



Aging Gracefully Through the Journey of Life

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July, 2003



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, AL¹ & 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 countries³
 - China, US, India, & Japan

Gender

- 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 Gracefully⁴

- 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 is⁵...

- 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>
 - Some available in English and Spanish
- FOCUS
 - Transportation and other services for older adults
 - 205-758-3393 or <http://www.focustuscaloosa.org>
- West Alabama Regional Commission-Tuscaloosa Area Agency on Aging
 - 205-339-2990 or <http://www.warc.info>
- Elder Law Clinic
 - Legal services for those 65 and older
 - 205-348-4960 or <http://www.uaelderlaw.org>
- The University of Alabama Psychology Clinic
 - 205-348-5000, Monday through Friday

References

1. 2005-2007 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates.
2. 2007 population estimates by US Census Bureau.
3. He, W., Sengupta, M., Velkoff, V. A., & DeBarros, K. A. (December 2005). *65+ in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
4. Knight, B. G. (2004). *Psychotherapy with Older Adults*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
5. Laditka, S. B., Corwin, S. J., Laditka, J. N., Liu, R., Tseng, W., Wu, B., et al. (2009). Attitudes about aging well among a diverse group of older Americans: Implications for promoting cognitive health. *The Gerontologist*, 49(S1), S30-S39.