

Family, social & cultural  
aspects of illness

# Family

**Family** is a group of people related by blood, adoption or marriage.

The **interpersonal relationships** in families play a significant **role in the health** of family members.

## Types of family

1-**The traditional nuclear family**: include a mother, father & dependent children (under the age of 18 of age) living together in one household.

2-**The extended family**: include grandparents, uncles & cousins, who live outside the household.

# Marriage & children

In USA the average age of the 1<sup>st</sup> marriage is about 25 years for women & 27 years for men.

Most people who are 30-54 years of age are married.

Married people are mentally and physically healthier & have higher self-esteem unmarried people.

50% of children live in families with two working parents & only about 25% of children live in traditional families in which mothers are full-time home maker.



# Divorce

Close to halve of all marriages in USA end in divorce.

Factors associated with divorce include short courtship, lack of family support, premarital pregnancy, marriage during teenage years, family history of divorce, differences in religion or socioeconomic background & serious illness or death of child.

Physician have higher divorce rate than people in other occupations. The differences may be as a result of the life style & stresses that associated with a career in medicine.

Divorced men are more likely to remarry than are divorced women.

# Single parent families

Single parent families often have lower income & less social support & therefore face increased chances of physical & mental illness.

many unmarried or single mothers belong to low socioeconomic group. Most SPF are headed by women.

The percentage of children living in single parent families varies by ethnic group & it is 43% of African American & 12% for Hispanic American (Latino).

Children in SPF are at increased risk for failure in school, depression, drug abuse, suicide, criminal activities & divorce.

Children who continue to have regular contact with the non-custodial parents have fewer of these problems than those who have no contact.



# Types of child custody

1-**Sole custody** in which the child live with one parent while the other parent has visitation rights. It is the most common type of custody in Iraq.

2-**Joint residential custody** in which the child spends some time living with each parent.

3-**Split custody** in which each parent has custody of at least one child.

**In Iraq** the child custody is mentioned under the law number **188** that was established in **1959** in which **mother has the custody** for children under the age of **10** years, the mother may continue to has custody until the age of **15** years **if a medical committee decided** that separation from mother has a potential to cause harm to the dependent child. After the child age of 15 years the law give the child **the right to choose** who he or she prefer to live with.

In some situations **the father has the custody** if living with mother is associated with high potential for harm like absence of a suitable house, giving up school or inappropriate mother behavior.

**Father is obligated to cover the cost of living** for his children up to age of 18 or 27 years if the child is involved in academic education. Father may not pay to support his children economically if they had been left education and obtained job prior to age of 18.



# Culture in the united states of America

There are approximately 285 million people in USA. The population is made up of large **white middle class** which is the major cultural influence & many minority subcultures.

Most **elderly** Americans spend their last years living on their own & only about 20% of them live with family members & 5% live in nursing homes.

The white ethnic groups are not homogenous, groups often have characteristic ways of **dealing schizophrenia & depression** are seen to about **the same extent in all cultures**. The sort of behavior that considered abnormal may differ considerably by culture.

Differences in presentation of **symptoms** may be the result of the individual characteristics of a **patient** &/or characteristic of the particular **ethnic** group.

A patient **belief system** has much to do with compliance & response to treatment e.g. it is believed that illness can be cured by eating certain foods, curse imposed by some one can cause illness & people may seek health care from religious healing.

# Culture shock

Culture shock is a strong emotional response which may involve psychiatric symptoms related to geographical relocation & the need to adapt to unfamiliar social and cultural surroundings.

Young immigrated men appear to be at higher risk for cultural shock because they lose the most status on leaving their culture of origin & often they must get out in to the new culture & earn a living.



# USA Minority subcultures

1-African American account 12.7% of population. They have **shorter life expectancies**, **higher rates** of hypertension, heart diseases, stroke, infant mortality, obesity, asthma, TB, DM, prostate cancer & AIDS

2-Hispanic **hot & cold foods** influences are believed to relate to illness. Latino women are more likely to have **cervical cancer** than black.

3-Native American: **The distinction** between mental & physical illness may be **blurred**, are engaging in **forbidden behavior** & **witchcraft** are thought to result in illness.

4-American of European descent

A-Anglo-Americans: They are in general **less emotional**, **less vocal** about pain & illness than Mediterranean origin therefore they may become **very ill before seeking treatment** while people of Mediterranean origin may be considered complainers & ignored when they in fact quite ill.

B-Middle-Eastern/North African descent: They are often referred to as **Arabs**. Female patients may wish to remain as **covered** as possible in the examining room & often prefer to have **female physician**.