
UNIT 3 PSYCHOSOCIAL CHANGES (EARLY ADULTHOOD, MIDDLE AGE, OLD AGE)

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will be dealing with development during adult years. The period of adulthood is marked by society's expectation of performing one's duty as an adult. Some special roles and relationship like family and career are the major milestones of adulthood. While discussing development during adult years stage theories will be put forward to explain the adult years. This will be seen in contrast to the contextual theories. This unit will discuss psychosocial changes during early and middle adulthood and the various changes that come about as one grows older. Finally the unit will discuss the various growth and development issues related to old age.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the development during adult years in terms of stage vs Contextual theories;
- explain the psychosocial changes during early adulthood;
- delineate the psychosocial changes during middle adulthood; and
- analyse the psychosocial changes during old age.

3.2 DEVELOPMENT DURING ADULT YEARS

The spurt of growth during adolescence stabilises by adulthood and the individual looks forward to more concrete roles in the society. The capabilities and behaviours of the individuals continue to change as they grow older not only because of the biological growth process but also because of their understanding and the way they interact with their environment.

In the Indian tradition the period of adulthood is referred to as Grihastha ashram. During this stage an individual enters the social life and accepts responsibilities of family, marriage and entering into one's career. The stages of adulthood have sub periods such as young adulthood, middle adulthood and late adulthood.

Perhaps middle adulthood is best known for the midlife crisis. This is a time of reevaluation that leads to questioning long held beliefs and values. The midlife crisis may also result in a person divorcing his or her spouse, changing jobs, or moving from the city to the suburbs.

Typically beginning in the early or mid 40s, the crisis often occurs in response to a sense of mortality, as middle age persons realise that their youth is limited and that they have not accomplished all of their desired goals in life. Of course, not everyone experiences stress or upset during middle age, instead they may simply undergo a midlife transition, or change, rather than going through the emotional upheaval of a midlife crisis.

Other middle age adults prefer to reframe their experience by thinking of themselves as being in the prime of their lives rather than in their declining years.

The field of life-span development seems to be moving away from a normative crisis model to a timing of events model, so as to explain such events as the midlife transition and the midlife crisis. The former model describes psychosocial tasks as occurring in a definite age related sequence, while the latter describes tasks as occurring in response to particular life events and their timing. In other words, whereas the normative crisis model defines the midlife transition as occurring exactly between ages 40 and 45, the timing of events model defines it as occurring when the persons begin the process of questioning their own life desires, values, goals, and accomplishments.

Later adulthood or the period of old age begins at the age of sixty. During this stage most individuals lose their jobs because they retire from active service. They begin to fear about their physical and psychological health. In our society, the elderly are typically perceived as not so active, deteriorating intellectually. They tend to become narrow minded and seem to attach significance to religion. Many of the old people lose their spouses and suffer from emotional insecurity. However, this may not be true of everybody. Many people at the age of sixty or above remain very healthy and active in life. The life style including exercise, diet, and regular health check up helps people to enjoy meaningful and active life.

Involvement in grand parenting helps elderly satisfy many of their personal and emotional needs. Grandparents can serve as important role models. Old people find these roles emotionally self fulfilling and tend to derive self satisfaction through achievement of their grand children.

Successful ageing occurs when elders have developed many ways to minimize losses and maximise gains.

How and why does a change occur during our adult years? Is it purely the result of biological processes, alteration in our bodies and brains as we grow older? Certainly,

such changes must play an important role, but are they the entire story? Let's discuss these important questions according to psychologist's stage theories or contextual approach.

3.2.1 Stage Theories Versus the Contextual Approach

Stage Theories: Stage theories suggest that all human beings, no matter where or when they live, move through an orderly progression of stages in their development. The individual grows in a systematic process. According to Eric Erikson's eight stages of life, development proceeds through a series of distinct stages, each defined by a specific crisis. These crisis, in return results from the fact that as an individual grows older, they confront new combinations of biological drives and societal demands. The biological drives reflect the expectations and requirements of society for people at different ages.

During adulthood, every individual passes through three major crises. The first of these is the crises of integrity versus isolation. During late adolescence and early adulthood, individual must develop the ability to form deep, intimate relationships with others. This does not simply mean sexual intimacy, rather, it involves the ability to form strong emotional attachment to others. In other words, the first crisis of adult life centers in the capacity to love, to care deeply and consistently with others. People who fail to resolve it successfully will live in isolation, unable to form truly intimate, lasting relationships.

Erikson labeled the second crisis of adult life, that is the crisis of generativity versus absorption. The need for individuals to overcome selfish, self-centered concerns and to take an active interest in helping and guiding the next generation. For parents, such activities are focused on their children. After children have themselves grown up into adults, however, the tendency towards the generativity may involve serving as mentor or guide for members of younger generation, helping them in their careers and lives. People who do not become parents can express generativity by providing help and guidance to young people such as students, younger co-workers, nieces and nephews, and so on. Individuals who successfully resolve this crisis become absorbed in their own lives and gradually cut themselves off from an important source of growth and satisfaction.

Erikson termed the final crisis of adult development as integrity versus despair. Individuals in this stage reach the final decades of their life and look back and analyse themselves with questions like "Did my life have any meaning?" "Did my being here really matter?" If the individual is able to answer "yes" for the questions, and to feel that they have reached many of their goals, they attain a sense of integrity. If, instead, they find their lives to be lacking on such dimensions, they may experience intense feelings of despair. Successful resolution of this final crisis can have important effects on how individuals come to terms with their own mortality, the inevitable fact of death, and on their psychological and physical health during the final years.

According to Erikson and others who view adult development in terms of discrete phases or stages, development during human adult years follows an orderly plan, reflecting the fact that at different times in people's lives, everyone experiences the same problems, events, challenges, or as mentioned crises. The way in which an individual deals with each of these turning points determines the course and nature of people's lives from that point on.

Contextual Approach: Contextual theories of development take careful account of many of the differences that exist in one's life and situations. The context and situation of each individual varies a great deal and these in fact account for the individuals to experience the crises in their life differently.

Contextual theories of development hold that it is the context or environment under which a child grows, that is more important than inbuilt mechanisms. These theorists believe that infants and children develop and grow according to the environmental and contextual influences they are exposed to and that these contextual factors are what makes them fully functioning adults or disordered adults. Biological influences are seen as secondary if not completely ignored.

Two of the most important contextual theories were put forward by American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner and Lev Vygotsky. According to Bronfenbrenner's theory development is influenced by experiences arising from broader social and cultural systems as well as a child's immediate surroundings. Ecological Systems Theory, also called "Development in Context" or "Human Ecology" theory, specifies four types of nested environmental systems, with bi-directional influences within and between the systems.

This ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner presents the sociocultural view of development which focuses on the changing relations between individuals and the environments in which they live. It consists of five environmental systems ranging from the individual's direct interactions with social agents to the broad-based inputs of culture. The five systems in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

The microsystem in ecological theory is the setting in which an individual lives (Bronfenbrenner 1979). This context includes the person's family, peers, school, neighbourhood, etc. is the immediate environment in which a person is operating. The individual directly interacts with this environment and the latter has a direct impact on a child's biological and psychological development. The key concept is the "direct contact" between the child and the niche. The mesosystem in ecological theory involves linkages between Microsystems. Behaviourists like John Watson and B.F. Skinner defined environment as "any and all external focuses that shape the individual's environment". While environment is extremely important, there are others who are of the view that the individual in addition has an important role to play.

That is, it is not just that he/she gets influenced by environment, but the developing individual is not all passive but actively influences also the environment in which he/she grows up.

Self Assessment Questions

1) Delineate the Characteristic features of development during early adulthood.

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2) What are the important features of development during midyears and old age?

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3) Describe the stage theory of development.

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4) How does stage theory differ from contextual theory?
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3.3 PSYCHOSOCIAL CHANGES DURING EARLY ADULTHOOD

Early adulthood is the stage of our life between the ages of about 20-40 years old, who are typically vibrant, active and healthy, and are focused on friendship, romance, child bearing and careers. It is the first stage of adulthood in which the body physically changes and is one of the hardest times in our lives after teenage years. One has to deal with so much in this time and it seems to be the time for self search as well as preparation for the future coming years of old age.

During this time in one’s life, people find themselves with a new sense of independence and for the first time in life they really feel free. However, along with that comes a lot of added personal responsibility to both individuals and others and the persons really start learning more about themselves as well as others through social interaction.

3.3.1 Eric Erikson’s Theory

According to Erikson, the socialisation process consists of eight phases – the “eight stages of man.” His eight stages of man were formulated, not through experimental work, but through wide - ranging experience in psychotherapy, including extensive experience with children and adolescents from low - as well as upper - and middle - social classes. Each stage is regarded by Erikson as a “psychosocial crisis,” which arises and demands resolution before the next stage can be satisfactorily negotiated. These stages are conceived in an almost architectural sense: satisfactory learning and resolution of each crisis is necessary if the child is to manage the next and subsequent ones satisfactorily. It is like the foundation of a house which is essential to the first floor, which in turn must be structurally sound to support the second floor as it gets built up. Some of the important crises of the adulthood include the following:

Intimacy vs. Isolation

Intimacy requires that an independent persons give up some of their independence and redefine their identity to include the interests of another person or others in their lives. The adult life is a conflict of intimacy vs. independence, and includes differing needs for connection, fears of abandonment or being overwhelmed, and it’s a challenging work in progress.

People who have achieved intimacy are cooperative, tolerant, and accepting of differences. They can accept times of aloneness without fear of loneliness. If there is too great a sense of isolation, there will be fears of forming close ties, due to fears of loss of identity or freedom.

Such people are more competitive than cooperative. They get easily threatened if any person gets too close, and not accepting of another’s differences. If there is successful resolution of this conflict, a person can go on to develop generativity, which means

caring for the next generation and helping to improve society. In women, child bearing usually occurs in the 20s and 30s, while contributions to society may occur later. As children come into the picture, values and focus will shift with those demands.

3.3.2 Levinson's Seasons of Life Theory

Levinson sought to find a common path of change in adulthood. He believed that there were stages with tasks inherent to each one. He was of the view that each stage began with a transition, lasting about 5 years. Between transitions there are periods of 5 – 7 years that are stable, during which a person builds a life structure.

Life structure is the underlying design of a person's life, which involves relationships with significant others and occupations. This structure is designed to harmonize inner and outer demands to enhance quality of life. Early adulthood is the time of greatest energy, contradiction and stress. It is also a time of intense satisfaction, as a person charts his/her own course in love, sexuality, family, occupation, setting life goals, etc.

Dreams and mentors: In Levinson's theory, during the early adult transition (age 17 – 22) most people construct a dream, an image of themselves in the adult world that will guide their decision making. The more specific the dream, the more motivating it is. Men's dreams are said to be more individualistic and often entail success in business and career. On the other hand if they include women, their dreams are invariably related to their being supporters of their goals.

Age-30 transition serves as a time to reevaluate their life structure. If the person is still single, she/he will begin looking for a partner. Women who had immersed in marriage and child-bearing may begin to assert more individualistic goals. This period can be a real crisis if neither relationships nor occupation is successful.

Settling down for Men means focusing on certain relationships and aspirations, and leaving others behind. They try to establish a niche in society consistent with their values: family, wealth, power, achievement.

Continued instability for Women occurs as women often get side-tracked from a professional focus by child-bearing and family responsibilities. Most women don't attain the stability that men achieve in the early 30s until middle age.

The Social clock is the age-graded expectations that we hold for life events, such as first job, getting married, having children, buying a house, retirement. Women who followed a feminine social clock (marriage and child bearing in the 20s) are considered to be responsible, self-controlled, tolerant, and caring, but do seem to feel their self-esteem decline, and are said to feel more vulnerable as they aged.

Women who followed a masculine social clock (early career development) became more dominant, sociable, independent, and intellectually effective. Women who had not followed a social clock are said to be suffering from self-doubt, feelings of incompetence, and loneliness.

Close relationships require finding a partner, building emotional bonds, and learning how to engage in true intimacy with another person.

Romantic Love entails finding a partner to share one's life and dreams with. It enhances self-concept and well-being.

Selecting a mate usually means finding someone of similar background, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status and religion, in places where people like that congregate. It requires some physical proximity to develop a meaningful relationship.

Components of love: The triangular theory of love (Sternberg) suggests love has 3 components: intimacy, passion, and commitment. Intimacy has to do with emotions of tenderness, warmth, concern for others, desire for partner to reciprocate. Passion is the sexual component, as well as romance, which is the physical arousal component.

Passionate love is the stuff of the beginning of a relationship – the courting, sexual attraction. It declines as the partner becomes more known, less idealised. Few long-term relationships maintain this level of attraction.

Companionate love is formed with intimacy and commitment, as partners develop warm, trusting affection and offer caregiving. Solid long-term relationships involve both types of love at different stages. It requires this glue to hold a couple together as the newness of a relationship wears off. Commitment determines if a relationship will survive. Communication of commitment requires warmth, forgiveness, sensitivity, acceptance, and respect.

3.3.3 Attachment Patterns and Romantic Relationships

Early attachment patterns predict the quality of later intimate relationships. That early attachment bond sets up an internal working model, or expectations about love figures. It also relates to quality of parenting and attachments formed in those relationships. The attachment is itself of various types which are discussed below:

- i) Secure attachment – those with secure attachments to a caregiver viewed themselves as likable, open to others, comfortable with intimacy, with few fears of abandonment or intimacy. They describe their love relationships as trusting, happy, and the partner as a friend. They were willing to turn to the partner for comfort, and they described satisfying sexual behaviour.

Avoidant attachment – those with an avoidant attachment history (demanding, disrespectful, critical parents) had internal models heavy on independence, mistrusting of partners, and anxious about people getting too close. They believe others dislike them and true love is hard to find or doesn't last. Their relationships are characterised by jealousy, emotional distance, little enjoyment of physical contact. They may become workaholics or engage in affairs to prove their theory that love can't be counted on.

- ii) Resistant attachment – this includes parents who were unpredictable or unfair. These people set up intense relationships characterised by fears of abandonment and smothering of the partner. They experienced extreme highs and lows in a relationship. They have poor boundaries with others, disclosing inappropriately to others too early in the relationship.

Characteristics of the partner also affect romantic relationships. Those partners who feel internal security about themselves fostered security in their partner. So a healthy relationship can help a person from a troubled background overcome some of the deficits of their background.

Friendships are usually similar in background, age, interests and needs. Friends offer affirmation and acceptance, support during difficulty. Sharing deep feelings and needs may be more open in a friendship than a marriage, especially for women.

Same-sex friendships are more intimate for women than men. Women enjoy just talking, while men choose to do some activity together, especially sports. Unfortunately men feel competitive with other men, so they describe barriers to deep friendships with other men, in the form of resistance to revealing any vulnerabilities or needs unmet.

Other-sex friendships occur less often and don't last as long as same-sex friendships. Men and women disclose more to women, but women can learn important things about male motivations and taking a more objective stance from a male friend.

Siblings as friends – especially sisters become companions in adulthood. Rivalries from the past subside as sibs develop a different type of supportive relationship. Close sib relationships predict mental health.

Self Assessment Questions

1) According to Erikson's theory indicate the conflict cum crisis that takes place during adulthood.

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2) Put forward Levinson's theory and its features in adult development.

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3) What is meant by social clock? How is it important for development in adulthood?

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4) Describe attachment patterns and romantic relationships.

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3.4 THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

This is a sequence of phases in the development of most families. Early adulthood, people live on their own, then marry and bear children. In middle age children leave home, parenting responsibilities diminish and people spend more time and money on themselves if they don't have to care for an elderly parent, finally retiring, getting older, and loss of a spouse.

Leaving home happens more often at earlier ages now than in the past. People leave for school, military, and for jobs, so they leave at different ages. Youth in chaotic and disturbing homes leave home earlier to escape the tension. Most leave home to experience

their independence, even though that may mean living with a number of roommates to be able to afford it. If there are financial setbacks, however, most people feel they can return home if they have to.

Joining of families in marriage – people are waiting longer to marry today: ages 25 (M) and 27 (W). Marriage represents connection between 2 family systems, with all the traditions and expectations inherent.

Marital roles encompass meals, time together and apart, leisure time decisions, sexual needs, financial decisions. Some of these things are not as emotionally charged as others, but the partners rarely know which topics are potential explosions until they face them. Without good communication and negotiation skills, the openness of the marriage will be compromised.

Traditional marriages involve a clear division of labour between husband and wife. Man's responsibilities include economic provision; woman's responsibilities have to do with making a home and providing for children.

Egalitarian marriages have spouses relating as equals, with power and authority being shared. Both partners try to balance devotion to work with family responsibilities. Better-educated women expect this sort of marriage. Even so, division of labour in the home may not be equal.

Marital satisfaction – Men relate being happier in marriage than women. Being married enhances men's health, due to feelings of attachment, belonging, social support. Women need a certain relationship quality to feel satisfied in a relationship. So women suffer more when the relationship is having problems. Women also suffer under multiple role demands, feel overwhelmed by the needs of all the people in their circle. Women are more willing to work on the relationship through discussion, but men are more willing to withdraw from conflict, leading to frustration in the women.

Parenthood has become an active choice for couples, as birth control is available and effective today. There is less stigmatisation for couples who remain childless. The decision to have children is based on financial circumstances, religious values, health concerns. Women with more traditional identities usually choose to have children. Those with high status, demanding jobs choose less often to have children.

Advantages of having children include warmth and affection, the fun that children offer, learning experiences, desire to pass on values, family name, feelings of accomplishment in raising successful children.

Disadvantages of having children include loss of freedom, burdens financially and in being tied down. The conflict between work responsibilities and family also is cited as a problem.

Transition to parenthood occurs in all areas: loss of sleep, new tasks and responsibilities, less time for the couple, increased expenses. The roles become more traditional, even for egalitarian couples, so this can impose frustration on the couple. Loving, supportive marriages can usually manage the strain and will describe themselves as happy. Troubled marriages seem to become more distressed after a baby. Husband's negativity or out-of-control conflict predicts a drop in mother's satisfaction. The greater the difference in caregiving responsibilities, the greater the decline in marital satisfaction after childbirth. Interventions such as group experiences with other couples can get fathers more involved and enhance the father's appreciation of what caregiving entails, increasing affirmation of mother, and satisfaction.

Career development aids in establishing a satisfying identity- as adults with satisfying work develop skills, sense their accomplishments, make friends and feel more financially independent and secure.

Establishing a career

Men enter their careers earlier, as soon as they finish school, and they stay in the marketplace continuously. Promotion often seems to depend on job commitment and competitiveness in the worker. Very successful men emphasise their jobs over family responsibilities and leisure activities. Also a sense of self-efficacy makes a difference in promotion. Those people with fears of failure will tend to set lower goals for themselves.

Combining work and family

Dual-career marriage are challenging, particularly for women who carry so many role responsibilities- role overload. This links to stress, poorer marital relationships, poorer parenting, and child behaviour problems. It is particularly a problem for people in poorer paying jobs, with fewer options about child care, time off, etc. Career decisions are more flexible for professional people, but moves are difficult, since both careers must be considered. Women are particularly afflicted with overload.

Self Assessment Questions

1) Elucidate the family life cycle during adulthood and related factors.

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2) What are the advantages and disadvantages of having children early?

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3) What are the transitional aspects involved in parenthood?

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4) Discuss career development during adulthood.

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3.5 PSYCHOSOCIAL CHANGES DURING MIDDLE ADULTHOOD

Eric Erikson's Theory

Erikson stated that the primary psychosocial task of middle adulthood—ages 45 to 65—is to develop generativity, or the desire to expand one's influence and commitment to family, society, and future generations. In other words, the middle adult is concerned with forming and guiding the next generation. The middle adult who fails to develop generativity experiences stagnation, or self-absorption, with its associated self-indulgence and invalidism.

Generativity means reaching out to others in ways that give to and guide the next generation. In early adulthood it occurs as parents train children and develop a career. In midlife this extends beyond the nuclear family to a community or social group. Now people are trying to integrate their goals with the welfare of the larger world. Generativity includes all things people generate that can outlive them and improve society. Parenting is one way, but there are other ways, such as mentoring in the workplace, volunteering, community involvement, creative endeavors. People need to be needed and feel like their lives amount to something eternal.

There are certain social clock imperatives toward generativity, but there is also an optimistic "belief in the species" that we want to be part of. This means finding ways to be part of improving humanity. The alternative to finding a means to generativity is *stagnation*—becoming self-centered and narcissistic. These people place their own comfort/ security above challenges that include other people. There is a detachment even from their own children, a self-centered focus on what they can get from others, not what they can give, losing interest in being productive at work or developing their talents. Generative people are better adjusted, low in anxiety and depression and high in self-acceptance and life satisfaction. They are more open to others' differences in point of view, have leadership qualities, care about the welfare of others, and care more about their work than financial gain. Fatherhood seems to enhance generativity in men more than women.

Levinson's Seasons of life – middle adulthood begins with a transition (40-45), followed by a life structure (45-50). This structure is re-evaluated (50-55) and ends in a culminating life structure (55-60).

Midlife Transition occurs around age 40, when people evaluate their success in meeting their adult goals. They are realising there is more time behind them than ahead of them. In response to the valuation of time, they often make big changes in their lives- family, occupation. They may turn inward, focusing on their own needs, instead of allowing themselves to be distracted by the people around them. They seem to re-evaluate everything.

3.5.1 Four Developmental Tasks of Middle Adulthood

Following are the developmental tasks of this stage of development:

- i) Young-Old- seeking new ways of being young and old- giving up some youthful qualities that no longer seem appropriate, and transforming others, finding positive meaning in changes.
- ii) Destruction-Creation. They re-evaluate past hurtful acts- there may be attempts to apologise and make amends, or general attempts to be kinder, more creative, other-focused.

- iii) Masculinity- Femininity. Middle-aged people must find a way to recognise and integrate the masculine and feminine aspects of their personality- men become more empathic/ caring; women becoming more autonomous/ assertive
- iv) Engagement- Separateness. Middle-aged people are trying to find a better balance between engagement with the outside world and their interior needs. Men often pull back from occupational ambition and achievement focus; women may shift their interests from family to job or community and accomplishment.

Modifying the Life Structure

Gender similarities and differences are seen as people try to find a balance between youth and age. They may face life-threatening illnesses, or have to cope with ageing parents' needs. Women often fear the ageing process, as our society places so much emphasis on women's youth and looks as their value. Women will tend to perceive themselves as younger than they are – that gap increases with age. The more people integrate their masculine and feminine characteristics, the more androgynous they become, which is an adaptive approach to life.

Life Structure in Social Context is enabled through supports in the environment- poverty, unemployment and lack of personal value subverts this process. Even high-powered careers and great financial success can sabotage self-development, as the focus is on material concerns, not self development.

Midlife Crisis was cited by Levinson as people moved to middle adulthood. This is the idea that adults get to a certain point and question their life choices, resulting in a restructuring of the personality. The changes seen were slow and steady. Changes for men may occur around the early forties, but for women may occur in the late 40s and 50s, as they are freer from child responsibilities.

Stage vs. Life Events approach

There is controversy about whether midlife is actually a stage of development, like Erikson described. Many theorists just seen midlife transitions as adaptations to life events- children moving out or having to move back in, parents ageing concerns, retirement. There certainly is no specific age when changes will occur. Most midlife people describe troubling moments that prompt new goals and internal changes.

Stability and Change in Self-Concept and Personality

Possible Selves are all the ideas a person has about what one can become or what one fears becoming. Possible selves generated in the 20s are varied, positive and idealistic. As people age, possible selves become more realistic, fewer in number and more modest, related to competence in the areas already selected. The future no longer seems to hold endless opportunities, so people adjust to cope.

Self-Acceptance, Autonomy, and Environmental Mastery .

People become more introspective as they enter the second half of life. They have often made choices to change their lifestyle to suit their needs.

Coping strategies. These include finding the “silver lining” in a difficult situation, planning better ways to handle problems, evaluate alternatives to manage situations, and use humor to express themselves more effectively.

Gender Identity shifts in response to shifting proportions of sex hormones

Women adopt more masculine traits of assertiveness and self-confidence, and men

often become more sensitive, caring, and considerate. People become more androgynous. Men may turn to their relationships as they see they have fewer opportunities to develop influence at work. Women may have taken steps out of a bad marriage and have chosen to be more autonomous and assertive to survive.

3.5.2 Individual Differences in Personality Traits

Some people maintain consistent traits over the lifetime, while others adjust in some ways in response to life.

Relationships at Midlife

This period of the family life cycle is called “launching children and moving on.” In the past it was known as the “empty nest,” but it is no longer seen in such a negative light, even for women. This period may last as long as 20 years before retirement. It also relates to establishing different relationships with children and finding new relationships with in-laws and grandchildren. They also must cope with elderly parents and their needs.

Marriage and Divorce

Households at this stage are well off economically compared to other age groups. Adults between 45 and 54 have the highest annual income. This can allow for expansion of opportunities to learn, travel, etc. If the marital relationship is shaky, many people choose this time to divorce and start over. At midlife, divorce seems to be more manageable emotionally.

Feminisation of poverty

This is a trend in which women who support themselves or their families have become the majority of the adult poverty population, regardless of age and ethnic group.

Causes of divorce

Women who cite poor communication, husband’s substance abuse, husband’s physical or verbal abuse, or their desire for autonomy will adjust better, since it indicates a remnant of self-esteem in spite of the failure. Women who do survive divorce successfully tend to be more tolerant, comfortable with uncertainty, nonconforming, and self-reliant.

3.5.3 Changing Parent-child Relationships

This adjustment is more positive when parents have interesting activities of their own, beyond parenting and focus on children. Parents who relinquish authority over their adult children will have more positive relationships with them after they move out. The authoritative parenting style links to better contact after the child leaves home, and better life satisfaction for the parents.

Grandparenthood is such a stage in this age, as it is a relationship with fewer responsibilities and mostly fun. Meanings of Grandparenthood are more significant than people think until they face that transition. The gratifications include:

- Valued elder
- Immortality through descendants
- Reinvolvement with personal past
- Indulgence

Grandparent-Grandchild relationships are somewhat dependent on the age of the child. As the child grows older, the grandparents shift from play to warmth, support, information and advice-giving. The closer the families live geographically, the better chance the children can relate more closely to the grandparents, especially the grandma.

Siblings report declining contact in midlife, but this increases as one or more experience life events. Families gather for weddings, and support one another when a child divorces, or has a baby. Siblings reconnect as their children leave home and they rediscover it's fun to do things together. They often reconnect in response to the parents' illnesses or needs. Sister relationships are usually closer than brother relationships. If only one sibling holds the responsibility for elder care, there can be enormous resentment build up against the other sibs.

Friendships still cleave across genders – men are more likely to bond with men, and women with women. Women seem to have more close friends and offer and get more emotional support than men report. Numbers of friends decline with age, since people get more selective about friendships. If it is a close friendship, though, people will try to maintain it with care. Friendships are sources of emotional support, pleasure and enhance well-being.

Career Development

Job Training is less available to older workers, but if a person wants to upgrade his/her job, training is important. Unfortunately older worker have less supportive supervisors who tend to believe the ageing stereotypes and expect less of older workers.

Gender and Ethnicity

The Glass Ceiling is the unspoken, invisible barrier to advancement to women and ethnic minorities. Women managers are just as effective as male managers – they tend to be more inspiring and considerate than male managers. The current emphasis on team building is perfect for female skills in consensus-building.

Career Change at Midlife – usually they entail leaving one line of work for a related one. Some people find another line of work to find more stimulating work, others to more relaxing, less rigid or demanding work. Drastic job shifts usually signal personal crisis.

Unemployment has been a serious problem in the past 2 years as the technology industry cratered and many jobs went with it. Highly trained and well-paid workers were suddenly on unemployment lines. Middle-aged workers are more affected by unemployment, as they recognise they won't be the most employable, or they won't command the same salary they had before. This can seriously affect a worker's sense of self worth at this point.

Planning for Retirement

This is not always adequate, as people tend to believe they will work as long as they want, but illness or family crisis will sometimes short-circuit this plan. The other aspect of planning has to do with how one wants to spend their time. If people don't develop hobbies, community interests, etc., boredom can trigger depression and hopelessness. Even the idea of relocation requires much thought, since moving to be with children may impact that relationship very negatively.

Self Assessment Questions

1) Differentiate between generativity and stagnation.

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2) Discuss four developmental tasks of middle adulthood.

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3) Discuss an individual's relation with siblings and friends.

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4) Discuss psychosocial changes in mid adulthood.

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5) What is the importance of Levinson's seasons of life?

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6) Put forward the developmental tasks of mid adulthood.

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7) What is meant by modifying life structure?

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3.6 PSYCHOSOCIAL CHANGES DURING OLD AGE

The social world of older adults is varied. In general, older adults place a high value on spending time with friends, sometimes more so than time with family. This might be because of life events wherein family members are not always nearby or readily available. Also, many elders prefer not to interfere with or be a burden to their extended family. They strive to be independent and enjoy life with members of their own cohort. Within a marriage, couples may have trouble adjusting to retirement. This is most true for more traditional marriages. However, evidence suggests that married persons tend to be happier in late adulthood than single persons, though those who have never married often cope the best with feelings of loneliness in late life.

Erikson's Theory

Ego Integrity vs. Despair is the final stage of life. This involves coming to terms with one's life. If there is a sense of integrity, people feel whole, complete, and satisfied with their life choices and achievements. They have accepted the setbacks and disappointments and celebrated the successes and found a way to meaning within all these life events. Everything gets put into a perspective which allows a certain contentment with life. Increased age is associated with greater maturity and well-being. There is even a peace about one's mortality, even as close to the end as these people are. Despair, on the other hand occurs when seniors feel they have made wrong decisions, but life is too short to remedy any life directions. They display bitterness, defeat and anxiety about death, a hopelessness.

Peck's Theory: Three Tasks of Ego Integrity are involved in finding integrity:

Ego differentiation vs. work-role preoccupation. This task comes out of retirement, as people who have been invested in careers find other ways to self-worth. They must find another role to invest in and find meaning.

Body transcendence vs. body preoccupation. This task requires finding a way to transcend physical limitations, disabilities, loss of youth and beauty, to find value in cognitive, social strengths and relationships.

Ego transcendence vs. ego preoccupation. This task involves finding a constructive way of facing the reality of death. Elders must find a future beyond their own mortality, through giving back to a younger generation.

Labouvie-Vief's Theory

Emotional Expertise. Early adulthood is all about pragmatic choices- finding ways to solve real-world problems, at work as well as within relationships. Elders are becoming more in touch with their feelings and must use those feelings to reflect on their life experiences. This emotional sensitivity allows elders to detach from experiences in order to choose better how to respond. Younger people are more impulsively emotional in their coping and problem-solving. Elders are better at emotional self-regulation.

Reminiscence and Life Review

Reminiscence is telling stories about people and events from one's past, and reporting thoughts and feelings. Life review is reminiscence in which the person reflects on past experiences, considering their meaning with the goal of achieving greater self-understanding. Middle age was also assessed as satisfying, with childhood and adolescence ranked as less satisfying.

3.6.1 Stability and Change in Self-Concept and Personality

Secure and Multifaceted Self-Concept- after a lifetime of self-knowledge, people feel more secure about whom they are, and their self-concepts become more complex and multi-faceted.

Agreeableness, Sociability, and Acceptance of Change – there are 3 shifts in personality at this point: a more flexible and optimist approach to life is present.

Agreeableness – *generosity, acquiescence, and good-naturedness* are higher for many people at this point.

Sociability drops to some extent, as people become more selective about relationships and significant people die or move away.

Acceptance of change seems to link to well-being. They develop a capacity to accept life's vagaries, and they are resilient in the face of adversity.

Spirituality and Religiosity – their sense of spirituality encompasses their lives more meaningfully. Often there develops a sense of truth and beauty in art, nature, and relationships. Religion gives people rituals that stabilise life and give meaning to the life struggle. Spirituality advances to a higher level in late life- to a more reflective approach that is more at ease with the unknowable aspects of life.

Individual differences in Psychological Well-Being- Control Vs Dependency

Dependency-support script is a script in which dependent behaviours are attended to immediately, reinforcing the weaker member in her dependency.

Independence-ignore script is a script where independent behaviours are ignored, also reinforcing dependency in the weaker member. Unfortunately, being dependent is not a happy state, so the helper is often resented, even though the elder may recognise s/he needs the help. These negative feelings can foster depression. Context makes a difference however, since the more lovingly the help is offered, the easier it is to accept without regret. Elders will need help, but we can offer it without expressing disgust or impatience for their needs.

Elder Suicide is not always evident. Sometimes elders quit eating, taking care of emotional or physical problems, refusing to take meds, refusing relationships that could be encouraging.

Health is a strong predictor of well-being in late adulthood. When people face illness or chronic disabilities, they feel a loss of personal control. Not only does helplessness increase, but social isolation increases, too. Then as mental health declines, it affects physical health, as people eat more poorly, get out less, distract themselves less from their ailments.

Negative Life Changes occur more often in late adulthood- loss of friends, spouses, poor health issues, financial strain and greater dependency. This issues hit women more often, but they still report that they have people who depend on them emotionally, so they retain some of their former identity, even though many relationships often feel strained, due to the women's lower ability to care for others.

Social Support and Social Interaction – social support reduces stress, so it promotes health and well-being, and increases the odds of living longer. If elders require much assistance from others, though, they often feel distressed that they can no longer reciprocate.

3.6.2 Relationships in Late Adulthood

Social convoy is a cluster of family members and friends who provide safety and support. Some bonds become closer with age, others more distant, a few are gained, and some drift away. Elders do try to maintain social networks of family and friends to preserve security and life continuity.

Marriage – marital satisfaction rises from middle to late adulthood if perceptions of fairness in the relationship increase. If couples engage in joint leisure activities and enjoy more positive communication, their relationships become more satisfying.

Siblings- Bonds with sisters are generally closer than those with brothers. Siblings enjoy reminiscing as they enter later adulthood. This allows them to feel a family continuity and harmony, as well as begin to put their lives into a perspective as they naturally do a life review.

Friendships function to offer intimacy and companionship, acceptance, a link to the larger community, and protection from the toll of loss- physical and emotional. Women are more likely to have both intimate friends and secondary friends- people who are acquaintances they do some activities with occasionally.

3.6.3 Retirement and Leisure

Decision to retire depends on affordability, health status, opportunities to pursue meaningful activities, early retirement benefits, gender and ethnicity. Women retire earlier than most men because of family demands.

Adjustment to Retirement is affected by health status, financial stability, sense of personal control over life events, including the retirement decision, characteristics of the work they did, satisfaction derived from work, social support and marital happiness.

Leisure Activities engaged in relate to physical and mental health, but they also relate to reduced mortality. It is best to develop hobbies and interests and volunteer activities before retirement that can be invested in more seriously after retirement.

Successful ageing occurs when elders have developed many ways to minimize losses and maximise gains. Social contexts can foster successful ageing. These are such things as well-funded social security plans, good health care, safe housing that adjusts to changes in elders' needs, social services, opportunities for lifelong learning. Better in-home help, adapted housing and sensitive nursing home care could make a difference in ageing, too.

Self Assessment Questions

1) Differentiate between ego integrity versus despair.

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2) Discuss reminiscence and life review.

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3) Explain how is spirituality and religion important during the late adulthood.

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3.7 LET US SUM UP

During the period of young adulthood one sees himself or herself as an autonomous and independent adult. In this period the individual becomes financially less dependent on the parental family. A major developmental task during this period is the choice of career. Young men and women tend to settle down in a career of their choice. In addition a young adult tries to settle down and start the family life. They are also concerned about various social issues and forming close relationships with one’s professional peers and members of community. The duties of a person demand two fold responsibilities which are towards oneself as well as the society.

Perhaps middle adulthood is best known for its infamous midlife crisis: a time of reevaluation that leads to questioning long-held beliefs and values. The midlife crisis may also result in a person divorcing his or her spouse, changing jobs, or moving from the city to the suburbs. Typically beginning in the early- or mid-40s, the crisis often occurs in response to a sense of mortality, as middle adults realise that their youth is limited and that they have not accomplished all of their desired goals in life. Of course, not everyone experiences stress or upset during middle age; instead they may simply undergo a midlife transition, or change, rather than the emotional upheaval of a midlife crisis. Other middle adults prefer to reframe their experience by thinking of themselves as being in the prime of their lives rather than in their declining years.

During the male midlife crisis, men may try to reassert their masculinity by engaging in more youthful male behaviours, such as dressing in trendy clothes, taking up activities like scuba diving, motorcycling, or skydiving.

During the female midlife crisis, women may try to reassert their femininity by dressing in youthful styles, having cosmetic surgery, or becoming more socially active. Some middle adult women try to look as young as their young adult children by dyeing their hair and wearing more youthful clothing. Such actions may be a response to feelings of isolation, loneliness, inferiority, uselessness, nonassertion, or unattractiveness.

The field of life-span development seems to be moving away from a normative-crisis model to a timing-of-events model to explain such events as the midlife transition and the midlife crisis. The former model describes psychosocial tasks as occurring in a definite age-related sequence, while the latter describes tasks as occurring in response to particular life events and their timing. In other words, whereas the normative-crisis model defines the midlife transition as occurring exactly between ages 40 and 45, the timing-of-events model defines it as occurring when the person begins the process of questioning life desires, values, goals, and accomplishments.

Later adulthood or the period of old age begins at the age of sixty. During this stage most individuals lose their jobs because they retire from active service. They begin to fear about their physical and psychological health. In our society, the elderly are typically perceived as not so active, deteriorating intellectually, narrow-minded and attaching significance to religion. Many of the old people lose their spouses and suffer from emotional insecurity. However, this may not be true of everybody. Many people at the

age of sixty or above remain very healthy and active in life. The life style including exercise, diet, and regular health check up helps people to enjoy meaningful and active life.

Involvement in grand parenting helps elderly satisfy many of their personal and emotional needs. Grandparents can serve as important role models. Old people find these roles emotionally self-fulfilling and tend to derive self-satisfaction through achievement of their grand children.

3.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss stage versus life events approach.
- 2) What are the differences in individual personality traits?
- 3) Discuss the dynamics of relationship in middle age.
- 4) Discuss the importance and characteristics of grand parenthood.
- 5) What are the psychosocial changes that occur in old age?
- 6) What importance has retirement in late adulthood?

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

Agich, G (2009). *Dependence and Autonomy in Old Age*. Cambridge university Press, Cleveland

Sigelman, Carol K. & Rider Elizabeth A. (2009). *Lifespan Human Development*. Wardworth, NY