Assignment # 1: The Aging Population

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1. Lifestyles – What are the social issues older adults are confronted with as they advance in age?

According to Eliopoulos (2014), the older adult population often experiences social issues such as isolation and feelings of loneliness. The death of a spouse can have a huge impact and can cause feelings of loneliness for the aging individual. The adjustment from having a constant companion to living alone is often very difficult and can be quite detrimental to the overall health of the individual if not dealt with correctly. As people age it is highly likely that they will witness their children move out of the home, on with their life and begin to build families of their own. The loss of their role as caretaker and the general loss of the presence of their children can also contribute to their loneliness. The death of friends can also have a negative impact on the aging adult, especially when they were the main source of social interaction. Social challenges can present in the aging adult with deficits in hearing and speech, as well as, those whose level of functioning has diminished.

2. What are current trends in life expectancy older adults can anticipate?

Currently, “more people [are] reaching old age [and] living longer once they do” (Eliopolous, 2014, p. 4). Reasons include, “advancements in disease control and health technology, lower infant and child mortality rates, improved sanitation, and better living conditions” (Eliopoulos, 2014, p. 4). Current trends show that “the gap in life expectancy has widened among the races [and is] narrowing between the sexes” (Eliopoulos, 2014, p. 4).

3. Marital status – What are the marital issues for older adults?

As the life expectancy of the aging population continues to increase, so do the differences in percentages between sexes pertaining to their marital status, which “affects income, mobility, housing, intimacy, and social interaction” (Konecny, 2012). Being that widowhood is more common amongst older women than men, more women “are likely to be poor, live alone, and have a greater degree of functional impairment and chronic disease” (Konecny, 2012).

4. What are the current trends regarding marital status among the elderly?

According to Eliopoulos (2014), there are currently many more married men over the age of 65 than women. Women between the ages of 65 and 74 are “three times as likely as men in the same age group to be widowed” (OA, 2008). Divorce, separation, and/or an absent spouse occur in small yet relatively similar proportions between both sexes, as well as, those that have never been married (Eliopoulos, 2014, p.6). As the aging population continues to grow and more people enter ages older than 85, “the difference amongst percentages of older men and women is anticipated to grow…in which women are the obvious majority” (Konecny, 2012).

5. Living arrangements – What are the residential issues for the older adults?

An array of issues regarding living arrangements often arises for older adults. These include concerns about safety, both internal and external. Homes may require modifications to better facilitate those that may have deficits and diminishing function, such as installing safety bars in bathrooms and removing any clutter and area rugs. It may also be necessary to enhance security measures to better protect from robberies and prepare for any emergencies that may occur in the home. Furthermore, it is important to note that people in this population are “more likely to lose a home as a result of property taxes and maintenance costs that were difficult to pay on a fixed income” (Konecny, 2012).

6. What are the current trends regarding living accommodations for older adults?

Current trends show “most older adults live in a household with a spouse or other family member” (Eliopoulos, 2012, p. 6). However, it is also true that “approximately 10.8 million people live alone” and “women comprise a majority of this group, numbering 7.9 million to 2.9 million men” (Konecny, 2012). According to Older Americans 2010 (2008), “older non-Hispanic white women and black women were more likely than women of other races to live alone” and “older black men lived alone more often than older non-Hispanic white men.” Other current trends regarding living accommodations include residing with relatives and non-relatives, which is far more common amongst older women than men (OA 2010, 2008, p. 8).

7. Geographic distribution – What are the geographic considerations older adults contemplate when determining where they will reside in the United States?

Considerations taken into account when older adults contemplate where they will reside include distance to nearest caregiver, “a more economical location…or a location with a temperate climate and recreational activties” (Konecny, 2012). Preferences may also include a metropolitan area over a suburb or vice versa. The location of friends and family members, especially their children and grandchildren may also have an impact on where they will reside in the United States.

8. What are the current trends regarding geographic distribution of older adults in the United States?

According to Older Americans 2010 (2008), “in 2008, Florida had the highest proportion of people age 65 and over, 17 percent” (p. 3). However, “they are less likely to change residences than other age groups” (Konecny, 2012). Nonetheless, relocations do occur, such as for retirement, during “countermigration” (which takes place after retirement), and for social and economic reasons (Konecny, 2012).

9. Income and employment – What are the economic issues facing older adults in regards to income and employment?

As the aging population grows, more people aged 65 and older are becoming more dependent on Social Security and other resources as their sole sources of income (Eliopoulos, 2014, p. 6). These, along with private pension plans have and continue to leave members of the aging population in poverty due to inflation and lack of accumulated assets (Eliopoulos, 2014, p. 41). Inadequate savings and retirement planning contributes to the dilemma.

Employed older adults are being replaced by a cheaper and younger labor force, which can leave them unemployed and without a sufficient income prior to their financial goals being met. This age group is also likely to experience discrimination in the workplace, as well as, during the hiring process. They may also face a disadvantage in reentering the workforce after being unemployed for some time.

10. What are the current trends in employment and income for older adults in the United States?

According to Older Americans 2010 (2008), many older adults have climbed into the middle income and high income brackets, and have a higher median household income. Data shows that of four sources of income, “Social Security provided 37 percent, earnings provided 30 percent, pensions provided 19 percent, and asset income accounted for 13 percent” (OA, 2008, p. 14). Poverty is still a real issue amongst older adults, especially women over 65 years old. Differences also exist in percentage of poverty based on ethnicities – “only 7.4% of older whites were poor in 2007 compared to 23.2% of older African Americans and 17.1% of Latinos” (Konecny, 2012).

As life expectancy increases, the amount of older adults in the labor force, as well as, the amount of years spent working. For many reasons, “many older men and women have continued to work past the expected age of 65 (retirement)” (Konecny, 2012). Current trends show that men 65 years and older are experiencing a slow increase in labor force participation after a period of decline in the mid-20th century (OA, 2008, p. 18). An increase in participation of older women in the workforce between the ages of 65-70 became apparent in the mid-1990s and continues to grow (OA, 2008, p. 19). However, “the difference between labor force participation rates for men and women has narrowed over time” (OA, 2008, p. 19).

11. Education – What are the educational issues older adults, particularly older women, are challenged with?

Level of education continues to be a standing issue with the older adult population. This is especially common amongst older women aged 65 and over, where “their age, limited education, lack of skills, and long period of unemployment while raising their families are limitations in a competitive job market” (Eliopoulos, 2014, p. 39). In addition, “low levels of education can impair older adults’ abilities to live a healthy lifestyle, access service and benefit programs, recognize health problems and seek appropriate care, and follow recommendations for care” (Konecny, 2012).

12. What are the current trends in education for the older adult in the United States?

Although generally less educated, older adults continue to attain higher levels of education. Recent reports show that “77 percent were high school graduates or more, and 21 percent had a Bachelor’s degree or more” in 2008, up from 24 and 5 percents, respectively, in 1965 (OA, 2008, p. 6). Nonetheless, “substantial educational differences exist among racial and ethnic groups” with non-whites showing the greatest disadvantage (OA, 2008, p. 7).

13. Health issues – What are the health issues older adults are challenged with in the United States?

The increase in life expectancy and number of older adults living longer lives has introduced health challenges. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2013), “a major shift occurred in … older adults, from infectious diseases and acute illnesses to chronic diseases and degenerative illnesses” (p. ii). It is important to take into consideration the significance of the technological and medical advancements that are currently available, which have greatly impacted the state of health of the general older population. However, health issues they *are* currently faced with include heart disease, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, such as COPD, stroke and Alzheimer’s disease, diabetes, and influenza and pneumonia (CDC, 2013, p. 3). These chronic conditions can lead to disability, which can have a negative impact on the quality of life of the older individual.

14. What are the current health trends senior citizens residing in the United States can expect?

New technologies, and the availability and access to information pertaining to one’s health and how to maintain it has proven to be beneficial to the human race, particularly the older population, in a general sense. Adults aged 65 and over in the United Stated have current health trends that are representative of a population that is more proactive and involved in their health than they were twenty years ago. In a study conducted by Akushevich, Kravchenko, Ukrainsteva, Arbeev, and Yashin (2012), the incidence of 19 different diseases (age-related) was monitored in a random sample of Medicare recipients over the age of 65. Findings showed that “rates of Alzheimer’s disease, stroke, and heart failure increased with age, while the rates of cancers of lung and breast, angina pectoris, diabetes, asthma, emphysema, arthritis, and goiter became lower at advanced ages” (Akushevich, et al., 2012). However, “current data on health-related behaviors among people aged 55-64 years do not indicate a positive future for the health of older Americans” (CDC, 2013, p. 5). With the recent movement of healthcare from acute care settings to the community, special attention should be paid by the nurse to promote active involvement in their care to prepare for further aging.

References

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