

LESSON 14

ADULTHOOD AND AGING

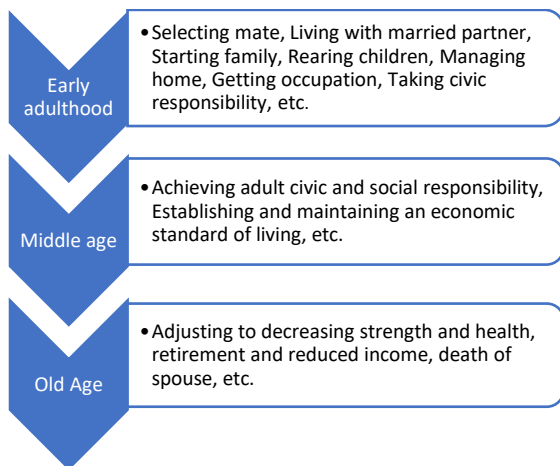
SUMMARY

At every stage of life, there are several changes coming up in the lifestyle of the people. Adults achieve stability by making adjustment with the world outside as well as within one's own self.

Psychological Perspective on Adulthood

There are many specific development tasks during adulthood and old age requiring the grown up to engage in specific development and make special adjustments in life.

Havinghurst's developmental task for adulthood stage:



Daniel Levinson gave the following stages:

Levinson's stages

- Leaving the family (20-24)
- Getting into the adult world (early 20s to 27-29)
- Settling down (early 30s to early 40s)
- Becoming one's own man (35-39)
- The midlife Transition (early 40s)
- Restabilization and the beginning of middle adulthood

The Period of Adulthood

Young Adulthood - The major concerns of young adults in 20s are to establish themselves in life, job, and family. The young adult wants to seek social and economic security in preparing for a role of greater independence and responsibility in society.

Middle Age - the individual arrives at middle age in the forties and fifties. Middle age is characterized by competence, maturity, responsibility and stability.

Old Age - The period of old age begins at the age of sixty. At this age most individuals retire from their jobs formally. They begin to develop some concern and occasional anxiety over their physical and psychological health.

Mental or physical decline does not necessarily have to occur. Persons can remain vigorous, active, and dignified until their eighties or even nineties. In fact, the older persons have vast reservoir of knowledge, experience, and wisdom on which the community can draw.

Physical changes during adulthood and aging

Major physical changes with ageing are –

(1) **external changes**- External changes refer to the outward symptoms of growing old. The more observable changes are those associated with the skin, hair, teeth, and general posture. The losses of teeth, balding and greying of the hair, wrinkling of the skin, and lack of physical strength all have a potentially negative effect on an individual's self-concept and confidence.

(2) **internal changes** - refer to the symptoms of growing old that are not visible or obvious. Changes taking place with increasing age in the respiratory system, gastrointestinal system, cardiovascular system, and central nervous system.

(3) **changes in sensory capacities**
- With advancing age, there is gradual slowdown in the sensory abilities. Losses in any senses can have profound psychological consequences. E.g. – Vision and hearing capacity, sense of taste and smell.

Cognitive Changes during adulthood

The term 'Cognition' refers to the processes by which information is acquired, stored, and used. Major cognitive aspect affected due to aging – memory, learning, attention and Intelligence.

Memory - Older subjects do not perform as well on the tasks that demand repeating numbers in reverse order. Old persons are found to perform poorer than young ones on long-term memory tasks which require processing of information and organization of material. Factors affecting memory in old age

- Beliefs about memory
- Use of memory strategies
- Life styles of elderly

Learning - Old persons' learning performance maybe very close to that of young person's if older persons are allowed more time or can self-pace the tests. They were found to perform better when there is no time pressure and the material is presented very distinctly and in a simplified manner.

Attention - The term attention refers to the manner in which we focus on what we are doing. Old people may not differ from young people in terms of their attention span as such. However, they get easily distracted by any kind of interference. With training, attention can be improved.

Intelligence - Intelligence in adulthood and aging maybe viewed as enabling the individual to cope with a variety of demanding everyday tasks and events. Everyday intelligence of the elderly maybe determined by their ability in performing daily jobs. Lower performance on intelligence tests

may be due to slower reaction time than due to a decline in intellectual functions.

Problems of Adjustment in Old age

A. Poor image problems faced by older people - older people in general do not like themselves as much as younger people. Older men are generally found to have lower self-esteem than older women.

B. Happiness - majority of elderly men and women report that they hardly had any feeling of excitement in their lives and that their life is very dull with nothing to look forward to.

C. Economical Problems - Adjustment to retirement is often difficult for individuals. Retirement requires adjustment to a new life-style characterized by decreased income, lesser activity level, and increased free time.

D. Death - Elderly persons are not afraid of death per se. They do, however, fear to a great extent the dying process — the process of dying in pain or dying alone.

E. Depression - Older persons often show two major symptoms of depression: depressive mood and reduced behaviour such as - giving up, apathy. Many elderly persons also represent their depression somatically by complaints of loss of

appetite, sleep disturbances. Both biological factors and social/cultural factors can contribute to depression in aged persons.

Coping with the problems

Some of the effective coping strategies may be summarized as follows:

(1) The elderly need to develop an attitude of flexibility so that they may adapt to life's pressures and problems of old age.

(2) They need to recognize that they have to explore new ways of coping with their life events.

(3) The elderly need to make greater use of information seeking and of problem solving rather than withdrawing or isolating.

(4) Increasing one's self-confidence, self-reliance, developing healthy attitude about one's strengths and weaknesses, learning and maintaining effective coping skills and adopting an active approach.

(5) Enlarging social networks is another way of coping with life problems.

(6) Involvement in grand parenting helps elderly satisfy many of their personal and emotional needs.

Psychological Interventions for the aged

The most important goals of psychological interventions are:

1. Insight into one's behaviour

2. Anxiety or depression relief
3. Adaptation to a present situation
4. Improving self-care skills
5. Encouraging activity
6. Facilitating independence
7. Accepting one's weakness and difficulties
8. Improving interpersonal relationships

There are several psychological interventions which are needed for the aged. Some are listed below:

- Seeking Help through mental health services
- Cognitive-behavioural Interventions
- Behavioural Interventions
- Family Therapy
- Societal Intervention

Evaluate yourself

1. What are the main psychological interventions for the aged?
2. Discuss the cognitive and physical changes that takes place due to aging.