UNIT 8 : ADULTHOOD

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8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will learn about:

- the role of cognitive development, work life and family role in adulthood stages
- the common challenges an individual encounters in various adulthood stages

8.2 INTRODUCTION

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is not very apparent. However from a general trend it can be said that economic independence and the ability to take independent decisions mark the entry to adulthood. Adulthood has been broadly classified as early adulthood, middle adulthood and late adulthood or old age, based on various roles and responsibilities one performs in each stage. Late adulthood or old age marks the entry of an individual's journey towards the end of their life-span. In this unit various facets of development at each stage of adulthood will be discussed, focusing mainly on the influence of cognition, work and family factors. Some important issues of adulthood will also be discussed in brief.

8.3 COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

According to K. Warner Schaie, an American gerontologist and psychologist, in adulthood , there is a progress in the development of cognitive abilities that go beyond Piaget's stages of development which were focused mainly on acquiring knowledge. Warner K. Schaie was a Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioural Science in the University of Washington who conducted various studies on adult intelligence to understand the similarities and differences among adults. The different stages suggested by Schaie are as follows:



In adulthood , there is a progress in the development of cognitive abilities that go beyond Piaget's stages of development which were focused mainly on acquiring knowledge.

1. Acquisition stage: This is the stage of acquiring information and knowledge. Here an individual learns about different aspects in his/her environment, and the primary focus in this stage is on acquiring knowledge and information rather than on applying it.

After this stage, an adult's cognition moves from the function of acquiring knowledge to that of applying knowledge.

2. Achieving Stage (Early adulthood): This is the stage which occurs between 20 or 30 years of age. In this stage there is application of intelligence to situations that have potential to yield long term benefits, i.e., in this stage, an individual applies the knowledge and skills acquired during the acquisition stage, in different situations, which have profound consequences in achieving long term goals. Here the individual utilizes his/her problem solving skills to meet the demands encountered. A young adult selecting a professional career is an example of such an action.

3. Responsibility Stage (Middle Adulthood): After acquiring financial independence, young adults are generally inclined towards taking social responsibilities. In this stage a person becomes less self centered, starts thinking about others and accepts responsibilities for others and their families. This is reflected in the attention given to work and team mates, family, siblings and offspring.

4. Executive Stage (Late Middle Adulthood): This stage can be considered a part of the Responsibility stage. Individuals take responsibility for driving societal systems relating to business or government. In this stage, individuals learn executive skills, such as knowing who answers to whom and for what purpose. Apart from undertaking personal responsibilities, this stage involves extending one's responsibility to the community and society as well.

5. Reintegrataive Stage (Old Adulthood): In this stage the need to acquire and apply knowledge or information is much less as compared to the earlier stages. At this stage older adults indulge in activities that have meaning for them, such as spiritual activties.

8.4 SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In this section, the socio-emotional changes that take place in an individual through their encounter with work life, family life situations in early adulthood, middle adulthood and old age are discussed.

8.4.1 Work Life During Adulthood

The prime focus of an adult is to become financially independent so that they can lead an independent life. In early adulthood, upon entering a job, an individual is vested with new roles that have a high demand for competence. Unanticipated problems and conditions relating to work and work environment create work adjustment problems at this stage of life span.

Young adults are generally confused in the selection of appropriate careers. The drive for financial independence may lead them to making a wrong choice. However, young adults go through a phase of work adjustment where they develop a distinct occupational identity. During this phase, an individual may choose to drop out or select an entirely new profession. According to Holland's Job-fit Theory, when an individual find work that suits his/her personality, he or she is more likely to stay in that job. Holland suggests six basic career-related personality types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional.

In middle adulthood, greater job satisfaction and commitment to work is noticed in comparison with the attitude towards work in early adulthood. The reasons for this can be attributed to an increase in pay and vertical growth in the company's job hierarchy. Studies show that workers of advanced age have lower rates of absenteeism, fewer accidents and enhanced job satisfaction. Experiences about how the work is done at the workplace help elderly workers to perform sometimes better than younger counterparts. However, preparation for leading life after retirement starts in the mind of aging workers.

In an earlier time, due to gender stereotyping of social roles, workplaces were dominated by males. Work roles were typically identified with masculine characteristics. However, today's work environment witnesses a large section of women at work. Young women are selecting careers in law, medicine and engineering which go beyond stereotypical work roles. They are more open to adjusting with a work environment where males are the majority. Research has shown that assertive women report iety and stress in a job environment dominated by men. However, omen still experience sexual harassment at the workplace which leads to job dissatisfaction and burnout. In some industrial sectors, female employees also face the 'glass-ceiling' effect that stop them from attaining top management positions. A lot of women in India also encounter problems at the home front in societies where men with lower earnings find it difficult to accept their wives' careers. However, a lot of women are also successfully managing family and careers simultaneously.





Women still experience sexual harassment at the workplace which leads to job dissatisfaction and burnout. In some industrial sectors, female employees also face the 'glass-ceiling' effect that stop them from attaining top management positions.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

1. What are the cognitive development stages in adulthood?
2. What is the position of women at the workplace?

8.4.2 Marriage And Family Cycle

Young adults often encounter a dilemma relating to getting married. This may arise due to the fear of losing their independence and life style options. Individuals at this age often engage in romantic relationships. Physical attraction and passion defines the close relationships of opposite sexes in early adulthood while in the middle adulthood stage a need for security, loyalty and mutual respect predominates. In the late adulthood or old age, a partner's ability to deal with personal conflicts including aging, illness and even death, defines the satisfaction one can draw from intimate relationships. Families are unique social systems, membership in which is based on affection and geographical, biological, historical, or legal ties.

The family life cycle explains the various socio-emotional factors catering to marriage and family at each stage of life span development in adulthood.

1. **Leaving home and leading a single life**

   In order to pursue life goals, young adults start living separately from their families without cutting off emotional ties with parents. They aspire for a distinct identity and financial security before joining another person to form a family. In this stage, young adults aspire to develop a different identity or recognition from their family of origin, aim to establish close peer relationships and aim for future goals and career. Also, if the peer group misleads them and the environment is not supportive, there are chances of individuals getting involved in crime at this stage, in situations where the young adults have not completed their education.

2. **Joining of families through marriage**

   At this stage of adulthood, an individual realigns relationships with his/her partner's families which become his/her extended family by virtue of marriage. A sense of commitment is added to the responsibility factor seen in the early adulthood phase. In this stage the individual is generally in his/her early 30s, and this stage also signals the commencement of middle adulthood.

3. Parenthood

In this stage of middle adulthood, adjustments in marital life have to be made to create space for child(ren). In this stage, individuals need to commit time as parents, understand their roles as parents and adapt to the developmental changes in the child. In the case of career women, child rearing and balancing work and household chores sometimes put unbearable pressure on them which may lead to maladjustment in social, family or work-life.

In this phase, the parenting role involves the couple trying to meet the children's needs for safety, intellectual stimulation, control and care, which is a complex process. Also the style of parenting adopted by the parents is crucial at this stage, as it has long term influences on the cognitive and personality development of their children.

4. Family at midlife



In this stage a lot of changes in the relationships among family members are noticed. A mature adult-to-adult relationship between grown up children (adolescents) and parents is crucial. There is a necessity for realignment in the parent-child relationship at this stage, to give space to the adolescents to develop autonomy. A lot of conflicts between children and parents can manifest themselves at this point of time. Individuals at this stage also deal with death and special needs of their parents, and also increasing demands for care-giving for ageing parents. Due to the constant tension and turmoil arising out of changes in work life, family life and social life, people at this stage may develop 'midlife crisis'.

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5. Family at old age

In this stage, individuals enter into a new role as grandparents. They act as a central source of wisdom of the middle generation. Experiences gained from the earlier stages act as a source of wisdom for the newer generations. However, at this stage a sharp decline in health and physiological aspects is noticed, and the support of partner and children is sought for. At this stage, people have direct

experiences with death when they see their friends and relatives become ill and die. They are forced to examine the meanings of life and death more than younger adults.

8.5 CHALLENGES IN ADULTHOOD

Following are the Challenges of adulthood :

1. Divorce

Separation from one's partner in a marriage induces a lot of emotional pain in divorced adults. The stress of separation may lead both men and women into deep psychological issues like depression, psychiatric disorders, alcoholism and psychosomatic problems. In a collectivistic society, divorce is still looked down as a societal damage where the condition of divorced women is worse than their male counterparts. Both male and female divorced adults need to create a positive single identity to overcome loneliness, lack of autonomy and financial hardship.

2. Widowhood

Women outnumber men in widowhood during their middle adulthood and late adulthood because of two main reasons. Firstly, women have a higher life expectancy than men, and secondly, they tend to marry men that are older than them. Problems of widowhood include loneliness and economic hardship for women. Though widowhood result in more difficult experiences for women, both genders face the danger of negative psychological well-being. Though widow remarriage does not haveany legal implications, Indian widows are often regarded as having an 'evil eye by society. On remarriage, some women may have to sacrifice the custody of their children or any ancestral property rights. In some places where low education is prevalent, young widows are sexually and financially exploited and even thrown into prostitution.

3. Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour

A decline in intereste in sex is observed in middle adulthood. Apart from a decline in biological wellbeing, factors like career interests,

children's presence, and reduced physical attraction for the partner may contribute to reduced sexual activity.

4. Balancing Career and Family:

The challenges of the work environment lead to a lot of stress and pressure. As a result an individual ends up spending very little quality time with his/her family. This could lead to a lot of chaos and domestic turmoil, because of which both the professional and the personal arena of the individual may suffer.

5. Midlife Career Change:

Daniel Levinson describes this career change phenomenon as a turning point in adulthood. Frustrated with the monotony of work life, or realizing that they are pursuing unrealistic goals, many middle age people make a career change. Others who cannot may move towards depression over unfulfilled dreams. Levinson found that many men at this stage feel constrained by their bosses at the workplace and wives and children at home. This can provoke a rebellious attitude in men, which can take forms like extramarital affairs, divorce, suicide or career change. Similar attitudinal changes may also occur in working women.

6. Adjustment to Retirement

During this phase, people who enjoyed a high position at work and have executed control and power generally find it difficultto adjustito retired life. Older adults whose incomes have decreased, and who sufferfrom illnesses find it most difficult to adjust to retirement.

7. Mental Health in Old Adults

In old age, life may be unfortunately disrupted due to mental disability. This disability can be because of the following factors.

1. Depression: Living a lonely life and experiencing poor health may make an old adult demotivated and unhappy, leading to this mood disorder.

2. Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease:

Dementia is a neurobiological disorder whose primary symptom is a deterioration of mental functioning. Most aged individuals suffer

from this disease. One of the types of zerious dementia is Alzheimer's disease, which is a progressive brain disorder associated with gradual decline of memory, reasoning, language and eventually physical functioning. Families should act as indispensible support systems for Alzheimer's patients. Though care-giving to an Alzheimer's patient may incur huge financial as well as emotional costs, the patients need their close family members' emotional support in their painful journey.

8. Fear of Victimization

The physical decline in late adulthood contributes to a sense of vulnerability among older adults. This fear of being a victim of a crime makes them shy away from attending any social events or pursuing an active life style.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

3. What are the family life cycle stages?

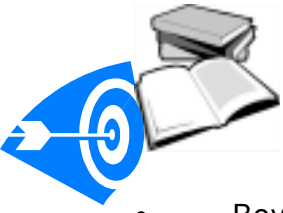
4. What are the major challenges of adulthood?



8.6 LET US SUM UP

- According to K. Warner Schaie, in adulthood, cognition shifts from acquiring knowledge function to applying knowledge function.
- The different cognitive development stages suggested by Schaie in adulthood are Achieving Stage, Responsibility Stage, Executive Stage and Reintegrative Stage.
- In early adulthood, upon entering a job, an individual is vested with new roles that have a high demand for competence.. Unanticipated problems and conditions relating to work and work environment create work adjustment problems at this stage of life span.
- In middle adulthood greater job satisfaction and commitment to work are noticed, in comparison with early adulthood's attitude towards work.

- The experienceof how work is done at the workplace helps elderly workers to sometimes perform better than their younger counterparts.
- Some women experience the 'glass-ceiling' effect in reaching top management positions.
- Family life cycle explains the various socio-emotional factors catering to marriage and family at each stage of life span development in adulthood. Family life cycle stages are leaving home and leading a single sdult life, joining of families through marriage, parenthood, family at midlife and family at old age.
- Some challenges in adulthood are divorce, widowhood, sexual attitudes and behaviour, midlife career change, adjustment to retirement, mental health in old adults and fear of victimization in old adults.



8.7 FURTHER READING

- Boyd, D. R., Bee, H. L., & Johnson, P. A. (2006). Lifespan Development. Pearson/A and B.
- Santrock, J. W. (2009). Life-Span Development. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to check your progress

1. Different cognitive development stages suggested by Schaie in adulthood are Achieving Stage, Responsibility Stage, Executive Stage and Reintegrative Stage.
2. In the modern workplace, women are more open to adjusting with a work environment where males are the majority. Research has

shown that assertive women report less anxiety and stress in a job environment dominated by men. However, some women still experience sexual harassment at the workplace which leads to job dissatisfaction and burnout. In some industrial sectors, female employees also face the 'glass-ceiling' effect that stop them from attaining top management positions. A lot of women in India also encounter problems at the home front in societies where men with lower earnings find it difficult to accept their wives' careers. However, a lot of women are also successfully managing family and careers simultaneously.

3. Family life cycle explains the various socio-emotional factors catering to marriage and family at each stage of life span development in adulthood. Family life cycle stages are leaving home and leading a Single Adult life, joining of families through marriage, parenthood, family at midlife and family at old age.
4. Some challenges in adulthood are divorce, widowhood, sexual attitudes and behaviour, midlife career change, adjustment to retirement, mental health in old adults and fear of victimization in old adults.



8.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. What are the cognitive development stages in adulthood and how are socio-emotional changes at various stages in adulthood brought about by work and family?
2. What are the issues observed at various stages of adulthood?
3. State the common mental health problems among old adults.
4. Describe the cognitive development phase among the adults.

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