

Eldercare: coping with a major life stress of adult life



JOHN D. RANSEEN, PH.D. PSYCHIATRY
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Quotes



- **Old age is 15 years older than I am**
 - Oliver Wendell Holmes
- **Old age ain't no place for sissies.**
 - Bette Davis
- **Every man desires to live long, but no man would be old.**
 - Jonathan Swift
- **All diseases run into one, old age**
 - Ralph Waldo Emerson

background



- **Psych dept. liaison to UK Eldercare office**
 - Office director- Terri Kanatzar
- **HH talk- 2000**
- **Experience as a neuropsychologist evaluating elderly people.**
- **Personal experience over the past few years.**

Study: who is stressed by eldercare?



× Informal design:

+ Pilot study.

× Interviewed 19 middle age adults (approx. age 47-68) across 4 settings:

Results



- 15 of 19 expressed some stress ranging from mild to severe regarding their current personal involvement with ongoing eldercare of parent or parent of spouse.
 - 2 confided to seeking psychiatric treatment as a result (medications from PCP).
- Findings will be used to illustrate various points about eldercare.

Aging: Fun Facts



- Life expectancy rose 56% from 1900 to 2000.

	1900	2000	2050
Life expectancy	49.2	76.8	
At age 65	11.9	18.0	
At age 85	4.0	6.5	
% of life spent ill	1%	10%	
# of elderly with AD		4.5 million	13 million (proj.)

Quotes



- There's one advantage to being 102. There's no peer pressure.
 - Dennis Wolfberg
- Age is a high price to pay for maturity.
 - Tom Stoppard
- Life is a moderately good play with a badly written 3rd act.
 - Truman Capote

Trends during the 20th century



- ✘ Movement from rural to urban lifestyle.
- ✘ Influx of females into the workforce
- ✘ Increasing % of dual working couples
- ✘ Delay in having babies.
- ✘ Car culture and development of the interstate highway system and air travel.
- ✘ Rise in divorce rate and reconfigured families.
- ✘ Unprecedented wealth and leisure time.

Also



- Fertility increase/ spike after WWII– the “baby boomer” generation.
- This spike hit it’s fullest in 1957.
- First boomers hit age 65 in 2011 (that would be now).

Meaning?



- ✘ High % of people leave their families of origin; move away from parents.
- ✘ Delayed having kids so are older when parents are aging and may get caught caring for kids and parents.
- ✘ A couple may live a fairly hectic lifestyle with both working.
- ✘ May be involved in various permutations of blended families.

So what you ask?



- ✘ Boomer generation has often found themselves with aging parents who can no longer take care of themselves at a time where they don't live in the same place as their parents, may still be raising children and are both working long hours. Because of divorce and remarriage, many are finding the situations more complicated.
- ✘ This trend will not be confined to the boomer generation.

Quotes



- Years ago we discovered the exact point, the dead center of middle age. It occurs when you are too young to take up golf and too old to rush the net.
Franklin Adams
- I recently had my annual physical exam, which I get once every 7 years, and when the nurse weighed me I was shocked to discover how much stronger the earth's gravitaional pull has become since 1990.
Dave Barry

Quotes



- True terror is to wake up one morning and discover that your high school class is running the country.
 - Kurt Vonnegut

Eldercare estimates



- 20-25% of the working population has some eldercare responsibility (1992).
- Average hours per week= 6-10 hr.
- Duration: 5-7 years.
- 40% also have children in the home.
- Net effect– extra responsibility
- Impact on work– missing time, interruptions, may need to quit.

When does one decide that a parent or parents need care?



- **No hard and fast rules.**
- **Physical and/ or mental disability that prevents independent living.**
- **Request by parents.**
- **Health crisis, death of spouse, lack of safety, car wrecks, financial mismanagement, living situation that is untenable, etc.**

Quotes



- Old age is the most unexpected of all the things that can happen to a man.
 - Leon Trotsky
- I don't know how you feel about old age . . . But in my case I didn't even see it coming. It hit me from the rear.
 - Phyllis Diller
- Old age is like a plane. Once you're onboard there's nothing you can do.
 - Golda Meir

Advice #1: Plan for the problem



- **Planning for eldercare is a really good idea.**
 - Better not to have to deal with this in a crisis situation. This planning may take years.
- **Usually this involves conversation with parent(s) about options.**
 - Adult children often have difficulty having this conversation (as do parents).
 - May be inhibited by 'boomer' attitudes. All things having to do with aging are fixable; lack of interest in thinking about old age and what it means.

Advice #2: Make a decision about where and who will (help) deliver care



- **Options for eldercare:**
 - Move to be closer to adult child
 - Live with or near adult child
 - Hire someone into the home
 - Independent living facilities
 - Assisted living/ nursing home
- **Options are greatly dependent upon financial resources.**
- **Estimate of 7 million doing eldercare from a distance.**

Who does bulk of eldercare?



- **Studies have tended to indicate two factors are more apt to lead to eldercare:**
 - Daughters
 - Location— proximity. Who lives closest.
 - However, studies in recent years have indicated that sons are almost as likely to engage in eldercare.

Advice 3: Important to make good decision about who should be most involved in eldercare



- **Proximity and logistics loom large:**
 - Who is financially prepared.
 - Who has a job that is flexible.
 - Who has the time.
 - Who has a spouse that will be helpful.
- **Who is best psychologically prepared to deal with elderly parent (s).**
 - Some siblings are probably less well equipped to engage in eldercare on a regular basis.

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#4: Be aware of range of activities involved



- Obviously, this depends upon the level of independence and health problems.
- Daughters more apt to be involved with day to day personal care/ ADLs (dressing, bathing, etc).
- Typical activities: driving them around, shopping, taking to Dr. appointments., household maintenance, cleaning, companionship and the like.

Other things (personal experience)



- Dealing with/ managing financial matters.
- Dealing with insurance issues (medicare D for instance)
- Coordinating health care including operations.
- Taking the car away.
- Selling a house and helping move.
- Helping manage medications.
- Heading off con artists.

#5: Be aware: Sibling conflict is common



- When involved in issues of eldercare from planning to implementation to end stages, sibling conflict is very common.
- Often disagreement as to how the primary care giver is proceeding.
- Often disagreement over what is needed.

Psychology 101: A necessary review



- **Adult transitions are times of stress:**
 - Dependent child figuring out how to be independent.
 - Less well described is the transition from independence to dependence.
- **Oedipal complex:**
 - Confusing name for a simple idea— people may, because of childhood interactions, have conflicted feelings for parents and:

Psych 101 (cont.)



- They may be less than fully aware of these conflicted feelings (i.e. unconscious of them).
- Conflicted feelings may also extend to siblings (i.e. sibling rivalry).

And so:



- Parental transition to dependence is rarely devoid of stress and conflict.
- Parental and sibling response to decline and disability may range from complete panic to denial.
- Different parents and siblings may respond to eldercare issues quite differently and have very different beliefs about how to proceed.

Differing beliefs, attitudes



- Many authors have commented on culture's beliefs that inhibit a full realization of issues related to aging, disability and death (ex. Becker, *The Denial of Death*)
- Thus, parents & siblings may vary greatly on how they think about aging and disability.
- Conflict is often because none of us have very good background, information as to how to proceed. One is operating with a great deal of ambiguity.

Complex emotions common



- **Guilt, shame, anger, anxiety, sadness, ambivalence, etc.**
- **Revert to childhood roles but these roles have now changed dramatically.**
- **Child who used to be in charge may no longer be in charge.**

Common scenarios



- Sibling doing the bulk of the care is angry and resentful at other siblings who have opted out but unwilling to communicate need for help.
 - Or, tries to make the other sibling feel guilty for not doing more
- Sibling who is not doing much feels guilty yet defends their guilt by offering critical comments to the sibling who is doing the care.

Cont.



- **Elderly parent having difficulty dealing with decline foments rivalry among the siblings with who is doing what and how much.**
- **Siblings acting out old rivalries rather than cooperating in care.**
- **Sibling becomes a 'fly in' or a 'white night'.**

Particularly Stressful issues



- If the parent begins to exhibit dementia.
- Dealing with financial issues; power of attorney, trusts, etc.
- As the parent is dying— dealing with end of life issues.
- Dealing with inheritance issues.

Advice for primary caregivers



- **Communicate with siblings.**
- **Don't avoid discussions of unpleasant topics.**
- **Be willing to clearly ask siblings for help even from a distance.**
- **If sibling doesn't agree with your view of necessary level of care, have them spend time with the parent.**

Advice for sibling of primary caregiver



- **Figure out ways to be helpful from far away.**
- **Try to communicate your concerns but not second guess decisions that have to be made by the primary caregiver.**

Positives of eldercare



Positive experience of giving back to one's parents.

Positive experience of being helpful.

Providing a role model for one's own children in terms of caring for the elderly.

Getting to know your parent better than may have otherwise been the case.

Future Trends



- Improved technology to assist elderly.
- Improved environmental design to allow elderly to live independently.
- Additional living communities, options for elderly.
- Increasing flexibility of work settings to cope with eldercare.
- But, continued issues of how to pay, finance eldercare.

Final Quotes



- Growing old is mandatory, growing up is optional.
Chili Davis
- The great secret that all old people share is that you really haven't changed in seventy or eighty years. Your body changes but you don't change at all. And, that, of course, causes great confusion. Doris Lessing