
UNIT 1 PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGES

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

We are often told by our elders to act according to our age. Have you ever wondered what does it mean? There seems to be certain expectations of how individuals of a certain age should act. 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. The spurt of growth during adolescence stabilises 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 process but also because of our understanding and the way we interact with our environment. In the Indian tradition the period of adulthood refers to Grihastha ashram. During the 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) Early adulthood (20s to 30s) (2) Middle adulthood (40s to 50s) and (3) Later adulthood or Old Age (60s and above.)

1.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the Physical development during adulthood;
- explain the period of middle age period;
- list the characteristics of adulthood;
- describe the physical, social and psychological changes during old age;
- explain the attitude towards successful aging; and
- define death and aging.

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO PHYSICAL CHANGES

1.2.1 Early Adulthood (20s-30s)

In terms of physical development, a great deal of attention is usually placed on the teenage years and puberty. Less attention is placed on physical development in the adult years. Early adulthood is the first stage of adulthood in which the body physically changes. Early adulthood is, for most people, the time of peak physical capacity. The body reaches full height by the late teens, and physical strength increases into the late 20s and early 30s (Whitbourne, 2001). Manual agility and coordination, and sensory capacities such as vision and hearing, are also at their peak. Shoulder width and chest size increase, and people continue to develop their athletic abilities.

The body continues to undergo significant hormonal changes. These changes may make beards grow a bit thicker and the voice to become slightly deeper and richer. This is the period in which women usually have children, so it is the time in which women gain a little weight and finish their full breast development. But change is imminent, even in these basic capacities. Some decline is seen in the perception of high-pitched tones by the late 20s (Whitbourne, 2001), and manual dexterity begins to reduce in the mid 30s.

In general, people in early adulthood feel robust and energetic, although it is not unusual to see fluctuations around deadlines and exam periods! On the other hand, people in this age group are also legally able to use damaging substances, such as alcohol and tobacco, and many can obtain access to illegal stimulants or narcotics. Young adults also have increasing responsibility for organising their own eating habits and exercise regimes. Not surprisingly, the health status and prospects of young adults are dependent more than ever before on their own behavioural choices.

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 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 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 characterised by new tasks and characteristics of Young Adulthood 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.

1.2.2 Middle Adulthood (40s-50s)

Middle adulthood begins arbitrarily at 40 and may constitute 50% or more of the lifespan. During mid-life, people experience a range of external and internal physical changes. External changes include the appearance of grey hair and hair thinning, increase in facial wrinkles, and a tendency to put on weight around the waist or lower body. Internal changes include reductions in the efficiency of the cardiovascular, respiratory and nervous systems (Whitbourne, 2001). The most

common of these involve further loss of sensory sharpness (Fozard et. al., 1977). The other changes are as follows:

Sensitivity: People become less sensitive to light, less accurate at perceiving differences in distance, and slower and less able at seeing details. Hearing, particularly sensitivity to higher frequency sounds, is also prone to weaken during middle age (Brant & Fozard, 1990; Wiley et al., 1998). Sensitivity to smell, taste, and pain declines in middle adulthood but is more gradual and less noticeable than vision and hearing.

Farsightedness: At about age forty, increased farsightedness is common, and glasses may be necessary to correct for it.

Astigmatism: A common vision change in middle age involving loss of elasticity in the lens which causes difficulty changing focus from near to far distance.

Climacteric: The period of time preceding menopause during which the body adjusts to lower estrogen levels.

Menopause: In their late forties or early fifties, women generally experience menopause, the shutdown of reproductive capability. Estrogens and progesterone levels drop, and the menstrual cycle eventually cease. There is some evidence that the physical symptoms associated with menopause vary across some cultures (Avis et al., 2001). This may reflect variations in diet and/or social expectations about the nature of the menopause.

Male Menopause: In males, menopause is a controversial concept stating that men have their own version of menopause which for many is experienced as a psychological, rather than a physiological phenomenon.

Middle Age Spread: Fat redistribution in middle age which for women tends to occur above the belt and for men, below the belt. The uterus shrinks and breast size reduces: 70% to 81% of women report hot flashes, whereas 50% to 60% of women report night sweats.

Osteoporosis: A condition where the bones become porous and brittle due to lowered levels of estrogen in women.

Vasomotor Instability: Temporary disruptions in the body mechanisms that constrict or dilate blood vessels to maintain body temperature and which result in hot flashes and flushes experienced by menopausal women.

As at other stages of the lifespan, physical changes are closely interwoven with psychological changes. Signs of ageing prompt many people to review their lives and some begin to feel dissatisfied with their bodies. In a large sample of middle-aged and older Swiss women, for example, Allaz, Bernstein, Rouget et al. (1998) found that a majority expressed dissatisfaction about their weight and many had dieted to control it, even though their weight fell within the normal range. Individuals' own behavioural choices can moderate the effects of biological changes. For example, menopausal women who take regular aerobic exercise report more positive moods and less somatic discomfort than non-exercising peers (Slaven & Lee, 1997). The reactions and support of partners can also influence women's experience of menopause (Leiblum, 1991).

1.2.3 Late Adulthood or Old Age (60s-Above)

Late adulthood is perhaps the most difficult of all to define precisely and that too because there is very wide individual variations in the physical, cognitive and

social processes of aging. In late adulthood, external physical changes include changes in the skin (wrinkling, loss of elasticity), loss of subcutaneous fat, thinning of the hair, and changes in general posture due to the loss of collagen between the spinal vertebrae (Cavanaugh, 1997; Whitbourne, 2001). There are also many internal changes, less apparent to the onlooker but important to the functioning of the aging individual. These include changes to the cardiovascular system and loss of cardiac muscle strength, decline in muscle mass and reductions in the efficiency of the respiratory, digestive and urinary systems (Whitbourne, 2001). Older adults tend to go to sleep earlier but may find it harder to sleep through the night without awakening (Park et al., 2002).

Although physical change is inevitable, the timing and extent are highly variable and, to some degree, influenced by the behavioural choices and lifestyle of the individual. For example, aging of the skin is affected by exposure to sunlight, physical strength and fitness decline. The ageing process is relatively slower in those who exercise regularly. The well-being of the digestive system is influenced by diet and drug use (Whitbourne, 2001).

Physical and sensory capacities, so important in our earliest encounters with the world, also tend to decline with age. Manual dexterity is reduced (Francis & Spirduso, 2000), and the visual system becomes less effective (Glasser & Campbell, 1998). The older person's pupils become smaller, and the lens of the eye becomes less transparent (and so less sensitive to weak lights, and less able to adapt to darkness) and less able to accommodate. Hearing, taste, olfaction and touch all become less sensitive during later adulthood (Marsh, 1996; Whitbourne, 2001). The results of both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies reveal substantial decline in mental abilities as one reaches the age of 70 years and beyond (Aiken, 1996). The cognitive malfunctioning is generally expected, and is regarded as a natural consequence of aging process. However, a number of variables are believed to be important predictors in the relationship between aging and cognition, like health and environment.

If perceptual abilities were so vital at the outset of life, what are the psychological consequences of beginning to lose them? Imagine becoming less able to listen to music, experiencing difficulties in attending to conversations, or finding that food and drink seem less interesting all these would make a person feel miserable. Research indicates that our physical senses remain important at this end of the lifespan, too. There is a strong connection between sensory functioning and intelligence in old age (Baltes & Lindenberger, 1997). Gradual deficits in hearing can affect older people's ability to process speech in the context of other noise, which in turn affects how easily they interact with other people.

Certainly, the decline of abilities that were once taken for granted can lead to a reduced sense of competence for the older person (Whitbourne, 2001). And the curtailment of activities that were previously enjoyed can affect people's assessment of their quality of life. But, once again, the extent of the impact of biological decline varies from person to person, and is influenced by both the rate of change and the individual's coping skills which are, in turn, influenced by personality and social circumstances.

<p>Self Assessment Questions</p> <p>1) What are the stages of adulthood?</p> <p>.....</p>
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 2) Explain physical changes in early adulthood and late adulthood.

1.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGES

1.3.1 Early Adulthood (20s-30s)

During the period of early (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 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 family life. They are also concerned about various social issues and form close relationships with one's professional peers and members of the 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 characterised 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 characterised 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.

Levinson (1978) extended some of Erikson's ideas, but drew also on social psychological theory to explain the relationship between the developing individual and the demands of society. He emphasised the social role requirements at different life stages, and the interaction between personal growth and relationships. He maintained that all normally developing adults progress through the same stages in the same sequence, and at roughly the same pace.

Early adulthood begins with the sub-stage of early adult transition (approximately 17–22 years), in which young people are working towards autonomy from their parents and formulating a 'Dream' of what they hope to become in life. The Dream is important because it guides their efforts and choices in both the occupational and personal spheres. Do you have your own Dream, or did you have one during this phase of life, and how does/did it relate to your current occupation and plans?

The next sub-stage is the period of entering the adult world (22–28), and is organised around forging a pathway at work and attaining a special personal relationship.

This is followed by the ‘age 30’ transition (28–33), in which people undergo a moderate degree of self-questioning that is, reviewing their dream, the choices they have made and the problems in their lives.

The rest of this decade (33–40) is the ‘settling down’ period, when people have usually found their niche in life and are striving to consolidate their professional and domestic roles – they are basically getting their life in order.

Levinson arrived at his account on the basis of a series of intense individual interviews with a group of American men in mid-life. Although Levinson’s original sample was relatively limited, subsequent work has shown that the model fits many American women reasonably well, too (Levinson, 1996; Roberts & Newton, 1987).

Thus, the psychosocial development for the young adult can be identified with a desire to be socially independent and with a high ambition to succeed and can include occupation selection, selecting a life-partner, starting a family, accepting responsibilities, and social networking (Nevid & Rathus, 2005).

Characteristics of Young Adulthood

The characteristics of young adulthood are:

- Choice of a career
- Starting family life
- Concern about society
- Forming close relationships with peers.

1.3.2 Middle Adulthood (40s-50s)

From the period of twenties and thirties, the individual arrives at middle age in the forties and fifties. Middle age is characterised 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 fate of children, aging parents, the use of leisure time and plans for old age. For women, menopause occurs between the ages of forty-five and fifty. Menopause is supposed to be accompanied by some distressing physical and psychological symptoms in women. Men during this period show greater concern towards their health, strength, power and sexual potency.

The ‘Mid-life Crisis’

Midlife 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 characterises the middle adulthood as a phase of crisis involving generativity versus stagnation. Unless a person makes meaningful contribution during this period he or she may become preoccupied with selfish needs and desires. Recent research has supported Erikson’s claims that generativity is positively associated with subjective well-being in middle-aged people, while a preoccupation with ageing (‘time running out’) is negatively associated with well-being (Ackerman, Zuroff & Mostkovitz, 2000; Stewart, Ostrove & Helson, 2001).

Levinson (1978) also depicts mid-life as a period of inner conflict. Recall that Levinson saw the period from approximately 33 to 40 as the ‘settling down’

period. But settling down is not the end of the story. Levinson found that most of his interviewees next underwent a major new phase, during a period of mid-life transition (40–45). Many of the men he interviewed reported that this was a time of personal crisis. They began to review their lives, asking themselves what they had achieved and where they were heading. Many wondered whether their personal and career struggles had been worthwhile, and some contemplated or underwent radical changes in direction (changing career paths, divorcing). Although Levinson's sample was all male, other research indicates that many women report similar periods of reassessment during middle age (Koski & Steinberg, 1990; Waskel & Phelps, 1995).

These kinds of reassessment are popularly associated with the notion of the 'mid-life crisis'. The visible signs of aging, changes in the family structure as children become adolescents or young adults, and frustrations in the workplace may all serve to remind the middle-aged person that life is passing by – and this might precipitate a personal 'crisis'. Levinson argued that this is a normative process, and that successful adult development beyond mid-life requires facing up to and resolving the crisis.

Characteristics of Middle Adulthood

The characteristics of middle adulthood are:

- Competence, maturity, responsibility and stability he/she may become
- Attention focused on children
- Plans for old age
- Occurrence of menopause in women.

1.3.3 Late Adulthood or Old Age (60s-above)

Theorists such as Erikson and Erikson (1997) and Levinson (1978) regarded late adulthood as another major stage of adult development. Erikson and Erikson again saw the individual as facing a conflict between integrity and despair. They maintained that as people realise they are coming towards the end of their life, they reminisce about their past and review how they feel about themselves. Have I met life's challenges and successfully achieved goals that I value. Have I contributed to the wellbeing of those I care about? Or have I failed to realise my potential. Have I wasted time in pointless work or futile relationships. Have I been a burden to others? Erikson and Erikson believed that individuals who arrive at a predominantly positive view that is regarding their life, (as integrated and successful) are reported to experience a more contented late adulthood.

Levinson saw the period from approximately 60 to 65 as the late adult transition, when the individual has to deal with intrinsic changes in capacity and performance, as well as changes in relations with others and in society's expectations. One of the key aspects of many people's adult life, their job, etc. is now approaching its end, or has already concluded. All of these changes pose challenges to the old person. How do older people cope with the demands of ageing and their changing social status? The answer is that there is considerable variation in regard to coping from one individuals to another.

Relationship status with others – As in all other parts of the lifespan, relationships are important to the older person's adjustment (Johnson, 2001). For some people, marital relationship may become more rewarding during old age. Some research

has found that satisfaction with marriage tends to be rated higher in retired people than in middle-aged adults (Orbuch, House, Mero & Webster, 1996).

This may be partly because older married people tend to be those whose marriages have been successful (i.e. they have stayed together because they were satisfied with the relationship). But it could also be because partners now provide each other with a degree of companionship and support that may not always have been so apparent or so appreciated in busier earlier years, when many other types of relationship were competing with the person's time. On the other hand, it may be that older people of today grew up in times when marriages were expected to last, and so their more positive ratings may reflect a more traditional determination to 'see things through' (Norris & Rice, 1997).

Other social roles such as grand-parenting or great-grandparenting are also enjoyed by many older people, and allow them to feel that they contribute to their family and to a new generation. Sibling relationships often become important as by this stage, our most long-lasting relationships are usually those with our brothers and sisters. And the many positive benefits of friendships remain at least as important in the later years as they are earlier in the lifespan. Overall, when asked to identify the most important considerations affecting quality of life, older people consistently place personal relationships and social networks high on their lists (Antonucci, 2001).

Self Assessment Questions	
1) Elucidate the psychological changes in early adulthood?
2) Explain social changes in middle and later adulthood?

1.4 LET US SUM UP

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. 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.) From the period of twenties and thirties, the individual arrives at middle age in the forties and fifties. Middle age is characterised 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.

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.

There are also certain cognitive changes taking place from middle adulthood onwards. These changes are slow and gradual. It seems that aging can be delayed but no one can escape it. One must accept one's age and act in a realistic but in optimistic manner.

1.5 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Describe in brief the stage of middle adulthood.
- 2) What are the physical changes during old age?
- 3) Explain mid life crisis.
- 4) Discuss psychological and social changes during young adulthood.
- 5) Differentiate adulthood and old age periods.

1.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Moshman: *Theories of Development*, Willey International, New York.

Elizabeth B. Hurlock (1980): *Developmental Psychology: A Life-Span Approach*, Tata Mcgraw- Hill.