

# Impact of Intergenerational Relationships on an Aging Society

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## INTRODUCTION

The number of adults age 65 and older is expected to more than double within the next 25 years, and older adults are anticipated to represent at least 20% of the entire US population.

Many older adults are at risk of experiencing social isolation & loneliness, which has negative impacts on their health & wellbeing.

*“The social environment is now considered to be as important as genetic or biological factors on the experience of aging” (Brownie, 2011)*

**Social Isolation:** “A state in which the individual lacks a sense of belonging socially, lacks engagement with others, has a minimal number of social contacts, and they are deficient in fulfilling and quality relationships” (Nicholson, 2012)

**Loneliness:** “The distressing feeling that results from a discrepancy between one’s desired and actual social relationships” (Brownie, 2011)

### Risk Factors:

- Living alone
- Mobility
- Cognitive or sensory impairment
- Major life events
- Low income
- Low education
- Language
- Small social network
- Location/inaccessible community

*As a risk factor of mortality loneliness is comparable to obesity, sedentary lifestyles & smoking*

### Consequences include increased risk of:

- Mortality
- Dementia
- Re-hospitalizations
- Falls

## INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

*“A social vehicle that offers younger and older generations the opportunities to interact and become engaged in issues concerning our society” (Generations United, 2007)*

## BENEFITS:

### YOUTH

- Academic performance
- Communication
- Problem solving
- Aging attitudes
- Purpose
- Community Service

*“Young children interacting with older adults had higher personal & social development by 11 months compared to children in non-intergenerational facilities”*

### SOCIETY

Filling Service Gaps  
*“Volunteers age 65+ contributed an estimated \$239 billion in 2000”*

Combating Age Segregation  
*“Americans are more likely to have a friend of a different race than one who is 10 years older or younger”*

### OLDER ADULTS

- Enhanced socialization
- Emotional support
- Purposeful engagement
- Learning
- Cognition
- Physical health

*“Older adults regularly volunteering w/ children burn 20% more calories/week, decrease falls & assistive devices, improved on memory tests”*

## BARRIERS TO RELATIONSHIPS

*“1/3 of people age 75 or older in America live alone” (Applewhite, 2016)*

- Self-reliance
- Ageism / Age Segregation
- Transportation
- Community accessibility
- Physical, mental, sensory, cognitive impairments



## MODELS ACROSS SETTINGS

### AGING IN PLACE:

“Aging in place supports the notion that older persons should be able to maintain a desirable lifestyle by participating in their communities, remaining independent as their health allows, having access to educational, cultural, and recreational facilities, feeling safe, and living in an intergenerational environment” (Administration on Aging)

- Establish a shared vision for mutually beneficial activities
- Collaboration across all sectors - public, nonprofit, health, urban planning, architecture, transportation, agriculture, schools, social services
- MOBILIZE! We must bring programs to adults where they are aging in place
- Imagine...Mentor program meets at senior center instead of Boys & Girls Clubhouse
- Imagine...High school NHS weekly service project sharing meals in senior complexes or homes
- Advertise & connect older adults to programming

### LONG TERM CARE FACILITIES:

#### Eden Alternative

- On-site daycare & student programs for staff children, along with the addition of plants and animals into the nursing home environment
- Resulted in decreased psychotropic medication use in residents, improved staff retention, and improved levels of sociability among residents



#### NewBridge

- Nursing home shared grounds with K-8 school
- Residents tutor students, work in library, and volunteer in other areas
- Students offer buddy program with dementia residents
- Both participate regularly together in shared holidays and celebrations

#### Clark on Keller Lake

- WMU Occupational Therapy students moved into Assisted Living facility to study perspectives on aging, ageism, and intergenerational relationships
- Students completed dementia training & are receiving free housing
- Residents are spending more time out of their rooms and are preliminarily perceiving increased quality of life, friendships, and learning opportunities

#### European Shared Housing

- Mutual beneficial goal of decreasing social isolation and increased shared housing opportunities for students in a tight European housing market.
- Netherlands
  - Rent-free housing to students in exchange for 30 hours/month being a “good neighbor” to older adult residents
- Finland
  - Discounted rent for people under age 25 in exchange for 3-5 hours/week in activities with older adult neighbors

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Collaboration is needed across all sectors to overcome barriers and social risk factors.

Organizations must seek opportunities to mobilize and bring their programming to where older adults are engaging in the community, aging in place, or living in long term care settings.

Policymakers consider granting compensation for family caregivers:

- The nuclear family has changed, leaving older adults with a lack of family support
- “Married couples with children under 18 living in dual-income households increased from 25% to 60% over the last 50 years” (Pew)
- Family caregivers would provide a much needed increase in the geriatric workforce, help support aging in place, saving on costly long term care facility placement, increase multigenerational family interactions, and help bridge age gap

Reimbursement for Geriatric Consultation in Primary Care

- Social isolation and loneliness should be recognized as reimbursable diagnoses for treatment and consultation by primary care physicians, extenders, care managers, and social workers to help connect older adults to beneficial intergenerational therapies.

Long Term Care Reform

- CMS Innovation Grant program/reimbursement for pilot projects seeking to foster intergenerational relationships in long term care facilities

Advocacy

- Raise awareness and advocate for intergenerational programming in your community



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