



The Influences of Community Social Organization on the Well-Being of Older Adults

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**Presented at the World Demographic Association
World Ageing and Generations Congress
St. Gallen, Switzerland, September 2007**



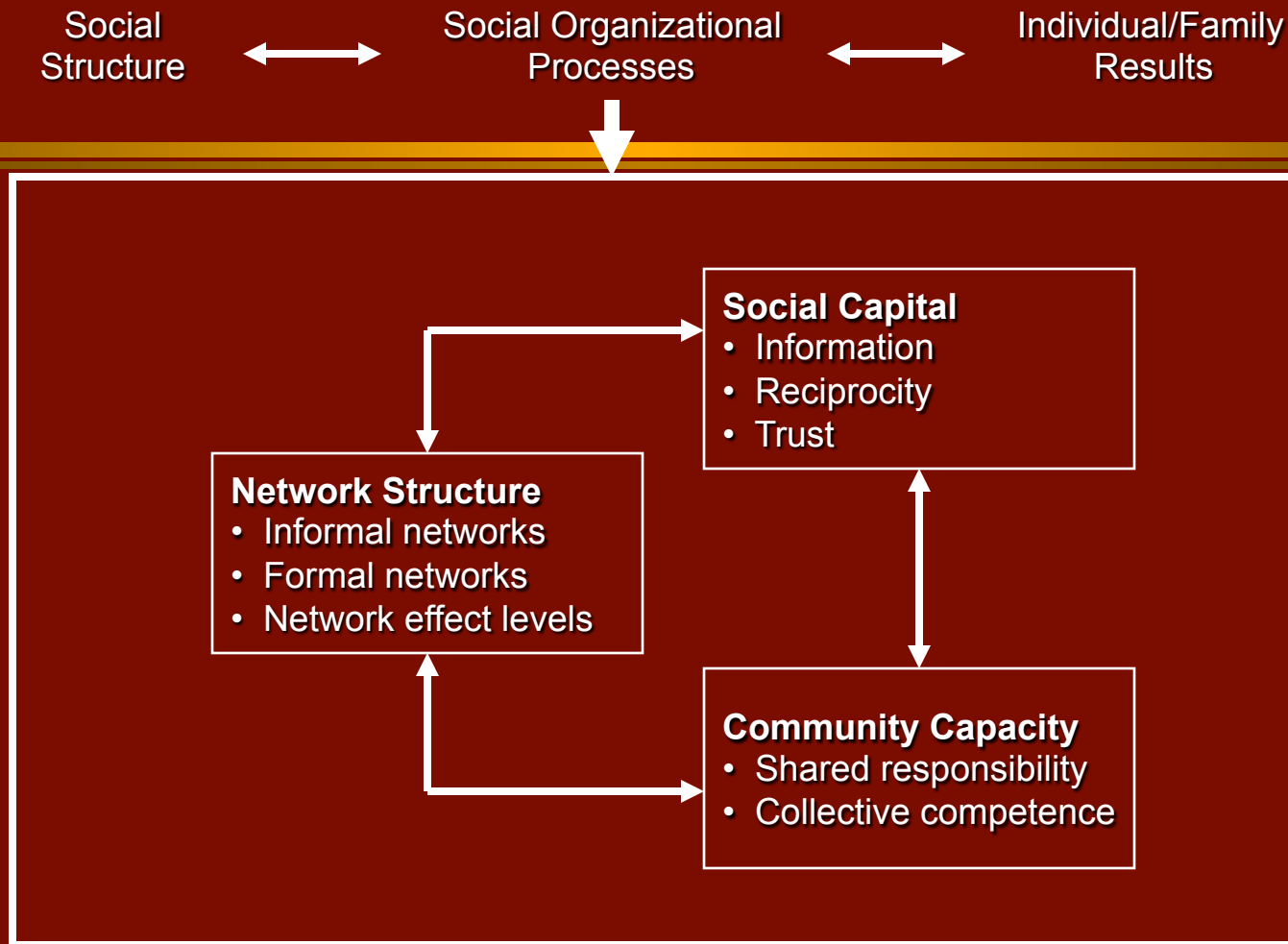


Figure 1. Social Organizational Processes, Social Structure, and Individual/Family Results

Social Organization Theory: Definition of Social Organization

- Values, norms, processes, and behavior patterns within a community that organize, facilitate, and constrain interactions among community members
- Process by which communities achieve desired results for individuals and families, including ability to demonstrate resiliency
- Includes networks of people, exchanges and reciprocity in relationships, accepted standards of social support, and social controls that regulate behavior and interaction



Our Social Organization Theorizing and Research

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- Mancini, J.A., & Marek, L.I. (2004). Sustaining community-based programs for families: Conceptualization and measurement. *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies*, 53, 339-347.
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Our Social Organization Theorizing and Research

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- Bowen, G., Martin, J.A., Mancini, J.A., & Nelson, J. (2001). Civic engagement and sense of community in the military. *Journal of Community Practice*, 9, 71-93.
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Social Organization Theory: The Model

● Our approach

- Moves social organization theory from single plane of explanation on disorganization and delinquency
- Moves the theory toward a more layered approach to communities
- Presents the theory as having a more fundamental role in explaining broader family system phenomena



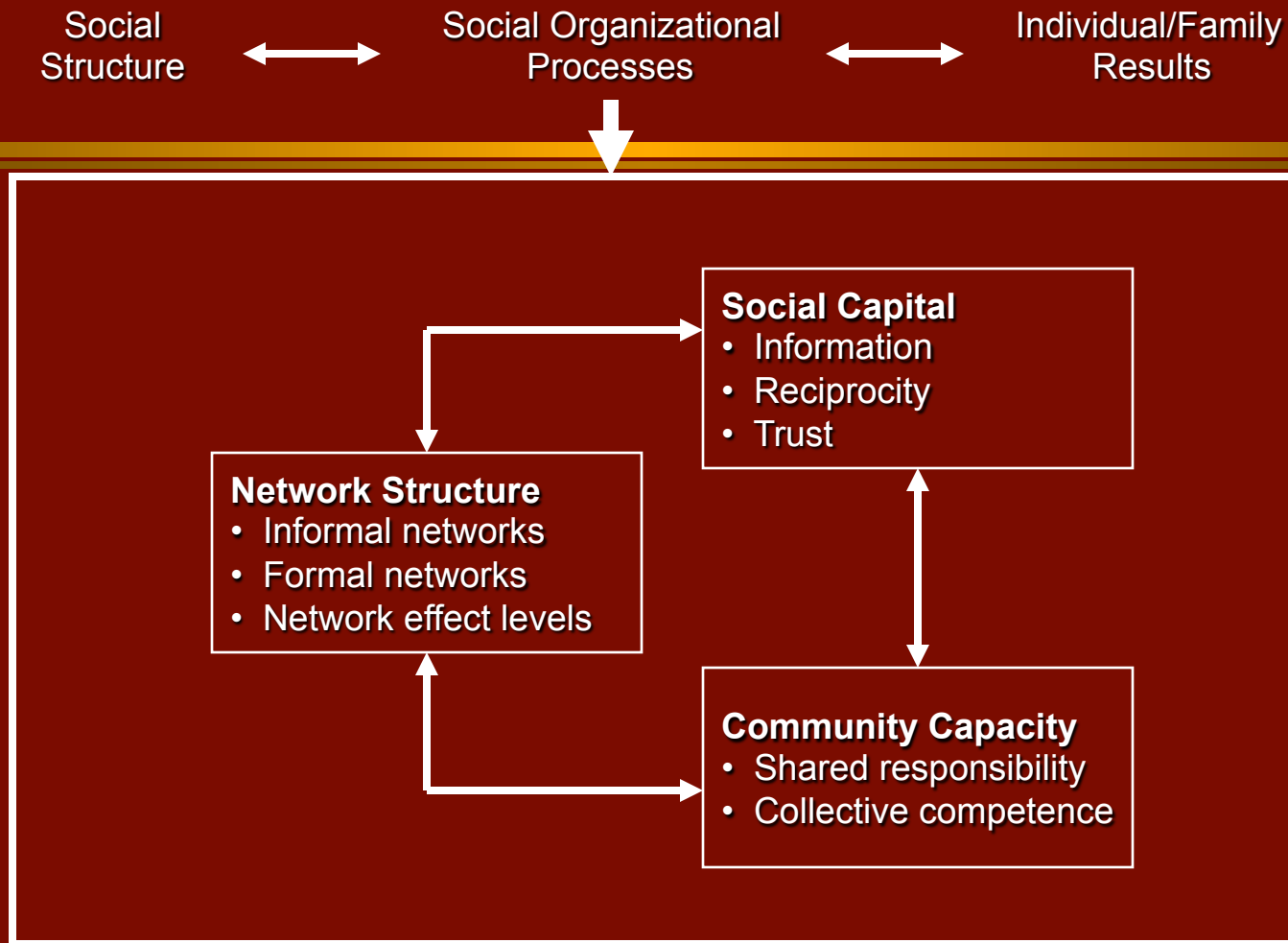


Figure 1. Social Organizational Processes, Social Structure, and Individual/Family Results

Social Organization Theory: Structure and Process

- Differentiation of structure from process
 - Former pertains to configuration and composition
 - Latter involves operations and methods of working
 - Process occurs within structural frameworks
 - Processes provide linkage between social structure and effects on individuals and families



Social Organization Theory: Focus on Processes

- Main focus is on processes
 - Networks
 - Social Capital
 - Community Capacity
- Relationships between them
 - Networks provide context for the development of social capital, and for building community capacity



Social Organization Theory: Networks

- Primary ways through which community life is enacted
- Informal networks comprise web of relationships with friends, neighbors, work associates
- Formal networks associated with agencies and organizations
- Voluntary and obligatory relationships



Social Organization Theory: Networks

- Networks effects levels
 - Action element of our framework
 - Nexus of informal and formal networks
 - First level-within a network
 - Second level-between like networks
 - Third level-between dissimilar networks
- Network configurations provide leverage for achieving results through generation of social capital and production of community capacity



Social Organization Theory: Social Capital

- Information, reciprocity, and trust
 - Aggregate of resources (information, opportunities, and instrumental support)
- Arise from reciprocal social relationships
- Results from participation in formal and informal settings
- Social capital observed in actions of civic groups, faith communities, and any number of community-based groups
- Increases odds of achieving results otherwise not attained



Social Organization Theory: Community Capacity

- Shared responsibility
 - For general welfare of the community and its individual members
 - Sentiments
- Collective competence
 - Taking collective action, confronting situations
- Assumptions
 - Concern directed at community as a whole and at particular elements, action is beyond expression of positive sentiments, action is proactive and reactive, action targeted at threats and at normative situations



Social Organization Theory: Community Results

- Consequences of effective social organization
- Desired results (examples, safety, health and well-being, family resilience)
- Results not owned by any particular group but valued across community
- Identified results assist to determine leverage points for change
- Moves theory from interesting framework to theory of action



Social Organization: Summary

- Need for theorizing that connects families and communities
- Social organization provides linkage framework
- Theory focused on action and community change
- There are leverage points that can be mobilized to support families and communities
- Consequent set of considerations for professionals
 - Prevention/intervention program development
 - Program and community researchers



Application to Individual and Population Aging

- Potential later life challenges
 - Health and mobility
 - Shifting friend network
 - Economic status strains
 - Changing neighborhoods/relocation
 - Uncertainty about the future
 - Family changes/mobility/widowhood
 - Increasing societal complexity/technology
 - Risks of daily life



Application to Individual and Population Aging

- Key social organization questions:
 - What community structures are older people experiencing? Physical/geographic, transportation, environment generally? Is access constrained?
 - Are older people part of active networks? Formal networks of services, informal networks of friends, neighbors, associates? Strength of connections?



Application to Individual and Population Aging

- Key social organization questions:
 - What formal networks are intentional about engaging older people? Are formal networks focused on fostering connections within informal networks?
 - Are formal and informal networks coalescing around older adult personal risk issues, such as violence directed toward them? What is the community capacity to deal with risk issues?



Application to Individual and Population Aging

- Key social organization questions:
 - Who is taking responsibility for the community welfare of older adults? Moreover, who is doing something about the situation?
 - What are community norms when it comes to considering, valuing, recognizing, and noticing older people in the community? Is the community older-person friendly? Is the community intentional about keeping older people on their radar screen?



Application to Individual and Population Aging

- Key social organization questions:
 - Is it “hard work” being an older person in the community? What are the barriers? What are the enablers?
 - What are the desired community results involving older people? Easy access to social life, safety and protection, being connected rather than isolated, valued rather than discounted, “looked to” rather than “looked at”?



Conclusions

- Social organization theory has merit for understanding nuances of successful aging
 - Predicated on community capacity, social capital, and networks
 - Suggests “leverage points” for making a positive difference in older people’s lives
 - Provides guidance on a range of research studies on multiple contexts and their influences



For Further Information

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