



# 9

## Family Ties, Relationships, and Transitions

### Chapter Overview

The family in its many forms is understandably the most important institution in our lives. You will be exposed to the various ways in which the family influences the aging process, including family patterns over the life course; relationships and family ties; marital, parent–child, sibling, grandparent, and other family relationships; variant family forms such as gays and lesbians, childlessness, and common-law arrangements; and other family transitions, such as the empty nest period, widowhood, and remarriage.

### Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

- Understand diversity in modern families.
- Identify the major changes in family composition or structure that have influenced intergenerational relationships and the provision of care in later life.

- Describe the different family arrangements found in Canada that involve an older adult, and discuss the advantages and/or disadvantages of each.
- Understand how family life transitions can affect quality of life in old age.
- Answer the question: If one is single, childless, gay, or lesbian, to what extent, and why, do these situations influence family relations and support across the life course?
- Discuss research findings and their implications for intimacy and romance in later life.
- Understand/comprehend why widowhood and divorce are so influential in the lifestyle and quality of life of older women.

## Key Facts

- In 2012, approximately 4.5 million Canadians aged 45 and over provided caregiving assistance, and about 28 per cent of this group provided care to children under 18 living at home (Sinha 2013).
- More than 80 per cent of older people have at least one living child of their own, and some have stepchildren through common-law relationships or remarriage.
- Among those aged 65 and over, about 80 per cent of the women and 75 per cent of the men are grandparents. In 2016, about 3 per cent of households were multi-generational, with at least three generations living together
- Marital status data from the 2016 census show that about 56.0 per cent of Canadian older adults are married; 3.5 per cent live in common-law relationships; 25.4 per cent are widowed; 7.7 per cent are divorced; 5.2 per cent have never been married; and about 1.5 per cent are childless.
- The 2016 census found that there were 145,765 same-sex couples of any age, an increase of 224 per cent from 2006, and that of these couples, about one-third were legally married (Bill C-38 legalized same-sex marriages federally in 2005) and the remaining (about two-thirds) were living common-law.

## Key Terms

**empty nest** A state experienced by parents once the last child has moved out of the family home, thereby signalling the end of child-rearing. (p. 302)

**family** A kinship group in which members are determined by blood, marriage, or common-law ties. (p. 284)

**fictional kin** Informal, family-like relationship with a friend or neighbour in which the person is viewed almost as a blood relative. Such people often are a core part of the informal social network of older persons who lack legal kin or who do not have legal kin available for support and assistance. (p. 284)

**kin keeper** A member of the extended family who takes responsibility for informing the family about others and for organizing and perpetuating family rituals. (p. 288)

## Study Questions

*See below for answers.*

1. What is family? Why is family important for older adults?
2. What is one major life transition in a family context how does it affect them in later life?

## Additional Resources

### *Articles*

- Armstrong, P. & Kits, O. 2001. [One Hundred Years of Caregiving](#). Ottawa: Law Commission of Canada.
- Bein, S. 2018. [Grey Divorce: Why Are More Baby Boomers Ending Their Marriages When They Get Older?](#) *National Post*.
- Campbell, M. 2018. [Canada's Loneliest People](#). Maclean's Magazine.
- Sinha, M. (2012). [Portrait of Caregivers, 2012](#), Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-652-X.

### *Videos*

Cut Has A Field Day. 2015. [100 Years of Beauty: Aging](#)

If you had a crystal ball and could gaze into the future, how would you feel seeing the love of your life as a 90-year-old? Cut offered a young couple about to say their vows the unique chance to do just that by aging them over 60 years with incredibly life-like makeup and prosthetics. We dare you not to tear up as they fall in love again and again.

Field Day Extra. 2015. [100 Year of Beauty: Aging Couple Reacts Day After Wedding](#)

Goldman, B. 2016. Still Kathryn, White Coat, Black Art, CBC Radio. (27:29 minutes)  
Kathryn Fudurich was 21-years old when her 55-year-old mother Pat was diagnosed with dementia. When it became clear that Pat could not manage living on her own, Kathryn quit her job and moved back home to care for her. Kathryn is among the youngest of an estimated two million Canadians who put their careers and lives on hold to care for an ailing loved one. Kathryn reveals the challenges of being a young caregiver to a parent with early-onset dementia. Now 28, Kathryn talks about how she eventually found a balance between caring for her mother, and caring for herself.

Revera. 2017. [Age is More - Reel Youth Playlist](#).

The Revera and Reel Youth Age is More Film Project is a new, intergenerational partnership between Revera, a Canadian leader in seniors' accommodation, care and services, and Reel Youth, a not-for-profit that empowers youth to create engaging films about important social issues. Visit [Ageismore.com](#) to see more photos and videos from the film project.

***Websites***

Carers Canada, [www.carerscanada.ca](http://www.carerscanada.ca)

CANGRANDS National Kinship Support, [www.cangrands.com](http://www.cangrands.com)

Generations United (US), [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)

## Study Questions—Answers

1. At one time, “family” meant a social group in which membership was determined by blood or marriage ties (termed kinship), but social definitions of a family have evolved over the years. Statistics Canada defines a census family as “[A] married couple (with or without children of either or both spouses), a couple living common-law (with or without children of either or both partners), or a lone parent of any marital status, with at least one child living in the same dwelling. A couple living common-law may be of the opposite or same sex. ‘Children’ in a census family include grandchildren living with their grandparent(s) but with no parent present.” An economic family, on the other hand, is “a group of two or more persons who are related to each other by blood, marriage, common-law or adoption, and who live in the same dwelling.” Family and kinship units are social and ideological constructions, not just products of biology. Therefore, more inclusive definitions (e.g., same-sex partnerships) are being developed for collecting census data, for establishing legal rights, and for conceptualizing research and policies about family units across the life course. The life-course perspective enables us to examine change and stability in the structure, transitions, and relations within family units across time. Continuity and change in family or kinship (lineage) structures and relationships across the life course and embedded in successive cohorts’ influence who provides companionship and care in the later years. (pp. 284–286)
2. Answers may vary. Choose an example from pages 301–310.