Death and Grieving

**What is death?**

- Functional death
- Brain death
- Legal death

**Infant Mortality Rates**

- Congenital Defects
- Preterm Birth and Low Birth Weight
- SIDS

**Leading Causes of Death**

**Infancy**

1. Congenital Defects
2. Preterm Birth and Low Birth Weight
3. SIDS

**Early Childhood**

1. Accidents
2. Congenital Defects
3. Cancer
Death and Grieving

Leading Causes of Death

**Middle Childhood**
1. Accidents
2. Cancer
3. Homicide

**Adolescence**
1. Accidents
2. Homicide
3. Suicide

**Leading Causes of Death**

**Middle Adulthood**
- Heart Attack
- Stroke

**Late Adulthood**
- Cancer
- Stroke
- Heart Disease

**Leading Causes of Death in Early Adulthood**

Variations in Health

- U.S. death rates in early adulthood higher than other industrialized nations
- SES variations
- Environmental factors
- Lack of universal health care
Death and Grieving

SES(?) and Self-Reports of Health

Chronic Diseases in Middle-Late Adulthood
- Arthritis: Typically begins after age 40
- Diabetes: Most likely to occur in people between the ages of 50 and 60
- Hypertension (high blood pressure): One of the most frequent chronic disorders found in middle age

Gender Differences in Middle Age Health
- Women: More non-life threatening illnesses, smoke less, drink less alcohol, have less dangerous jobs
- Men: More serious illnesses

Coronary Heart Disease
- Largest cause of death of men in middle age
  - Both genetic and experiential characteristics are involved
Type A Behavior Pattern

- Characterized by
  - Competitiveness, impatience, and a tendency toward frustration and hostility

- More susceptible to heart disease
- Evidence is only correlational so cannot say Type A behavior causes heart disease

Type B Behavior Pattern

- Characterized by
  - Non-competitiveness, patience, and a lack of aggression

- Less than half the risk of coronary disease than Type A people

Psychological and Mental Disorders in Late Adulthood

Common Psychological Disorders

15 to 25 percent of those over age 65 show some symptoms of psychological malady

- Major depression
- Dementia

Alzheimer’s Disease

- Progressive brain disorder
- Produces loss of memory and confusion
**Symptoms of Alzheimer’s Disease**

- Develops gradually
- Forgetfulness
- Affects recent memories first
- Then older memories fade
- Total confusion, inability to speak intelligibly or recognize closest family members
- Loss of voluntary muscle control

**The Biology of Alzheimer’s Disease**

- What about a genetic link?
  - Inherited disorder
  - Nongenetic factors such as high blood pressure or diet may increase susceptibility
  - Cross-cultural influences

**Treatment and Cure**

- No cure
- Treatment deals only with the symptoms
- Drugs effective in only half of Alzheimer’s patients
- Many end up in nursing homes
Death and Grieving

### Caring for People with Alzheimer’s Disease
- Make patients feel secure
- Provide labels for everyday objects
- Keep clothing simple
- Put bathing on a schedule
- Prevent people with the disease from driving

### Adulthood and Understanding of Death

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Key Points</th>
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| Early adulthood| • avoidance  
                  • death anxiety  
                  • death considered distant                                                |
| Middle adulthood| • begin to think of death  
                      • fear of death is the greatest  
                      • aware of limited time left to live  
                      • focus on tasks to be completed                                           |
| Late adulthood | • think and talk more of death  
                      • less anxiety about death  
                      • practical concern about how and when                                      |

### Lifespan Averages

- **Ethnicity/Nationality**
  - Caucasian in US: 76 years
  - African American: 71 years
  - Japanese: 79 years
  - Gambian: 45 years
- **Gender averages**
  - Male born in the US: 73 years
  - Female born in the US: 80 years

*(Source: Anderson, 2023)*
Are there steps toward death?

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross
- Theory of death and dying
- Built on extensive interviews with people who were dying
- Input from those who cared for them

Evaluating Kübler-Ross’ Theory

**PROS**
- Systematic observations
- Increased public awareness
- Affected practices and policies related to dying

**CONS**
- Largely limited to those who are aware that they are dying
- Less applicable to people who suffer from diseases in which the prognosis is uncertain
- Stage-like increments questioned
- Anxiety levels not included

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

- **Euthanasia**
  - Passive
  - Voluntary active

- **Assisted suicide**
  - Kevorkian
Death and Grieving

What is the difference?

- Bereavement
- Grief

Grieving in the Western World

1st stage
- shock, numbness, disbelief, or outright denial

2nd stage
- confront the death and realize extent of their loss

3rd stage
- accommodation

When Grief Goes Awry

- Grieving may take considerably longer than a year (for some people)
- 15 to 30 percent of people show depressive symptoms following loss of loved one

One of the Best Pay-Offs: Longevity

(Chart: Higher fitness level = lower death rate; One of the Best Pay-Offs: Longevity; Mar et al., 1996)
Death and Grieving

Disengagement Theory: Gradual Retreat

- Late adulthood involves gradual withdrawal from world on physical, psychological, and social levels
- Withdrawal is a mutual process and not necessarily negative

Activity Theory: Continued Involvement

- Happiness and satisfaction from high level of involvement
- Adaptation to inevitable changes
- Continuing/replacing previous activities

And so...

Neither disengagement theory nor activity theory provides a complete picture of successful aging

Continuity Theory: A Compromise Position

- People need to maintain their desired level of involvement in society to maximize their sense of well-being and self-esteem
- Regardless of activity level, most older adults experience positive emotions as frequently as younger individuals
- Good physical and mental health is important in determining overall sense of well-being
Finding the Fountain of Youth

- Telomere therapy
- Unlocking longevity gene
- Reducing free radicals through antioxidant drugs
- Reducing calories
- Bionic solution: replacing worn-out organs