

Investigating Social Networks

Social Networks: "That set of contacts with relatives, friends, neighbours, etc., through which individuals maintain a social network and receive emotional support, material aid, services and information and develop new social contacts." (Walker et al, 1977)

Investigating social networks in a community involves obtaining information through observation and questioning to determine the following information:

- Who are the most influential people in the network?
- Are the relationships in the network one-way or two-way (reciprocal)?
- Are there different networks for different topics, e.g. health, legal problems, cars, home decorating, etc.?
- How important is family membership in community life? How are families and kinship groups typically organized within the culture?
- What roles do the father, mother, son, daughter, grandparents (or other persons typically part of the family within a certain culture) play within the family?
- Who generally makes health-related decisions within the family (i.e. what to do when a member is sick, whether to take certain preventive measures, what the family will eat, what money can be allocated for health-related expenses, whether a sick member may follow certain medical advice)?
- Who are the most influential people in the community? Are there informal leaders who are looked to for decisions although they remain in the background?

Activity 3.4

Draw a series of concentric circles. Write your name in the centre of the first circle. In the next circle put the names of the people in your social network who have the most influence on your life. In the next circle put people who have some influence, but are less important than those in the inner circle. What does this diagram say about the influences on your life and health related decisions? If you were to make a diagram like this for another person, how do you think you might be able to use it in health promotion with that person?