



Social Structures, Aging, and Self-Regulation in the Elderly (Springer Series on the Societal Impact on Aging)

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This collection considers ways in which societal contexts influence aging by influencing self-regulatory processes. No one doubts that the social contexts in which individuals develop exert strong influence on life trajectories. Those born into environments that provide high quality education, supportive social relations, and economic assets do better in old age than those born into environments bereft of such resources. The extent of this influence, however, is only beginning to be revealed. Recent research shows that life experiences influence basic brain structures (e.g. the effect of musical training on neural organization) and functions (e.g. inflammatory processes), and that social embeddedness may even protect against Alzheimer's disease. Similarly, education increasingly appears to have a "real" effect on neural integrity. Thus, societal contexts may not simply open or close doors for individuals, but may influence self-regulatory processes at the most basic levels of functioning.

Although social structures are generally seen as the independent variables that affect individual aging, it is also possible to think of a lifetime development of self-regulatory processes leading to behaviors in old age that can have impact on and modify societal structures. Two parts of this book consider self-regulation as the dependent variable, asking how social contexts influence cognitive, emotional, and self-regulatory processes. The third part reverses the question, treating self-regulation as the independent variable and retirement and physical health as dependent variables. In this part, consideration is given to how the effectiveness of self-regulation influences physical and economic outcomes in old age.

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