UNIT 15: STAGES OF HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT: ADULTHOOD

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15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This units shall enable you to -

- Have a deeper understanding of the role of cognitive development, work life and family role in adulthood stages.
- Describe the common challenges an individual encounters in various adulthood stages

15.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have discussed the stages of human development with reference to pre and post natal, infancy and childhood, adolescence and now let us understand the adulthood and late adulthood stage. The transition from adolescence to adulthood is not very apparent. However from a general trend it can be said that said that economic independence and ability to take independent decisions mark the entry to adulthood. However, adulthood has been broadly classified as early adulthood, middle adulthood and late adulthood or old age based on various

roles and responsibilities one adhere to in each stage. Late adulthood or old age marks the entry of an individual's journey towards the end of 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.

As the adult enters into the last stage of their life, they may begin to physically grow frail and can often suffer with mental illness. Older adults' eyesight and hearing often begins to fail as they age. Socially the older generation tend to follow other interests and after retirement have time to lead a full social life. However, the older generation can become more isolated due to family issues or health reasons such as hearing or sight difficulties. Emotionally they can become withdrawn feeling themselves as a burden to their society, family and friends. They may begin to contemplate their lives and have negative feelings such as regret or guilt; however they may feel fulfilled, proud of their accomplishments and their family. An older adult has wisdom and experience although they may find it difficult to grasp and understand new technology and develop new skills. These disabilities are often due to ill health or memory loss.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, at that top of the pyramid the individual has a need for esteem; self-esteem and the esteem they receive from others. They require a level of respect for themselves and from others; with the needs met they feel self confident and valuable. Without esteem they can feel inferior and worthless. If all the needs of the pyramid have been met, the older adult reaches self-actualisation; a feeling that they have lived a life of purpose. Without the other needs of the pyramid being met they may struggle to reach this level.

15.3 COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

K. Warner Schaie proposed that in adulthood, there is a progress in the development of cognitive abilities that go beyond Piaget's stages of development which focused mainly on acquiring knowledge. At this stage,

adults cognition shifts from acquiring knowledge function to applying knowledge function . The different stages suggested by Schaie are as follows:

1. Achieving Stage (Early adulthood): Application of intelligence to situations that have potential to yield long term benefits. Selecting a professional career by a young adult is an example of such action.

2. Responsibility Stage (Middle Adulthood): After acquiring financial independence, young adults generally incline towards taking social responsibilities. This is reflected in the attention given to work and team mates, family, siblings and offsprings.

3. Executive Stage(Late Middle Adulthood): Individuals take responsibilities to drive societal systems which can be business or government. Executives need to know who answers to whom and for what purpose.

4. Reintegrataive Stage (Old Adulthood): At this stage older adults indulge in those activities that have meanings for them. A sense of spirituality

15.4 SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Here the socio-emotional changes that take place in an individual by encountering some work-life, family life situations in early adulthood, middle adulthood and old age are discussed.

15.4.1 WORK LIFE DURING ADULTHOOD

The prime focus of an adult is to become financially independent so that they can lead a life at their own discretion. Early adults on entering a job vested with a new role which has 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 career. The drive for financial independence may get them into a wrong choice. However, young adults go through a phase of work adjustment where they develop a distinct occupational identity. Along 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, commitment to work is noticed in comparison with early adulthood's attitude towards work. The reasons can be attributed to increase in pay and vertical growth in the company's job hierarchy. Studies show that old aged workers have lower rates of absenteeism, fewer accidents and enhanced job satisfaction. Experiences about how the work is done at workplace help elderly workers to perform sometimes better than younger counterparts. However, preparation for leading life after retirement starts in the mind of aged workers.



HOLLAND : propounded the Job-Fit Theory

Earlier due on social role gender stereotyping workplaces were dominated by males. Work roles were identified having 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 are out of stereotypical work roles. They find it less difficult to adjust with the work environment where males are working in majority. It has been found out that high self -assertive women reported less anxiety and stress in a job dominated by men. But still, some portion of females experience sexual harassment at workplaces which leads to job-dissatisfaction and turnover. In some industrial sectors, females also face the "glass-ceiling" effect to attain top management positions. Women in India encounter problems at home front where men with low earnings have difficulty in accepting wives' employment. However, few women are also successfully managing family and career simultaneously.

15.4.2 MARRIAGE AND FAMILY CYCLE

Young adults often encounter a dilemma regarding getting married. This may crop up due to the fear of losing independence and life style options. However, individuals at this stage 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, partner's ability to deal with personal conflicts including aging, illness and even death defines the satisfaction one can draw from intimate relationships at this time.

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

Leaving home and leading a Single Adult life

Young adults in order to pursue life goals start living separately from their family of origin without cutting off emotional ties with parents. They aspire for a distinct identity and financial security before joining with another person to form a family.

Joining of families through marriage

At this stage of adulthood, an individual realign relationships with his/her partner's families which become his/her extended family by virtue of marital system. A sense of commitment adds up to the responsibility factor seen in early adulthood phase. At this stage the individual is generally in his/her early 30s and commencement of middle adulthood begins.

Parenthood

At this stage of middle adulthood, adjustments in the marital life has to be made to create space for the child(ren). In this stage, individuals need to commit time as parents, understand their roles a parent and adapt to the developmental changes in the child. In case of a career woman, indulging in child rearing and managing work and household tasks sometimes put unbearable pressure which leads to maladjustment in social, family or work-life.

Family at midlife

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. Lot of conflicts between child and parent can manifest at this point of time. Individuals at this stage also deal with death and

disabilities of their parents. A constant tension and turmoil due to changes in the work life, family life and social life , people at this stage may develop "midlife crisis".

Family at old age

Individuals enter into a new role as grandparents. They act as a central role of 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 physiological aspects is noticed where the support of partner and children is highly sought for. At this stage, people have direct experiences with death as 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.

15.5. CHALLENGES IN ADULTHOOD

These are some of the common problems that an adult faces in life as one advances in age and experience. There are emotional and hormonal changes associated with each stage of transition. Depending on the personality and life-situations of each individual adult, a person may face either of the following challenges.

1. Divorce

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

2. Widowhood

Women outnumbered men in widowhood during their middle adulthood and late adulthood mainly because of two reasons. First, women have high

life expectancy than male and secondly they tend to marry men of older age. The problem in widowhood lies in the loneliness and economic hardship for females. Though widowhood has more difficult experiences associated with women, both gender faces a negative psychological well-being. Widow remarriage though have no legal obligations, Indian widows are often regarded as "evil eyes" by the society. On remarriage, they may have to sacrifice the custody of their children or any ancestral property rights. At some places where low education among people is prevalent, young widows are sexually and financially exploited and even thrown to prostitution.

3. Sexual attitudes and behavior

A decline in the indulgence in sexual activities with partner is observed in middle adulthood. Apart from a little biological decline, factors like career interests, children's presence, and reduced physical attraction for the partner may contribute to this reduced sexual activity.

4. Midlife career change

Daniel Levinson describes this career change phenomena 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 workplace and wives and children at home. This can fire a rebellious attitude in men which can take forms like extramarital affairs, divorce, suicide or career change.

5. Adjustment to Retirement

During this phase, people who enjoyed a high position at work and have executed control and power generally find difficulty in adjusting with retirement life. Older adults who have low income and are suffering with illness find most difficult in adjusting to retirement.

6. 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.

Depression: Living a lonely life and experiencing an ill-health may lead to a demotivated, unhappy old adult who suffer from this mood disorder.

7. Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease:

Dementia is a neurobiological disorder whose primary symptom is a deteoration of mental functioning. Most old aged individuals suffer from this disease. One of the type of serious dementia is Alzheimer's disease which is a progressive brain disorder associated with gradual decline of memory, reasoning, language and eventually physical functioning. Family should act as indispensible support system for Alzheimer patients. Though care-giving to an Alzheimer patient incur huge financial as well as emotional cost, the patients need their closest one's emotional support in their painful journey.



ALZEIMER'S DISEASE: brain disorder associated with gradual decline of memory.

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 shuts them away from attending any social events or indulging in active life style.



15.6 LET US SUM UP

- According to K. Warner Schaie, adults cognition shifts from acquiring knowledge function to applying knowledge function.
- Different cognitive development stages suggested by Schaie in adulthood are Achieving Stage, Responsibility Stage, Executive Stage, Reintegrataive Stage.
- Early adults on entering a job vested with a new role which has 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, commitment to work is noticed in comparison with early adulthood's attitude towards work.
- Experiences about how the work is done at workplace help elderly workers to perform sometimes better than younger counterparts.
- Some portion of females experience "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 Adult life, Joining of families through marriage, Parenthood, Family at midlife, Family at old age.
- Some challenges in adulthood are Divorce , Widowhood, Sexual attitudes and behavior, Midlife career change, Adjustment to Retirement, Mental health in old adults, Fear of victimization in old adults



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the cognitive development stages in adulthood?

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Q 2: What is the position of women at workplaces?

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Q 3: What are the family life cycle stages?

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Q 4: What are the major challenges of adulthood?

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15.7 FURTHER READING

1. Santrock, J. W. (2009). Life-span development. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
2. Boyd, D. R., Bee, H. L., & Johnson, P. A. (2006). Lifespan development. Pearson/A and B.
3. Pikunas, Justin. 1961. Psychology of Human Development. McGraw-Hill Book Company http://www.archive.org/details/psychologyof huma00piku.

15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers 1. Different cognitive development stages suggested by Schaie in adulthood are Achieving Stage, Responsibility Stage, Executive Stage, Reintegrataive Stage.

Answers 2. In modern workplaces women find it less difficult to adjust with the work environment where males are working in majority. It has been found out that high self -assertive women reported less anxiety and stress in a job dominated by men. But still, some portion of females experience sexual harassment at workplaces which leads to job-dissatisfaction and turnover. In some industrial sectors, females also face the "glass-ceiling" effect to attain top management positions. Women in India encounter problems at home front where men with low earnings have difficulty in accepting wives' employment. However, few women are also successfully managing family and career simultaneously.

Answers 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, Family at old age.

Answers 4. Some challenges in adulthood are Divorce , Widowhood, Sexual attitudes and behavior, Midlife career change, Adjustment to Retirement, Mental health in old adults, Fear of victimization in old adults.



15.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1: What are the cognitive development stages in adulthood

Q2: How does socio-emotional changes at various stages in adulthood brought by work and family?

Q3: What are the issues observed at various stages of adulthood?