



Pending Dependency

A person is considered to be in a situation of dependency when he or she is not able to independently and permanently carry out at least one of the basic activities of daily living.

In this Panorama, only basic activities of daily living (ADLs) considered as uniform statistical information are available, but that is not the case with instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs). **IADLs are activities that are considered necessary to lead an independent life, such as eating, bathing, using the toilet, or dressing (WHO 2004).** People with dependency need the support of other people to carry out their daily activities.

Dependence is more prevalent among older adults than among the rest of the population, although younger people with some level of disability are also more likely to experience dependence. However, it must be emphasized that a considerable number of people with disabilities lead an independent life and do not depend on external support for their daily activities, especially when they have access to technical aids and operate in a favorable environment.

Data show that the incidence of difficulties in performing ADLs – and consequently the condition of dependency – increases strongly with age for all activities, particularly after the age of 80, and that the increase is considerably higher in the case of women. But age not only increases the likelihood of having difficulty performing a specific ADL; it also increases the intensity of dependence, measured by the number of such activities with which someone has difficulty, as

Dependent Persons and the Intensity of Dependence (percentage of the population by age and gender)



Número de dificultades 1 2 3+

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the Encuesta Longitudinal de Protección Social in [Chile \(2015\)](#), [Colombia \(2012\)](#), [Paraguay \(2015\)](#), [El Salvador \(2014\)](#), and [Uruguay \(2013\)](#); and the [Estudio de Longevidad y Envejecimiento Saludable, Costa Rica \(2009\)](#).

Almost 8 million people age 60 or older are dependent, which represents more than 1 percent of the total population of the region and 11 percent of the individuals in that age group.

shown in the following graph. The differences between countries are remarkable. In particular, the high proportion of dependent older adults in Costa Rica, Chile, and Mexico stands out, as does the relatively low prevalence of dependence among Uruguayan men.

In addition to age, dependence and its intensity are positively correlated with the presence of chronic diseases and with disability. In Chile, for example, 95.5 percent of healthy seniors are considered autonomous in the performance of all ADLs. This proportion falls to 80.5 percent among those who have a comorbidity of three or more chronic conditions. In any case, it is important to note that the presence of chronic diseases does not in itself mean dependence. In fact, among those over 60 who have at least one chronic disease, only 12.6 percent are dependent.

In the same way, 36.8 percent of Chilean seniors with at least one disability are in a dependent condition, compared to 6.3 percent of those who do not have any disability. The relationship, however, is not unequivocal: almost two-thirds of older adults with at least one disability are autonomous in carrying out of their ADLs.

Number of Older Adults in Dependency Status in Latin America and the Caribbean

In order to estimate the amount of support service needs in the region, we calculate the number of dependents using the dependency rates obtained in the country surveys. For countries that do not have dependency data, we use the average of those for which data exist.

Almost 8 million people age 60 or older are dependent, which represents more than 1 percent of the total population of the region and 11 percent of the individuals in that age group. These figures are significant and show the magnitude of the challenge of assisting people with dependency.

The pressures will be even greater in the future; assuming that dependency rates remain constant, the demographic dynamics themselves will make the number of dependents in the region triple by 2050 and exceed 26 million people, around 14 percent of the older adult population.

Learning material prepared by **Natalia Aranco**.



Copyright © 2019 Inter-American Development Bank. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons IGO 3.0 Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives (CC-IGO BY-NC-ND 3.0 IGO) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/igo/legalcode>) and may be reproduced with attribution to the IDB and for any non-commercial purpose. No derivative work is allowed.

Any dispute related to the use of the works of the IDB that cannot be settled amicably shall be submitted to arbitration pursuant to the UNCITRAL rules. The use of the IDB's name for any purpose other than for attribution, and the use of IDB's logo shall be subject to a separate written license agreement between the IDB and the user and is not authorized as part of this CC-IGO license.

Note that link provided above includes additional terms and conditions of the license.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Inter-American Development Bank, its Board of Directors, or the countries they represent.