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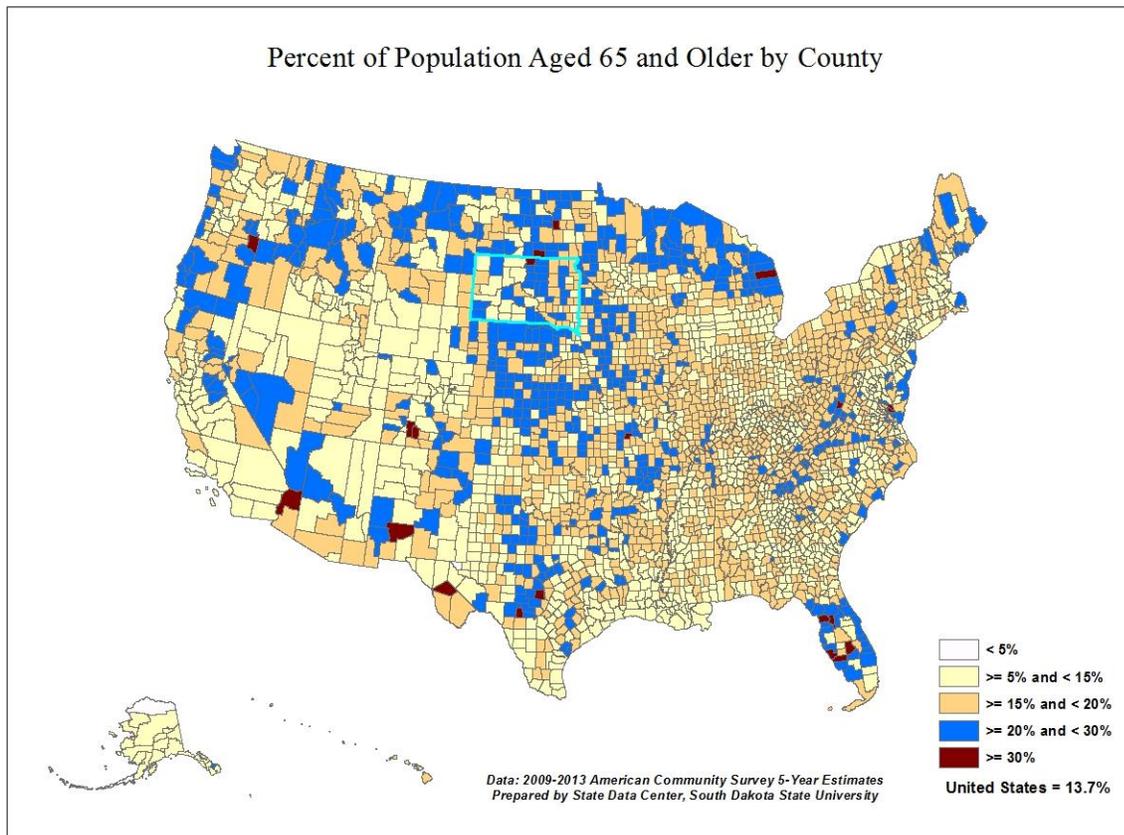
Aging in South Dakota

By Weiwei Zhang¹

A couple of weeks ago, “South Dakota Focus” organized a panel discussion on sustainable elder care in South Dakota. Click [here](#) to watch the video. After the program, I looked into the statistics of the elderly population in our state and documented some facts in this report.

The map in Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the older population as a share of the county population in the US, based on the 2009-2013 5 year American Community Survey estimates. Besides a few counties that had more than 30 percent county population aged 65 and over (shaded in dark brown), there were some clusters of counties with 20 to 30 percent of population aged 65 and over (shaded in blue). South Dakota (highlighted by the bright blue boundary) is one of the states in Great Plains that had a disproportionately large share of population aged 65 and over compared to other parts in the US.

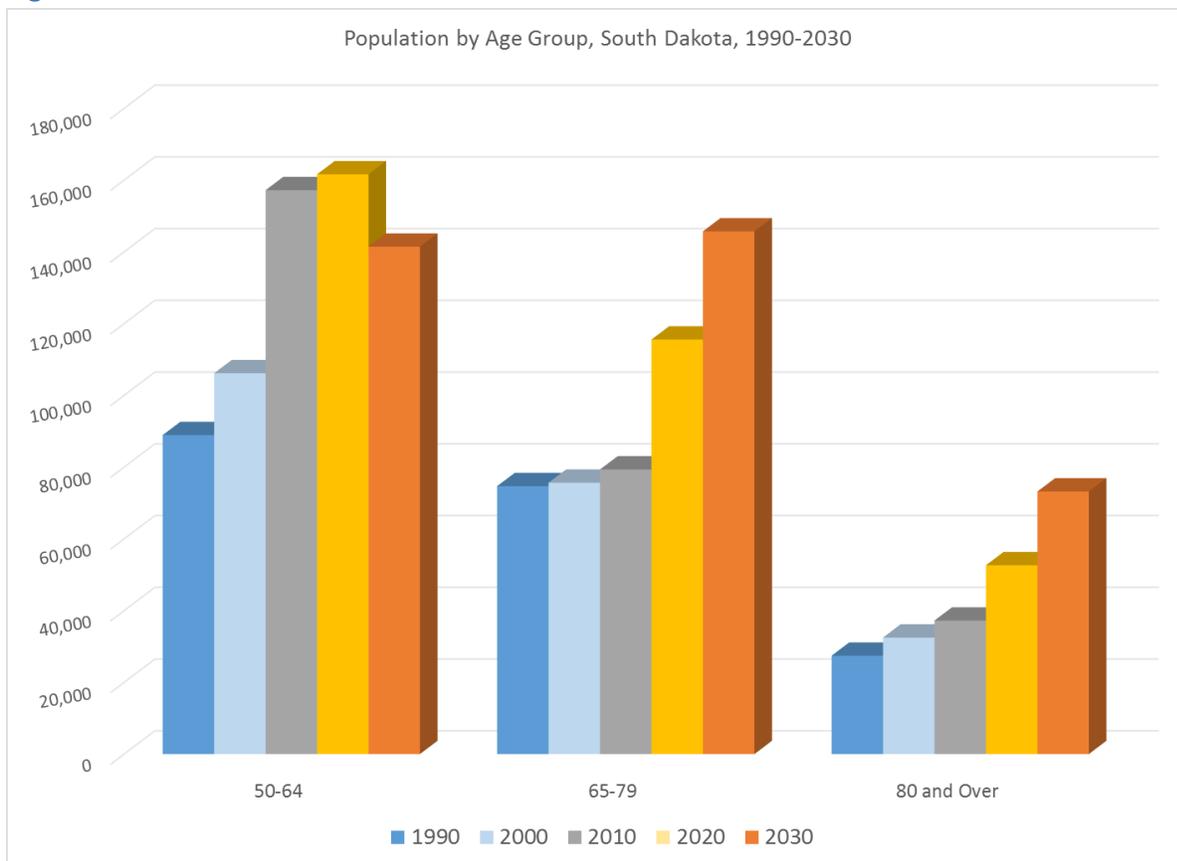
Figure 1



¹ State Demographer, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology and Rural Studies, South Dakota State University

The actual and projected growth trend of the population aged 50 and over in South Dakota from 1990 to 2030 by three groups: 50-64, 65-79, and 80 and over, were presented in bars in Figure 2. Three sets of bars represent three age groups; one bar corresponds one decade with the earlier periods sorted to the left. Compared to the group aged 50 to 64, the two older groups are projected to increase in size more substantially, especially the state oldest old group aged 80 and over in 2030 is projected to triple its size in 1990.

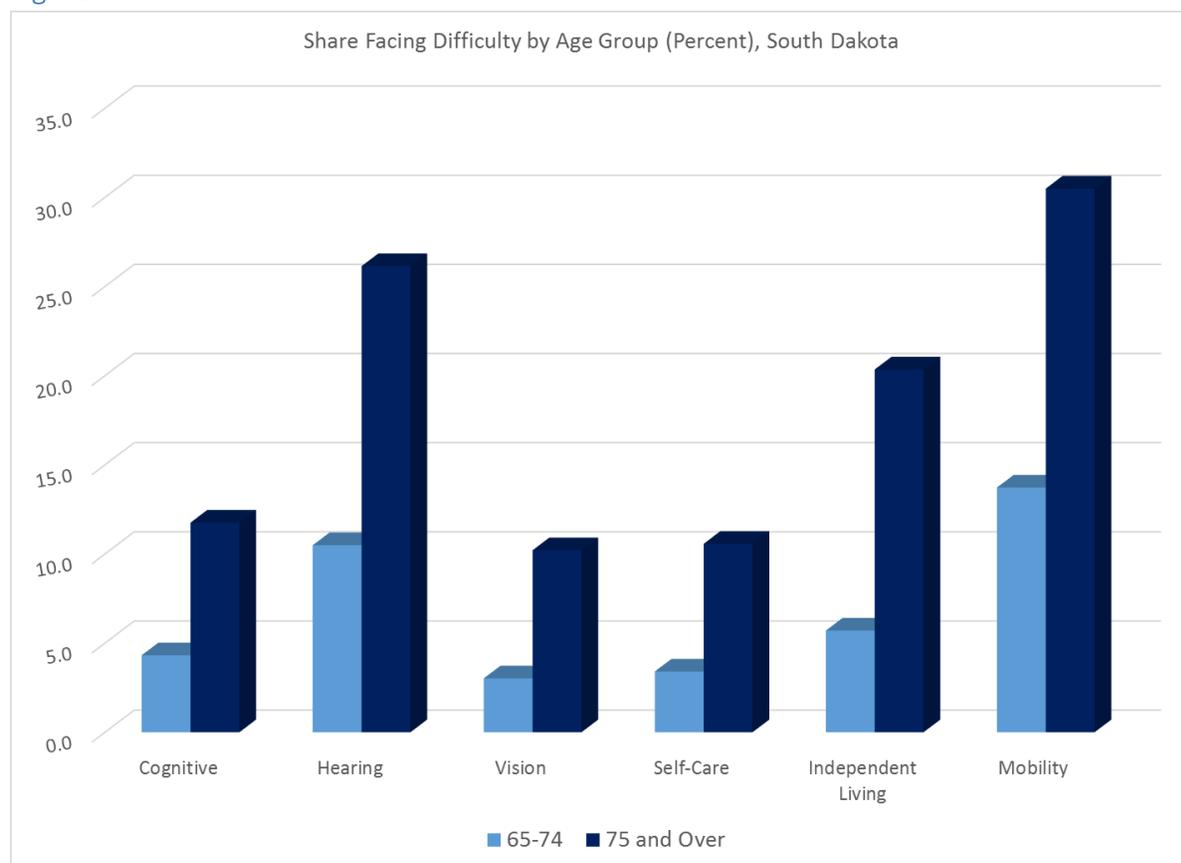
Figure 2



Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Censuses. South Dakota State Population Projections, 2013.

With this projected growth among elderly populations in South Dakota, how much do we know about their living conditions? American Community Survey conducted by Census Bureau collects data on both physical and economic status of the elderly population. First of all, we take a look at the overall physical conditions of the older population in the state. Compared to the population aged 65 to 74, the share of the older people aged 75 and over in South Dakota that experienced a wide range of difficulties in daily life is substantially larger. In Figure 3, proportions of the older population facing different types of difficulties by the two age groups are illustrated in bar charts. The types of difficulties include cognitive, hearing, vision, mobility, self-care, and independent living. Take mobility as an example. The share facing mobility difficulty, defined as having serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs, was doubled in the group aged 75 (30.5 percent) and over compared to the younger group (13.7 percent).

Figure 3



Source: US Census Bureau, 2010-2014 5 Year American Community Survey.

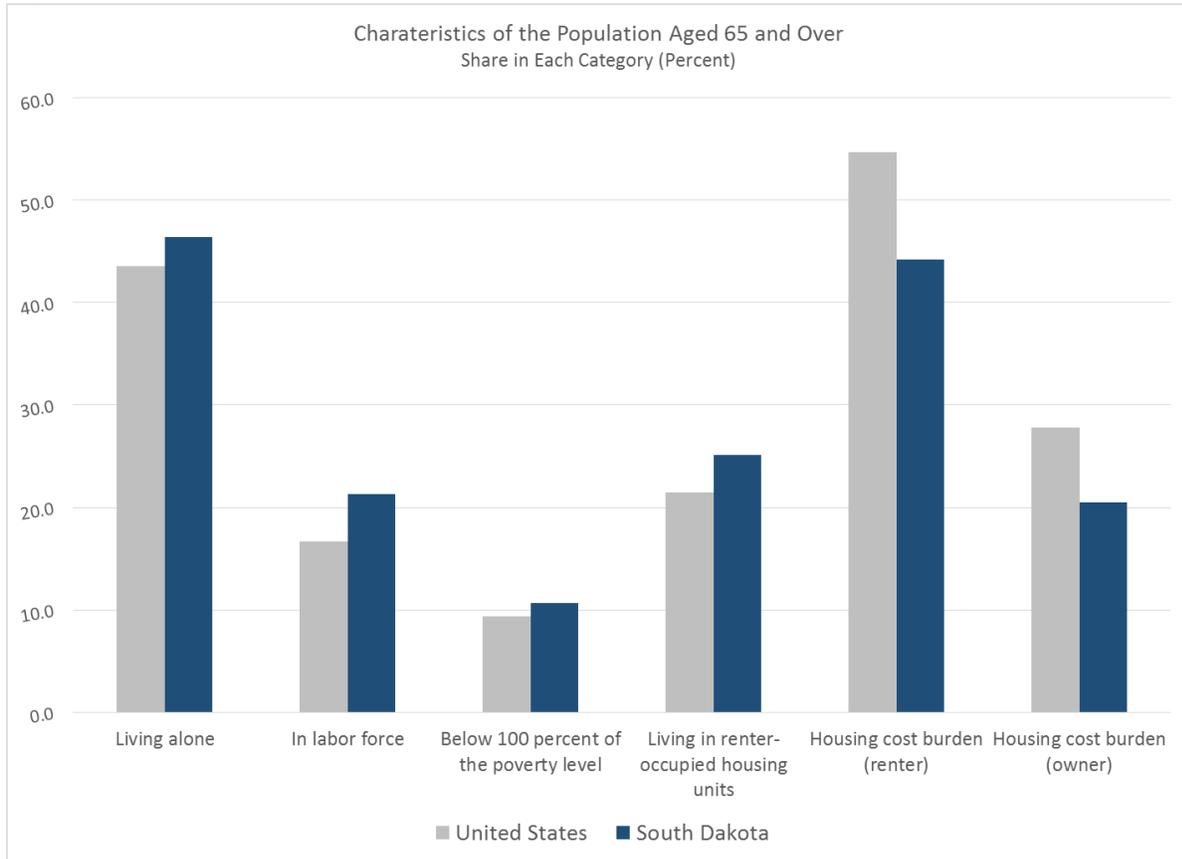
Notes: Cognitive difficulty - Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, having difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions (DREM). Hearing difficulty - deaf or having serious difficulty hearing (DEAR). Vision difficulty - blind or having serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses (DEYE). Self-care difficulty - Having difficulty bathing or dressing (DDRS). Independent living difficulty - Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, having difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping (DOUT). Mobility difficulty - Having serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs (DPHY).

Then how did our older population compare to the nation's older population in terms of social and economic conditions? These comparisons are presented by bar charts in Figure 4 and 5. Bars shaded in gray represent numbers at the national level and bars shaded in blue are for our state. Compared to the nation's older population, people aged 65 and over in South Dakota were more like to be living alone, participating in labor force, in poverty, and living in rental housing units. Take labor force participation as an example. In South Dakota, 33.6 percent of aged 65-74 were still active in labor force, which was significantly higher than the 25.3 percent in the US. Among the population aged 75 and over, the labor force participation rate in South Dakota was also higher than the US (8.5 vs 6 percent).² The share of the older population facing housing cost

² Statistics, not shown in the figures, are derived from the 2010-2014 5 Year American Community Survey Estimates.

burden³ was lower in South Dakota than the US. Finally, a look at the source of income (Figure 5) shows that about 40 percent of the population aged 65 and over in South Dakota reported having earnings, which was slightly higher than the national average. However, only 36.8 percent in South Dakota reported having retirement income, compared to the national average at 48.3 percent.

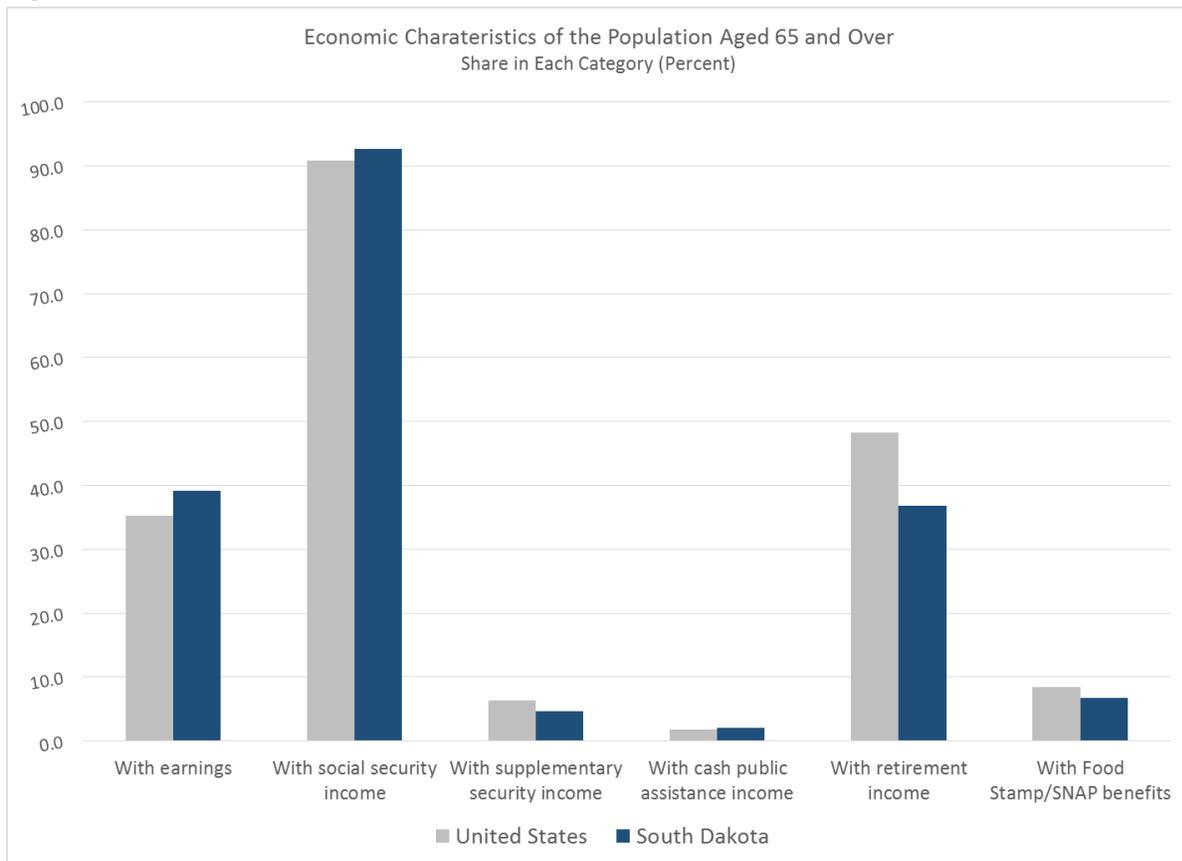
Figure 4



Source: US Census Bureau, 2010-2014 5 Year American Community Survey.

³ Housing cost burden is defined as paying more than 30 percent of the income for housing.

Figure 5



Source: US Census Bureau, 2010-2014 5 Year American Community Survey.

Along with this brief review of the statistics of the elderly population in South Dakota in comparison to the US counterpart, some concerns may arise. How would our state ensure the provision of health care and social assistance to the rapid growing older population aged 80 and over, which indeed would be the group facing much increased probabilities of developing disabilities in a wide range of aspects? The distribution of these population is not random and by no means will be even across the space. We may also want to look into the geography and array our local communities that may be in need of such services to different extent and at different time periods. Furthermore, we would also want to follow up the examination of the social and economic conditions of the elderly population in our state on a regular basis to evaluate how we do in helping the aging in South Dakota.