

# Sociodemographic Characteristics of Comparison Countries

## 3

**I**nternational comparisons of health status are generally based on aggregated information that does not allow analysts to control for socioeconomic variables that could affect health status. This chapter describes how countries compare in selected demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.<sup>1</sup>

### POPULATION SIZE, GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION, AND AGE COMPOSITION

The size, geographic distribution, and age composition of a nation's population play major roles in determining the allocation and use of health care resources. Urban and rural distribution can affect physical access to services and the availability of specialized tertiary care. The aging of developed countries' populations affects health status measures and increases demands on social and health services.

The population of the United States is much larger than that of any of the comparison countries and some of the larger States are more populous than some of the comparison countries. California, for example, has more residents than Canada does. The population of the United States is 75 times greater than that of the least populous country, New Zealand. Even Japan, whose population is the second largest of the comparison countries, has less than half as many residents as the United States does (table 3-1).

At least three-quarters of residents in almost all comparison countries are urban dwellers (table 3-1). The most urbanized

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the information in this chapter comes from the U.S. C- Bureau's Center for International Research. The Center maintains an international database containing demographic and socioeconomic information (%).

Table 3-I-Selected Demographic Characteristics, United States and Selected Countries, 1990

Country	Population (thousands)	Population under age 25 (percent)	Population aged 65 and over (percent)	crude birth rate (per 1,000) <sup>a</sup>	Population natural increase (per 1,000) <sup>b</sup>	urban population (percent) <sup>c</sup>
United States	249,415	36.5%	12.5%	15.1	6.3	75%
Australia	17,071	38.3	11.2	15.0	7.5	86
Canada	26,620	35.4	11.5	14.1	6.6	77
France	56,720	34.2	14.6	13.8	3.5	74
Germany <sup>d</sup>	79,357	29.7	15.0	11.2	-1.1	NA
Italy	57,661	32.4	14.6	9.9	-0.3	69
Japan	123,611	33.4	12.0	11.3	4.3	77
Netherlands	14,849	34.4	12.7	12.7	4.0	89
New Zealand	3,362	39.9	11.1	16.7	8.6	85
Norway	4,253	34.2	16.4	12.4	1.9	75
Spain	38,959	36.6	13.4	12.1	3.0	79
Sweden	8,529	31.2	18.0	12.9	0.8	84
United Kingdom	57,418	33.8	15.7	13.6	1.8	89

KEY: NA = not available.

aThe crude birth rate is the number of live births per 1,000 population and is shown for the period 1985-1990.

bThe rate of natural population growth is the difference between the crude birth and death rates and is shown for the period 1985-90.

cThere is no uniform definition of urban populations. Countries have different definitions, sometimes based on such factors as population density and economic characteristics. Urbanization data are for 1991.

dBased on data from the former Federal Republic of Germany.

SOURCES: Y. Kanegae, Chief, International Statistical Affairs Section, Ministry of Health and Welfare, Tokyo, Japan, personal communication, July 1993; M.A Khawaja Chief Demographer, Population and Demography Division, Department of Statistics, Christ Church, New Zealand, personal communication, August 1993; K. Kinsella Chief, Aging Studies Branch, census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, Suitland, MD, personal communication, June 1993; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the census, *An Aging World II*, International Population Report (P25, 92-3) (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992); World Health organization, *World Health Statistics Annual, 1991* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, 1992); World Bank *World Development Report 1993* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1993).

countries are the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, with nearly 90 percent of their populations residing in urban areas. Somewhat less urbanized are Italy, France, Norway, and the United States, with roughly 70 to 75 percent of their populations residing in urban areas.

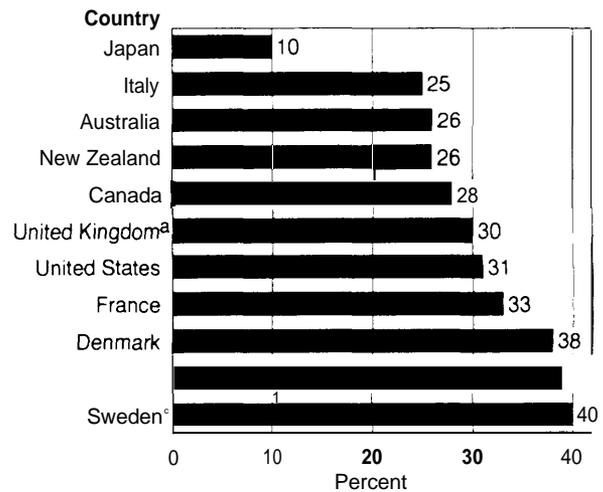
The population of the United States is younger than most comparison countries, in that a larger share of its population is under the age of 25 and a smaller share of its population is aged 65 and over (table 3-1). Birth rates higher than those in Europe contribute to a greater expansion of population in the United States. By contrast, Germany and Italy, where the number of deaths exceeds the number of births, are experiencing natural declines in population.<sup>2</sup>

The proportion of the population aged 65 and over in the United States will not increase significantly until after 2010, when the large birth cohorts of the baby boom (from 1946 to 1964) begin turning 65. By the year 2025, nearly one in five (19 percent) U.S. residents could be aged 65 and over (table 3-2). Even so, the United States as a whole will likely remain younger than Japan and most countries of Western Europe (196). Among the world regions, Europe has the highest proportion of residents aged 65 and over (14 percent in 1990), and by the year 2025, more than 1 in 10 Europeans are likely to be at least 75 years old (196). By the year 2025, an estimated 1 in 13 U.S. residents are projected to be at least 75 years old.

### LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Living arrangements and household composition may influence health status, especially for the elderly and children. International differences in the extent to which a country's elderly live alone or in institutions may indicate cultural preferences, the availability of families and informal networks to provide support, access to home or institutional care, or differences in the elderly's

**Figure 3-1—Percentage of Elderly Population (Age 65 and Older) Living Alone in Private (Noninstitutional) Households: United States and Selected Countries, Selected Data from the 1980s**



<sup>a</sup> Refers to men aged 65 and over, women aged 60 and over.

<sup>b</sup> Based on data from the former Federal Republic of Germany.

<sup>c</sup> Refers to pensioners, with usual pension age being 65 years.

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *WorldAging II*, International Population Reports (P25, 92-3) (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992).

physical ability to live independently. According to data from the 1980s, the proportion of the elderly (age 65 and older) population living alone in private (non-institutional) households ranges from a low of 10 percent in Japan to a high of 40 percent in Sweden. Nearly one-third (31 percent) of the elderly in the United States live alone, a proportion comparable to those of France (33 percent) and the United Kingdom (30 percent) (figure 3-1).

About 6 percent of the elderly in Australia, France, and the United States compared with 11 percent in the Netherlands live in institutions (either medical or non medical) (figure 3-2).

Residents of Japan are much more likely than residents of Germany to live with children (the percentage of households including children being 42 and 25, respectively) (table 3-3). More than

<sup>2</sup> Estimates of natural changes in population take into account numbers of births and deaths, but ignore migration.

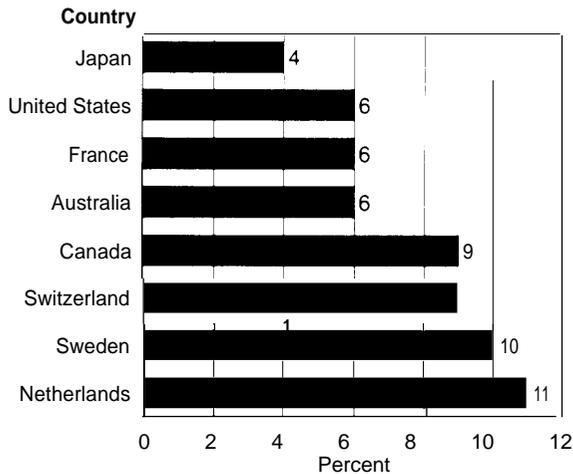
Table 3-2--Elderly Percent of Population by Age, United States and Selected Countries, Selected Years

Country	1990			2010			2025		
	65+	75+	80+	65+	75+	80+	65+	75+	80+
United States	12.5	5.3	2.8	13.3	6.2	3.8	18.7	8.0	4.3
Australia	11.2	4.4	2.2	13.4	6.1	3.6	18.8	8.4	4.6
Canada	11.5	4.6	2.4	14.3	6.8	4.1	20.7	9.2	5.2
France	14.6	7.1	4.1	17.2	9.1	5.6	22.6	11.1	6.3
Germany <sup>a</sup>	15.0	7.2	3.8	20.4	8.9	5.2	24.4	11.9	7.7
Italy	14.6	6.4	3.2	19.8	9.7	5.8	24.1	12.3	7.5
Japan	11.8	4.8	2.4	21.3	10.0	5.7	26.7	15.2	9.3
Netherlands	12.9	5.5	2.9	16.4	7.5	4.5	23.7	11.2	6.2
New Zealand	11.2	4.6	2.3	14.2	6.5	4.0	20.6	9.5	5.3
Norway	16.4	7.1	3.8	16.4	8.0	5.2	22.4	10.8	6.1
Spain	13.4	5.6	2.9	17.7	9.1	5.3	22.1	10.8	6.6
Sweden	18.0	8.2	4.4	19.6	9.2	5.9	23.7	12.6	7.5
United Kingdom	15.7	6.9	3.7	17.1	8.3	5.1	21.5	10.8	6.3

<sup>a</sup>Based on data from the former Federal Republic of Germany.

SOURCES: K. Kinsella, Chief, Aging Studies Branch, Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, Suitland, MD, personal communication, June 1993; U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, *An Aging World II, International Population Report*, table 1, (P25, 92-3) (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992).

**Figure 3-2—Percentage of Elderly Population (Age 65 and Older) Living In Institutions (Medical and Nonmedical): United States and Selected Countries, Early to Mid-1980s**



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *World Aging II*, International Population Reports (P25, 92-3) (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992).

one-third (35 percent) of U.S. households include children. Households composed of single parents and their children constitute a high proportion (8 percent) of households in the United States, although the rate is not much higher than those of some other countries (6 percent, for example, of Canadian households fall into this category).<sup>3</sup>

### ETHNIC AND RACIAL COMPOSITION

Health status disparities between racial and ethnic groups occur in the United States (48). Some of these differences reflect social factors, such as income and education (2,64,91,92,153).

The population of the United States is characterized by racial and ethnic diversity. In 1990, for example, Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, and Pacific Islanders constituted as many as one in five U.S. residents (197). Data on racial and ethnic composition are not always collected by comparison countries, but available data suggest that increased migration from less developed countries to Western Europe and other developed regions has increased population diversity there (131). For example, about 6 percent of the residents of France and 5 percent of the residents of the Netherlands were foreign, often from less developed countries (e.g., Algeria, Morocco, and Turkey), and from relatively disadvantaged groups (table 3-4) (241). An estimated 8 percent of U.S. residents, 15 percent of Canadian residents, and 23 percent of Australian residents are foreign-born (table 3-4) (105,131 ).<sup>4</sup>

### SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Educational attainment (as measured by school attendance) is generally positively related to health status (133a,171). In the United States, for example, 1986 death rates among those who had not graduated from high school were two to three times higher (depending on race and sex) than those of college graduates (133a).

Available data on school attendance suggest that U.S. residents are well educated compared with residents of selected comparison countries.<sup>5</sup> Around 1980, for example, the proportion of young adults (age 25 to 44) who had completed post-secondary education was twice as great in

<sup>3</sup> The proportion of households with children that are headed by a single parent is 23 percent in the United States and 15 percent in Canada (table 3-3).

<sup>4</sup> European countries use nationality to define the “foreign” population and non-European countries generally use place of birth to define the “foreign-born” population (131).

<sup>5</sup> Data on school attendance are not widely available, and statistics may vary by country for several reasons, including differences in educational systems, differences in categories used to describe educational level, varying durations of particular educational levels, different concepts of attendance, and differences in reporting attendance to international organizations. These factors hamper international comparisons, and available data must be interpreted with caution (196).

**Table 3-3-Percent of Households with Children by Marital Status of Parent, United States and Selected Countries, Selected Years<sup>a</sup>**

Country	Year	Total households (thousands)	Households with children (thousands)			Percent of all households			Percent of households with children	
			Total	Married parents	Single-parent	Households With children	Married parents with children	Single-parent with children	Married parents	Single-parent
United States	1988	91,066	31,920	24,601	7,319	35.1%	27.0%	8.0%	77.1%	22.9%
Australia	1982	5,214	1,770	1,569	201	33.9	30.1	3.9	88.6	11.4
Canada	1986	8,992	3,406	2,903	503	37.9	32.3	5.6	85.2	14.8
France	1988	20,853	7,070	6,301	769	33.9	30.2	3.7	89.1	10.9
Germany <sup>b</sup>	1988	27,403	6,918	5,984	934	25.2	21.8	3.4	86.5	13.5
Japan	1985	37,980	15,836	14,896	940	41.7	39.2	2.5	94.1	5.9
Sweden	1985	3,670	1,051	873	178	28.6	23.8	4.9	83.1	16.9
United Kingdom	1987	NA	NA	NA	NA	32.0	28.0	4.0	87.3	12.7

KEY: NA= not available.

<sup>a</sup>The definitions of households, children and the treatment of unmarried cohabiting couples may differ across countries so comparisons should be made with caution. Households may include related or unrelated individual. A small proportion of other household type may contain children. Households of unmarried cohabiting couples may be classified as single-parent households, married couple households, or 'other' households, depending on responses to surveys, in all countries except Canada, France, and Sweden where they are explicitly included under married couples. Singleparent subfamilies living in larger households are excluded from the data on single-parent households. Children are defined as under 18 years old with the following exceptions: Australia includes all children under 15 and full-time students aged 15 to 20 years. The United Kingdom includes all children under 16 and full-time students aged 16 and 17; data refer only to Great Britain (excludes Northern Ireland), and are based on a household survey that has not been inflated to national levels. Numbers in thousands. Figures may not add to totals due to rounding.

<sup>b</sup>Based on data from the former Federal Republic of Germany.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Children's Well-Being, International Population Reports (P-95, No. 80) (Washington, DC: U.S. Government printing office, 1990).

Table 3-4-Foreign or Foreign-born<sup>a</sup> Population, United States and Selected Countries, 1990

Country	Foreign or foreign-born <sup>a</sup> population (percent)	Significant cultural or language minority groups
United States	7.9%	Cuban, Mexican
Australia	22.6	Yugoslav
Canada <sup>b</sup>	14.7	Caribbean, Vietnamese, Yugoslav
Denmark	3.1	NA
France	6.4	Algerian, Moroccan, Portuguese
Germany <sup>c</sup>	8.2	Turk, Yugoslav
Italy	1.4	NA
Netherlands	4.6	Moroccan, Turk
Norway	3.4	Pakistani, Vietnamese
Sweden	5.6	Iranian, Turk
United Kingdom	3.3	Caribbean, Guyanan, Indian

KEY: NA = not available.

<sup>a</sup>European countries use nationality to define the "foreign" population. Non-European countries use place of birth to define the foreign-born population.

<sup>b</sup>Data for Canada are for 1986

<sup>c</sup>Based on data from the former Federal Republic of Germany.

SOURCES: S.J. Lapham, *The Foreign Born Population in the United States: 1990*, special tabulations of the Ethnic and Hispanic Branch, Population Division, Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, DC, Dec. 18, 1992; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *SOPEM; Trends in International Migration* (Paris, France: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1992).

the United States as in Canada (table 3-5).<sup>6</sup> Of the six countries where data are available, however, school attendance was highest in New Zealand where more than 90 percent of young adults (age 25 to 44) completed secondary schooling, and more than 30 percent completed some post-secondary education as of 1981 (table 3-5).

## LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

The extent to which a nation's population participates in the labor force is a well-recognized economic indicator and can affect or reflect health status to varying degrees. In the United States, for example, an individual's employment can affect his or her access to health insurance, and absence from work or inability to work is a morbidity

measure commonly used to reflect health status in health surveys (see chapter 6). Participation in the labor force may have indirect effects on health status, as well. Since 1970, for example, young women participation in the workforce has increased from nearly 50 to 75 percent in the United States, and some observers have speculated that this movement from the home to the workforce has affected the health of mothers and their young children.

More than 90 percent of the men aged 25 to 44 in all comparison countries participate in the labor force,<sup>7</sup> but participation by men over the age of 44 declines at different rates in different countries (table 3-6) (196). More than half of the women aged 25 to 44 participate in the labor

<sup>6</sup> Estimates of 1990 school attendance in the United States and Canada show that U.S. residents were more likely to have completed secondary education. Among young adults (age 25 to 44), 87 percent of men and 87 percent of women in the United States, as compared to 77 percent of men and 79 percent of women in Canada, had completed high school (162).

<sup>7</sup> A country's labor force or economically active population is usually defined as all persons who are working, actively seeking work, or temporarily out of work because of illness, layoff, vacation, or strike. Because reporting of labor force participation varies as a result of, for example, the inclusion or exclusion of certain categories of workers, international comparisons need to be made cautiously (1%).

**Table 3-5—Level of Education Completed by Age and Sex, United States and Selected Countries, Circa 1980<sup>a</sup>**

Country by sex	Secondary level or more					Post-secondary		
	25-44	45-54	55-64	65+	25-44	45-54	55-64	65+
<b>United States (1980)</b>								
Male	82.9%	66.9%	59.9%	39.2%	26.5%	20.5%	14.7%	10.3%
Female	81.8	69.6	61.5	41.8	19.1	11.0	8.6	7.4
<b>Canada (1981)</b>								
Male	66.8	44.5	37.6	27.7	14.4	8.9	7.1	5.0
Female	64.3	42.6	36.4	28.7	8.4	3.6	2.5	2.0
<b>Italy (1981)</b>								
Male	51.4	26.1	21.6	13.8	7.0	4.5	5.0	3.4
Female	41.1	20.1	16.0	12.1	5.4	2.0	1.7	0.7
<b>Japan (1980)</b>								
Male	70.6	51.5	36.2	26.8	24.8	16.1	13.0	9.5
Female	69.6	48.0	31.8	19.6	15.5	5.2	3.4	2.3
<b>New Zealand (1981)</b>								
Male	93.1	71.8	48.7 <sup>b</sup>	NA	38.6	24.9	15.5 <sup>b</sup>	NA
Female	94.2	74.4	46.8 <sup>b</sup>	NA	31.2	21.6	13.3 <sup>b</sup>	NA
<b>Norway (1980)</b>								
Male	38.9	24.2	17.3	13.5	10.7	6.0	4.3	4.0
Female	24.6	12.3	7.9	6.3	4.9	1.5	0.7	0.5

KEY: NA = not available

<sup>a</sup>Data on completed educational attainment may vary by country for a variety of reasons including, differences in categories used to describe educational level, varying durations of particular educational levels, different concepts of attainment, and differences in reporting of attainment to international organizations.

<sup>b</sup>Refers to ages 55 years and over.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *An Aging World II*, International Population Report, table 10 (P25, 92-3) (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992).

**Table 3-6--Labor Force Participation Rates, by Sex and Age, United States and Selected Countries, Selected Years**

Country	Year	Male						Female					
		25-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65+	25-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65+
United States	1991	93.9%	92.2%	88.4%	79.0%	54.8%	15.8%	74.9%	75.4%	67.8%	55.7%	35.1%	8.6%
Australia	1986	92.1	89.8	85.7	76.4	44.8	9.0	59.0	58.2	46.4	30.9	13.6	3.0
Canada	1986	94.9	93.3	89.9	81.3	59.9	14.6	73.0	67.1	57.9	44.7	27.5	4.7
France	1990	96.1	95.9	91.6	68.6	18.1	2.8	77.2	71.8	63.2	46.8	16.7	1.5
Germany <sup>a</sup>	1988	94.1	96.4	93.2	79.8	34.5	4.9	64.6	60.9	53.7	41.1	11.1	1.8
Italy	1989	95.6	95.6	87.5	67.8	35.2	7.9	59.5	44.7	34.1	20.2	9.8	2.2
Japan	1989	97.0	97.6	96.0	91.6	71.4	35.8	61.1	70.7	64.2	52.2	39.2	15.7
New Zealand	1989	94.4	93.3	91.9	78.1	33.8	10.6	67.6	75.8	69.8	47.1	14.4	3.5
Norway	1989	93.7	93.8	90.5	83.2	64.9	23.6	78.9	82.0	75.8	63.2	44.1	11.8
Sweden	1985	90.6	92.1	90.3	85.3	63.2	11.3	85.6	87.5	83.1	72.5	45.6	3.1
United Kingdom	1986	93.9	91.6 <sup>b</sup>	NA	80.3	53.4	7.5	66.9	69.9 <sup>b</sup>	NA	51.5	18.8	2.7

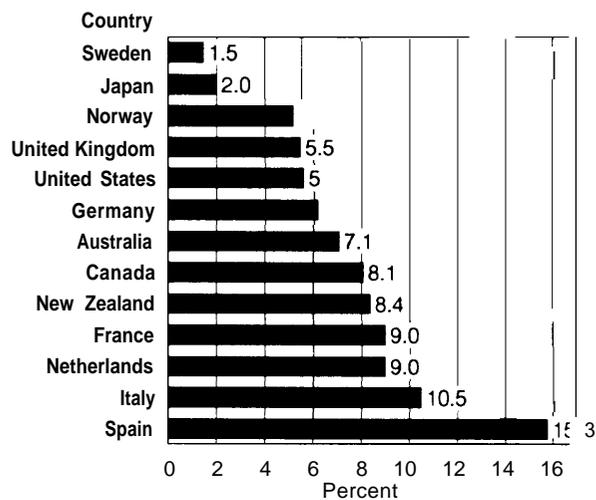
KEY: NA = not available

<sup>a</sup>Based on data from the former Federal Republic of Germany.

<sup>b</sup>Refers to ages 45 to 54 years.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, *An Aging World*, International Population Report, table 1 (92-3) (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991).

**Figure 3-3-Unemployment Rates, United States and Selected Countries, 1990 (percentage of labor force)**



SOURCE: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *OECD Health Systems: The Socio-Economic Environment Statistical References, Volume II* (Paris, France: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1993).

forces of all comparison countries, but participation ranges from a low of 59 percent in Australia to a high of 86 percent in Sweden. Three-quarters of young women are economically active in the United States. Labor force participation by men and women aged 65 and older is relatively high in the United States (16 and 9 percent, respectively) and is exceeded only in Norway (24 and 12 percent) and Japan (36 and 16 percent) (table 3-6).

Unemployment rates in 1990 were low in the United States (5.6 percent) relative to Spain (15.8 percent) and Italy (10.5 percent), but are somewhat higher than the very low rates of Sweden (1.5 percent) and Japan (2.0 percent) (figure 3.3) (133).

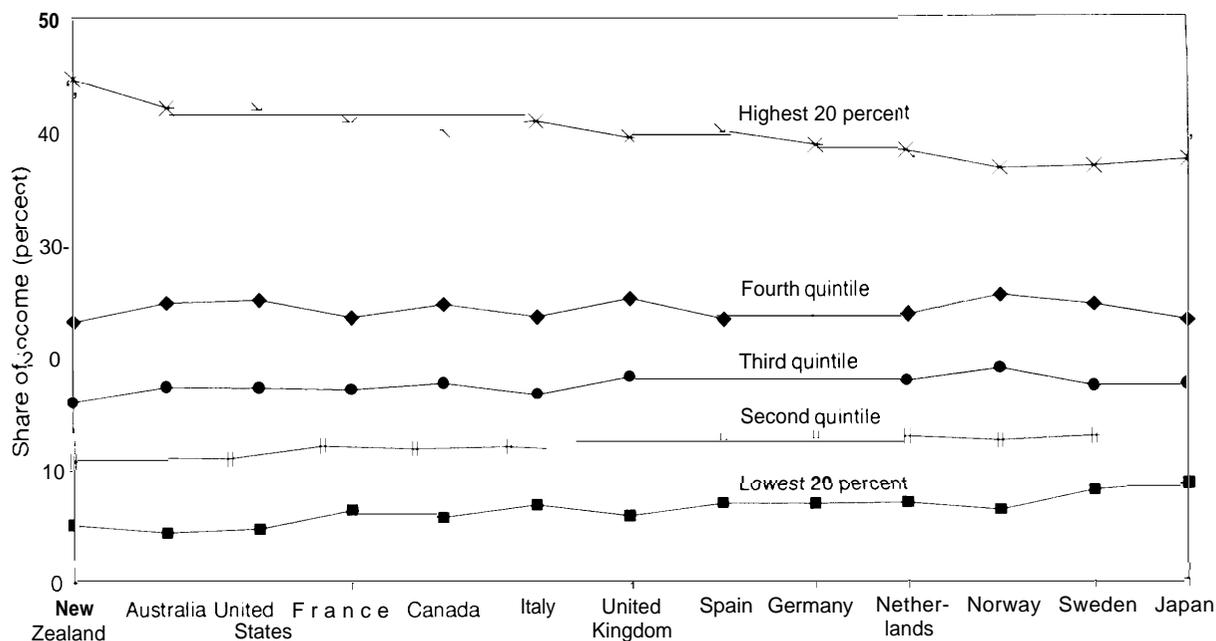
## INCOME AND POVERTY

Significant disparities exist between the health status of poor people and that of people with higher incomes in the United States and other developed countries (46,133a,153,246). In the United States, for example, 1986 death rates among people with a yearly income of less than \$9,000 were three to seven times higher (depending on race and sex) than people with a yearly income of \$25,000 or more (2,133a).

Comparisons among industrialized countries have generally found little relationship at the aggregate level between mortality and per-capita personal income or other measures of the average standard of living (46,246). But some research suggests that a country's poverty rates and income distribution are associated with the health status of the population (83,244). A study of European countries, for example, found that improvements in life expectancy over a decade (generally from 1975 to 1985) were strongly related to reductions in poverty (245). According to the Luxemburg Income Study, which evaluated comparable income data from nine countries,<sup>8</sup> the nations with the most equality in distribution of income are Germany, Norway, and Sweden, and those with the greatest inequality are Switzerland and the United States. Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom occupy the middle of the ranking (10). Household income distribution data from the early to late 1980s show that the poorest fifth of households in the United States held a smaller share of income, and the wealthiest fifth of households held a larger share of income relative to most other comparison countries (figure 3-4) (25 1). In the mid 1980s the United States had the highest poverty rates and the lowest

<sup>8</sup> The **Luxemburg** Income Study provides comparable data on income distribution in **Australia**, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, **Sweden**, **Switzerland**, **West Germany** (the former Federal Republic of Germany), **the United Kingdom**, and the United States. The study defined family net cash income as gross original income plus public and private transfers minus direct (income and payroll) taxes. Income distribution is described in terms of the share of total income going to successive tenths of the population (245).

Figure 3-4-income Distribution: United States and Selected Countries, Selected Years<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Data for France, Japan, Norway, and the United Kingdom are for 1979. Data for Spain are for 1980-81. Data for the Netherlands are for 1983. Data for Germany (the former Federal Republic of Germany) are for 1984. Data for Australia and the United States are for 1985. Data for Italy are for 1988. Data for Canada are for 1987.

NOTE: This figure shows the distribution of household income accruing to percentile groups of households ranked by total household income. Households in each country were ranked according to total household income. Each country's listing of ranked households was then divided into 5 equal "quintiles." This figure shows each household quintile's share of total national household income for each country. The poorest households in the United States (i.e., the 20 percent of households with the lowest household incomes) hold a relatively small share of income (4.7 percent). Of the comparison countries, only Australia's poorest households hold a smaller share (4.4 percent) than do those in the United States. Japan and Sweden's poorest households appear to be better off insofar as they hold a larger share of income (8.7 and 8.0 percent, respectively) than the poorest households in any of the other comparison countries. The wealthiest households in New Zealand and the United States (i.e., the 20 percent of households with the highest household incomes) hold larger shares of income (44.7 and 41.9 percent, respectively) than comparable households in any of the comparison countries. These data support the contention that the United States has relatively unequal income distribution.

SOURCE: World Bank, *World Development Report 1993: Investing in Health* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993).

poverty escape rates than some other developed countries (table 3-7) (39).

Poverty rates for children are generally higher in the United States than in selected comparison countries. In the mid-1980s, as many as 17 percent of children in the United States lived in poverty, compared with 5 percent in Sweden and 8 percent in the former Federal Republic of Germany (table 3-8).

## HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

Whether people are covered by health insurance affects their access to health services; the types, quality, and intensity of care delivered; and patient health (193). The proportion of the population with health insurance is smaller in the United States than in any of the comparison countries. In 1991, an estimated 13 percent of the U.S. population lacked health insurance coverage

## 26 I International Health Statistics: What the Numbers Mean for the United States

**Table 3-7--Poverty Indicators, United States and Selected Countries, Mid-1980s**

Country	Single-year poverty rate <sup>a</sup>	Persistent poverty rate <sup>b</sup>	Poverty escape rate <sup>c</sup>
United States	20%	14%	22%
Black	49	42	15
White	15	10	25
Canada	17	12	23
France (Lorraine)	4	2	32
Germany <sup>d</sup>	8	2	24
Ireland	11	NA	22
Luxemburg	4	<1	29
Netherlands	3	<1	23
Sweden	3	NA	45

KEY: NA= not applicable.

aPercent of families with income less than 50 percent of the median.

bPercent with less than 50 percent of median income for 3 years in a row.

cPercent of families with income 40 to 50 percent of the median whose income jumped to greater than 60 percent of the median 1 year later.

dBased on data from the former Federal Republic of Germany.

SOURCE: Adapted from G. J. Duncan, B. Gustafsson, R. Hauser, et al., "Poverty Dynamics in Eight Countries," *Journal of Population Economics* 6(3):215-234, August 1993.

**Table 3-8--Child Poverty,<sup>a</sup> United States and Selected Countries, Circa 1980**

Country	Year	Poverty rate for children		Poverty rate for families with children	
		All families	Single parent	All families	Single parent
United States	1979	17.1%	51.1%	13.8%	42.9%
Australia	1981	16.9	65.0	15.0	61.4
Canada	1981	9.6	38.7	8.6	35.3
Germany <sup>b</sup>	1981	8.2	35.1	6.9	31.9
Sweden	1981	5.1	8.6	4.4	7.5
United Kingdom	1979	10.7	38.6	8.5	36.8

aPoverty is defined as the percentage of people who have adjusted disposable income below the U.S. poverty line (\$5,763 for a family of three in 1979) converted into national currencies using the purchasing power parities developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The definition of adjusted disposable income includes all forms of cash income (earnings, property income, and all cash transfers including the value of food stamps in the United States and housing allowances in Sweden and the United Kingdom) and it subtracts income and payroll taxes. This definition differs slightly from the definition of income used in the official United States calculation of poverty rates. The source of the estimates of earnings, government transfers, and poverty rates is the Luxemburg Income Study.

bBased on data from the former Federal Republic of Germany.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Children's Well-Being*, International Population Reports (P-95, No. 80) (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990).

(144). All but one of the 12 comparison countries have public health insurance programs that cover at least 90 percent of their respective populations (133).<sup>9</sup>

## SUMMARY

The most outstanding sociodemographic difference between the United States and the 12 comparison countries is population size. The United States has nearly 250 million residents, twice as many as Japan, nearly 10 times as many as Canada, and 75 times as many as New Zealand.

Another difference is age distribution. The United States has a relatively young population age distribution and will remain younger than Japan and Western European countries through 2025, even though the U.S. baby boom cohort will have reached age 65 by then.

The U.S. population is racially and ethnically diverse, with as many as one in five residents belonging to minority groups. Although comparable data on ethnic and racial composition from other countries are limited, available data suggest that foreign migration to Western Europe has

increased in recent years, contributing to the presence of sizable, disadvantaged minority populations.

Labor force participation is relatively high in all comparison countries and varies chiefly in the extent to which women and the elderly are economically active. Women's participation in the labor force is highest in Sweden, lowest in Australia, and intermediate in the United States. The United States, along with Norway and Japan, have relatively more elderly in the labor force than do other comparison countries.

Poverty is associated with poor health, as are large disparities in the distribution of income throughout a nation. Income distributions are relatively unequal in the United States and more equal in Japan, Norway, and Sweden. Poverty rates are higher in the United States than in most comparison countries.

Health insurance coverage improves health (193). Among the comparison countries, only the United States has a large segment of population without any health care insurance.

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<sup>9</sup> In the Netherlands, 69 percent of the population is covered through a publicly financed program and about 30 percent of the population are insured privately (16,133).