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Dependence in the Rural South

Libby V. Morris  
*University of Georgia*

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DEPENDENCE IN THE RURAL SOUTH

By Libby V. Morris

ABSTRACT

This article re-introduces the concept of dependence into rural studies and shows that age-related dependence varies greatly by race and location across the South. Youth, elder and total dependence ratios were calculated for blacks and whites and by metropolitan and nonmetropolitan locations for Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Total, youth, and elder dependence are higher in nonmetropolitan areas. The highest dependence is in nonmetropolitan counties with high percentages of black population. Total dependence is higher for blacks than whites. This difference is primarily because of the much higher dependence ratios for black youth. Elder dependence is highest in nonmetropolitan counties, and white elder dependence is slightly higher than black elder dependence in all locations. The wide range of dependence ratios found in this study suggests that rural development efforts should consider the divergent needs of black and white populations in nonmetropolitan places.

INTRODUCTION

As America moves toward the 21st century, racial and ethnic diversity is becoming more pronounced. In only 40 years, 1950 to 1990, the total U.S. population increased by approximately 100 million residents, while minorities grew from 10.5 to 25 percent of the U.S. total (Hodgkinson, 1992; U.S. Census Bureau, 1991a; 1991b; 1992a). The largest minority group, African Americans, doubled in number between 1950 and 1990, and Hispanics climbed to 22.4 million in 1990, an increase of 8 million in a single decade (U.S. Census Bureau, 1991b).

Population diversity is of particular importance in the Southern region because a large number of the nation's African Americans live...
in the South. According to the 1990 census, nearly 16 million of the nation's approximately 30 million blacks live in the Southern census region, and 93 percent of all rural blacks live in the South (Falk and Rankin, 1992; Wimberley et al., 1992). In 1990 the Southern census region claimed the 10 top-ranking states in percentage black population; six of the 10 states with the largest numbers of African Americans were in the South (U.S. Census Bureau, 1991a).

The rapid increases in racial diversity in the United States and in the South during the latter half of the 20th century were accompanied by equally dramatic changes in the age composition of the population. For example, in 1900 the median age of the population was 22.9 years, compared with a much older 32.9 years in 1990. From 1900 to 1990, the percentage of the population under age 15 declined from one-third of the total population to less than 23 percent. Concomitantly, the number of people age 65 and above grew from 3 million or 4 percent of the population in 1900 to over 31 million and 12.5 percent of the total in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992a; Stockwell, 1964). The distribution of the young and old, however, like the racial composition of the population, varies by state and region. In Florida, for example, 18 percent of the total population is 65 and over compared with only 4 percent in Alaska (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992f).

The U.S. population changes noted above are important to policymakers, educators and legislators as they attempt to shape public programs and serve constituents with diverse interests and needs; however, a more detailed assessment of a population's composition is needed by region and state to tailor programs that are effective for local populations. Although age and percentage of the population within various racial categories are often considered in planning social, health and educational services, this paper proposes a more in-depth assessment of the population based upon the concept of dependence. The importance of dependence in population assessments will be demonstrated by examining the population composition of three Southern states with large rural and minority populations.

THE CONCEPT OF DEPENDENCE

In the 1960s, Peterson (1961) and Stockwell (1964) introduced the concept of dependence in studies of the changing composition of the
population. Since then, much less use has been made of the term. Consequently, the purpose of this analysis is to re-introduce the concept of dependence into the literature and to show that age-related dependence can vary greatly by race and by metropolitan and nonmetropolitan residence across the Southern region. This assessment will show that, as a social indicator, dependence has broad implications for rural development programs and service delivery.

Although dependence may be defined in a number of ways, it is generally defined and measured using age-related categories. Although persons of any age may be dependent upon the government, community, and/or other family members for economic or other support, the young and old typically represent the largest categories of dependent persons (Stockwell, 1964). The three major categories of age dependence, therefore, are labeled "youth," "adult or contributor," and "elder." While elder dependence is consistently defined as 65 and above, youth dependence is sometimes defined as under age 15 (Peterson, 1961; Stockwell, 1964) or below age 20 (Moland, 1981). The upper age limit for defining youth has tended to rise in response to increased years spent in formal schooling.

For this analysis, dependence by age is measured using three, socially-meaningful, age categories: youth under 18, contributing adults aged 18-64, and elders aged 65 or above. Age-related dependence ratios are calculated by comparing the number of dependents in a specific age category -- either youth, elder, or both -- per 100 persons of contributing age (Peterson, 1961; Stockwell, 1964). Total dependence is the ratio of all dependents per those of contributing age, or the sum of the youth and elder dependence ratios.

An advantage of measuring dependence by age is that it provides a singular and easily comparable indicator that reflects various age-related conditions within and across populations. These ratios may be used to compare dependence by county, rural and urban designation, state and region (Peterson, 1961). In using a most conservative estimate of dependence, that based on age, it is recognized that regardless of age, some persons in the adult or contributor category also may be dependent due to unemployment, disabilities or educational or cultural disadvantages. It is also assumed that persons under 18 years of age generally are not in the workforce and are dependent upon parents or others for food, housing and other
subsistence needs, while those 65 or over generally have moved beyond their productive working years and depend upon fixed retirement or social security benefits, federal or state health care benefits, and family and community networks. Although such assumptions may not always and entirely hold, the exceptions in one age-grouping tend to offset the exceptions in another category. Not all contributing-aged people are self-sufficient, and some under 18 are self-supporting. Nevertheless, in 1990 only 11.5 percent of those 65 and over were employed (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992f).

In brief, this paper examines age-related dependence in the Southern states of Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi using 1990 census data. Youth, elder, and total dependence ratios are calculated by race for total states, metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas, and nonmetropolitan counties with high percentages of black population.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STATES

Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi form the heart of the old plantation South. They are included in this study because each continues to have large rural areas, significant numbers of rural residents, and populations that are racially diverse. Even though outmigration during the later half of the 20th century led more than four million of the region's African Americans to the urban North and other metropolitan areas, all three states continue to have large African-American populations (Moland 1981; U.S. Census Bureau, 1992b, 1992c, 1992d). As shown in Table 1, each state has more than 25 percent black population, more than twice the national average of 12.1 percent. Of the three, Georgia has the largest number of African-American residents at 1.7 million, and Mississippi has the largest percentage black population nationwide, with 35.6 percent. All three states also have significant nonmetropolitan populations, ranging from 35 percent in Georgia to 70 percent in Mississippi (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992f). Nationally, only about 1 in 4 persons lives in a nonmetropolitan county (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992f).

Although these states have much in common, they possess varying levels of nonmetropolitan residence and varying concentrations of minority populations. This analysis shows that age-related dependence varies greatly by race and by metropolitan and
Table 1. Selected Demographics, 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Percent Black</th>
<th>Percent Nonmet*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US**</td>
<td>248,710</td>
<td>199,686</td>
<td>29,986</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>6,478,216</td>
<td>4,600,148</td>
<td>1,746,565</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALA</td>
<td>4,040,587</td>
<td>2,975,797</td>
<td>1,020,705</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISS</td>
<td>2,573,216</td>
<td>1,633,461</td>
<td>915,057</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percent of State designated as nonmetropolitan by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget.
** United States populations numbers are in thousands.

nonmetropolitan residence across these states. It is likely that the higher dependence found in rural areas and minority populations is related to the displacement from agriculture and farming beginning in the 1940s, when mechanization and technology, along with shifts in agricultural policy and expectations, left many of the residents of the rural South, both black and white, without employment and dependent upon changing social and economic conditions (Wimberley et al., 1991; 1992).

DEPENDENCE IN THE U.S. AND THE SOUTH

In 1990 total dependence in the United States stood at 62 dependents per 100 contributors; that is, for every 100 adults from 18 to 64 years old, there were 62 dependents either below 18 or above 64. Youth dependence contributed the larger proportion at 41 youths per 100 contributors, while elder dependence equalled 20 elders per 100 contributors nationwide. (Because of rounding, the numbers do not add up to 62.)¹ From 1980 to 1990, youth dependence declined from 46 to 41 dependents per 100 contributors, while elder dependence
Table 2. Dependence Ratios in Selected States, 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Dependence Ratios</th>
<th>White Dependence</th>
<th>Black Dependence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elder</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALA</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: Elder dependents are 65 or older. Youth dependents are younger than 18. Total dependents are the sum of youth and elder dependents per 100 population age 18-64. Total may differ due to rounding.

climbed slightly from 18 to 20 (Wimberley and Morris, 1993).

The changes in dependence during the 1980s are related to the nation's demographic structure. By 1990, the baby boom generation -- those born between 1946 and 1964 -- fell entirely within the contributing-age category. This occurrence was a marked change from the 1980 census when the youngest of this large baby boom cohort were still below 18 years of age. Accordingly, the 1990 dependence ratios reflect a slightly expanded contributor population with fewer youth and more elder dependents relative to the contributors. It is important to note that a shift in dependence ratios does not indicate growth or decline in population size. For example, the total dependence ratio in the United States declined from 64 to 62 dependents between 1980 and 1990, while the total population increased from approximately 226 million in 1980 to more than 248 million in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992f).

When the dependence ratios of Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi are compared with those for the United States, striking differences are noted in youth, elder, and total dependence. In 1990, total dependence across these Southern states ranged from 58 per 100 contributors in Georgia to 71 per 100 in Mississippi (Table 2). Overall, Mississippi
Morris has 9 more dependents per 100 contributors than the nation and 13 more dependents than Georgia.

Georgia's lower total dependence ratio is partially due to the state's low elder ratio of 16 elders per 100 contributors, compared with elder ratios of 21 in both Alabama and Mississippi. Mississippi and Alabama, like the nation, average one elder dependent for five contributors, while Georgia's ratio is approximately one elder to six contributors.

Mississippi's higher total dependence is driven by a high youth dependence ratio of 50 youths per 100 contributors. Youth dependence in Georgia and Alabama is 42 and 43, respectively. Whereas Georgia and Alabama have approximately two youths per five contributors, Mississippi has one youth for every two contributors.

Dependence by Race

United States. Not only does dependence vary by state, as shown in Table 2 there are large differences by race in the United States. Total dependence in the black population nationwide is 68 dependents per 100 contributors compared with white dependence at 61. This difference between races can be explained by the dramatically different within-group compositions. In 1990, white youth dependence averaged 38 per 100 contributors, compared with black youth dependence of 54 per 100. Nationally, there are 16 more youth dependents per 100 contributors in the black population than in the white population.

In contrast, though less pronounced, white elder dependence at 22 per 100 contributors is higher than black elder dependence at 14. As shown in Table 2, youths account for more of total dependence among both blacks and whites; however, the proportional contribution to total dependence varies greatly by race. Nationally, black youth dependents outnumber black elder dependents by almost 4 to 1. In contrast, white youth dependents outnumber white elder dependents by a much lower 1.5 to 1 ratio. Total dependence in the black population is largely driven by youth dependence; youth and elder dependence ratios in the white population are more balanced.

Across and within-states. Table 2 also illustrates that dependence varies within race across the three states. For example, total white
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dependence ranges from 54 in Georgia to 63 in Mississippi, and total black dependence ranges from 69 in Georgia to 88 in Mississippi. For the youth and elder components of total dependence, the largest within-race difference is noted in black youth dependence, which is 56 in Georgia and 69 in Mississippi.

It is also important to note that aggregated data conceal within-state differences by race. For example, Alabama’s aggregated dependence ratios closely resemble the U.S. dependence ratios. An examination by race, however, reveals dramatic internal differences and contrasts sharply with the nation. White total dependence in Alabama at 60 per 100 closely parallels the U.S. dependence ratio of 61. For Alabama’s black population, however, total dependence at 80 per 100 contributors much higher than the U.S. ratio of 68 per 100. Although elder, youth and total dependence for whites in Alabama are virtually identical to white dependence nationally, dependence for blacks in Alabama increases for both elders and youths over the national ratios.

Mississippi shows even more dramatic within- and between-race differences in dependence: Black total dependence at 88 is 25 dependents higher than white total dependence in Mississippi, and 20 dependents higher than black total dependence nationwide. Mississippi has 69 black youth dependents per 100 contributors, compared with 40 white youth dependents per 100 contributors.

In summary, dependence varies by age and race across and within each state; however, several trends may be noted. Across the states, total dependence is higher for the black population than the white population, and black youth dependence is much higher than white youth dependence. Conversely, white elder dependence is higher than black elder dependence, although the difference is less pronounced than in youth dependence.

Dependence by Metro and Nonmetro Counties

Across and Within States. Dependence also varies by geographical location, as shown in Table 3. To examine these differences, ratios were developed for metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties as classified on June 30, 1990, for the 1990 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1991b).
Table 3. Dependence by Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Designations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Metro Dependence</th>
<th>Nonmetro Dependence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counties</td>
<td>Elder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALA</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: County metro and nonmetro designations are based on MSA status.

In all three states, total, youth and elder dependence are lower in metro counties than nonmetro counties. Mississippi shows this quite clearly: elder dependence averaged 17 per 100 contributors in metro counties compared with 23 in nonmetro counties; youth dependence averaged 46 in metro and 51 in nonmetro counties; and total dependence averaged 63 in metro and 74 in nonmetro counties. It is important to note, however, that across-state differences reveal that nonmetro total dependence in Georgia at 60 is lower than metro total dependence in Mississippi at 63.

By Race. Dependence by race in metro and nonmetro counties is shown in Table 4. Because dependence ratios generally appeared to be higher in nonmetro areas and for African-American populations, dependence ratios also were calculated for a subset of counties in each state that were nonmetro and had 40 percent or more African-American population. These largely black, nonmetro counties are hereafter referred to as nonmetro 40 percent counties (i.e., NM40%).

Table 4 shows that dependence varies by race, by age and by metro and nonmetro status. Several findings are evident. First, total dependence in the black population is higher than total dependence in the white population at all three levels (metro, nonmetro and NM40%) for all three states. For example, in Georgia's metro counties, black total dependence at 63 is higher than white total dependence at 51. Representing the most extreme difference by race and location, in Alabama's NM40% counties, black total dependence at 96 per 100...
### Table 4. Dependence in Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Locations by Race.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counties</td>
<td>Elder</td>
<td>Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metro</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonmet</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NM40%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metro</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonmet</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NM40%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metro</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonmet</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NM40%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Totals may differ due to rounding.
contributors is 28 dependents higher than white total dependence.

Second, total dependence increases for both whites and blacks as one moves from the metro counties to the most heavily black, nonmetro areas. For example, Alabama’s total dependence increases from 58 to 68 for whites and 76 to 96 for blacks in moving from metro counties to NM40% black counties. This same comparison holds in Georgia and in Mississippi.

Third, black total dependence increases more than white total dependence when comparing metro counties with NM40% counties. In each state, for example, black total dependence increased by 20 or more dependents moving from metro counties to NM40% counties. Total dependence for whites increased by 10 to 15 across the levels.

Fourth, much of the difference in total dependence by race may be explained by black youth dependence. Black youth dependence ratios are higher than white youth dependence ratios in all three states and for metro-nonmetro residence. The largest difference is in NM40% counties in Mississippi; in these 31 counties, black youth dependents numbered 75 per 100 contributors compared with white youth dependents at 40 per 100.

Fifth, white youth dependence remains essentially unchanged across types of counties and varies by no more than two dependents per state across all three locations. Among states, the lowest youth dependence ratio of 36 for whites in metro Georgia is only 4 dependents lower than the highest dependence ratio of 40 for white youth in NM40% Mississippi. Black youth dependence, however, is substantially higher in nonmetro areas of each state. For the black population, however, the lowest youth ratio at 53 in metro Georgia is much lower than the highest at 75 in Mississippi’s NM40% counties.

Sixth, the amount of elder dependence by race contrasts with youth dependence in these states: white elder dependence is higher than black elder dependence in each of the three county classifications across all three states. The largest difference in white and black elder ratios is in NM40% counties. However, for both blacks and whites, elder dependence increases as one compares metro counties with NM40% counties. In Georgia, white elder dependence increased from 15 to 28, in comparing metro and NM40% counties; and in Alabama, black elder dependence moved from 18 to 25, in comparing metro and MN40% counties.
CONCLUSIONS

Federal policies, jobs programs, educational funding and institutional policy are often built upon generic, aggregated data. Frequently overlooked are regional and state variations in race and age composition that do not conform to the norm. Further, differences in rural and urban populations often are unrecognized or not accommodated when policies and programs are implemented. This study, however, points to important differences in the age and racial composition of populations across the rural South.

The aggregated dependence data from Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia resemble that of the rest of the nation. When examined by metro and nonmetro status and by racial groups, however, clearly observable differences in the levels of dependence emerge. Youth, elder and total dependence are higher in nonmetro areas than in metro areas, and the highest levels of dependence exist in nonmetro counties with high percentages of black population.

Total dependence varies by race and is higher for blacks than whites. This difference is primarily due to much higher dependence ratios for black youth. For both blacks and whites, youth dependence represents the larger proportion of total dependence. Furthermore, the difference in white and black youth dependence grows even more pronounced as one moves from metro to nonmetro counties. Additionally, elder dependence, like youth dependence, is highest in nonmetropolitan counties and white elder dependence is higher than black elder dependence at all levels.

Many nonmetropolitan counties in the rural South are disproportionately populated by black children and older whites: this is a legacy of Southern plantation agriculture and shifting employment opportunities from rural to urban areas (Wimberley and Morris, 1993). As the data indicate, more than half the dependent population in many of these rural counties would not qualify for job openings or programs such as Job Training Partnership Act because of their ages. Rather, the quality of their lives would improve with elder daycare, access to healthcare, preschool education, or parenting classes.

During the 1980s, rural areas in general and minority populations in particular were characterized by low income, limited access to health care -- both geographically and financially -- and lower
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educational levels (Hobbs, 1991; Porter, 1989; Ross, 1990; Slesinger, 1991; Summer, 1991). These data suggest that places having the highest dependence may correspond to places with poorest life conditions. Nationally, for example, Mississippi ranks highest in percentage of persons below the poverty level, lowest in per capita income, and fourth in unemployment (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992e), and the data from this study show that Mississippi is significantly higher in dependence across all locations and for both whites and blacks.

If the trends of an increasing aged white population and a younger black population continue, black youth and white elder dependence may intensify in many nonmetro counties across the South. To bring these areas even close to parity with the rest of the country will require community development activities to go far beyond traditional economic development through industrial recruitment. Young children do not hold jobs, the elderly no longer work, and poorly educated workforces are no longer desired by most firms. Highly dependent communities will require specialized programs and external assistance to assist the young in moving from dependence to productive independent adulthood and to help the elderly obtain needed services and maximize their independence.

Dependence is important to state and local policymakers. Just as high levels of dependence in a family unit place economic and other stress upon those of contributing age, high levels of dependence in a population place increased demands upon governmental budgets and services. The wide range of dependence ratios suggests divergent needs and services within and across metro and nonmetro areas. These differences will likely pull many traditional policies and programs into conflict because uniform programs and policies may be dysfunctional in serving places having atypical population compositions. Future studies should address the relationship between dependence and quality of life. Analyses are needed to determine the most effective ways to develop and serve nonmetropolitan and rural populations, both black and white, of whom many are highly dependent.
Endnotes

1 The total number of dependents may vary from the sum of youth and elder dependents due to rounding. The total of 62 U.S. dependents per 100 contributors differs from the sums of 41 for youths and 20 for elders due to rounding. The underlying figures are 41.3 for youths, 20.3 elders, and a total of 61.6 that rounds to 62. Such rounding discrepancies also will occur for other dependence ratios reported here.

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