THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORTS: FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND NEIGHBORS, AND COMMUNITIES
THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF INFORMAL SUPPORTS

• Social Integration
  • The degree to which an individual is involved with others in his/her environment
  • Includes social networks and social support

• Reciprocal Exchanges
  • Being able to help others
IMPACT OF INFORMAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL SUPPORTS ON WELL-BEING

- Giving/receiving support contributes to perception of support availability
- Interactions/informal networks associated with improved cognitive functioning
- Social support mediates adversity/negative life experiences
- Association between social support structures and reduced mortality risk
- Elders can expand /diversify their networks
CHANGING FAMILY STRUCTURE

• About 66% of older adults live in a family setting

• Factors associated with greatest geographic proximity to the nearest child
  • Family size
  • Health of parent
  • Age of parents
  • Parent’s socioeconomic status
  • Marital status
FIGURE 9.1  Living Arrangements of Persons 65+
GROWTH OF THE MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILY

• Among Americans over age 35, 80% live in multigenerational families.

• A growing number of people over age 65 have a child over age 65.

• Multigenerational Families
  • A family with three or more generations alive at the same time
CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILIES

- Multigenerational families are more common among ethnic minorities than Caucasian populations.
- American culture and economic pressures can weaken multigenerational support in immigrant and refugee populations.
OLDER PARTNERS

- Couples are faced with learning to adapt to changing roles and expectations.
- Most older adults appear satisfied with their relationship.
- An increasing proportion of older adults are choosing divorce.
- Research on lesbian and gay partners is relatively new.
- Sibling relationships in old age are characterized by a shared history, egalitarianism, and increasing closeness.
- The majority of never-married older people develop reciprocal relationships with other kin.
- For childless older adults family and friends play key roles.
MARITAL STATUS OF PERSONS 65+

FIGURE 9.2  Marital Status of Persons 65+
INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS: ADULT CHILDREN

- Approximately 50 percent of older people have daily contact with adult children.
- Nearly 80 percent see an adult child at least once a week.
- More than 75 percent talk on the phone at least weekly with an adult child.
GRANDPARENTHOOD/GREAT-GRAND PARENTHOOD

• Intergenerational Stake Hypothesis
  • the older generation tends to be more invested in future generations around transmission of values

• Grandparents are increasingly custodial caregivers of grandchildren.

• Great-Grandparents
  • Increasing numbers of great-grandparents
STYLES OF GRANDPARENTING

- Authoritative Style
- Individualized Style
- Involved Style
- Remote Style
- Companionate Style
GRANDPARENTS AS PRIMARY CAREGIVERS OF GRANDCHILDREN

- Legal
- Financial
- Child Care
- Medical Insurance
- Schooling
- Psychological/emotional challenges for both grandparent & grandchild
EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON GRANDPARENTHOOD

• Grandparents’ Rights
  • U.S. Supreme Court (2000) ruled that the right of responsible parents to raise their children as they see fit takes precedence over state laws that give grandparents wide visitation rights
FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS AS SOCIAL SUPPORTS

• Friends are important sources of intimacy and exchange confidences. 
  • especially true after a major role transition.

• Socioemotional Selectivity Theory
  • individuals over the life course are surrounded by a conclave or group of 
    people engaged in exchanges of social support.
INTERVENTIONS TO STRENGTHEN OR BUILD SOCIAL SUPPORTS

• Intergenerational programming
  • services that facilitate interaction of people across generations

• Most typical intergenerational program involves older adults serving children and youth.

• Sharing physical space encourages intergenerational contact.