The Future of Families and Health Research

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Families and Health: New Directions in Research and Theory
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Division of Behavioral and Social Research

- Supports basic social and behavioral research and training on the processes of aging at both the individual and societal level.
  - How people change during the adult lifespan
  - Interrelationships between older people and social institutions
  - The societal impact of the changing age composition of the population
Biological

Individual/Dyadic

Societal & Economic
Biological

• Caregiving as a model of chronic stress
  (Kiecolt-Glaser and colleagues)
  – Poorer immune functioning not correlated with sleep and exercise
  – Less likely to show an increase antibody titers after vaccination
  – Slower wound healing
Marital strain accelerates health decline with age (Umberson et al, 2006)
- Marital quality affects health trajectories
- Marital strain accelerates decline in self-rated health
Societal and Economic

• Marital status and risk of death (Sbarra & Nietert, 2009)
  • Being widowed or single didn’t confer as much risk as being divorced or separated
  • However, it’s not separation or divorce that confers risk, but something about not remarrying.
  • Those who remarried didn’t have the same risk as those who didn’t.
Future Directions

• 2008 NACA review of DBSR
  – Promote studies that improve the adaptive functioning of individuals in their daily environments
  – Focus on the effectiveness and role of social relationships across the lifespan and their influence on behavior, health and decision making.
  – Encouraged development of family demography
Future Directions, cont.

• Life course approach
• Encourage the integration of the latest substantive and methodological advances
  • Social neuroscience, genetics, etc.
• Genetics
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