval and health quintile in the last year observed before death (which can be any year from 1993 to 2006). These are the same data that were shown as the fiftieth percentile in table 1.9. The lower panel shows the total income of these same households in 1993, the first year they were observed in AHEAD. All dollar amounts have been converted to 2008 dollars. On balance, income was slightly lower in the last year before death. It was 1 percent higher for the first health quintile, and then –6 percent for the second quintile, –2 percent for the third, –7 percent for the fourth, and –3 percent for the fifth health quintile. The similarity of incomes in 1993 and the last year observed should not be surprising because a large fraction of income is indexed Social Security benefits. These sample members were single in 1993 and single at the time of death and thus did not transition to survivorship benefits. On the other hand, some income is DB pension benefits, which are not fully indexed. These data do not suggest that household income declined in the years just before death. Household assets, in contrast, do show a decline.

Table 1.11 **Comparison of total income in last year observed to total income in 1993, original one-person households**

	Age interval					
Health quintile	70–74	75–79	80–84	85–89	90+	All
	Total income in last year observed					
1	16,353	12,791	14,071	13,219	13,040	13,341
2	18,862	18,077	15,877	15,452	13,440	15,012
3	13,353	21,525	15,802	14,253	14,264	15,802
4	22,432	16,904	17,809	14,840	15,814	16,887
5	20,586	21,146	22,342	18,483	19,472	20,586
All	16,952	15,935	15,423	14,097	13,440	14,344
	Total income in 1993					
1	16,917	12,406	14,221	13,269	12,864	13,269
2	18,890	21,868	17,586	15,119	14,993	15,947
3	15,031	21,513	18,027	13,690	14,285	16,153
4	22,432	20,532	17,445	16,887	17,375	18,132
5	28,159	28,488	25,296	16,564	19,472	21,146
All	17,621	17,340	16,317	14,097	13,906	14,943

Although it is informative to consider the change in income over the (at most) thirteen years of AHEAD (from 1993 to 2006 for persons who died before 2008), we would like to compare resources just before death to resources at a younger age, say prior to "retirement age." Such a comparison is not easy to make. Nonetheless, we begin by comparing total income of single persons in the last year observed before death to median earnings of these same persons when they were between ages fifty-seven and sixty-two, based on Social Security earnings records. We first index earnings to 2008 using the SSA Average Index of Monthly Earnings (AIME). We then calculate the median of earnings for ages fifty-seven to sixty-two, excluding years in which earnings were not positive. Approximately half of the original single-person households have matched SSA earnings records. The SSA only records earnings up to the SSA earnings limit, which ranged from $57,600 in 1993 to $94,200 in 2006. Thus our estimate of pre-retirement earnings may be low for some higher-earning workers. More importantly, the Social Security earnings of these original single persons in 1993 may be a very inexact indicator of household resources at the younger age. Many persons may have been married at ages fifty-seven to sixty-two, but were single when first interviewed in 1993. Single women who were previously married may have substantially greater Social Security benefits at older ages than women who never married.

Table 1.12 shows the comparison. Overall median total income in the last year observed was less than half of median earnings at ages fifty-seven to sixty-two. The percentage difference is greatest for those in the poorest

Table 1.12 **Comparison of earnings at ages fifty-seven to sixty-two and potential annuity income in last year observed, original one-person households with matched SSA earnings records**

	Age interval					
Health quintile	70–74	75–79	80–84	85–89	90+	All
Median of nonzero pre-retirement earnings for ages 57 to 62, AIME indexed						
1	21,468	31,017	29,594	27,711	28,828	28,828
2	32,321	33,539	37,551	31,978	29,465	32,172
3	31,957	42,526	31,318	28,073	28,896	31,318
4	31,029	41,584	26,969	45,607	27,318	34,202
5	51,203	35,990	24,493	38,227	47,373	35,990
All	31,957	35,029	29,981	30,602	29,078	30,651
Total median income in last year observed						
1	16,353	12,791	14,071	13,219	13,040	13,341
2	18,862	18,077	15,877	15,452	13,440	15,012
3	13,353	21,525	15,802	14,253	14,264	15,802
4	22,432	16,904	17,809	14,840	15,814	16,887
5	20,586	21,146	22,342	18,483	19,472	20,586
All	16,952	15,935	15,423	14,097	13,440	14,344

health and smallest for those in the best health. Combining all age intervals, LYO income was only 46.3 percent of "pre-retirement" earnings in the first health quintile and 57.2 percent of "pre-retirement" earnings in the fifth health quintile. If these "pre-retirement" earnings are an underestimate of actual pre-retirement earning, then these "replacement" rates are an overestimate of true replacement rates.

Overall, for the original single-person pathway, we find that a rather large fraction of these single persons have low income judged by poverty thresholds—12.1 percent below the poverty threshold and with no financial assets, 23 percent below twice the poverty line and no financial assets. And the proportion in poverty is much greater for those in poor health than for those in good health. On the other hand, the data show little difference between income just prior to death and income in 1993 when first observed in the AHEAD survey. However, total income in the last year observed is, on average, only about 50 percent of (possibly poorly measured) income in the pre-retirement years. While this difference is hard to evaluate because the two measures are not directly comparable, the implied replacement rate is likely an overestimate of the true replacement rate.

1.5 The Other Marital Pathway Groups and All Groups Combined

Table 1.13 presents median regression estimates of the effects of age and health on assets in the last year observed. Separate estimates are presented

Table 1.13 **Median regression estimates of the effects of health and age on assets in last year observed, by family pathway**

	Original singles		Original two-person household with spouse deceased at death		Original two-person household with spouse alive at death	
Variable	Coefficient	*t*-stat	Coefficient	*t*-stat	Coefficient	*t*-stat
LYO						
1995	–7,707	–0.67			94,130	2.98
1998	–14,346	–1.19	–44,452	–0.62	106,030	3.15
2000	–13,933	–1.12	–68,460	–1.01	118,320	3.32
2002	18,767	1.42	10,161	0.15	106,023	2.69
2004	4,266	0.30	–48,988	–0.73	204,739	4.87
2006	20,731	1.36	–16,651	–0.25	318,929	6.46
2008	3,788	0.31	–7,164	–0.12	275,335	8.08
Health	**1,260**	**9.53**	**2,063**	**5.01**	**2,042**	**6.02**
Age	**–9,323**	**–17.14**	**–7,203**	**–3.52**	**–20,619**	**–12.24**
Constant	933,078	20.16	808,133	4.58	2,038,368	15.06
N	3,003		1,357		2,286	
R^2	0.0545		0.0246		0.036	

for each of three marital pathway groups. The estimates control for last year observed as a marker for financial market returns that the household experienced since 1993. These estimated age and year effects are the average over all last years observed. Unlike the estimates for single-person households in table 1.4, these estimated health and age effects are not interacted with LYO but instead show the average effects over all years. The estimates are graphed for all three marital pathway groups on the left side of figure 1.13. The figure shows the effect of a 10 percentile increase in health on total wealth. The estimates range from $10,000 for single persons to $20,000 for the other two pathways. The estimated age effect varies from a decline of $7,203 per year of age for persons in original two-person households whose spouse is deceased in the last year observed to $20,619 for persons in original two-person households whose spouse is alive in the last year observed.

We next consider summary measures of financial resources that focus on the joint distribution of annuity income and liquid financial assets. We first present these results for all family pathways combined. We then compare the results across family pathways. Table 1.14 shows results for all family pathways combined. The table follows the same format as table 1.10 for persons in the single household pathway. Among all family pathways, 9.1 percent of persons have annuity income less than $10,000 (approximately the poverty rate for single persons sixty-five and older) and no liquid financial assets; 40.0 percent have annuity income less than $20,000 and financial assets less than $10,000. Overall, 50.4 percent have no housing wealth. Of those with annuity income less than $10,000 and no liquid financial assets, 67.0 percent have no housing wealth.

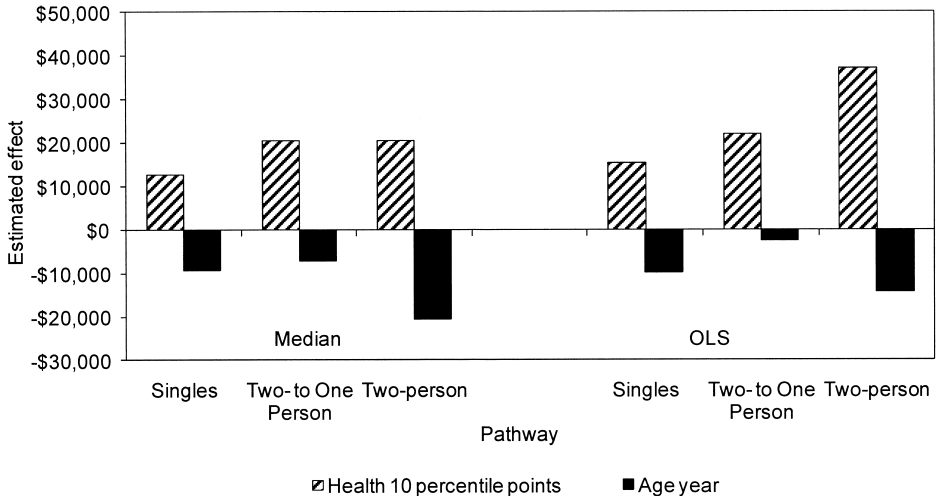

Fig. 1.13 Estimated median and OLS estimates of the effect of health and age on assets in last year observed, by family pathway

Table 1.14 Selected characteristics of persons in all family pathways, by annuity income and financial assets in the last year observed before death

	Annuity income ($000s)				
Financial assets ($000s)	<$10	<$20	<$30	<$40	All
	Percentage distribution				
Zero	**9.1**	17.0	18.2	18.5	18.8
<$10	19.1	**40.0**	44.5	45.2	46.1
<$25	21.7	47.3	**53.3**	54.6	55.5
<$50	23.7	54.1	62.0	**63.7**	64.9
All	31.0	76.2	92.0	96.2	100.0
	Annuity income interval ($000s)				
Financial asset interval ($000s)	$0–$10	$10–$20	$20–$30	$30–$40	All
	Percent of households with zero home equity				
Zero	**67.0**	60.7	64.9	49.7	63.2
$0–$10	51.9	**54.6**	51.5	45.0	51.7
$10–$25	42.2	36.9	**37.3**	37.2	38.5
$25–$50	30.8	39.0	37.9	**25.3**	33.2
All	48.4	46.5	40.3	31.2	50.4
	Mean health percentile				
Zero	**24.3**	26.6	23.2	33.9	25.8
$0–$10	26.5	**28.2**	30.1	30.3	28.2
$10–$25	31.3	35.4	**34.7**	36.4	34.3
$25–$50	31.1	32.7	35.0	**42.4**	35.5
All	28.0	30.9	32.2	37.2	31.7

The strong relationship between wealth and health is again observed for persons in all family pathways combined. The median health percentile ranges from 24.3 percent for persons with annuity income less than $10,000 to 42.4 percent for those with annuity income between $30,000 and $40,000 and financial assets between $25,000 and $50,000.

Tables 1.15, 1.16, and 1.17 compare results across family pathways. Table 1.15 compares the bivariate cumulative distribution of annuity income and financial assets. The easiest way to compare across pathways is to consider the diagonals in the tables for each pathway. Entries are the proportion of persons below any annuity income/financial asset level. The table shows that more single-person households have low resources than persons in the two-person to one-person pathway (persons in original two-person households whose spouse predeceased them), which in turn have lower resources than persons in the two-person pathway (persons in original two-person households whose spouse is alive at their death). For example, the proportion of persons below $30,000 in annuity income and below $25,000 in financial assets is 64.5 percent for one-person households, 52.2 percent of two- to one-person households, and 38.9 percent for two-person households.

Table 1.16 shows the proportion of households with zero housing wealth for each of the three pathways. Again, the diagonal values facilitate the comparison. For example, in the $20,000 to $30,000 annuity interval and the

Table 1.15 **Percentage distribution of persons by annuity income and financial assets in the last year observed before death, by family pathway**

	Annuity income ($000s)				
Financial assets ($000s)	<$10	<$20	<$30	<$40	All
	One-person households				
Zero	**12.1**	23.0	24.2	24.7	24.9
<$10	23.9	**52.0**	55.7	56.4	57.0
<$25	26.3	58.8	**64.5**	65.7	66.5
<$50	27.9	65.5	72.8	**74.4**	75.4
All	31.9	82.0	94.1	97.7	100.0
	Two-person to one-person households				
Zero	**6.2**	14.1	16.0	16.1	16.6
<$10	13.2	**36.4**	43.7	44.3	45.5
<$25	15.0	43.6	**52.2**	53.1	54.7
<$50	15.6	50.0	60.2	**61.5**	63.6
All	18.7	67.5	87.7	93.0	100.0
	Two-person households				
Zero	**6.2**	10.1	11.0	11.2	11.6
<$10	14.8	**26.3**	30.1	30.8	31.7
<$25	18.1	33.4	**38.9**	40.3	41.3
<$50	21.1	40.5	48.3	**50.3**	51.6
All	34.2	71.7	90.7	95.3	100.0

Table 1.16 **Percentage of persons with zero home equity by annuity income and financial assets in the last year observed before death, by family pathway**

	Annuity income interval ($000s)				
Financial asset interval ($000s)	$0–$10	$10–$20	$20–$30	$30–$40	All
	One-person households				
Zero	**76.3**	69.8	74.8	63.6	73.1
$0–$10	62.9	**63.3**	57.8	53.8	61.2
$10–$25	49.8	46.8	**52.2**	53.5	50.0
$25–$50	48.6	47.2	48.3	**47.0**	47.7
All	63.7	57.7	53.9	47.6	**57.1**
	Two-person to one-person households				
Zero	**70.5**	63.5	82.1	74.5	69.6
$0–$10	60.0	**53.0**	60.6	63.0	58.0
$10–$25	65.6	28.6	**27.9**	48.2	39.4
$25–$50	44.0	33.4	49.0	**11.8**	32.7
All	61.7	50.3	50.0	41.7	**49.6**
	Two-person households				
Zero	**42.0**	24.2	19.3	11.7	31.7
$0–$10	29.4	**25.9**	35.2	23.1	28.3
$10–$25	30.8	22.0	**20.0**	15.3	23.1
$25–$50	17.5	27.4	14.0	**10.5**	16.9
All	27.0	21.2	18.0	13.1	**20.4**

$10,000 to $25,000 financial asset interval 52.2 percent of one-person households have no housing wealth but only 27.9 percent of one- to two-person households, and just 20 percent of two-person households have no housing wealth. Overall, in the last year before death, 57.1 percent of single-person households have no housing wealth and 49.6 percent of persons in two to one-person households have no housing wealth. Remarkably, only 20.4 percent of persons who die with a surviving spouse have no home equity.

Table 1.17 shows the mean health percentile of persons in each of the three pathways. Unlike the very dissimilar proportions of households below annuity income/financial asset thresholds across family pathways, and the very different proportions with zero housing wealth within annuity income/financial asset intervals, the levels of health within the cells are very similar across family pathways. That is, given similar annuity income and levels of financial assets, the mean health percentile is about the same for persons in each family status pathway. For example, the overall mean health percentile in the three groups is 28.5, 32.3, and 28.5, respectively, in the one-person, two- to one-person, and the two-person pathways. For persons in the zero to $10,000 annuity income and zero housing wealth interval, the mean health percentiles are 24.1, 22.7, and 24.1, respectively.

Finally, table 1.18 compares median income in the last year observed with income in 1993. Because of small sample sizes in many cells, the table shows

Table 1.17 **Mean health percentile by annuity income and financial assets in the last year observed before death, by family pathway**

	Annuity income interval ($000s)				
Financial asset interval ($000s)	$0–$10	$10–$20	$20–$30	$30–$40	All
	One-person households				
Zero	**24.1**	24.8	22.4	28.3	24.5
$0–$10	23.4	**28.2**	24.3	26.2	25.6
$10–$25	28.5	33.3	**38.3**	35.6	33.5
$25–$50	26.6	25.3	26.8	**43.3**	30.2
All	25.1	28.4	29.5	33.4	**28.5**
	Two-person to one-person households				
Zero	**22.7**	28.5	30.6	46.3	29.2
$0–$10	33.7	**23.9**	36.1	28.1	28.9
$10–$25	24.9	42.0	**31.5**	29.3	32.6
$25–$50	41.2	40.7	47.9	**49.1**	45.4
All	29.1	31.0	33.2	35.0	**32.3**
	Two-person households				
Zero	**24.1**	24.8	22.4	28.3	24.5
$0–$10	23.4	**28.2**	24.3	26.2	25.6
$10–$25	28.5	33.3	**38.3**	35.6	33.5
$25–$50	26.6	25.3	26.8	**43.3**	30.2
All	25.1	28.4	29.5	33.4	**28.5**

Table 1.18 **Comparison of median total income in last year observed to median income in 1993 and median earnings when age fifty-seven to sixty-two, all persons, by pathway**

	Pathway		
Comparison	One to one	Two to one	Two to two
	For all persons		
Total income in 1993	14,943	31,719	34,656
Total income in last year observed	14,344	18,143	33,449
Percent change	–4.2%	–74.8%	–3.6%
	For men with matched Social Security records		
Median earnings when age 57 to 62	25,604	40,855	41,584
Medial total income in last year observed	15,213	19,844	33,759
Percent change	–68.3%	–105.9%	–23.2%

data for all health quintiles and for all last years observed combined. For men with matched Social Security records the table also compares median income in 1993 with median earnings for ages fifty-seven to sixty-two. For one-person households and for two-person households total income in the last year observed was, on average, only slightly below income in 1993, for

two- to one-person households the decline in income between 1993 and the last year observed was almost 75 percent.

For men with matched Social Security records, table 1.18 shows that for one- to one and for two- to one-person households total income in the last year observed much lower than income when aged fifty-seven to sixty-two—over 68 percent less for one to one households and almost 106 percent less for two to one households. The decline was only 23.2 percent for two- to two-person households.

1.6 Summary and Conclusions

We began by summarizing the balance sheets of households in the Health and Retirement Study by five-year age intervals from age sixty-five to sixty-nine through age eighty-five and older. These balance sheets show that many households have accumulated considerable wealth, ranging in 2008 from a median of $214,371 for older single-person households to a median of $1,015,317 for younger two-person households. Interpretation of these balances is confounded by cohort effects (older generations have lower lifetime earnings than younger generations) and mortality effects (persons in poorer households within a cohort die at younger ages). Thus, although these balance sheets present the point-in-time wealth of households who survive to a given age, they do not reveal the evolution of assets of the same households over time.

To analyze this evolution, we direct attention to the AHEAD households, who were aged seventy and older in 1993 when first observed and age eighty-seven and older in 2008 when last observed. We divide the AHEAD households into three family pathway groups: (1) original one-person households in 1993; (2) persons in two-person households in 1993 with a deceased spouse in the last year observed; and (3) persons in two-person households in 1993 with the spouse alive when last observed. For each of these pathways we describe the evolution of assets from 1993 to the year last observed. We describe the evolution of total wealth and several of its components—financial assets including IRA accounts, housing wealth and housing ownership, Social Security annuity wealth, and DB pension annuity wealth. We find a very strong relationship between health when last observed and the level of assets just before death. Those in poor health have much lower assets than those in good health.

Much of our analysis is restricted to persons who are known to have died. For these persons we are able to calculate wealth in the last year observed before their death. Because waves of the AHEAD are typically spaced two years apart, our last observation for each person is at most two years prior to death. Several general results stand out: (1) Median total wealth was relatively high in the year last observed for each of the three family pathway

groups. (2) Wealth in the last year before death is greatest for persons who were in two-person households the longest period of time. For example, the average assets in the last year observed were $141,606 for persons in one-person households in 1993 whose last year observed before death was 2006, $252,849 for persons in two-person households in 1993 whose spouse was deceased when last observed in 2006, and $691,588 for persons in two-person households in 1993 whose spouse was alive when last observed in 2006. (3) For total wealth and for each of the asset subcategories there is a strong correspondence between the level of assets in 1993 and the number of years a person survives after 1993. Persons who lived longer had higher initial assets. (4) For each family pathway group, there is a very strong relationship between health status and wealth in the last year observed. Thus there is a strong association between health and wealth even among persons who would die within the next two years. (5) Despite the appearance of substantial assets at the median, a substantial fraction of people die with income less than $10,000, with no financial assets, and with zero housing wealth.

A rather large fraction of the original single-person households have low income, judged by the income poverty thresholds. We find that 12.1 percent are below the poverty threshold and have no financial assets, and that 23 percent are below twice the income poverty line and have no financial assets. To put the results in context we first compare the total income in the last year observed to total income in 1993, the first year the AHEAD data were collected. Total income in the last year observed was about 4 percent higher, on average, than total income in 1993. We also compare total median income in the last year observed to median earnings (in 2008 dollars) of the same persons when they were between ages fifty-seven and sixty-two. While the difference is hard to evaluate because the two measures are not clearly comparable, overall median income in the last year observed was approximately 50 percent lower than median earnings of the same persons at ages fifty-seven to sixty-two.

There are also important differences across the pathways. Consider, for example, the proportion of persons with annuity income less than $20,000 (approximately twice the poverty level for single persons over age sixty-five) and financial assets less than $10,000: 52 percent of persons in the single-household pathway fall below these thresholds, but only 36.4 percent of those in the two- to one-person pathway, and only 26.3 percent of those in the two-person pathway. Similarly, consider the proportion of persons with annuity income in the $10,000 to $20,000 interval and financial assets less than $10,000 who have zero housing wealth: 63.3 percent of those in the single-family pathway, 53.0 percent of those in the two- to one-person pathway, and only 25.9 percent of those in the two-person pathway. A perhaps striking similarity across the pathways is that given income and housing wealth, the health status of the persons in the three pathways is very close.

The median health percentile of persons with annuity income in the $10,000 to $20,000 interval and financial assets less than $10,000 is 28.2 for persons in the single-household pathway, 23.9 percent for those in the two- to one-person pathway, and 28.2 for persons in the two-person pathway. Finally, the total household income of one to one and two to two households when last observed was only slightly less than income in 1993, while income of two to one households was almost 75 percent lower when last observed than in 1993. And for men with matched Social Security records, income when last observed was over 68 percent lower than earning at ages fifty-seven to sixty-two for one to one households, 106 percent lower for two to one households, but only 23 percent less for two to two households.

The results raise several issues. First, a noticeable fraction of persons die with virtually no financial assets—46.1 percent with less than $10,000. Based on a replacement rate comparison, many of these may be deemed to have been well-prepared for retirement, in the sense that their income in their final years was not substantially lower than their income in their late fifties or early sixties. Yet with such low asset levels, they would have little capacity to pay for unanticipated needs such as health or other shocks or to pay for entertainment, travel, or other activities. This raises a question of whether the replacement ratio is a sufficient statistic for the "adequacy" of retirement preparation. In addition, this group relies almost entirely on Social Security benefits for support in retirement. These persons balance on only one leg of the oft touted three-legged stool that is said to provide retirement support—Social Security, pension benefits, and personal saving. If the one leg is judged inadequate it raises the question of how to strengthen the other legs, which in turn may, for example, increase interest in the spread of 401(k)-like plans to low-wage workers in firms with high turnover.

Appendix

Table 1A.1 **Balance sheets for households aged sixty-five to sixty-nine in 2008**

Asset category	Percent of households with asset	Median holding	Mean holding	Share of total wealth	Values conditional on positive holding	
					Mean	Median
			All households			
Financial assets	86.7	15,000	132,484	12.6	152,805	25,000
Nonmortgage debt	36.2	0	–3,679	–0.4	10,225	5,000
Home equity (primary home)	79.8	100,000	176,188	16.8	222,546	145,000
Home equity (second home)	15.8	0	26,280	2.5	166,423	50,000
Other real estate	14.8	0	69,137	6.6	466,416	125,000
Business assets	9.7	0	45,966	4.4	473,289	200,000
Personal retirement accounts	52.2	5,000	121,137	11.5	231,910	100,000
IRAs and Keoghs	41.5	0	75,299	7.2	181,577	80,000
401(k)s and similar plans	26.1	0	45,839	4.4	175,670	50,000
Social Security	88.2	315,163	341,556	**32.6**	387,195	351,709
Defined-benefit pension	42.1	0	140,176	13.4	332,834	232,492
Nonannuity net worth	90.8	221,700	567,496	54.1	626,768	269,800
Net worth	99.4	731,121	1,049,228	100.0	1,056,245	732,866
			Single-person households			
Financial assets	82.3	5,000	83,082	12.8	100,941	12,000
Nonmortgage debt	34.8	0	–3,042	–0.5	8,734	4,000
Home equity (primary home)	65.9	52,000	107,483	16.6	165,712	***110,000***
Home equity (second home)	9.4	0	7,969	1.2	86,894	***20,000***

Other real estate	8.7	0	73,361	11.3	845,335	150,000
Business assets	6.1	0	18,069	2.8	297,513	100,000
Personal retirement accounts	36.4	0	47,074	7.3	129,148	64,000
IRAs and Keoghs	27.9	0	32,206	5.0	115,385	52,000
401(k)s and similar plans	15.6	0	14,869	2.3	95,604	30,000
Social Security	86.6	230,060	225,842	**34.8**	260,890	256,051
Defined-benefit pension	38.0	0	89,323	13.8	235,059	190,032
Nonannuity net worth	84.4	100,000	333,996	51.5	398,690	150,000
Net worth	99.1	414,435	649,161	100.0	655,857	420,494
			Married couples			
Financial assets	90.3	27,750	172,830	12.6	191,419	39,000
Nonmortgage debt	37.2	0	–4,232	–0.3	11,364	5,000
Home equity (primary home)	91.1	150,000	232,300	16.9	256,111	*160,000*
Home equity (second home)	21.1	0	41,235	3.0	195,369	*70,000*
Other real estate	19.8	0	65,688	4.8	331,062	120,000
Business assets	12.7	0	68,750	5.0	542,028	250,000
Personal retirement accounts	65.1	35,000	181,625	13.2	278,881	122,000
IRAs and Keoghs	52.5	5,841	110,493	8.0	210,295	100,000
401(k)s and similar plans	34.7	0	71,132	5.2	204,975	59,600
Social Security	89.6	473,933	436,059	**31.7**	486,901	494,485
Defined-benefit pension	45.5	0	181,708	13.2	399,557	272,490
Nonannuity net worth	96.0	357,000	758,196	55.1	790,385	385,000
Net worth	99.6	1,015,317	1,375,963	100.0	1,381,422	1,016,076

Source: Authors' tabulations using Health and Retirement Survey, Wave 9 (2008).

Table 1A.2 **Balance sheets for households aged seventy to seventy-four in 2008**

Asset category	Percent of households with asset	Median holding	Mean holding	Share of total wealth	Values conditional on positive holding	
					Mean	Median
			All households			
Financial assets	88.1	17,000	146,663	14.8	166,540	28,000
Nonmortgage debt	27.8	0	2,991	0.3	–10,776	–3,000
Home equity (primary home)	76.9	100,000	156,484	15.8	204,387	150,000
Home equity (second home)	13.7	0	26,975	2.7	197,037	92,000
Other real estate	14	0	44,987	4.5	321,528	120,000
Business assets	7.4	0	50,443	5.1	682,759	200,000
Personal retirement accounts	45.9	0	94,632	9.6	206,233	83,000
IRAs and Keoghs	40.6	0	77,796	7.9	191,775	88,144
401(k)s and similar plans	11.8	0	16,836	1.7	142,647	35,000
Social Security	98.1	287,912	320,915	**32.4**	327,011	292,487
Defined-benefit pension	49.1	0	152,105	15.4	309,847	189,075
Nonannuity net worth	90.6	202,500	517,194	52.2	572,153	243,200
Net worth	99.7	660,495	990,214	100.0	993,139	661,260
			Single-person households			
Financial assets	84	5,000	86,738	14.4	103,207	11,300
Nonmortgage debt	27.9	0	–1,980	–0.3	–7,100	–2,500
Home equity (primary home)	63.1	50,000	107,729	17.9	171,368	*129,000*
Home equity (second home)	7.1	0	9,669	1.6	135,861	*70,000*
Other real estate	8.2	0	20,458	3.4	248,626	100,000

Business assets	4.4	0	36,342	6.0	817,311	200,000
Personal retirement accounts	34	0	38,520	6.4	113,276	47,000
IRAs and Keoghs	29.6	0	35,258	5.9	118,981	56,000
401(k)s and similar plans	6.3	0	3,262	0.5	51,824	14,000
Social Security	97.4	207,740	212,967	**35.4**	218,590	209,732
Defined-benefit pension	42	0	91,236	15.2	217,174	132,887
Nonannuity net worth	84.7	95,300	297,478	49.4	352,107	151,200
Net worth	99.7	389,592	601,680	100.0	603,457	390,909
			Married couples			
Financial assets	92.3	40,000	209,205	15.0	226,751	50,000
Nonmortgage debt	27.6	0	–4,046	–0.3	–14,649	–3,500
Home equity (primary home)	91.4	150,000	207,368	14.9	228,178	*160,000*
Home equity (second home)	20.6	0	45,037	3.2	219,136	*110,000*
Other real estate	20	0	70,586	5.1	352,821	130,000
Business assets	10.5	0	65,159	4.7	623,052	235,000
Personal retirement accounts	58.3	20,000	153,195	11.0	262,835	117,000
IRAs and Keoghs	52	9,000	122,193	8.8	235,088	116,000
401(k)s and similar plans	17.6	0	31,002	2.2	176,645	41,000
Social Security	98.9	427,936	433,578	**31.1**	438,510	429,213
Defined-benefit pension	56.5	55,539	215,633	15.4	381,789	254,016
Nonannuity net worth	96.7	355,700	746,505	53.5	773,307	373,000
Net worth	99.7	1,009,818	1,395,716	100.0	1,399,833	1,012,407

Source: Authors' tabulations using Health and Retirement Survey, Wave 9 (2008).

Table 1A.3 **Balance sheets for households aged seventy-five to seventy-nine in 2008**

Asset category	Percent of households with asset	Median holding	Mean holding	Share of total wealth	Values conditional on positive holding	
					Mean	Median
			All households			
Financial assets	88.6	16000	144,536	16.8	163,087	25,000
Nonmortgage debt	23.2	0	–2,760	–0.3	–11,883	–4,300
Home equity (primary home)	75.7	100,000	168,464	19.5	223,100	150,000
Home equity (second home)	11.6	0	21,243	2.5	183,253	75,000
Other real estate	10.9	0	63,748	7.4	584,397	190,000
Business assets	6.9	0	30,479	3.5	444,372	200,000
Personal retirement accounts	41.2	0	71,579	8.3	173,870	75,000
IRAs and Keoghs	39.4	0	68,179	7.9	173,252	76,139
401(k)s and similar plans	4.3	0	3,401	0.4	79,890	30,000
Social Security	98.2	216,900	249,219	**28.9**	253,707	219,136
Defined-benefit pension	51.8	11,613	115,742	13.4	223,644	130,383
Nonannuity net worth	91.5	195,000	497,290	57.7	544,699	230,000
Net worth	99.7	565,440	862,250	100.0	865,427	566,676
			Single-person households			
Financial assets	85.6	8,000	96,633	17.8	112,913	15,000
Nonmortgage Debt	24.9	0	–3,134	–0.6	–12,562	–4,000
Home equity (primary home)	65.7	60,000	123,144	22.7	187,707	*130,000*
Home equity (second home)	7.6	0	10,826	2.0	143,125	*60,000*
Other real estate	7.2	0	24,687	4.6	341,794	200,000

Business assets	3.9	0	15,067	2.8	386,937	200,000
Personal retirement accounts	28.9	0	31,888	5.9	110,192	50,000
IRAs and Keoghs	28.3	0	30,716	5.7	108,481	50,000
401(k)s and similar plans	1.6	0	1,173	0.2	72,316	14,000
Social Security	97.3	166,846	164,939	**30.4**	169,456	168,794
Defined-benefit pension	45.2	0	78,365	14.4	173,531	103,213
Nonannuity net worth	87.3	113,000	299,112	55.1	344,599	150,900
Net worth	99.4	336,058	542,416	100.0	546,110	337,517
			Married couples			
Financial assets	92.6	50,000	207,856	16.2	224,353	60,000
Nonmortgage debt	21	0	–2,266	–0.2	–10,816	–5,000
Home equity (primary home)	88.9	151,000	228,371	17.8	257,672	*175,000*
Home equity (second home)	17	0	35,013	2.7	206,890	*75,000*
Other real estate	15.8	0	115,381	9.0	731,182	175,000
Business assets	10.8	0	50,852	4.0	471,801	200,000
Personal retirement accounts	57.3	14,000	124,045	9.7	216,355	92,000
IRAs and Keoghs	53.9	11,000	117,700	9.2	218,192	96,000
401(k)s and similar plans	7.7	0	6,345	0.5	81,987	30,000
Social Security	99.4	348,675	360,624	**28.1**	362,742	349,695
Defined-benefit pension	60.5	61,531	165,148	12.9	273,115	174,047
Nonannuity net worth	97.1	345,000	759,251	59.1	782,508	364,500
Net worth	100	858,331	1,285,024	100.0	1,285,024	858,331

Source: Authors' tabulations using Health and Retirement Survey, Wave 9 (2008).

Table 1A.4 **Balance sheets for households aged eighty to eighty-four in 2008**

Asset category	Percent of households with asset	Median holding	Mean holding	Share of total wealth	Values conditional on positive holding	
					Mean	Median
			All households			
Financial assets	88.8	23,000	185,056	24.7	208,370	35,700
Nonmortgage debt	17.3	0	–1,179	–0.2	–6,820	–3,000
Home equity (primary home)	72.3	90,000	149,537	20.0	207,112	140,000
Home equity (second home)	9.2	0	18,553	2.5	201,880	80,000
Other real estate	9.6	0	38,186	5.1	396,044	95,000
Business assets	6.1	0	28,029	3.7	461,058	230,000
Personal retirement accounts	35.3	0	54,757	7.3	155,294	55,000
IRAs and Keoghs	35	0	52,459	7.0	149,766	55,000
401(k)s and similar plans	1.1	0	2,298	0.3	203,348	107,000
Social Security	98.1	146,095	177,651	**23.7**	181,080	147,263
Defined-benefit pension	53.7	9,872	97,520	13.0	181,722	98,386
Nonannuity net worth	92.2	180,000	472,940	63.2	512,981	207,000
Net worth	99.9	418,124	748,110	100.0	748,615	418,221
			Single-person households			
Financial assets	86.7	12,000	120,453	24.8	138,870	20,000
Nonmortgage debt	16.3	0	–1,037	–0.2	–6,360	–2,000
Home equity (primary home)	65.4	70,000	117,856	24.3	180,250	*125,000*
Home equity (second home)	5.5	0	9,937	2.0	179,155	*100,000*
Other real estate	7.2	0	20,634	4.2	286,954	55,000

Business assets	4.2	0	12,438	2.6	292,913	200,000
Personal retirement accounts	27.6	0	26,042	5.4	94,199	41,000
IRAs and Keoghs	27.6	0	26,022	5.4	94,127	41,000
401(k)s and similar plans	0.2	0	20	0.0	12,500	12,500
Social Security	97.8	119,406	123,086	**25.3**	125,834	121,259
Defined-benefit pension	49.7	0	56,229	11.6	113,231	64,384
Nonannuity net worth	90.7	127,000	306,323	63.1	337,868	160,000
Net worth	100	302,751	485,638	100.0	485,638	302,751
			Married couples			
Financial assets	92.8	70,500	309,775	24.7	333,758	84,000
Nonmortgage debt	19.2	0	–1,451	–0.1	–7,578	–4,900
Home equity (primary home)	85.5	136,000	210,697	16.8	246,798	*160,000*
Home equity (second home)	16.2	0	35,185	2.8	216,879	*65,000*
Other real estate	14.4	0	72,070	5.7	501,400	125,000
Business assets	9.6	0	58,127	4.6	604,378	280,000
Personal retirement accounts	50	0	110,193	8.8	220,558	73,000
IRAs and Keoghs	49.3	0	103,496	8.2	210,026	72,000
401(k)s and similar plans	3	0	6,697	0.5	222,938	110,000
Social Security	98.7	262,814	282,989	**22.6**	286,814	263,889
Defined-benefit pension	61.4	51,693	177,233	14.1	288,665	141,651
Nonannuity net worth	95.1	371,500	794,595	63.3	835,385	400,000
Net worth	99.8	748,356	1,254,817	100.0	1,257,291	748,875

Source: Authors' tabulations using Health and Retirement Survey, Wave 9 (2008).

Table 1A.5 **Balance sheets for households aged eighty-five or older in 2008**

Asset category	Percent of households with asset	Median holding	Mean holding	Share of total wealth	Values conditional on positive holding	
					Mean	Median
			All households			
Financial assets	88.7	29,000	177,611	33.2	200,293	48,000
Nonmortgage debt	9.4	0	–757	–0.1	–8,070	–2,000
Home equity (primary home)	60.9	63,000	125,883	23.5	206,935	140,000
Home equity (second home)	6.5	0	14,358	2.7	222,543	100,000
Other real estate	8.4	0	29,243	5.5	346,127	150,000
Business assets	5.4	0	26,752	5.0	500,032	350,000
Personal retirement accounts	20.9	0	15,096	2.8	72,396	33,387
IRAs and Keoghs	20.7	0	15,031	2.8	72,626	35,000
401(k)s and similar plans	0.2	0	65	0.0	41,803	2,500
Social Security	98	77,587	99,613	**18.6**	101,678	78,026
Defined-benefit pension	49.8	0	47,853	8.9	96,114	45,257
Nonannuity net worth	92.6	153,000	388,186	72.5	419,435	179,000
Net worth	99.8	291,832	535,652	100.0	**536,739**	**293,342**
			Single-person households			
Financial assets	88.1	19,000	143,704	35.2	163,115	30,000
Nonmortgage debt	9.2	0	–572	–0.1	–6,226	–2,000
Home equity (primary home)	54.1	35,000	101,728	24.9	188,223	*130,000*
Home equity (second home)	4.4	0	9,805	2.4	223,061	*125,000*
Other real estate	6.5	0	19,064	4.7	293,103	150,000

Business assets	4.5	0	16,997	4.2	375,286	275,000
Personal retirement accounts	15.6	0	9,255	2.3	59,211	25,000
IRAs and Keoghs	15.6	0	9,255	2.3	59,211	25,000
401(k)s and similar plans	0	0	0	0.0		
Social Security	98	69,352	73,500	**18.0**	75,024	70,373
Defined-benefit pension	47.8	0	35,082	8.6	73,462	35,319
Nonannuity net worth	91	116,500	299,980	73.4	329,835	148,000
Net worth	99.7	214,371	408,562	100.0	**409,628**	214,511
			Married couples			
Financial assets	90.7	98,000	296,971	30.2	327,416	125,000
Nonmortgage debt	10.1	0	–1,411	–0.1	–13,961	–2,000
Home equity (primary home)	84.8	125,000	210,917	21.5	248,919	*150,000*
Home equity (second home)	13.7	0	30,388	3.1	221,957	*100,000*
Other real estate	15.3	0	65,075	6.6	425,514	155,000
Business assets	8.2	0	61,094	6.2	741,382	500,000
Personal retirement accounts	39.2	0	35,660	3.6	90,885	51,000
IRAs and Keoghs	38.5	0	35,365	3.6	91,783	51,000
401(k)s and similar plans	0.7	0	295	0.0	41,803	2,500
Social Security	98	170,162	191,539	**19.5**	195,504	173,503
Defined-benefit pension	56.9	23,633	92,809	9.4	162,990	87,063
Nonannuity net worth	98.2	362,000	698,693	71.1	711,635	378,200
Net worth	100	674,965	983,042	100.0	**983,042**	**674,965**

Source: Authors' tabulations using Health and Retirement Survey, Wave 9 (2008).

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Comment David Laibson

Poterba, Venti, and Wise (PVW) provide a wealth of analysis that insightfully and painstakingly describes the financial state of aging US households. Their chapter uses the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), a biannual longitudinal survey of middle-aged and older adults. Poterba, Venti, and Wise cut the data in many different ways, revealing a grim picture of financial vulnerability for the bottom half of the population of US households. In this discussion, I summarize some of their most important findings and then ask whether the ongoing expansion of the defined-contribution savings system holds out hope for improvement among future cohorts of retirees. I reach

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