

The notion of the modified extended family (Litwak, 1960) with an emphasis on mutual aid and close personal ties among kin is more characteristic of present day Canadian society than the isolated nuclear family. Present day Canadian society is characterized by a continuation of the extended family, strength of intergenerational relations, the continuity of responsible filial behaviour, and a frequency of contact between the generations. That is, a focus on individualism and on youth has not translated into a society of isolated and alone seniors.

Most elderly individuals have fairly extensive social contacts with little evidence that advancing years reduce the need for affiliation or its lessened importance in people's lives. Lack of role involvement tends to refer to the lack of involvement in paid labour when one is elderly and lack of social contacts tends to refer to those who are old elderly, in poor health, and are frail, a minority of seniors. We know that in Canada, like other industrialized countries, women tend to be more involved in kin relations than men. Rosenthal's (1985; 1987) research on the kin-keeping role (the role assumed by a family member who expends effort to keep family members in touch with one another) and the comforter role (the role taken by a family member who provides emotional support to other family members) confirms the predominance of women in these activities. Women are more likely to use interpersonal and emotional skills in their interaction, whereas men are more likely to orient their behaviour to an instrumental style of interaction. Certainly, among those who are elderly today, most are or have been immersed in marriages and have children.

Canadian seniors have active lives. The most frequently reported leisure activities include socializing with friends and relatives, watching television, gardening, reading newspapers, and sitting and thinking. The majority do not become involved in seniors' organizations even when they know about them, and despite their presence in virtually all Canadian cities. Women, those in good health, those with access to transportation, those who have been joiners throughout life, those who belong to the lower middle and middle classes, and those with strong attachment to neighbourhood and community are most likely to become involved in seniors' organizations (McPherson, 1998). Not surprisingly, given the diversity among the senior population, leisure patterns are also diverse. However, leisure involvements in old age tend to be similar to those established in the younger years. Typically, it is declining health that will lead to a drastic decrease in leisure activity (Cousins & Keating, 1995).

Of course, Canada's elderly population in the future will be different in significant ways from those who are elderly today. We know that the baby boom generation has much more formal education, increased divorce rates, fewer children, more women working in paid labour, and much greater geographic mobility, than was true in the past. One of the most visible distinguishing features of present day society is its advanced technological capability which extends options available to individuals and families. Without question, ageing will be a different experience for the baby boom generation. Nevertheless, no evidence exists to support predictions that the baby boom generation will shirk their responsibility of family care towards their elderly members. To the contrary, the baby boom generation, who are now in middle age and are the family caregivers for many seniors in Canadian society, are demonstrating the strength of the Canadian family. Despite additional and competing demands in their lives, they make great personal sacrifice in order to care for their elderly loved ones. The evidence (Keating et al., 1999) suggests that these ties will endure into the future.

Because seniors in Canadian society are not isolated and abandoned and because they are generally integrated within social networks and engage in a variety of activities, does not mean things cannot improve. Indeed, social gerontologists argue that there are both longstanding and new issues that require urgent social policy attention. In addition, and