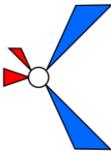


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<102/c>	34 per cent of the most severely disabled elderly people receive a home help (Victor, 1983, p. 303). Government policy extols the virtue and normality of family care (DHSS, 1981) but does not underpin the policy with sufficient resources. In economic and statistical terms people whom we define as old are usually taken to be men and women over 65. Ninety-three per cent of people in this age group live in their own homes or with relatives (OPCS, 1984; Wheeler, 1986, p. 219). Relatively few are in hospitals or residential accommodation. Those at home are usually part of a family network or social support network. As a person's independence gradually gives way to dependence in one or more areas of daily life, it is generally accepted that the family will increase support and assistance. This picture incorporates a good many complexities in reality. Social workers may need to take time to clarify the nature of the social and family network, and the reciprocal exchanges within it. Reciprocity is common in family life. The exchange of goods and services throughout the life-span has been explored (Finch, 1987c; Harper, 1987) emphasising how parents help young adults financially and with child care, in return for practical and financial help in old age. In considering some elderly people's transition from independence, first to interdependency, and possibly to dependency prior to death, there are a number of points to bear in mind which are outlined here, to be explored more fully later in the chapter. Retirement The position of retired people ensures a degree of economic dependency for many, and poverty in a good many cases, which accentuates all other difficulties. Poverty Sixty-six per cent of pensioners live on the margins of poverty, which increases with age (Walker, 1986, p. 185). A broad distinction must be observed between young-old people aged 65-74, old-old people aged 75-84, and very old people aged 85 and upwards. Within these age bands there are very wide variations in capability. The age span 65-100 is such that some families may have two generations in retirement, with young-old people as carers of very old parents . One sibling may care for another , or there may be a three-pension household. Independence Individuals have a right to some independence, and areas of choice in their style of living whatever the degree of their eventual infirmity. The structured dependency of old age feeds a culture that regards passivity as an inherent aspect of growing old (Phillipson and Walker, 1986). This should be resisted by social workers interested in developing good practice . Vulnerable elderly people and their carers are equal actors in
 <p>Key:</p> <p>Footprint</p> <p>ConEn1</p> <p>Footprint</p> <p>ConEn2</p> <p>Footprint</p> <p>ConEn3</p>	the drama of their caring relationships
	. The carers' needs must be taken on board as well. Diversity Diversity and complexity in living arrangements and family patterns in later life compel analysis of the nature and significance of the family, family networks and family system. The character of inter-generational relationships reflects the earlier history and experience of each member of that family and their shared life. Multiracial society The experience of any person incorporates biological and psychosocial aspects of life, including some experience of the inherent racism, sexism, and ageism in

	<p>society. Thus for some people, living in an alien multiracial society may present particular problems which need appropriately sensitive solutions (Norman, 1985). Gender Society makes a different response to old men and to old women, sometimes resulting in the greater denigration of older women; this takes some combating on a personal and a professional level (Sontag, 1978; Macdonald and Rich, 1984). Men are more likely than women to receive services if they are in a caring role (Charlesworth et al., 1984). Social services Complicated tasks face social service departments in trying to meet the claims for service made on them and to offer constructive assistance within statutory responsibilities and resource constraints. Action There is a need to take a proactive stance to develop social work with elderly people and their families, as the welfare state contracts, and a mixed economy of welfare emerges. A patchwork of care may well be required that is drawn from private and voluntary as well as formal and informal sources. A campaigning approach is needed to seek better resources and develop greater understanding. Definition of terms Before exploring the complexity of social work with old people it is necessary to clarify some of the terms used. This is not purely an academic exercise. It is helpful for understanding the situation of elderly people and possible intervention. The family A useful definition is: ` a kinship network spanning three or more generations and involving relatives who do not necessarily live in the same house' (Graham, 1984, p.17). Family network This involves neighbours, friends and other informal carers, as well as formal carers such as home help or the peripatetic warden, involved on a daily basis with an individual old person. The term ` social support network' also carries the same meaning but is descriptive of a more loosely structured set of connections with fewer family members. Family system The process of day-to-day interaction within the old person's family network. This necessarily affects the principal carer, the main relative and the formal carer who is the key worker as well as the individual or partnership in question. Principal carer This is the person carrying most responsibility for day-to-day care</p>
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