Aging Gracefully Through the Journey of Life

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Myth

- Most older people live in institutions
Myth

- Most older adults view themselves in poor health
Myth

- Older adults are unable to learn
Myth

- Older people are at less risk for HIV and AIDS than younger people
Older Adults
Demographics of Older Adults

- 13% currently over 65 in the US (12% in Tuscaloosa, AL\(^1\) & 14% in Tuscaloosa Co.\(^2\))
  - 20% by 2030

- In many countries in the world, 75+ are the fastest growing group

- 43% of oldest old (80+ years) live in 4 countries\(^3\)
  - China, US, India, & Japan
In the U.S., the average life span in 2000 for men was 74 and for women 79.53. 
- Up by 5 years (female)/ 7 years (male) since 1970 and 31 years (female)/28 years (male) since 1900. 
- For those who have managed to make it to age 65, the figures are even more promising: men of 65 can expect to live on average to age 81; women can expect to live on average to age 84.
Ethnic Minority Elders
Ethnic Minority Elders

- Rates of growth of the ethnic minority elders are expected to exceed those of Whites over the next 50 years.
  - 10% in 1990
  - 15% in 2020
  - 21% in 2050
Ethnic Minority Elders

- Hispanic elderly are projected to grow the fastest, from about 2 million in 2000 to over 13 million by 2050. By 2028, older Hispanics are projected to exceed the number of older African Americans.
Aging Descriptors

- Positive:
  - Long in the tooth

- Negative:
  - Crazy, “she doesn’t know what she’s talking about”
  - Ageism

- Neutral:

- How does your ethnicity impact your thoughts/beliefs about your aging body, mind, and relationships?
Rural Elders
Rural Elders

- 25% of the 65 year old and over population of this country live in rural areas
- Rural elders are one of the greatest at-risk groups for experiencing mental health problems
  - In many rural communities there are no psychosocial services available to meet the needs of the rural elderly
Mental Disorders
Mental Disorders

- Most older people enjoy good mental health. However, the number of older adults with mental health problems will quadruple, from 4 million in 1970 to 15 million in 2030.
Common Mental Disorders

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Dementia (mild memory problems to Alzheimer’s)
Other Issues Older Adults Encounter

- Physical Health
- Elder abuse
- Insomnia
- Sexual problems
- Issues related to death & dying
Family Structure
Family Structure

- In the United States there are currently many three, four and five generation families as a result of increased life expectancy.
  - There are fewer persons born into each generation therefore, family trees are smaller.
  - The number of existing generations in families along with the decreased numbers in each generation has produced what Qualls (1996) describes as “tall, skinny, family trees.”
Intergenerational Relations

- Elder Care
- Older adults assisting in child care
- Custodial grandparenting
Successful Aging
Aging Gracefully

- Cognitive complexity:
  - Crystallized intelligence (knowledge) remains the same
  - Development of wisdom

- Emotional complexity:
  - More focused on maintaining positive emotion
  - Better able to regulate emotion

- Potential for greater self-knowledge
Aging Gracefully is\(^5\)... 

- Living to an advanced age
- Having good physical health
- Having a positive mental outlook
- Being cognitively alert
- Having a good memory
- Being socially involved
Successful Aging Strategies

- Read
- Take adult ed courses
- Travel
- Interact with family, friends, etc.
- Hobby
- Volunteer
- Laugh
- Learn, Learn, Learn
Successful Aging Strategies

- Exercise
- Eat right
- Don’t smoke
- See a physician regularly
- Safety issues (falls & seatbelt, etc.)
- Limit sun exposure
- Plan for LT financial needs
- Enjoy LIFE!!
Policy Recommendations

- Increase training in the psychology of aging at the doctoral and post doctoral level
- Expand basic & applied research at NIMH/NIA
- Support legislation to increase the availability of & access to effective mental health services for older adults
- Increase coordination of mental & physical health care
- Reduce stigma
Resources

- **AgePage**
  - [http://www.niapublications.org/shopdisplayproducts.asp?id=45&cat=All+Age+Pages](http://www.niapublications.org/shopdisplayproducts.asp?id=45&cat=All+Age+Pages)
  - Some available in English and Spanish

- **FOCUS**
  - Transportation and other services for older adults
  - 205-758-3393 or [http://www.focustuscaloosa.org](http://www.focustuscaloosa.org)

- **West Alabama Regional Commission-Tuscaloosa Area Agency on Aging**
  - 205-339-2990 or [http://www.warc.info](http://www.warc.info)

- **Elder Law Clinic**
  - Legal services for those 65 and older
  - 205-348-4960 or [http://www.uaelderlaw.org](http://www.uaelderlaw.org)

- **The University of Alabama Psychology Clinic**
  - 205-348-5000, Monday through Friday
References

2. 2007 population estimates by US Census Bureau.