

Gerontology: August 29, 2012

## **Population Aging: Challenges and Opportunities**

Objectives:

1. What is gerontology?
2. Increases in life expectancy
3. World wide trends in life expectancy
4. Who are the baby boomers?
5. Implications of population aging

### **What is Gerontology?**

- Interdisciplinary scientific study of aging and the aging process.
- Relatively new discipline

### **What is Geriatrics?**

- Study of the diseases of the elderly.

### **Older Adults**

- Young-old: 65-74
- Old-old: 75-84
- Oldest old: 85 and older
- Centenarians: 100 years old & over

### **The Meaning of Age**

→ How old do you feel today?

- *Chronological Age*: calendar age
- *Perceived Age*: age you think of yourself as – “You’re only as old as you feel”  
“ 50 is the new 40”

- *Biological Age*: functioning of vital systems (smoking, alcohol, etc.)
- *Psychological age*: functioning of psychological abilities (where you are relative to what we would expect)

- **Are there limits to the human lifespan?**
- **How old is the oldest living person?**  
Woman: 116      Man: 115

### **Increased Life Expectancy Due to:**

- Reduction in Acute Diseases
  - Medical and Public Health Advances
- Reduction in infant mortality
- Reduction in female mortality at childbirth
- Treatment advances in Chronic Disease

## **Life Expectancy**

- The number of years that will probably be lived by the average person born in a given year.
- Average life expectancy is 78 years (80 years for women, 75 years for men)

## **How long will you live?**

### **Related to:**

1. Gender
2. Genetics
3. Lifestyle

## **Crash Course in Demography**

*Population aging:* term for shifts in the age distribution of the population toward older ages.

*Cohort:* group of people born in the same year.

## **Why do you care?**

Population changes affect families, social policy, economics, & well-being.

## **Change in Age Structure for U.S. related to:**

1. Increase in average life expectancy
2. Change in immigration patterns
3. Change in fertility patterns across cohorts

## **Ethnic and Racial Variations**

- Elderly population of 2050:
  - Non-Hispanic White will decrease to 58%
  - Hispanic American will increase to 18%
  - African Americans will increase to 15%
  - Asian Americans will increase to 9%
- Entire population much more ethnically diverse in 2050;

## **Gender Variations**

- Increase in female life expectancy
- The majority of older women are single
  - Single women highest poverty rate among the aged
  - More likely to be institutionalized compared to men

## **What about the Baby Boomers?**

- Born in 1946-1964 (1/4 of U.S. population)
- Blamed for nation's problems & successes
- Profound effects on society from childhood through adulthood
- Higher levels of education than previous cohorts

- Experienced social change (e.g., Civil Rights movement, Sexual Revolution, etc.)
- Characterized by *heterogeneity*
- Leading edge vs. trailing edge
- Changes in work and family; implications for population aging

### **Implications of Population Aging**

*What are some of the potential implications of population aging?*

### **Aging & The Environment**

*Structural changes in society*

1. Transportation
2. Housing
3. Technology

### **Marketing to the Baby Boomers:**

- Financial services, health care, travel/hospitality, and retirement housing