14

Adulthood and Ageing

14.1 Introduction

What is it like to grow old?
What changes as people age?
What does it mean to say that someone 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 myths.

When we look into our society today the older population is growing. It has been estimated that by the year 2021 major portion of the world’s population will be in the category of 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 help you to related to the older people is a better way.

14.2 Objectives

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

• explain the period of adulthood;
14.3 The Adulthood Stage

We are often told by our elders to act according to our age. Have you ever wondered what does it mean? There seem 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 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 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) 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 period.

Young Adulthood

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 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 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 Ericsson this period is characterised by a crisis of intimacy versus isolation. The young

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<th>Characteristics of Young Adulthood</th>
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<td>• Choice of a career</td>
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<td>• Starting family life</td>
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<td>• Forming close relationships with peers</td>
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<td>• Concern about society</td>
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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 the young adults towards goal directed efforts. Occupational and marital choices and establishment of 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 choices as well as their social relations. These experiences are described as “age thirty transition”

Do it yourself
Meet two persons, a male and a female, from the young adulthood period. Ask them to describe their roles and responsibilities. Record their descriptions and your own description. Compare and discuss with your peers and tutor.

14.4 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 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.

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. Ericsson characterises the 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 midlife transition is also a period of turbulence of the forties. People start viewing themselves as becoming older and become conscious of their mortality which leads to emotional instability. They also engage in taking stock of their lives to assess the extent to which they have realized

Characteristics of Middle Adulthood

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

Old Age

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.

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.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 14.1

1. Give any two characteristics of Middle Adulthood.

2. How can one remain healthy in old age?

14.5 Physical and Cognitive changes during adulthood and old age

Now let us study some 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 takes 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. They become more prominent among the elderly people. 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 organ of most persons show a 0.8 to 1 percent decline per year in the functional ability after the age of 30. Part of this decline is normal, some is disease-related, some is 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. 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

(i) Graying hair
(ii) Aging skin
(iii) Shift in posture
(iv) Development of wrinkles and other changes

2) Internal Changes

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

3) Changes in Sensory Capacities

With advancing age, there is a 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.

Key to Longer and Healthier Life
(a) Eat healthy diet
(b) Exercise regularly
(c) Reduce stress
(d) Don't smoke or drink alcohol and other drugs
(e) Cultivate certain positive aspects of personality
(f) Develop the powers of spirituality and faith

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
Cognitive Changes

Cognitive is defined as the process by which information is acquired, stored, and used. In the context of 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.

14.6 Coping with the Problem

You must be wondering that can the process of ageing 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, habits, undisciplined life, ill health work habits etc. Leading a disciplined life means giving the body enough time to rest, proper work habits, less tensions, proper nutrition and spirituality. 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. 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 adopt to life’s pressures and problems of old age.
2. Recognize that one has to explore new ways of coping with life events.
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 in old age.

Aging and Social Support

Enlarging social networks is another way of coping with life problems. Participating in various group activities such as joining clubs, certain organizations for informal social interaction is 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 expression 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. 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.

However, the pattern of family is changing. In urban areas nuclear family is becoming popular. The older parents often have difficult time staying alone.

14.7 Importance of the Aged People in the Society

अभिवादनशीलत्वः निसंबुद्धोपसेविनः।
चत्वारी तत्स्य कर्धन्ते आयुर्विधायशेषलम्।।

One of the reasons for the growth of the Indian society had been because of its multigenerational approach which means staying of many generations together in one family. This phenomenon is also known as the joint family system. Old 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. As the above given shloka says “Those who greet elders and does service to them, they grow in all four dimensions such as Age, knowledge, name and strength.

Today much of the problems seen in the society is due to the broken family system. Young couples prefer to stay alone for the reason of getting more 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, our younger generation are 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 14.2**

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.
2. Gradual changes in sensory abilities take place with ageing.
3. One must not accept one’s age and the become younger.
4. Developing healthy attitudes do not help in coping with age.
5. Aged people should considered as treasure of the society.
14.7 What you have learnt

- 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 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.

- 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.

- Some of the effective coping strategies are (1) Develop an attitude of flexibility (2) Greater use of information seeking and of problem solving strategies (3) Increasing self-confidence, self-reliance.

- Enlarging social networks is another way of coping with life problems.

14.8 Terminal Exercise

1. Describe in brief the stage of middle adulthood.

2. What are the physical and cognitive changes during old age.

3. How can one cope with the problems in old age.
14.10  Key to Intext Questions

14.1

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

14.2

1. True

2. True

3. False

4. False

5. True