

Compendium

Chapter 11: Pensioner Income and Expenditure, (2012 Edition)

This chapter examines the income and expenditure of pensioners. The main sources are the Department for Work and Pensions' 'Pensioners' Income Series 2010-11' and the Office for National Statistics' 'Family Spending, 2011 edition'.



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1 . Key points

- In 2010/11, pensioner couples received average income of £610 per week, compared with £345 per week for single men pensioners and £279 per week for single women pensioners.
- In 2010/11, the average weekly income of couples in the 'under 75' category was 32 per cent higher than that of couples in the '75 or over' category (Figure 11.1). A key reason for this is that younger pensioner couples are more likely to have some income from employment than older pensioner couples.
- Average gross pensioner incomes increased by an estimated 50 per cent in real terms between 1994/95 and 2010/11 (Figure 11.2).
- Average incomes conceal considerable variations between poorer and richer pensioners. In 2008-11, the median net income of pensioners in the highest income quintile was three to four times higher than that of pensioners in the lowest income quintile (Figure 11.3).
- The largest source of income for pensioners is 'benefit income', which includes state pension income and benefits such as housing and disability benefits. Occupational pensions are also a significant source of income (Table 11.4 and Figure 11.5).
- In 2010/11, median income from occupational pensions – for those with such pensions – was £172 per week for pensioner couples and £81 per week for single pensioners. Median income from personal pensions, for those with such pensions, was £42 per week for couples and £33 per week for single pensioners (Figure 11.6).
- In 2010, the average weekly expenditure of households headed by someone aged 65 to 74 was £365, of which 33 per cent was spent on food and non-alcoholic drink, domestic energy bills, housing and council tax/domestic rates. For households headed by someone aged 75 or over, average expenditure was £240 per week, of which 41 per cent was spent on these items (Table 11.7).

2 . Introduction

This chapter examines the income and expenditure of pensioners. In 2010/11, there were 8.70 million 'pensioner benefit units' according to the Pensioners' Incomes Series published by the Department for Work and Pensions. Single pensioners accounted for more than half of this total (4.55 million), and most of these were single women (3.35 million).

The median is the preferred measure of central tendency or 'average' for this chapter as the data distributions tend to be skewed to the right. This is because a small proportion of individuals have very high pensioner income and expenditure. In unequal distributions, the mean is likely to be influenced by high values, so it does not reflect the experience of most individuals. The median has been used where available, although in many cases the level of detail presented was not available in the form of medians.

3 . Pensioners' Income Series definitions

The Pensioners' Incomes Series measures the income of 'pensioner benefit units' defined by DWP as "a single adult over state pension age or married or cohabiting pensioners where one or more are over state pension age". Prior to April 2010, State Pension Age (SPA) was 65 for men and 60 for women. For 2010/11, women are defined to be over SPA based on date of birth and date of interview. In the Pensioners' Incomes Series, some benefit units are part of larger households – for instance where pensioners are living with relatives – but the income of the other members of the household is not considered here.

The Pensioners' Incomes Series defines 'pensioner couples' as two married or cohabiting adults where one or more are of SPA or over. Some of the couples in the series are mixed status (one person below and one above SPA). A 'single pensioner' is a single man or a single woman over the relevant SPA. Although most pensioners have retired, some still work full-time or part-time (see [Pension Trends Chapter 4](#)).

4 . Income

The income discussed in this chapter is that of single pensioners and couples. The data comes from the Pensioners' Incomes Series, which is based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS).

Pensioner units where the head of the benefit unit is less than five years over SPA are described as 'recently retired'. Pensioners in this group are most likely to be still in employment (including self employment).

Estimates from the 2010/11 Pensioners' Incomes Series show that 26 per cent of recently retired single pensioners were in receipt of income from earnings (including earnings from self employment), compared with 8 per cent of all single pensioners.

For pensioner couples, 36 per cent of recently retired couples were receiving income from earnings, compared with 29 per cent of all pensioner couples.

Figure 11.1 shows that the mean gross (pre-tax) income of pensioner units in 2010/11 was higher for those where the head of the unit was under 75 than for those where the head of the unit was 75 or over. The difference was particularly clear for couples: the average weekly income of couples in the 'under 75' category was 32 per cent higher than that of couples in the '75 or over' category.

One of the reasons for this is that younger pensioners are more likely to have income from employment than older pensioners. This is particularly the case if one member of a pensioner couple is below SPA, which is more likely in the 'under 75' and 'recently retired' categories than for the '75 or over' category. See Chapter 5 of The Pensioners' Incomes Series 2010-11 (DWP, 2012) for information on 'mixed status couples' (couples where one partner is above SPA and one is below).

Another reason is that average earnings have increased more quickly than prices in recent years with the result that newly retired pensioners with salary-related pensions generally receive a higher pension than someone in an equivalent job who retired several years earlier with the same pension entitlement.

Figure 11.1 Mean gross income of pensioners: by age of head of benefit unit, 2010/11

United Kingdom



Source: The Pensioners' Income Series 2010/11, Department for Work and pensions

Notes:

1. Recently retired pensioner units are those where the head of the benefit unit is less than five years over SPA
2. The under 75 category includes the recently retired
3. The 2010/11 price series is calculated using the Retail Price Index (RPI), excluding Council Tax

The mean gross incomes of all pensioner units increased from £297 per week at 2010/11 prices in 1994/95 to £446 per week in 2010/11 (Figure 11.2). Data before 2002/03 is for Great Britain whereas data after this year is for the United Kingdom, but this has made little difference to the results. According to [The Pensioners' Incomes Series 2005/6 \(Revised\)](#): "The results for Great Britain and the United Kingdom are nearly identical and the move to a United Kingdom basis made no significant difference to any of the main Pensioners' Income results or growth rates".

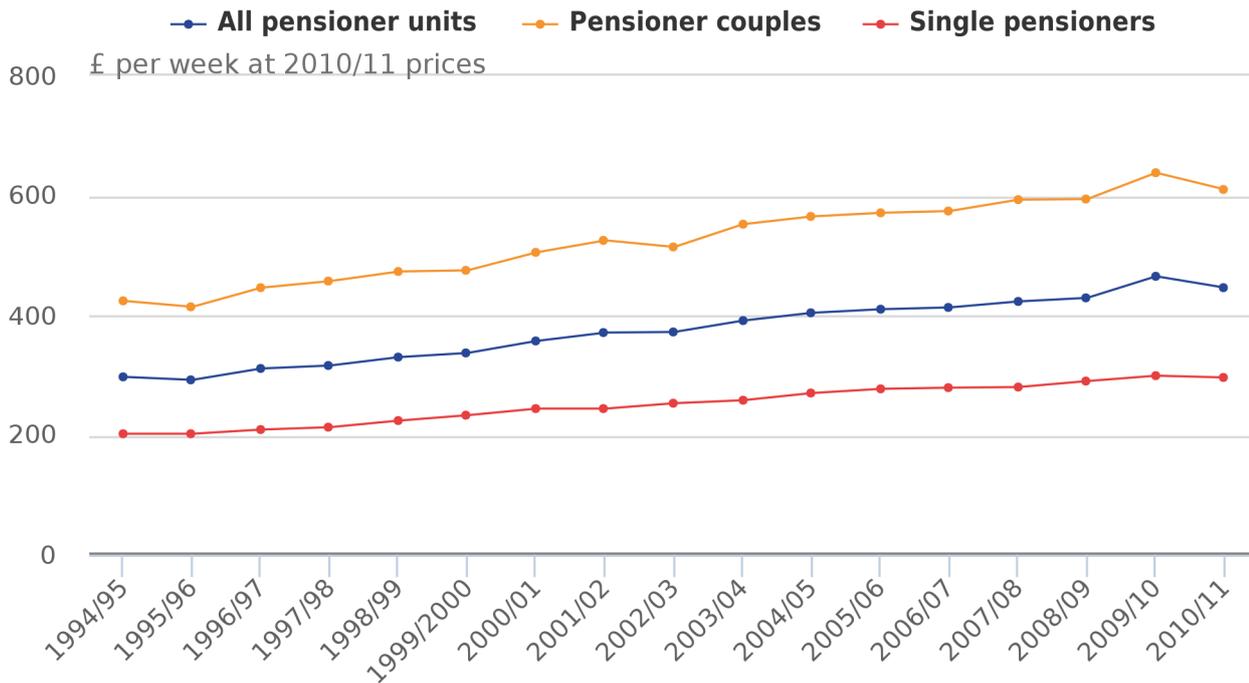
On average, in 2010/11 the incomes of pensioner couples (£610 per week) were more than twice the incomes of single pensioners (£296 per week). Single women pensioners, with £279 per week, were on lower average incomes than single men pensioners, with £345 per week.

Mean gross pensioner incomes increased by an estimated 50 per cent in real terms between 1994/95 and 2010/11. The real increase in average gross pensioner incomes is calculated in the Pensioners' Incomes Series by deflating the nominal increase by the Retail Price Index excluding Council Taxes/rates.

The increase in average gross pensioner incomes may seem surprising, given that during this period the basic state pension has been linked to prices, which have risen more slowly than earnings. The main reason for the increase is that occupational pensions have grown in importance during this period (see: **Sources of income**). However, 'average' growth figures conceal considerable variations between the experience of poorer and richer pensioners, as the following analysis shows (see also [Pension Trends Chapter 13](#)).

Figure 11.2: Mean gross income of pensioner units, 1994/95 to 2010/11

Great Britain/United Kingdom



Source: The Pensioners' Incomes Series 2010/11, Department for Work and Pensions

Notes:

1. Data before 2002/03 is for Great Britain. Data for 2002/03 onwards is for the United Kingdom
2. The 2010/11 constant price series is calculated using the Retail Price Index (RPI), excluding Council Tax

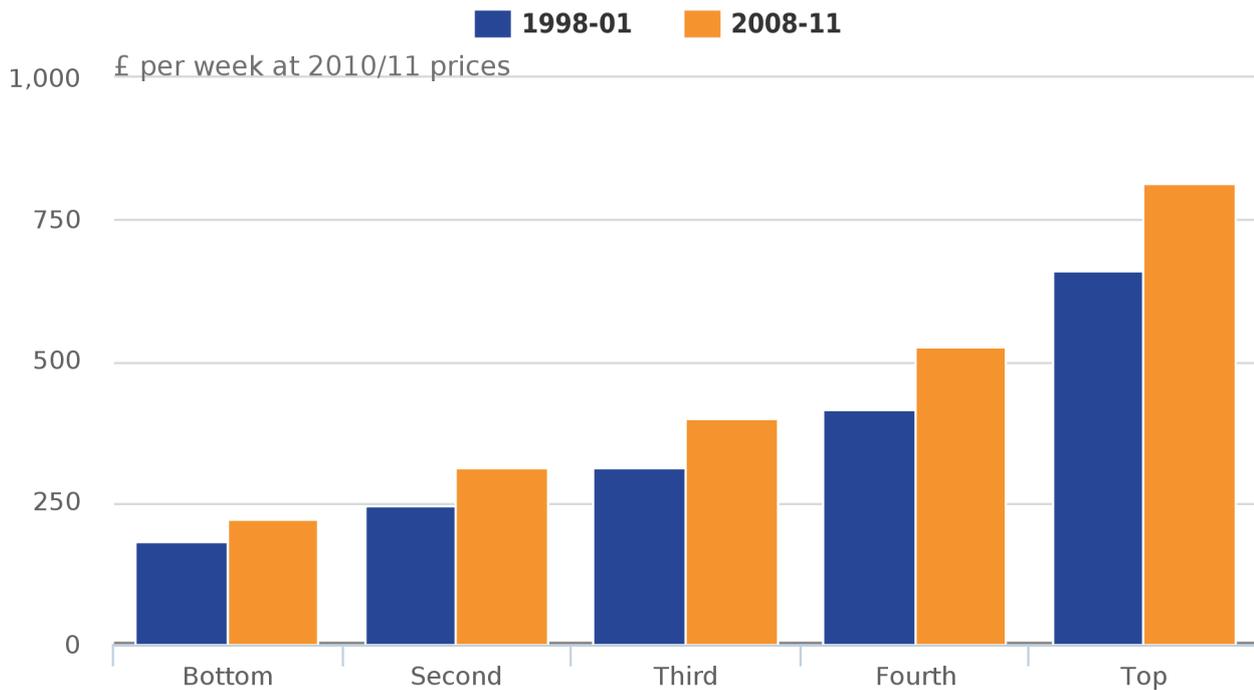
When looking at income distributions, comparisons are most commonly made on the basis of the differences between income quintiles. Quintiles divide the data, ranked in ascending order, into five equal parts – from pensioners with the lowest incomes in the bottom quintile group to those with the highest incomes in the top quintile group. Figure 11.3 shows median net income by income quintile for pensioner couples and single pensioners in 1998/01 and 2008/11. Net income estimates provide a more consistent measure of relative standards of living than gross income.

Figure 11.3 shows that there are big differences between quintiles, with couples in the highest income quintile group receiving median net income of £815 per week (at 2010/11 prices) in 2008-11, which was nearly four times that of those in the lowest income quintile group (£221 per week in 2010/11 prices).

Single pensioners in the highest income quintile group received median net income which was around three times that of single pensioners in the lowest income quintile. The middle and upper income quintiles groups are more likely to include pensioners who are still working, or whose spouse or partner is still working.

Figure 11.3: Median net income for pensioner couples: by income quintile, 1998-01 and 2008-11

Great Britain/United Kingdom



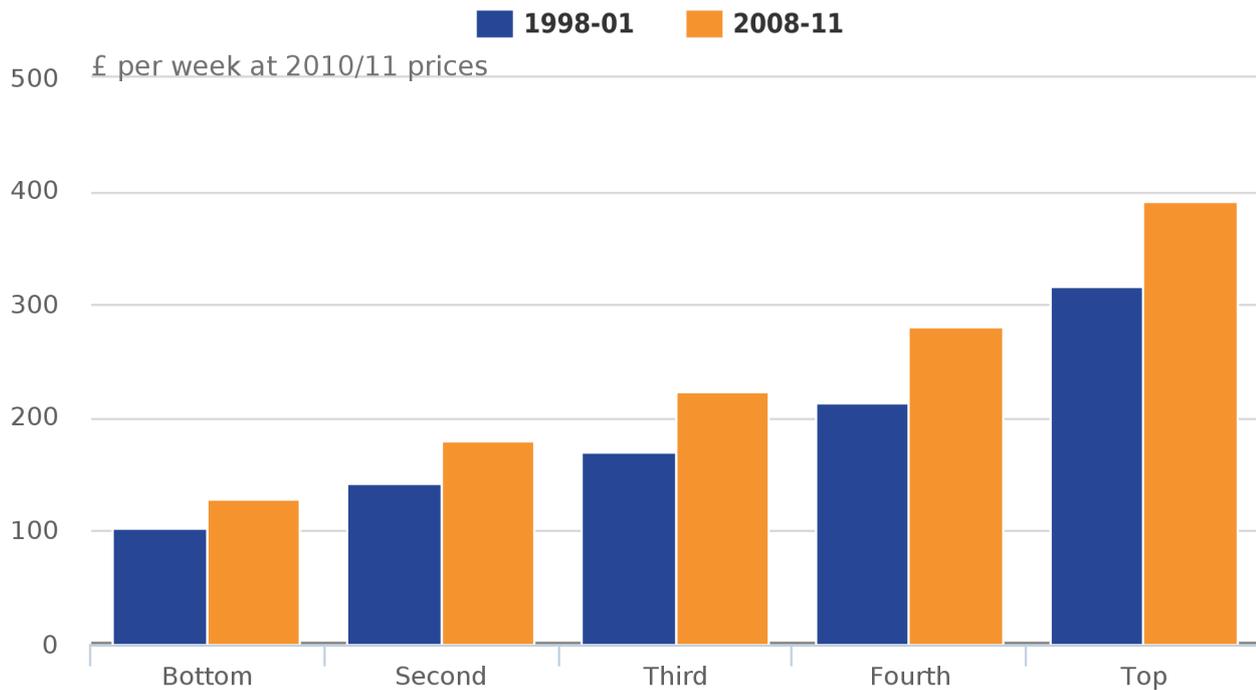
Source: The Pensioners' Incomes Series 2010/11, Department for Work and Pensions

Notes:

1. The median of a distribution is the value below which 50 per cent of the values lie when the data is arranged in ascending order from the lowest to the highest value
2. Income quintiles are calculated on net income before housing costs; they are calculated separately for pensioner couples and single pensioners
3. The Data before 2002/03 is for Great Britain. Data for 2002/03 onwards in for the United Kingdom
4. The 2010/11 constant price series is calculated using the Retail Price Index (RPI), excluding Council Tax
5. Quintiles divide the data, ranked in ascending order, into five equal parts – from pensioners with the lowest incomes in the bottom quintile group to those with the highest incomes in the top quintile group
6. Figures are presented in the form of three-year averages because results may be volatile from one year to the next

Figure 11.3: Median net income for single pensioners: by income quintile, 1998-01 and 2008-11

Great Britain/United Kingdom



Source: The Pensioners' Incomes Series 2010/11, Department for Work and Pensions

Notes:

1. The median of a distribution is the value below which 50 per cent of the values lie when the data is arranged in ascending order from the lowest to the highest value
2. Income quintiles are calculated on net income before housing costs; they are calculated separately for pensioner couples and single pensioners
3. The Data before 2002/03 is for Great Britain. Data for 2002/03 onwards is for the United Kingdom
4. The 2010/11 constant price series is calculated using the Retail Price Index (RPI), excluding Council Tax
5. Quintiles divide the data, ranked in ascending order, into five equal parts – from pensioners with the lowest incomes in the bottom quintile group to those with the highest incomes in the top quintile group. Figures are presented in the form of three-year averages because results may be volatile from one year to the next

5 . Sources of income

Table 11.4 Mean gross income of pensioner couples and single pensioners: by age of head of benefit unit and source of income, 2010/11

United Kingdom

	£ per week/percentages							
	Pensioner couples				Single pensioners			
	Head is under 75		75 and over		Under 75		75 and over	
	£ per week	%	£ per week	%	£ per week	%	£ per week	%
Gross income	657	100	498	100	322	100	274	100
Benefit income	196	30	243	49	170	53	178	65
Occupational pension income	165	25	161	32	74	23	68	25
Personal pension income	27	4	21	4	8	2	6	2
Investment income	53	8	43	9	22	7	14	5
Earnings	211	32	26	5	45	14	4	1
Other income	5	1	5	1	3	1	4	1

Source: The Pensioners' Incomes Series 2010/11, Department for Work and Pensions

Notes:

1. Benefit income includes the basic and additional state pensions, widow's pension and widowed parent's allowance; income related benefits (pension credit, housing benefit, council tax benefit and social fund grants) and tax credits; disability benefits; winter fuel payments; and carer's allowance

Pensioner income may be derived from various sources: state pensions and benefits, private pensions, employment income and income from investments. Table 11.4 shows the main income sources for pensioner couples and single pensioners in different age groups.

The largest source of income is 'benefit income', which includes the basic and additional state pensions, widow's pension and widowed parent's allowance; income related benefits (pension credit, housing benefit, council tax benefit and social fund grants) and tax credits; disability benefits; winter fuel payments; and carer's allowance. State pensions and benefits are particularly important for those aged 75 or over, comprising nearly half of mean gross income for pensioner couples and 65 per cent of mean gross income for single pensioners in this age group in 2010/11.

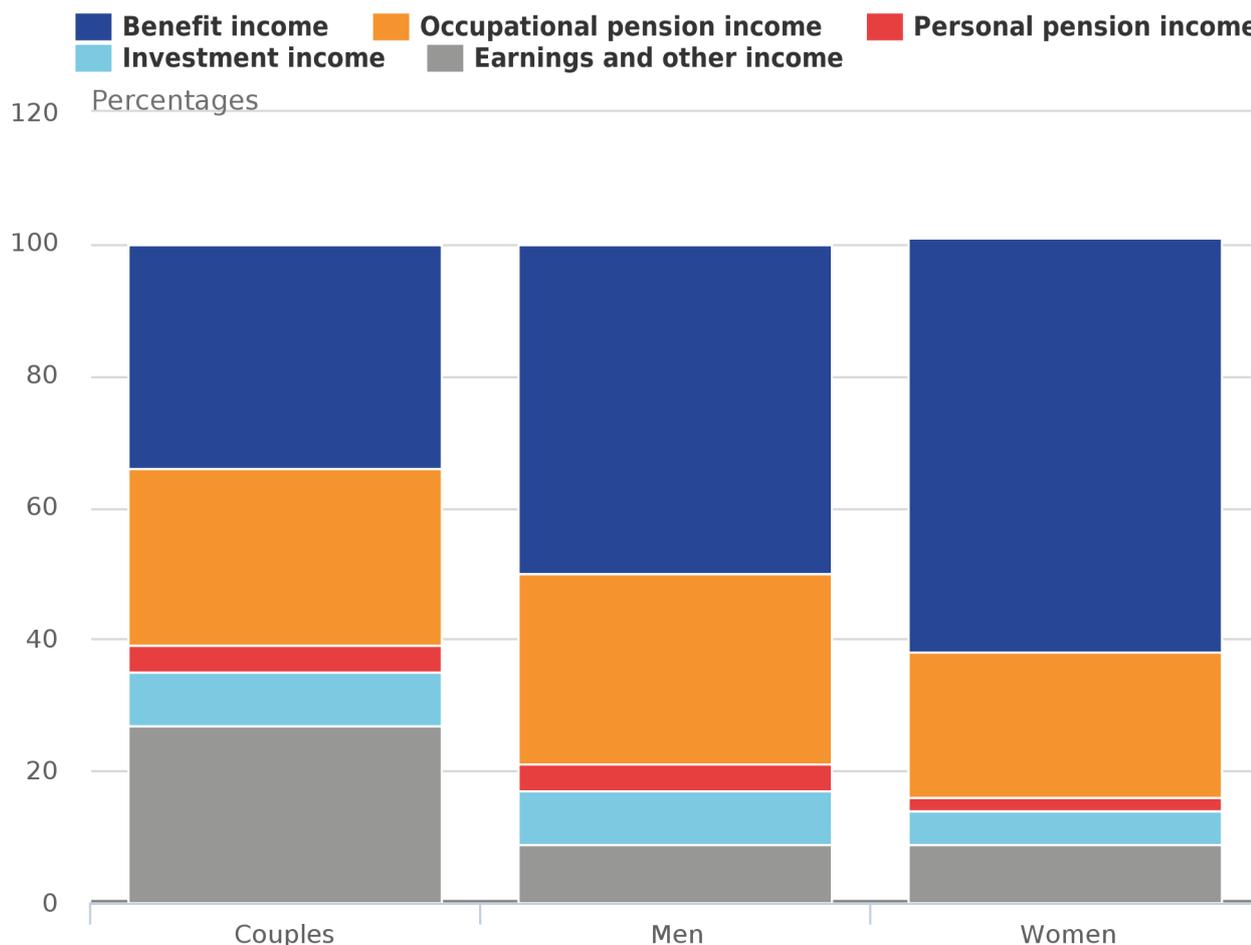
Income from occupational pensions is also significant, accounting for nearly a quarter of mean gross income for single pensioners and over one-quarter of mean gross income for pensioner couples in 2010/11 (Table 11.4 and Figure 11.5). Personal pensions accounted for only a small proportion of mean gross income.

There was a marked increase in occupational pension provision by employers in the 1950s and 1960s and many of these employees are now retired. Pensioner couples, in particular, are benefiting from occupational pensions. Some 67 per cent of pensioner couples and 55 per cent of single pensioners received occupational pension income in 2010/11.

Figure 11.5 shows that single women are more dependent on state pensions and benefits than single men pensioners. In 2010/11, 63 per cent of the mean gross weekly income of single women pensioners came from 'benefit income', compared with 50 per cent for single men. Occupational pension income accounted for 22 per cent of the total for single women, compared with 29 per cent for single men.

Figure 11.5 Mean gross weekly income of pensioner couples and single pensioners: by source of income, 2010/11

United Kingdom



Source: The Pensioners' Incomes Series 2010/11, Department for Work and Pensions

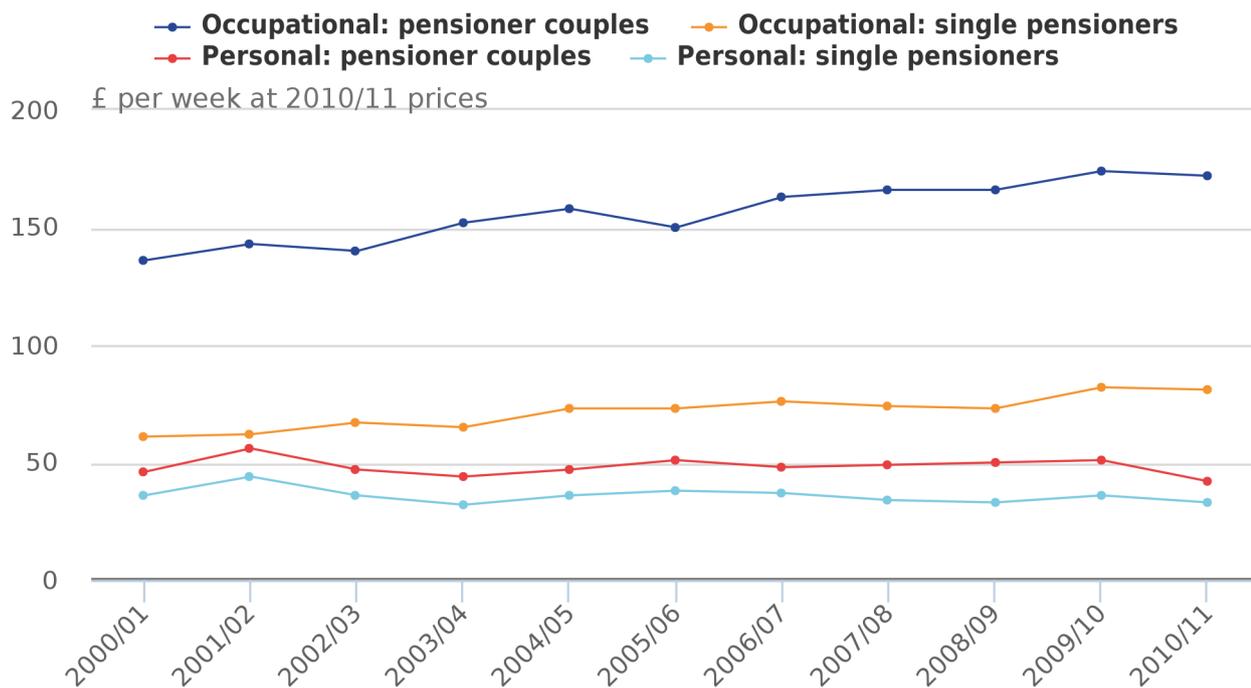
Notes:

1. Benefit income includes the basic and additional state pensions, widow's pension and widowed parent's allowance; income related benefits (pension credit, housing benefit, council tax benefit and social fund grants) and tax credits; disability benefits; winter fuel payments; and carer's allowance

There are a number of reasons for the differences between single men and women pensioners. Women generally have less opportunity to build up pension entitlement during their working life because of lower pay and greater likelihood of discontinuities in their employment history. Also, a proportion of single women pensioners are widows. The level of occupational pension received by a widow is generally only half the level of the pension received by the couple when the man was alive.

Figure 11.6 Median income from occupational and personal pensions for pensioner couples and single pensioners in receipt of such income, 2000/01 to 2010/11

Great Britain/United Kingdom



Source: The Pensioners' Incomes Series 2010/11, Department for Work and Pensions

Notes:

1. The median of a distribution is the value below which 50 per cent of the values lie when the data is arranged in ascending order from the lowest to the highest value. It is calculated excluding non-recipients of occupational/personal pension income
2. Data before 2002/03 is for Great Britain. Data for 2002/03 onwards is for the United Kingdom
3. The 2010/11 constant price series is calculated using the Retail Price Index (RPI), excluding Council Tax

In 2010/11, median income from occupational pensions, for those receiving income from this source, was £172 per week for pensioner couples. This represents an increase of 26 per cent in real terms since 2000/01 (Figure 11.6).

The gains were slightly higher for single pensioners: their median income from this source rose by 32 per cent between 2000/01 and 2010/11. However, there are big differences in absolute terms between pensioner couples and single pensioners.

For single pensioners in 2010/11, median income from occupational pensions, for those receiving income from this source, was only £81 per week. Many single pensioners who receive income from occupational pensions are widows receiving a survivor's pension, which is usually around half of the pension paid to their husband or partner.

Personal pensions are a more recent development than occupational pensions, having been introduced in 1988 (see [Pension Trends Chapter 1](#)). Only 24 per cent of pensioner couples and 10 per cent of single pensioners received personal pension income in 2010/11. Median income from personal pensions is lower than for occupational pensions (Figure 11.6).

There was a peak in 2001/02, when median income from personal pensions (in 2010/11 prices) reached £56 per week for pensioner couples and £44 per week for single pensioners. While median income for both categories has fallen in 2010/11, there is no clear trend over time. In 2010/11, median income from personal pensions was £42 per week for pensioner couples and £33 per week for single pensioners.

6 . Expenditure

The second part of this chapter explores data from the Office for National Statistics' Living Costs and Food Survey which shows the differences in expenditure patterns between different age groups and different types of retired household.

Table 11.7 shows that in 2010, the latest year available, household expenditure was lowest for households where the household reference person (see '[Pension Trends Glossary](#)') was aged 75 or over. This is partly explained by the relatively high proportion of single person households in this age group. Households in the 75 or over age group have on average 1.4 persons compared with 2.2 persons on average in households where the reference person was aged 50 to 64, and 1.8 persons in households of the 65 to 74 age group.

However, average expenditure per person is also lower in the older age groups: in the 75 or over age group, average expenditure per person per week in 2010 was £173, compared with £233 in the 50 to 64 age group and £208 in the 65 to 74 age group. Possible causes of this decline in consumption with age are the reduction in income as people get older and constraints imposed by lack of mobility or ill health, which make it harder to access local shops and other facilities.

Patterns of expenditure also change with age. Table 11.7 shows that the proportion of total expenditure allocated to food and non-alcoholic drink, domestic energy bills and council tax (or domestic rates) rises with age. This is because a certain amount of expenditure on these items is essential for older people. By contrast, older person households spend a smaller proportion of the total on mortgage interest payments than middle aged households.

Table 11.7 Household expenditure as a percentage of total expenditure: by age of household reference person, 2010

United Kingdom

	Percentages					
	Less than 30	30 to 49	50 to 64	65 to 74	75 or over	All households
Food and non-alcoholic drinks	9	10	11	14	16	11
Alcoholic drinks, tobacco and narcotics	2	2	3	3	2	2
Clothing and footwear	5	5	5	4	3	5
Housing (net), fuel and power	20	12	10	13	18	13
of which net rent (gross rent minus benefit payments)	15	6	2	3	3	5
of which electricity, gas and other fuels	4	4	5	6	8	5
Household goods and services	5	6	8	7	8	7
Health	0	1	1	2	2	1
Transport	13	14	15	13	8	14
Communication	3	3	3	3	3	3
Recreation and culture	9	11	14	15	11	12
Education	6	2	2	0	0	2
Restaurants and hotels	9	9	9	7	6	8
Miscellaneous goods and services	7	8	7	8	9	8
Other expenditure items	12	16	13	11	13	14
of which mortgage interest payments (primary dwelling)	5	8	4	1	0	5
of which council tax/domestic rates	3	4	4	5	7	4
All household expenditure (£ per week)	448.40	573.10	518.60	365.20	240.40	473.60
Average expenditure per person (£ per week)	190.10	193.70	233.10	208.20	173.40	203.10
Weighted average household size (number of persons)	2.4	3.0	2.2	1.8	1.4	2.3

Source: Family Spending 2011, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Housing (net) includes net rent, maintenance and repair, water supply, service charges and insurance. Excludes mortgage interest payments, Council Tax and Northern Ireland rates

2. All household expenditure excludes property purchase, mortgage capital repayments, household alterations and improvements

In 2010, the average weekly expenditure of households headed by someone aged 65 to 74 was £365, of which 33 per cent was spent on food and non-alcoholic drink, domestic energy bills, housing and council tax or domestic rates. For households headed by someone aged 75 or over, average expenditure was £240 per week, of which 41 per cent was spent on food and non-alcoholic drink, domestic energy bills, housing and council tax or domestic rates.

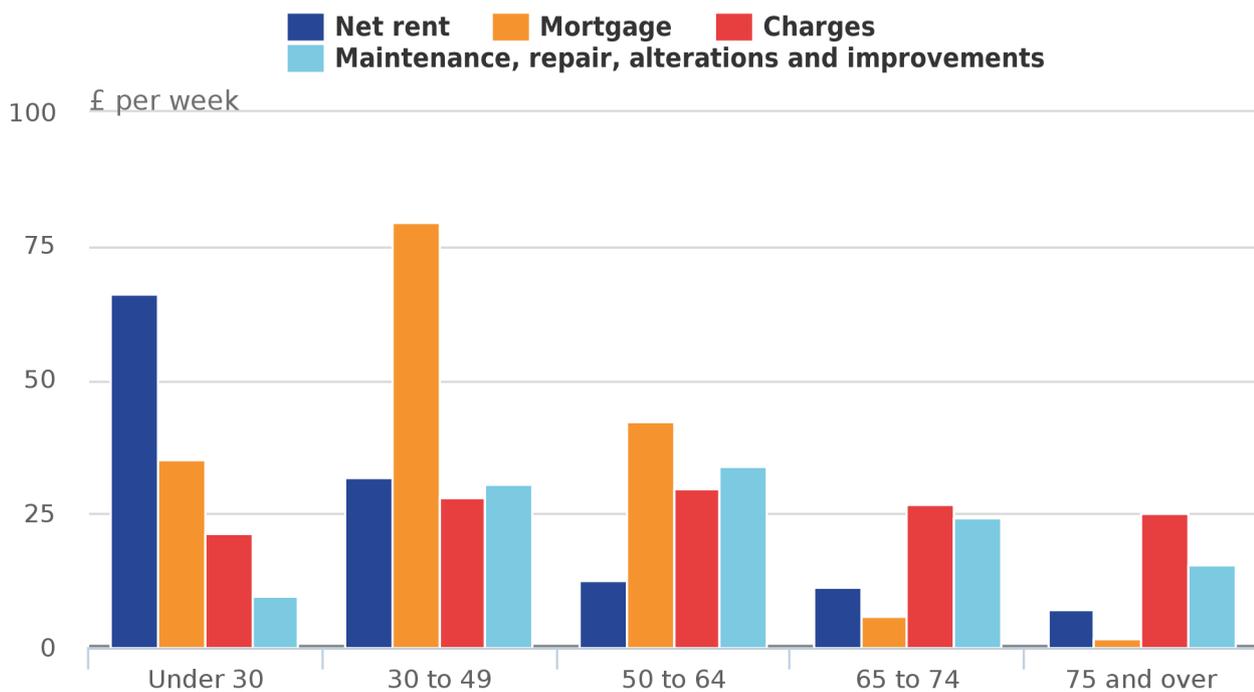
Figure 11.8 shows expenditure on housing in 2010. Here, expenditure on housing comprises all categories of housing expenditure, including those classified as 'other expenditure' in Table 11.7, or excluded altogether from Table 11.7.

Total housing expenditure reached its peak in the 30 to 49 age group, when on average households spent £170 per week on housing, with mortgage payments comprising almost half of this total. By contrast, in the 65 to 74 age group, total expenditure on housing was £69 per week on average, and mortgage payments represented 9 per cent of the total.

For people in the 65 to 74 and 75 or over age groups, the two largest categories of housing expenditure were council tax/ domestic rates and maintenance, repair, alterations and improvements, which accounted for three quarters of the total between them.

Figure 11.8 Main categories of housing expenditure: by age of household reference person, 2010

United Kingdom



Source: Family Spending 2011, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Average household expenditure
2. Net rent is gross rent less housing benefit, rebates and allowances received
3. Mortgage payments comprise mortgage interest payments, mortgage capital repayments and mortgage protection premiums

Table 11.9 explores differences in expenditure patterns in 2010 between different types of retired household: those which are mainly dependent on state pensions and related benefits and other retired households (see: **Retired households in the LCF**). These groups are further divided into single person households and one man, one woman couples.

7 . Retired households in the LCF

The Living Costs and Food (LCF) Survey defines retired households as those where the household reference person is over State Pension Age (SPA) which was 65 for men and increasing from 60 for women from April 2010, and economically inactive (neither working nor waiting to take up a job). Two categories of retired households are identified:

- retired household 'mainly dependent on state pensions' is one in which at least three-quarters of the total income of the household is derived from state pensions and related benefits.
- Other retired households are those which have more than a quarter of their income from other sources, such as private pensions, savings and investments.

Further information can be found in [Family Spending 2011](#).

Table 11.9 shows that average expenditure of couples on goods and services where amounts spent are related to the number of people in the household (such as food, drink and clothing), is almost double the expenditure of single people on such categories.

By contrast, couples and single people spend similar amounts on housing (net) – excluding mortgage payments and council tax/domestic rates – fuel and power, because expenditure in this category is mainly determined by the characteristics of the household's accommodation rather than by the number of people in the household. Thus, single people spend a greater proportion of the total than couples on housing (net), fuel and power.

Table 11.9 shows considerable differences between types of couple. Average total expenditure for 'other retired' couples (£397) is nearly one and a half times that of couples who depend mainly on state pensions and related benefits (£277). This difference does not translate into major differences between the absolute amounts spent on basic goods and services such as food and non-alcoholic drinks and housing, fuel and power.

However, 'other retired' couples spend considerably more than their counterparts on non-essential items such as recreation and culture, transport, and restaurants and hotels. As a result, couples who depend mainly on state pensions and related benefits spend a greater proportion of the total than 'other retired' households on basic goods and services such as food and non-alcoholic drinks (17 per cent of average weekly expenditure, compared with 14 per cent for 'other retired' couples) and housing, fuel and power (15 per cent, compared with 12 per cent).

These differences in expenditure patterns probably reflect differences in income, with couples who depend on state pensions and related benefits having tighter budgets than their 'other retired' counterparts.

Average weekly expenditure of 'other retired' single people (£214) is 33 per cent higher than that of single people who depend mainly on state pensions and related benefits (£161). Households which depend mainly on state pensions and related benefits spend a greater proportion of their total expenditure than 'other retired' households on basic goods and services such as food and non-alcoholic drinks and housing, fuel and power.

'Other retired' single people also spend more on non-essential items than those who depend mainly on state pensions and related benefits. However, the differences in non-essential expenditure appear to be smaller between the two types of single person than between the two types of couple, particularly for social activities.

This may be due to a difference of lifestyles among single people (compared with couples), or it may be a reflection of tight budgets for some groups of single people in the 'other retired' category who have not built up strong state pension entitlements or private pensions (see [Pension Trends Chapter 12](#)).

Table 11.9 Average household expenditure of retired households: by composition of household, 2010

United Kingdom

	£ per week/percentages							
	State pension				Other retired			
	One person	One person	Two adults	Two adults	One person	One person	Two adults	Two adults
		%	%		%		%	
1. Food & non-alcoholic drinks	28.10	17	47.80	17	29.70	14	56.70	14
2. Alcoholic drinks, tobacco & narcotics	4.70	3	8.70	3	5.10	2	10.60	3
3. Clothing & footwear	5.50	3	9.10	3	6.80	3	15.20	4
4. Housing(net), fuel & power	37.00	23	41.20	15	41.60	19	46.10	12
5. Household goods & services	12.40	8	20.30	7	18.30	9	29.50	7
6. Health	2.30	1	4.60	2	4.50	2	8.00	2
7. Transport	9.50	6	27.80	10	19.50	9	50.60	13
8. Communication	5.60	3	7.80	3	6.70	3	9.80	2
9. Recreation & culture	16.50	10	37.00	13	25.90	12	61.50	15
10. Education	..	2	-	-	..	0	..	0
11. Restaurants & hotels	7.00	4	18.20	7	11.50	5	31.50	8
12. Miscellaneous goods & services	13.10	8	22.90	8	17.10	8	32.10	8
1-12. All expenditure groups	144.30	90	245.40	89	186.80	87	352.10	89
13. Other expenditure items	16.90	10	31.10	11	27.50	13	45.10	11
Total expenditure	161.10	100	276.50	100	214.20	100	397.20	100
Average weekly expenditure per person (£)								
Total expenditure	161.10		138.30		214.20		198.60	

Source: Family Spending 2011, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The column entitled "State Pension" covers retired households mainly dependent on state pensions, i.e. households where at least three-quarters of the total income of the household is derived from state pensions and related benefits. The "Other retired" column covers households which have more than a quarter of their income coming from other sources, such as private pensions, savings and investments

2. Housing (net) includes net rent, maintenance and repair, water supply, service charges and insurance. Excludes mortgage interest payments, Council Tax and Northern Ireland rates

3. Other expenditure items are mainly mortgage interest payments and protection premiums, council tax/domestic rates; it also includes expenditure on education

4. All household expenditure excludes property purchase, mortgage capital repayments, household alterations and improvements

8. References

1. Department for Work and Pensions (2012) [The Pensioners' Incomes Series 2010-11](#).
2. Office for National Statistics (2011), [Family Spending, 2011 edition](#).
3. Office for National Statistics, [Pension Trends Glossary \(198.9 Kb Pdf\)](#) .
4. Office for National Statistics, [Pension Trends](#).

9. Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

These National Statistics are produced to high professional standards and released according to the arrangements approved by the UK Statistics Authority.