

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 282 073

CE 047 325

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TITLE Elderly Service Workers' Training Project. Block B: Cultural Gerontology. Module B.1.2: Communication and Adjustment.  
INSTITUTION Manitoba Univ., Winnipeg. Faculty of Education.  
SPONS AGENCY Department of National Health and Welfare, Ottawa (Ontario).  
PUB DATE 87  
GRANT 6553-2-45  
NOTE 28p.; For related documents, see ED 273 809-819 and CE 047 321-333.  
AVAILABLE FROM Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3T 2N2.  
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Materials (For Learner) (051)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Adjustment (to Environment); Aging (Individuals); Client Characteristics (Human Services); \*Counselor Training; \*Cross Cultural Training; Cultural Education; \*Death; Ethnic Groups; Foreign Countries; Gerontology; Human Services; \*Interpersonal Communication; Interpersonal Competence; Learning Modules; Older Adults; Postsecondary Education; Ukrainian  
IDENTIFIERS \*Manitoba; \*Ukrainian Canadians

ABSTRACT

This learning module, which is part of a three-block series intended to help human service workers develop the skills necessary to solve the problems encountered in their daily contact with elderly clients of different cultural backgrounds, deals with communication and adjustment in the context of death and dying and their role in Ukrainian culture. The first two sections provide background information on the Ukraine and on Ukrainian migration from the Soviet Union to Canada and outline the module's general objectives. The next section examines some of the family and spiritual issues surrounding death and dying. Psychological reactions to death and dying are discussed from the standpoint of Ukrainian culture. The next section suggests some ways in which human services workers can facilitate adjustment to death and dying among their elderly Ukrainian clients. A list of selected readings and descriptions of two pertinent films are appended. (MN)

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# BLOCK B

## Cultural Gerontology

### MODULE B.1.2

### Communication and Adjustment

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1987

FUNDING INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE: ELDERLY SERVICE WORKERS' TRAINING PROJECT

PROJECT GRANT NUMBER: 6553-2-45

SOURCE OF CONTRACT: HEALTH AND WELFARE CANADA

CONTRACTOR: UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA, FACULTY OF EDUCATION

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COMMUNICATION AND ADJUSTMENT  
MODULE B:1:2

THE ELDERLY SERVICE WORKERS' TRAINING PROJECT  
WISHES TO EXPRESS APPRECIATION OF THE FOLLOWING  
INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
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## Introduction

Before you begin this module, it is perhaps worthwhile to remind you of certain essential historical and social facts regarding the Ukrainian culture.

As you will recall in module B.1 on "Ukrainian Culture," since 1795, Ukraine has been a captive at the hands of various nations. These nations, while dominating the Ukrainian people, have sought to suppress and eliminate Ukrainian national identity. In fact, it was Russia's policy to subjugate Ukrainian culture. The use of the Ukrainian language, Ukrainian education and all Ukrainian language publications were forbidden.

By 1917, Ukraine declared her independence, however, this independence was shortlived. The eastern lands soon fell to the Communists, while the western lands were divided among Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

Between the years of 1921 to 1934, Ukraine experienced two demographic phenomena. The famine of 1921-22 and the artificially imposed Famine Holocaust of 1932-33 ordered by Stalin that took over seven (7) million innocent Ukrainian lives. This genocide, was a deliberate creation of a bureaucratic mind bent on the punitive destruction of an entire race of people.

After World War II, all Ukrainian territories fell

to the Communists. Today, Ukraine has the status of a republic of the Soviet Union and its name has been officially changed to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, (although most Ukrainians outside Ukraine refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of this name). Under Communist dictatorship the Ukrainian people are deprived of many of the civil liberties that Canadians take for granted. Unlike Canada, Ukrainian national identity is continually being suppressed by the Soviet regime. The ultimate aim of this suppression is the complete elimination of Ukrainian national identity, russifying the populace and eliminating opposition to Soviet rule.

It is against this background that we are able to see why, when the Ukrainians were given the opportunity to emigrate to Canada, they seized this as a chance to better their existence and did so in large numbers. The Ukrainians came to Canada in four major waves: 1) 170,000 Ukrainian immigrants, mainly illiterate farmers, arrived between the years of 1896 to 1914, 2) 60,000 Ukrainian immigrant farmers and political emigres, this time mostly literate, arrived between the years of 1917 to 1939, 3) 30,000 Ukrainian political emigres, better educated than the previous two waves with many skilled craftsmen and professionals amongst them, arrived between 1946 and the mid-1950s, and 4) a rather small

undetermined amount between the late 1960s and into the 1980s.

Despite the prejudice, the discrimination, and the many other hardships that Ukrainian immigrants faced, to a large extent, they became successful in their own adjustment to and settlement of the Western prairies.

Ukrainian pioneers in Canada helped build the Canadian west and successive generations of Ukrainian Canadians have become an integral and visible part of the Canadian culture. The traditional values and lifestyles may have undergone tremendous change in contemporary Canadian society. However, as module B.1.1 on Communication and Adjustment has shown you, that most older Ukrainian adults; still prefer to communicate in the Ukrainian language, prefer to associate with their own kind, prefer to live with their family as opposed to an institutional setting, tend not to remarry, try to observe traditional Ukrainian customs and all major holidays, and still favour traditional Ukrainian dishes.

This Communication and Adjustment module (B.1.2), will show you that; religion plays an integral role in the lives of Ukrainian older adults, they prefer to die amongst their own people, and where possible, at home.

The data required for this module was gathered from Ukrainian clergymen, who in the course of their pastoral

duties regularly counsel the dying and the bereaved, and from the older adults themselves.

## GENERAL OBJECTIVES

With respect to the Ukrainian older adult population, you will be able to:

- (1) describe several cultural issues surrounding death and dying.
- (2) describe the psychological reactions that Ukrainian older adults have to death and dying.
- (3) describe ways in which the worker can facilitate adjustment.

The following section will present several cultural issues surrounding death and dying.

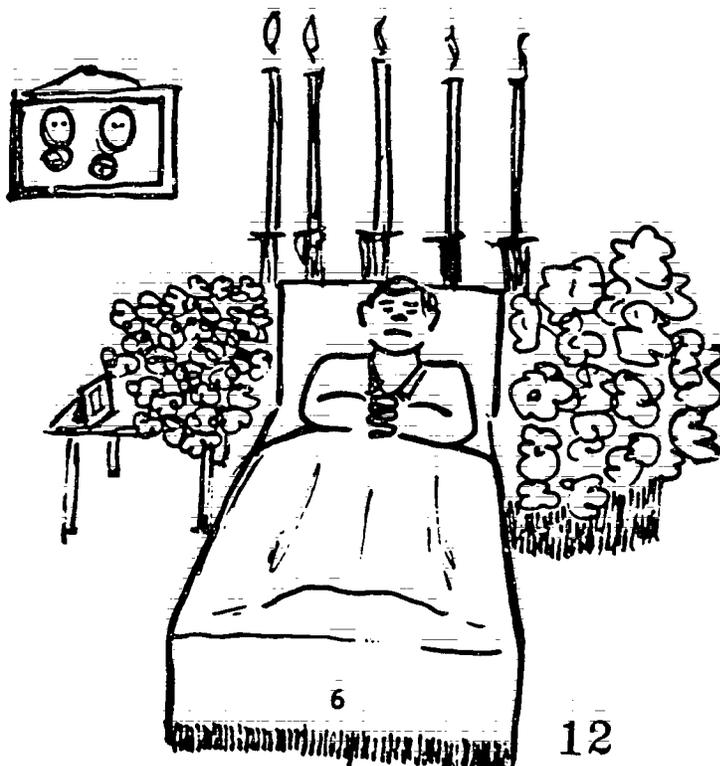
## CULTURAL ISSUES SURROUNDING DEATH AND DYING

Upon completion of this section, you will be able to describe several issues surrounding death and dying.

### Family

The family is the Ukrainian older adult's most important support group. The family's expressions of love, solace and consolation are, therefore, crucial to the dying or bereaved older adult. Other family members also usually find it difficult to cope with the death of one of their loved ones. It is mutual support that enables the family to effectively deal with the death of one of its members.

A dying individual should be made to feel as comfortable as possible in his surroundings. In traditional Ukrainian society a person died at home where he or she had been cared for by their loved ones.



Today, death usually occurs in the sterile environment of a hospital room where the caregivers are strangers. Although it may not be feasible for the older adult to die at home, it is extremely important for them to have as much contact with their families as possible as this eases the dying process for all concerned.

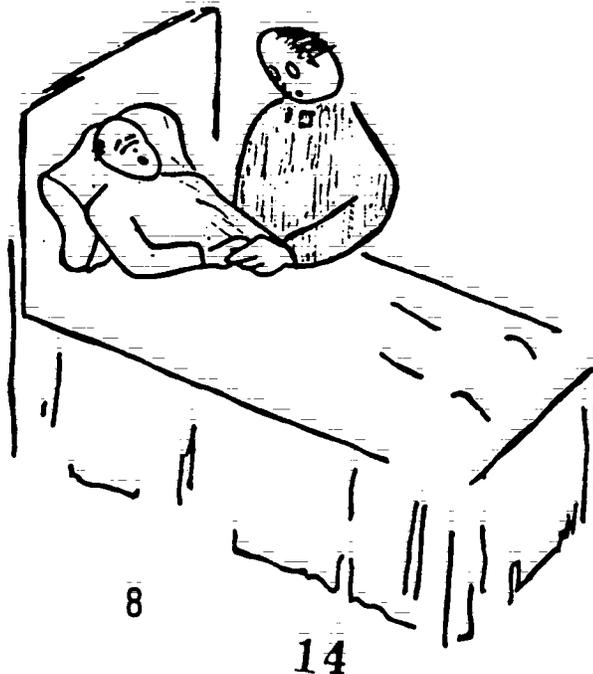
Older Ukrainians are believed to most grieve the loss of their spouses and children. They are usually able over time to realistically cope with the death of a spouse. This is particularly true if they believed their spouse lived a full and long life, or if their spouse endured much pain and suffering prior to death. However, if the spouse was their primary caregiver or if they are childless, then the gravity of their loss may be a devastating one, that they cannot completely overcome.

It is often most difficult for them to come to terms with the death of their children. They reason that since they are already old and often disabled it should be their turn to die rather than their child's. This appears to be true regardless of the age of their child and the circumstances of his or her death. The grief that a Ukrainian parent feels over the death of his or her child is so strong that a worker may find that the older adult continues to grieve over the death of a child that died many years ago in the same way as one would expect him or her to grieve a much more recent death.

## Spiritual

Religion plays an integral role in the lives of older Ukrainian adults. Their attachments to their religious beliefs tends to be strong and steadfast. Both the dying and bereaved, however, may at first turn away from God, in the belief that if there indeed were a benevolent God, He would not be punishing them in such a way. This is considered to be a completely normal reaction that usually passes over time.

If an older adult knows that he or she is dying, they usually seek to make peace with God. In spiritual preparation for death, most older adults appreciate the opportunity to meet with a clergyman of their faith who can provide the necessary spiritual counselling and administer The Holy Sacraments to them. It is imperative to the older adult of the Ukrainian Catholic or Orthodox faiths to have the opportunity to cleanse their souls in preparation for death through the ritual of confession and the acceptance of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.



Upon the death of a loved one, the bereaved older adults also require spiritual counselling in order to come to terms with their bereavement. A clergyman of their own faith can also be called upon to perform certain religious rituals associated with death such as conducting masses for the salvation of the souls of the departed. The celebration of a mass is of utmost importance on the fortieth day after the death of a loved one, for it is believed that on this day the soul of the deceased departs the worldly realms and goes to its ultimate reward. Older adults, if deprived of the services of a clergyman of their own faith may believe that the soul of their loved one cannot ever rest in peace.

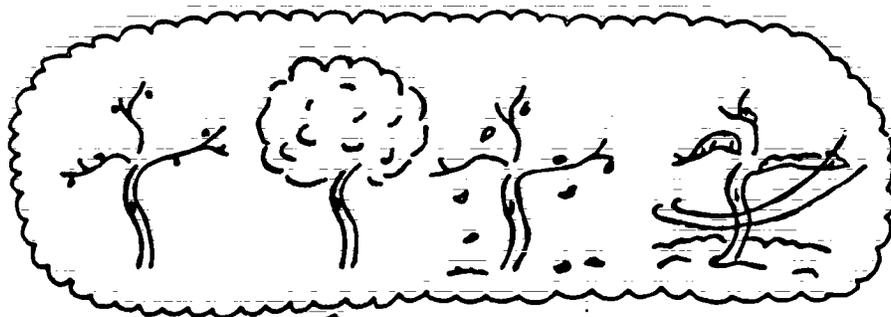
The following section will present the psychological reactions that Ukrainian older adults have to death and dying.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTIONS TO DEATH AND DYING

Upon completion of this section, you will be able to describe the psychological reactions that Ukrainian older adults have to death and dying.

Psychological reaction to death and dying is largely regarded as a highly individualistic matter that transcends cultural boundaries.

Many older adults are able to realistically accept the fact that they are dying. They realize that death is an imminent inevitability of advanced age and they psychologically and spiritually prepare themselves for death. At least one clergyman believed that because many of the older adults had rural backgrounds and were extremely familiar with life cycles in nature, their reaction to human death, including their own, was one of realistic acceptance.



Some older adults, however, are unable to come to terms with their own impending death. They may at first display disbelief since it is very difficult to accept one's own mortality. Even the most fatalistic individuals, at learning of their own imminent death, may refuse to believe that they are really dying. Once they believe that they are dying, they can display feelings of anger, frustration and depression. They may believe themselves to be completely alone in the world convinced that no one around them can really comprehend the way they feel. While some older adults may display a fervent will to live and may, in fact, prolong their lives through a refusal to give in to death, others, may lose their will to live, refusing nourishment, medication and social contact and this, in turn, hastens their death.

The dying older adult may also become very fervent in his or her own religious beliefs. They turn to religion as a solace that helps them to more readily accept impending death. The dying older adults usually appreciate and opportunity to meet with a clergyman of their faith who can provide necessary spiritual counselling, hear their confession and administer the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The latter are extremely important to the older adult. Both the Ukrainian Catholic and Ukrainian Orthodox faiths believe it to

be important for the faithful to face death with a clear conscience.

Besides looking after their spiritual needs the older adult may also wish to make a final peace with family and friends. They may also be concerned with settling all other personal matters. If not given the opportunity to do so, older adults may approach death anxious that they have not had the opportunity to look after all outstanding matters to their personal satisfaction.

In cases where older adults have lost a loved one, they may also encounter difficulties in coming to terms with their bereavement. They may display anger, hostility, depression and even loss of the will to live. An initial reaction may also be to turn away from their faith in the belief that God could not exist if He allowed such a tragedy to occur. They may also become suspicious of and hostile to all medical personnel believing them to be incompetent since medical personnel and technology were unable to save their loved one.

The following section will present ways in which the caregiver-worker can facilitate adjustment.

#### HOW THE CAREGIVER WORKER CAN FACILITATE ADJUSTMENT

Upon completion of this section, you will be able to describe ways in which the worker can facilitate adjustment.

In order to facilitate adjustment the worker must develop an understanding of the psychological processes associated with death and bereavement. His or her primary aim should be to guide the older adult toward a rational outlook on these matters.

The workers should realize that adjustment may be greatly facilitated through counselling, both spiritual and psychological. He or she should be sensitive enough to the needs of the older adult to realize that some of the anxiety concerning their own impending death may be a result of the fact that they feel they have unfinished matters to take care of. These may be of a cultural, legal, financial or personal nature. It may then be up to the worker to arrange for these matters to be looked after to the satisfaction of the older adult concerned. The worker should encourage both the dying and the bereaved to participate in social interaction as this will stimulate their interest in life and improve

the quality of their lives. In the case of the dying, it may even prolong their lives. If necessary, the worker should also contact the families of the older adults concerned to ensure that they fully understand the situation and provide adequate support. He or she could also recommend that volunteers spend time with these individuals.

The workers themselves must display a great deal of compassion toward dying and bereaved older adults. The caregiver-worker must be constantly prepared to act as a counsellor to these individuals for often it is the worker, who, through constant contact with the older adult is most attuned to their needs.

## SUMMARY

Ukrainian pioneers in Canada helped build the Canadian west and successive generations of Ukrainian Canadians have become an integral and visible part of Canadian culture. The traditional values and lifestyles may have undergone change in contemporary Canadian society, however, as the Communication and Adjustment module (B.1.2) has shown you, religion still plays an integral role in the lives of Ukrainian older adults, and they still prefer to die amongst their own people and where possible at home.

In traditional Ukrainian society, a person died at home where he or she had been cared for by their loved ones and not in the sterile environment of a hospital room. Older Ukrainians most grieve the loss of their spouses and children. They reason that since they are already old and often disabled it should be their turn to die rather than their child's, regardless of age. In fact the grief that a Ukrainian parent feels over the death of their child is so strong that a worker may find that the older adult continues to grieve over the death of a child that died many years ago in the same way that one would expect him or her to grieve a much more recent death.

Older adults who know they are dying usually seek to make peace with God. It is imperative to the older adult of the Ukrainian Catholic and Ukrainian Orthodox faiths to have the opportunity to cleanse their souls in preparation for death through the ritual of confession and the acceptance of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Spiritual counselling may also be required. A clergyman of their own faith should be called upon to perform certain religious rituals associated with death such as conducting masses for the salvation of the souls of the departed. The celebration of a mass is of utmost importance on the fortieth day after the death of a loved one, for it is believed that on this day the soul of the deceased departs the worldly realms and goes to its ultimate reward.

Many older adults realize that death is an imminent inevitability of advanced age and they psychologically and spiritually prepare themselves for death. However, there are those who are unable to come to terms with their own impending death, and they can display feelings of anger, frustration and depression. The dying older adult may also become very fervent in his or her own religious beliefs. Besides looking after their spiritual needs, the worker should be sensitive enough to the needs of the older adult to realize that some of the anxiety concerning their own impending death

may be the result of the fact that they feel that they have unfinished matters to take care of. These may be of a cultural, legal, financial or personal nature. It may then be up the worker to arrange for these matters to be looked after to the satisfaction of the older adult concerned. If necessary, the worker should also contact the families of the older adults concerned to ensure that they fully understand the situation and provide adequate support. Finally, it can be said that, the caregiver-worker must be constantly prepared to act as a counsellor to these individuals for often it is the worker, who, through constant contact with the older adult is most attuned to their needs.

APPENDIX

### Selected Readings

- Kovacs, L. Martin. (Ed.) (1978). Ethnic Canadians: Culture and Education. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, Canada.
- Marunchak, H.M. (Ed.) (1982). The Ukrainian Canadians: A History. 2nd ed. Winnipeg: Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in Canada.
- Migus, M. Paul. (Ed.) (1975). Sounds Canadian: Languages and cultures in Multi-Ethnic Society. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Ltd.
- Petryshyn, W. Roman. (Ed.) (1980). Changing Realities: Social Trends Among Ukrainian Canadians. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Canada.
- Yuzyk, Paul. (1982). "Religious Life," in A Heritage in Transition. :143-172.

### Additional Resources

Place: National Film Board of Canada  
245 Main St.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 1A7

#### I've Never Walked The Steps

A visit to a family of Ukrainian-Canadians at Christmas, a time when the rich traditional customs are most in evidence. The family is that of a prosperous Winnipeg lawyer, a son of immigrants who has reason for pride in his accomplishment. From the carols and folk tunes at the gathering, from pictures in the family album, from the midnight Mass and the Christmas feast, there emerges a warm, compelling portrait of Ukrainian-Canadians at home in Canada.

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28 minutes            106C 0175 018  
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#### Luchak's Easter

A Ukrainian Easter tradition is celebrated by a Ukrainian-Canadian family in Alberta. Coinciding with the time of Christ's Resurrection of those ancestors who have died. The family graveyard is decorated, religious rites are performed, and a family feast is held.

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26 minutes:37 seconds            106C 0178 438  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE ELDERLY SERVICE WORKERS' TRAINING PROJECT WISHES TO EXPRESS APPRECIATION OF THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS WHOSE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE IN THE AGING SECTOR HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE OVERALL EFFORT OF THE PROJECT.

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ELDERLY SERVICE WORKERS' TRAINING PROJECT (ESWTP)

TITLES OF THE TRAINING PROJECT'S MODULES

**Block A: Basic Knowledge of Aging Process**

- A.1 Program Planning for Older Adults \*\*
- A.2 Stereotypes of Aging \*\*
- A.3 Human Development Aspects of Aging \*\*
- A.4 Social Aspects of Aging \*\*
- A.5 Physiological Aspects of Aging \*\*
- A.6 Death and Bereavement \*\*
- A.7 Psychological Aspects of Aging \*\*
- A.8 Confusion and the Older Adult \*\*
- A.9 Nutrition and the Older Adult \*\*
- A.10 Listening and the Older Adult \*\*

**Block B: Cultural Gerontology**

- B.1 Ukrainian Culture \*\*
  - B.1.1 Communication and Adjustment \*
  - B.1.2 Communication and Adjustment \*
- B.2 German Culture \*\*
  - B.2.1 Communication and Adjustment \*
- B.3 French Culture \*
  - B.3.1 Communication and Adjustment \*
- B.4 Native Culture \*
  - B.4.1 Communication and Adjustment \*
  - B.4.2 Communication and Adjustment \*

**Block C: Work Environment**

- C.1 Work Environment I \*

**Resource Materials:**

Handbook of Selected Case Studies  
User's Guide  
ESWTP Authoring System  
ESWTP Final Report

Please Note:

ALL MODULES ARE AVAILABLE IN THE PRINT FORMAT. THE CODE FOR IDENTIFYING OTHER FORMATS IS LISTED BELOW.

Code / Format

- \* / Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) Courseware
- \*\* / Interactive Video (Tape)/Computer-Assisted Television Courseware