Quality of Life for the Elderly in Modern Society
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The research on longevity is showing that the physical integrity of the human body takes a big dive beyond the age of about 70. And this is true in virtually all types of societies in all ecologies from hunter-gatherers in simpler societies to desk jockeys in modern complex cultures. No doubt much of this situation is attributable to genetics and physiology.

Unfortunately, for at least the following reasons, modern complex societies are contributing to the negative nature of the experience of older adults in this post 70 period of life.

1) The increased focus since industrialization and urbanization on individualism and personal freedom rather than on family and community,
2) The corresponding greatly reduced value place on extended family relations,
3) The high mobility of individuals and nuclear families separating parents from their children and grandchildren,
4) The increasingly high rate of divorce in marriages – further weakening even the most basic of family relations,
5) The orientation of adolescent children to their peers and a separate peer culture rather than to the continued guidance and oversight of parents and other adults,
6) The reduction in a stable, intimate sense of place with the commitment to community that it encourages,
7) The celebration of youth and the effort to combat all signs of aging,
8) The focus on planning for the future rather than learning from the past,
9) The correspondingly high value placed on rapid change/innovation – always looking to what's "new" rather than to what is of sustaining value,
10) The pervasive shift to urbanization which gathers people together but in such extreme densities that impersonal rather than personal relations are promoted,
11) The increased emphasis on personal material and financial well-being together with the withdrawal from spiritual/religious engagement, which together diminish the importance of communal values,
12) The medical commitment to prolong life almost without consideration of the consequences to quality of life.

The Experience of Elders in this Modern Context

1)   Older adults are separated from their progeny as children move away and grandchildren are seen only occasionally,

2) Retirement from occupation/career results in older adults losing their sense of being productive. Freed for WHAT? Society provides minimal assistance for older parents and retirees to find ways to remain meaningfully engaged. Recreational activities in this context are only a partial substitute and diminish as physical abilities wane.

3) With less and less "to do," the quality of life diminishes, and life becomes more centered on just maintaining the home and one's physical life.

4) Later in life, retired adults may move to where their children and grandchildren are located, but this often occurs too late to bridge the long intervening period of relations based only on occasional visits. And such moves separate these older adults from the benefits of established friendships that they have cultivated in what was their home base.

5) Adults separated from their children often focus on developing friendship groups with the hope that they will substitute for the loss of family. But even close friends cannot be expected to take on the medical and financial oversight and routine chores that accompany the final period in life, which can be lengthy.

6) The "solution" is often that older adults are steered by remote family members and local health professionals first toward senior communities, then toward assisted living facilities, and eventually toward nursing homes.

7) Many older adults are in contact for years with family members almost exclusively by email or phone. Others only receive visits from their family members when they are threatened by or close to death. And more and more of these older adults die sedated and alone in ICUs, nursing homes, and hospice facilities.

As a result of encouraging virtually total freedom for young and middle aged adults to pursue success by following their own interests/careers/opportunities anywhere in the world, modern complex societies are in effect:

1) Sacrificing the quality of life of their older adults in spite of the fact that such adults have become an ever larger percentage of the world population,

2) Undermining the long term commitment of all adults to extended family and local place and community, which together have been the foundation blocks of high quality social relations since human societies first arose.

Ingredients in a Potential Solution at the Small Community Scale

1) Encourage children and young adults as they mature to get to know in detail and participate actively to benefit their local territory and community.

2) Support community based education that keeps children connected to, respectful of, and guided by adults.

3) Avoid the development of a separate peer oriented, adolescent subculture.

4) Support social values in educating children by instilling spiritual/intuitive/ subjective as well as physical/rational/objective capabilities and perspectives.

5) Avoid public education oriented to the belief system of any specific religion.

6) In all spheres, encourage respect for diversity while supporting a solid sense of responsible community identity.

7) While supporting an inclusive worldview, encourage a local family and community concept of "Home."

8) Encourage older children and young adults to a) become independent and creative, b) pursue their education in terms of their skills, talents and interests, and c) explore the "world" beyond their immediate locales.

9) But at the same time, encourage young adults to return to the communities – or at least the general areas in which they are raised – when the time comes to settle down.

10) Stop moving people all over the country and world as a part of the process of career "advancement."

11) Use the rapidly evolving internet tools like Zoom to create the teams to effectively address economic, scientific, environmental and social matters in the domains outside the local area.

12) Encourage periodic adult travel and visitation to alternative societies and cultures in different regions, states, and nations to promote a broadened worldview and curtail provincialism.

13) Promote regular/frequent family and community events and gatherings.

14) Promote non-partisan local political systems.

Conclusion

Humans living in villages and towns that incorporate the above fourteen characteristics will benefit from solid identities as well as being responsible to the larger human collectives at the regional, state, national, and global levels. Most importantly, the needs and desires of children and adults of all ages will be accommodated throughout their lives. In this regard, older adults will be able to continue to be meaningfully engaged in their families and communities, and they will be supported by these extended families and communities. And, whatever the post 70 period may bring, older adults will benefit from a significantly improved quality of life.

Of course, cities and large metropolitan areas pose a different set of challenges requiring the consideration of many other variables for dealing with the quality of life problem for older adults. This is especially true since urbanization itself is one of the causes of this problem. In this regard, one could argue that the modern difficulty in addressing the elderly issue lends support for the notion that humans in general – and not just the elderly – are better off living in smaller communities and that modern societies should favor development in this direction in one form or another. Creating a true sense of community in carved out urban "villages" with diverse populations would be a monumental challenge.