



Older Adults

Steven Keech, CAS & Roberta Chambers, PsyD

Learning Objectives

- ▶ Provide an overview of mental health issues that affect the Older Adult population.
- ▶ Understand the differences between depression and dementia.
- ▶ Discuss suicidality in the Older Adult population.
- ▶ Understand the rates and implications of substance use in Older Adults.



Quiz– True or False

- ▶ Personality changes with age, just like hair color and skin texture.
 - FALSE: Personality doesn't change with age. Therefore, all old people cannot be described as rigid or opinionated, only those who were so throughout their life.



Ageism

- ▶ Older adult stereotypes
 - Asexual, intellectually rigid, unproductive, forgetful, happy (or cranky), retired, invisible, passive, uncomplaining.
- ▶ How is ageism perpetuated?
 - Culture of youth, absence of positive media images, derogatory colloquialisms, unfair hiring and promotion practices, denying or limiting services, lack of training in older adult issues.



Ageism

- ▶ What are the consequences of ageism (Palmore, 1990)?
 - Acceptance – may act old, stop or reduce social activities, not seek appropriate medical treatment, accept poverty, loss of self-esteem, shame, depression, suicide.
 - Denial – lying about age, trying to look younger.
 - Avoidance – moving into age-segregated housing, self-imposed isolation, alcoholism, drug addiction, suicide.
 - Reform – recognition of ageism and advocacy efforts to reduce it.



Quiz– True or False

- ▶ At least 25% of all elderly live in nursing homes.
 - FALSE: Only 5% of persons over 65 are living in nursing homes at any given time. Even those 75+, only 10% are residents of nursing homes.
 - 8/10 women and 6/10 men live in family settings.



Quiz– True or False

- ▶ Older adults have the highest rate of poverty of all adult groups.
 - TRUE: Approximately 20% of older adults are below the poverty line.



Coping with Aging

- ▶ Loss of role or identity
 - ▶ Loss of mobility and independence
 - ▶ Loss of loved ones
 - ▶ Loneliness and isolation
 - ▶ Changing relationships
 - ▶ Changing worlds
- 

Exercise

- ▶ As you close your eyes, think about a real problem that you have. After pondering the problem, think about what might stop you from discussing it with another person.
- ▶ What kinds of messages come to mind? What concerns or fears do you have?
- ▶ What barriers did you identify?



What prevents help-seeking behavior?

- ▶ Maintaining self-esteem and independence.
 - I can do it myself.
- ▶ It's too late to change.
 - You can't teach an old dog new tricks.
- ▶ Pride in self-sufficiency.
 - Keep a stiff upper lip.
 - The Lord only gives you what you can handle.
- ▶ Lack of understanding about what help is and how it can be helpful.
 - Nothing you can say can bring my husband back.
- ▶ Practical Considerations
 - Loss of mobility, lack of transportation



Barriers to Identification and Treatment

- ▶ Lack of knowledge or skills by professionals
- ▶ Symptoms mistakenly believed to be signs of aging
- ▶ Resistance & inability of family members to name a problem
- ▶ Stigma about aging
- ▶ Co-occurring medical, mental health, and substance abuse problems



Quiz– True or False

- ▶ Depression is one of the most common problems of the elderly population.
 - TRUE: Depression is one of the most serious mental health problems among older adults.
 - 10% of adults of all ages experience depression, but as many as 30–60% of older adults experience depression.
 - Despite the high prevalence, fewer older adults are seen in mental health settings when compared with younger people.



Depression in Older Adults

- ▶ Depression v. Normal Aging
- ▶ Depression v. Dementia
- ▶ Depression v. Health Conditions
 - Somatic Complaints
 - Co-occurring Depression and Health Condition
 - Drugs with Depressive Side Effects



Depression “Clues”

- ▶ Unexplained or aggravated aches and pains
- ▶ Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- ▶ Anxiety and worries
- ▶ Memory problems
- ▶ Lack of motivation and energy
- ▶ Slowed movement and speech
- ▶ Irritability
- ▶ Loss of interest in socializing and hobbies
- ▶ Neglecting personal care (skipping meals, forgetting meds, neglecting personal hygiene)



Quiz– True or False

- ▶ Most people will become “senile” sooner or later if they live long enough.
 - FALSE: Even among those who live to be 80 or older, only 20–25% develop some sort of brain disease.
 - It is estimated that less than 10% develop dementia. In either case, dementia or memory loss is not a normal part of aging but typically indicates an organic condition.
 - Senility is a meaningless term. Specific descriptions of cognitive impairment should be used instead.



Dementia v. Depression

Dementia	Depression
Mental decline happens slowly	Mental decline is relatively rapid
Confused and disoriented; becomes lost in familiar locations	Knows the correct time, date, and where he or she is
Difficulty with short-term memory	Difficulty concentrating
Writing, speaking, and motor skills are impaired	Language and motor skills are slow, but normal
Doesn't notice memory problems or seem to care	Notices or worries about memory problems



Quiz– True or False

- ▶ Aged drivers have more accidents than younger drivers.
 - FALSE: Drivers over the age of 65 have fewer accidents per person than drivers under age 65.



Quiz– True or False

- ▶ Intelligence declines with age.
 - FALSE: Intelligence does not decline with age.
 - While studies have shown that older adults take longer to learn something new and have somewhat slower reaction times than younger people, this does not impair the ability to reason or function intellectually.



Older Adults and Substance Misuse

- ▶ Substance Misuse
 - People over age 65 take an average of 2–7 prescription medications per day.
 - Over-the-counter drugs are often perceived as being “harmless.”
 - Combine alcohol and other illicit drugs.
- ▶ Healthcare professionals ask about substances less with older adults.
 - Many people over the age of 60 are hospitalized due to undetected alcohol-related illnesses and trauma.
- ▶ Dangers for older adults
 - Increased sensitivity and decreased tolerance
 - Widowers over age 75 are the fastest growing group of alcoholics.



Substance Misuse Symptoms

- ▶ Anxiousness or irritability (feeling worried or “crabby”)
- ▶ Memory loss (trouble remembering things)
- ▶ New problems making decisions
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating or paying attention
- ▶ Lack of interest in usual activities
- ▶ Sadness or depression
- ▶ Mood swings (happy one minute, sad or angry the next)
- ▶ Chronic pain (pain that doesn’t go away)
- ▶ Problems with money or the police
- ▶ Falls, bruises, burns
- ▶ Incontinence (can’t control urinating, wetting the bed)
- ▶ Headaches
- ▶ Dizziness
- ▶ Poor hygiene (not combing hair, bathing)
- ▶ Poor nutrition, changes in eating habits (eating junk food only)
- ▶ Out of touch with family and friends
- ▶ Suicidal thoughts (wanting to kill yourself)
- ▶ Strange response to medication



Risk Factors

- ▶ Previous history of alcohol or other drug abuse, or family history
- ▶ Untreated psychiatric problems
- ▶ Chronic pain or Pain and / or Unsuccessful “pain management”
- ▶ Other limiting medical condition
- ▶ Limited social or family supports
- ▶ Bereavement and loss of other important relationships
- ▶ Having more than one prescribing physician
- ▶ Abuse, neglect, exploitation



Protective Factors

- ▶ No previous history of substance abuse or family history
- ▶ No psychiatric problems/adequately treated psychiatric problems
- ▶ Proper pain management
- ▶ Adequate support; involvement in community, church or volunteer activities
- ▶ Ability to cope with losses without using alcohol or other drugs; spiritual beliefs
- ▶ One physician oversee health care
- ▶ Support for care givers; respite care; recognizing one's own limitations



Quiz– True or False

- ▶ Older adults represent the group most at risk for suicide.
 - TRUE: Suicide is a more frequent cause of death among older adults than among any other age group.
 - People 65 or older have a 50% higher suicide rate than the rest of the population.



Suicidality in Older Adults

- ▶ Suicide rates increase with age (CDC, 2005).
 - More than 5,000 older adults die by suicide every year
 - 80% of these suicides are white men
- ▶ Older adults die more often in a suicide attempt.
 - Young People: 100 to 200 attempts– 1 death
 - Older Adults: 4 attempts– 1 death



Major Risk Factors for Suicide

- ▶ **Depression, other mood disorders, and psychotic disorders**
- ▶ **Substance abuse**, including the abuse of alcohol and prescription and over-the-counter medication
- ▶ **Physical conditions**, including poor physical health, physical impairments that limit the activities of daily living, and chronic pain



Prevention and Wellness Strategies

- ▶ Promote health
 - Physical activity, pain management, seek help for health problems
- ▶ Promote connectedness
 - Family, friends, peers, staff, community
- ▶ Promote hopefulness
 - Self-esteem, sense of competence, meaning in life



Questions?



References

- ▶ CDC. (2005). Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS). National Center for Injury Pre-vention and Control, CDC. Retrieved June, 1, 2009 from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars/default.htm>
- ▶ American Association of Suicidology. (2009). 2006 official final data. Retrieved May 14, 2009 from <http://www.suicidology.org/web/guest/stats-and-tools/statistics>

