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ADULTHOOD AND AGEING

What is it like to grow old? What changes occur as people grow older? What does it mean to say that some one is old? These are some of the questions which come to our mind when we see or meet an aged person. We find that our parents do not behave as we do. The kind of images which normally come to our mind when we hear the word 'adult and aging' are responsibility, stability, forgetfulness and some times poor health. We view the older years as a stage in life when people become more dependent on others. Are these stereotypes or myths?

When we look into our society today we notice that the segment of older population is growing. It has been estimated that by the year 2021 a major portion of the world's population will be in the category of the aged people. Becoming adult and growing old is a biological process, but many other developments also take place along with it. You will study about these changes in this lesson. This lesson will also help you understand the value of the aged people in the society and relating to them in a better way.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson you will be able to:

- explain the characteristics of the period of adulthood and old age;
- describe the key developmental changes during adulthood;
- describe the problems of ageing and coping with it; and
- appreciate the concerns of ageing and aged people.

12.1 THE ADULTHOOD STAGE

We are often told by our elders to act according to our age. Have you ever wondered what this means? There seem to be certain normative expectations about how



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individuals of a certain age should act. The period of adulthood is marked by society's expectations of performing one's duty as an adult. Some special roles and relationships like family and career are the major milestones of adulthood. The spurt of growth during adolescence stabilizes by adulthood and the individual looks forward to more concrete roles in the society. Our capabilities and behaviours continue to change as we grow older not only because of the biological growth but also because of our knowledge and the way we interact with environment. In the Indian tradition the period of adulthood refers to Grihastha Ashram. During this stage an individual enters the social life and accepts responsibilities of family, marriage and entering into one's career. The stage of adulthood has the following sub periods: (1) Young adulthood (20s to 30s), (2) Middle adulthood (40s to 50s) and (3) Later adulthood (60s and above.). Let us understand the various characteristics of each of these sub periods.

Young Adulthood

During this period one sees himself or herself as an autonomous and independent adult. The individual becomes financially less dependent on the parental family. A major developmental task during this period is the choice of a 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.

The stage of young adulthood is characterized by new tasks and challenges in life such as establishing financial and emotional independence and entering into marital relationship. Unemployment and marital discord are two typical crisis conditions during early adulthood. According to Erikson this period is characterized by a crisis of 'intimacy versus isolation'. The young adults must develop the ability to form deep intimate relationships with others, particularly in marriage. Otherwise, they can become socially and emotionally isolated. Most young adults develop a dream of future accomplishments or a vision of what they want to achieve as a life goal. Such dreams motivate young adults towards goal directed efforts. Occupational and marital choices and gaining social and economic independence are some major tasks of early adulthood. Very often, during the early thirties individuals make a reappraisal of their choices and seek to make specific changes in their career choice and social relations. These experiences are described as "age thirty transition".

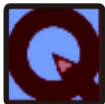
Characteristics of Young Adulthood

- Choice of a career.
- Starting a family life.

- Forming close relationships with peers.
- Concerns about society.

Do It Yourself

Meet two adults, a male and a female. Ask them to describe their roles and responsibilities. Record their descriptions and your own description. Compare and discuss with your peers and tutor.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 12.1

1. Identify the characteristics of young adulthood.

12.2 ADULTHOOD OR MIDDLE AGE

From the period of twenties and thirties, the individual arrives at middle age in the forties and fifties. Middle age is characterized by competence, maturity, responsibility and stability. This is the time when one wants to enjoy the success of job, satisfaction derived from the family and social life. People look forward to the success of their children. Attention gets more focused on health, the future of children, aging parents, the use of leisure time and plans for old age. For women, menopause occurs between the age of forty-five and fifty. Menopause is supposed to be accompanied by some distressing physical and psychological symptoms in women. During this period men show greater concern towards health, strength, power and sexual potency.

Middle age is also viewed as a period of creativity and significant contribution to society. It is found that the best works of scientists, writers and artists are produced during the late forties and early fifties. Erikson characterizes middle adulthood as a phase of crisis involving generativity versus self-absorption. Unless a person makes this a period of meaningful contribution he/she may become preoccupied with selfish needs and desires. The middle age transition is also a period of turbulence. People start viewing themselves as older and become conscious of their mortality which often leads to emotional instability. They also engage in taking stock of their lives to assess the extent to which they have realized their dreams. Such re-assessments often lead to occupational changes and changes in marital relationships such as divorce. For most people who are employed in regular jobs, the end of the middle adulthood years involves the task of coming to terms with possible retirement from work life and the associated readjustments in life.

Characteristics of Middle Adulthood

- Competence, maturity, responsibility and stability.
- Attention focused on children.





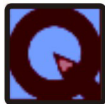
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- Plans for old age.
- Occurrence of menopause in women.

Old Age

Later adulthood or the period of old age begins around the age of sixty. During this stage most individuals lose their jobs as 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 and spirituality. Many of the elderly 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 enjoy a meaningful and active life during old age.

Aging, however, is also a psychological phenomenon. There are numerous examples of writers, statesmen, professors and yogis who lead a productive and active life during old age. So it is important to note that old age can be a much happier and fuller time. Mental or physical decline does not necessarily have to occur. Persons can remain vigorous, active and dignified until their eighties or even nineties. This is quite possible if they take adequate care of themselves right from their middle age years. In fact, the older persons have vast reservoir of knowledge, experience and wisdom on which the community can draw upon.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 12.2**

1. Describe any two characteristics of middle adulthood.

12.3 PHYSICAL AND COGNITIVE CHANGES DURING ADULTHOOD AND OLD AGE

In the present day society, with increasing health consciousness, both men and women want to be physically and mentally fit. With advancing age certain inevitable and universal changes such as chemical changes in cells or gradual loss of adaptive reserve capacity take place. There are also certain cognitive changes taking place from middle adulthood onwards. These changes are slow and gradual. Normally people see aging as a period of physical and mental health decline. These changes



are mainly physical and cognitive in nature. Let us try to understand these changes.

(a) Physical Changes: It has been found that the body organs of most persons show a 0.8 to 1 percent decline per year in the functional ability after the age of 30 years. Part of this decline is normal, some are disease-related and some caused by factors such as stress, occupational status, nutritional status and many other environmental factors. The major physical changes associated with aging are described as external changes, internal changes and changes in the sensory capacities and cognitive abilities. Let us understand these changes.

1) External Changes: This refers to the symptoms of growing old that can be seen in an individual. With many individuals the symptoms of aging can be seen as graying hair, aging skin shift in posture and appearance of wrinkles and other changes.

Key to Longer and Healthier Life

- (a) Eat healthy diet.
- (b) Exercise regularly.
- (c) Reduce stress level.
- (d) Don't smoke or drink alcohol and other drugs.
- (e) Cultivate certain positive qualities.
- (f) Engage with activities of social welfare.
- (g) Develop spirituality and faith.

2) Internal Changes: These changes refer to the symptoms of growing old that are not visible. These include changes in the respiratory system, gastrointestinal system, cardiovascular system, and central nervous system.

Some Great Achievers of late adulthood

- Mahatma Gandhi led India's struggle of freedom at the age of 77.
- Baba Amte
- Ramakrishna Paramhans
- Mother Teresa

3) Changes in Sensory Capacities: With advancing age, there is gradual slow down in the sensory abilities. As you know we communicate with the outer world through our senses. Losing in any of the senses can have profound psychological and social consequences.



Cognitive Changes: Cognition refers to the process by which information is acquired, stored, and used. During adulthood and aging various aspects of cognition like memory, learning, attention and speed of performance get adversely affected. The aged people often report forgetfulness, difficulty in learning new techniques and acquiring skills. Their concentration and responsiveness to environmental stimulus decreases. Dementia and Alzheimer and important diseases of old age. In general people become more vulnerable during old age.

12.4 COPING WITH THE PROBLEMS DURING OLD AGE

You must be wondering whether the process of ageing can be stopped or can anyone remain young throughout? We have noted that ageing is a biological process. This process gets affected by many other things such as stress, tension, habit, undisciplined life, ill health work habits etc. Leading a disciplined life means giving the body enough time to rest, proper work habits, less tension, proper nutrition and spirituality. It seems that aging can be delayed but no one can escape it. One must not deny and accept one's age and act in a realistic but optimistic manner. Different people adopt different coping strategies to meet their life challenges. Some of the effective coping strategies are as follows:

- (1) Develop an attitude of flexibility so that one may adapt to the pressures and problems of old age.
- (2) Recognize that one has to explore new ways of coping with life events.
- (3) Greater use of information seeking and problem solving strategies rather than withdrawing or isolating.
- (4) Increasing self-confidence, self-reliance, developing healthy attitudes about one's strengths and weaknesses.
- (5) Learning and maintaining effective coping skills and adopting an active approach towards the environment.

Use of the above styles of coping can be effective in making healthy adjustments during old age.

Aging and Social Support

Enlarging social network is another means of coping with life problems. Participating in various group activities such as joining clubs. Certain organizations for informal social interaction are found very helpful for the aged. Building a social network of people of their own age group in neighbourhood or elsewhere provides them with greater opportunity to share their life circumstances and find emotional expressions



for their existing problems. Through such social networks, one can get an unconditional expression of approval, share secrets, provide new experiences to each other, and develop trusting relationships.

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

12.5 IMPORTANCE OF THE AGED PEOPLE IN THE SOCIETY

अभिवादनं गीलस्य नित्यं वृद्धोपसेविनः ।

चत्वारि तस्य वर्धन्ते आयुर्विद्याय गोबलम् ।

“Those who greet elders and do service to them, they grow in all four dimensions such as longevity, knowledge, fame and strength”.

One of the reasons for the growth of the Indian society is its multigenerational structure which means staying of many generations together in one family. This phenomenon is expressed in the form of joint family system. Aged people have been always considered as individuals with a vast repertoire of knowledge and experience. Staying with them and respecting them helps not only in personal growth but facilitates multidimensional growth of a person.

Today many of the problems seen in the society are due to breakdown in the family system. Young couples prefer to stay alone to seek independence and doing away with the restrictions. But the repercussion of this system is largely being felt on the younger generation. The elders in the family have always been a medium of cultural transmission. Can you forget the stories told to you by your grand parents and their morals? The cultural traditions followed in our country have been passed from generation to generation. With the emerging nuclear family system, the younger generation is becoming deprived of this rich cultural transmission. It has been found that emotional expressions and values in young generation have also been affected by the absence of elders in the family.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 12.3

State whether the following statements are true or false:

1. The body organs show a decline of 0.8 to 1 percent after the age of 30. T/F
2. Gradual changes in sensory abilities take place with ageing. T/F



Notes

3. One must not accept one's age and become younger. T/F
4. Developing healthy attitudes do not help in coping with age. T/F
5. Aged people should be considered as treasure of the society. T/F

**WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**

- Some special roles and relationships like family and career are the major milestones of adulthood.
- Our capabilities and behaviours continue to change as we grow older not only because of the biological growth process but also because of our understanding and the way we interact with the environment.
- The stage of young adulthood is characterized by new tasks and challenges in life such as establishing financial and emotional independence and entering into marital relationship.
- Middle age is also viewed as a period of creativity and significant contribution to society.
- In our society, the elderly are typically perceived as not so active, deteriorating intellectually, narrow-minded and attaching significance to religion and spirituality; however it may not be true.
- The major physical changes associated with ageing are described as external, and internal changes and changes in sensory capacities.
- Leading a disciplined life means giving the body enough time to rest, proper work habit, less tensions, proper nutrition and spirituality. This may help in coping with the problems of old age.
- Aged people have been always considered as individuals with a vast repertoire of knowledge and experience.

**TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the key to longer and healthier life.
2. What attitude is helpful to meet out the pressures and problems of old age?
3. What is the main cause of today's problems in the society?
4. How can one remain healthy during old age?



ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS



Notes

12.2

1. Autonomous, independent, choice of career, new tasks and challenges, intimate relationships.

12.2

1. (a) Competence
(b) Attention on children
(c) Plans for old age
(d) Occurrence of menopause
2. By exercise, proper diet and regular health checkup

12.3

1. True
2. True
3. False
4. False
5. True

Hints for Terminal Questions

1. Refer to section 12.3
2. Refer to section 12.4
3. Refer to section 12.5
4. Refer to section 12.3