

6. ADULTHOOD AND OLD AGE

Different cultures have different ages at which children reach the adult status or the age of legal maturity. Generally, they reach this status when their puberty growth is complete and their sex organs have developed to the point where they are capable of reproduction.

Adulthood

Early Adulthood :

Early adulthood extends from age 20-21 to approximately age 40, when the physical and psychological changes, accompany the beginning of the loss of reproductive capacity.

Middle Adulthood (Middle Age)

Middle adulthood, or middle age, begins at forty and extends to age sixty, when both physical and psychological changes decline become apparent in the average person.

Late Adulthood (Old Age)

Late adulthood - senescence or old age – begins at sixty and extends to death. Physical and psychological decline speed up at this time. Modern medical techniques, as well as careful attention to clothing and grooming enable many men and women to look, act, and feel much as they did when they were younger.

1. Early Adulthood

It is a period of adjustment to new patterns of life and new social expectations. The young adult has to take roles as spouse, parent and bread earner and to develop new attitudes, interests and values in

keeping with these new roles. Some of the outstanding characteristics are :

- Early Adulthood is the **“settling - down age”**. This is the period when young men and women are trying out different life patterns in terms of jobs and different individuals to share their life. Once individuals decide upon the pattern of life they believe to meet their needs, they develop pattern of behavior, attitudes and values which tend to be characteristically theirs for the remaining of their lives.
- Early Adulthood is the **“Reproductive Age”** - parenthood is one of the most important roles in the lives of most young adults.
- Early Adulthood is a **“Problem Age”** - young adults need to cope up with all adjustments within their work, with partner, larger circle of friends and relatives. Expectations are too high to meet demand make it even more difficult.
- Early Adulthood is a period of **“Emotional Tension”** – what young adult’s worry about which leads to emotional tension will depend upon their work load at their work place, at home and in the social circle and also how much success or failure they are experiencing in meeting these problems.
- Early Adulthood is a period of **“Social Isolation”** - with the end of formal education and the entrance into adult life pattern of work and marriage, the association with peer groups is slowly weaned. They experience social isolation.

- Early Adulthood is a *“time of Commitment”* - As young adults change their role from student and dependent (characteristic of adolescence) to that of independent adults, they establish new pattern of living, new responsibilities and take up new commitments for themselves and their partners. Young adults with high level of education, good health support and guidance from partner and family members, high ambitions and realistic goals, ability to accept success or failure gracefully, ability and willingness to communicate with others, respect for others and active participation in prestigious community affairs will easily climb up the ladder to successful economic and social status. Poor health or physical defects can be hazardous to personal and social adjustments but these can always be overcome with the support one gets from the family and friends. A lot of adjustments need to be made by young adults, the most important being - adjustment to marriage, to parenthood, and to the expanded family circle. There are chances of singlehood also but how women feel about unmarried life and adjustment to singlehood differs from that of men. Stress is less for men than single women.

2. Late adulthood

It is generally considered to extend from age 40 to age 60. The onset is marked by physical and mental changes. It is recognized that, next to old age, it is the most dreaded point in the total life span and the one, adults will not admit that they have reached until the calendar and the mirror image force them to do so. Some of the reasons are, the mental and physical deterioration, cessation of the reproductive life, restrictions in finance and independence. Middle age is a time of transition always means adjustment to new interest, new values, new pattern of behaviour, physical changes, changed roles etc. and the most important adjustment is with death of a spouse. Of course adjustment with the problems of aging parents is always there. Middle age is a time of stress while major adjustment's to work, home, social life are

made, this will lead to stress. Women have stress during the period of menopause. Middle age should be a time not only for financial and social success but also for authority and prestige. They usually reach their peak after which they rest to enjoy the benefits of their hard work. Evaluation of their achievement and accomplishments in terms of money, social status, family size, their earlier aspiration, plans for future life etc., is carried out. Middle age is the time of the emptiness, the time when the children no longer want to live under the parental roof. This period is much more traumatic for women than men. This leads to boredom especially if one has given up the job and other activities.

One of the most difficult adjustment middle age men and women must make is to change the appearance. They must recognize that their body is not functioning as adequately as it formerly did and may even be 'wearing out' of in certain vital areas. This reproductive capacity is coming to an end and losing some of their sex drive and sexual attractiveness. Women may experience a sudden cessation of menstruation. Many women gain weight during menopause mainly around the abdomen and hips. They also experience personality changes, become depressed and hostile. Among men, there is a gradual decline in gonadal activity leading to decline in sexual desire and sex organ functioning. Good social adjustments in middle age is important. They should give up the "rocking chair" philosophy which many middle age people follow. They should not think they have to remain inactive and give up many of their normal activities and desires. Instead they need to develop skills to keep them engaged in economic and social activities, take up responsibilities in the family like take care of grand children and giving a moral support to the members of the family. Adjustmental hazards are more to single women than single men.

Adjustment to loss of a spouse presents many adjustment problems for the middle aged man or woman. This will lead to disruption in the pattern of living. They also have to adjust to approaching old age and retirement. The success with which men and

women adjust to middle age can be assured by their achievements, emotional status, effects of physical and psychological changes or personality and the degree of satisfaction of happiness the middle aged person experiences.

Old age :

Old age is the closing period in the life span. Age 60 is usually considered the dividing line between middle and old age. Chronological age is poor criteria to use in marking off the beginning of old age because there are such marked differences among individuals in the age and better aging actually begins. Most men and women today do not show the mental and physical signs of aging until early seventies because of better living conditions and health care. The characteristics of old age are far more likely to lead to poor adjustment than to good and to unhappiness rather than to happiness. That is why old age is even more dreaded than middle age.

Old age is a period of decline, comes partly from physical and partly from psychological factors. There is change in body cells due to the aging process. Unfavorable attitude towards one self and life in general can lead to decline or become depressed and disorganized. Motivation plays a very important role in decline. There are individual differences in the effects of aging. People age differently because they have different hereditary endowment, different socio economic and educational backgrounds and different patterns of living. The general rule is physical aging precedes mental aging. Old age is judged by different criteria. Age is judged in terms of physical appearance and activities. One who has white hair is labeled as old. There are many who try to cover up their aging symptoms to create illusion that they are not yet old. There are many stereotypes of old people – let it be the folklore, the media, poetry, fiction, jokes or different forms of humor or scientific studies, all portray the aged as those who are worn out physically and mentally, unproductive, accident – prone, hard to live, days of usefulness are over, should be pushed aside to make way for younger people. Poor adjustment is characteristic of old age – Because of

the unfavorable social attitudes towards the elderly that are reflected in the way the social groups treat them; It is not surprising that many elderly people develop unfavourable self-concepts. These tend to be expressed in maladjusting behavior of different degree of severity.



Fig. 6.1 : Old Person

Problems and changes during old age :

(i) Physical changes :

1. The nose elongates. The mouth changes its shape as a result of tooth loss or the necessity of wearing dentures. The eyes seem dull and lusterless and often have a watery look. A double or triple chin develops. The cheeks become pendulous, wrinkled, and baggy. The skin becomes wrinkled and dry, and dark spots, moles, or warts may appear. The hair on the head becomes thin and turns grey or white, and tough, bristly hair appears in the nose, ears and eyebrows.
2. The shoulders stoop and thus seem smaller. The abdomen bulges and droops. The hips seem flabbier and broader than earlier. The waistline broadens, giving the trunk a sack like appearance. The woman's breasts become flabby and droop.
3. The upper arm becomes flabby and heavy, while the lower arm seems to shrink in diameter. The legs become flabby and the veins prominent, especially around the ankles. The hands become

scrawny, and the veins on the back of the hand are prominent. The feet become larger as a result of sagging muscles, and corns, bunions, and collouses often appear. The nails of the hands and feet become thick, tough, and brittle.

4. Changes in Physiological functions include decline in the ability to see, hear, marked changes in taste, sense of smell becomes less, and also that of sensitivity to pain.
5. Elderly people tired quickly and require a longer time to recover from fatigue, changes in skilled movements especially handwriting, slow in learning new skills and quite often tend to become awkward and clumsy.
6. Recall is affected. Old people tend to have poor recent memories but better past memories.
7. Quite often due to lack of income or low economic status they become dependent and have to compromise on many of their hobbies, interests, activities etc.
8. Common physical hazards Include disease and physical handicaps like circulatory, metabolic and mental disorders. Heart diseases, rheumatism, arthritis, visual and hearing impairment, etc., are also common. Due to psychological and physiological disorder and economic reasons, malnutrition in old age is common.

(ii) Social :

With advancing age, most people suffer increasing social loss or social disengagement- a process of mutual withdrawal of the aged from the social environment. Social disengagement in old age commonly expressed in a narrowing down of the sources of social contact and a decline in social participation. For most older people this means a radical change in the pattern of social life they established during early adulthood and carried on, with only minor changes, through middle age. Women as a rule, retain their friendships longer than men, mainly because their friends, for the most part, come from their neighborhoods, while men's friend are largely

work associates who live in scattered areas of the community and who are not brought together by their common interest in work after retirement.

People who perceive their friends and family members as supportive during times of need have a stronger sense of meaning in their lives; that is, they live their lives with a broader purpose, adhering to a value system that fits within the larger social world. In addition, people with strong social networks report greater emotional well-being in day-to-day life and also when they experience stressful life events. Both structural - i.e., the number and type of social partners in a given network — and functional - i.e., the perceived or actual receipt of support - aspects of social networks contribute to emotional well-being.

(iii) Economic

The problem of economic insecurity is faced by the elderly when they are unable to sustain themselves financially. Many older persons either lack the opportunity and/or the capacity to be as productive as they were. Increasing competition from younger people, individual, family and societal mind sets, chronic malnutrition and slowing physical and mental faculties, limited access to resources and lack of awareness of their rights and entitlements play significant roles in reducing the ability of the elderly to remain financially productive, and thereby, independent.

The elders living with their families are largely contingent on the economic capacity of the family unit for their economic security and well being. Elderly often do not have financial protection such as sufficient pension and other form of social security in India. Also due to their financial dependence, elderly persons though are most vulnerable to infections have low priority for own health. Migration of younger generation, lack of proper care in the family, insufficient housing, economic hardship and break-up of joint family have made the old age homes seem more relevant even in the Indian context

Retirement from service usually results in loss of income and the pensions that the elderly receive are usually inadequate to meet the cost of living which is

always on the rise. With the reduced income they are reversed from the state of “Chief bread earner to a mere dependent” though they spend their provident fund on marriages of children, acquiring new property, education of children and family maintenance. The diagnosis and treatment of their disease created more financial problem for old age.

Old age is a period of physical deterioration and social alienation in some cases, loss of spouse, friends, Job, property and physical appearance. In old age physical strength deteriorates, mental stability diminishes, financial power becomes bleak and eye sight become weak. It is a period of disappointment, dejection, disease, repentance and loneliness.

(iv) Emotional :

An elderly person who continues to be physically active, mentally alert can retard this aging process to some extent and reduce associated physical and psychological problems. Absence of any useful, goal directed activity and dull, inactive mind hastens disability, personality and mood changes, increased irritability, self centeredness, social withdrawal or feelings of insecurity and neglect. Isolation, or a deep sense of loneliness, is a common complaint of many elderly is the feeling of being isolated. While there are a few who impose it on themselves, isolation is most often imposed purposefully or inadvertently by the families and/or communities where the elderly live. Isolation is a terrible feeling that, if not addressed, leads to tragic deterioration of the quality of life.

The elderly, especially those who are weak and/or dependent, require physical, mental and emotional care and support. When this is not provided, they suffer from neglect, a problem that occurs when a person is left uncared for and that is often linked with isolation. Changing lifestyles and values, demanding jobs, distractions such as television, a shift to nuclear family structures and redefined priorities have led to increased neglect of the elderly by families and communities. This is worsened as the elderly are less likely to demand attention than those of other age groups.

Decline in mental ability makes them dependent. They no longer have trust in their own ability or judgments but still they want to tighten their grip over the younger ones. They want to get involved in all family matters and business issues. Due to generation gap the youngsters do not pay attention to their suggestion and advice. Instead of developing a sympathetic attitude towards the old, they start asserting their rights and power. This may create a feeling of deprivation of their dignity and importance.

Loss of spouse during old age is another hazard. Death of a spouse creates a feeling of loneliness and isolation. The negligence and indifferent attitude of the family members towards the older people creates more emotional problems.

Care in old age :

Elderly people are highly prone to mental morbidities due to ageing of the brain, problems associated with physical health, cerebral pathology, socio-economic factors such as breakdown of the family support systems, and decrease in economic independence. The mental disorders that are frequently encountered include dementia and mood disorders. Other disorders include neurotic and personality disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, delirium, and mental psychosis.

The rapid urbanization and societal modernization has brought in its wake a breakdown in family values and the framework of family support, economic insecurity, social isolation, and elderly abuse leading to a host of psychological illnesses. In addition, widows are prone to face social stigma and ostracism. The socio-economic problems of the elderly are aggravated by factors such as the lack of social security and inadequate facilities for health care, rehabilitation, and recreation. Care should be done in following ways:

- (i) Balance diet :** The diet for elderly people should include nutrient rich foods to enable them to be fit and active. Senior citizens need more of vitamins and minerals to be healthy and active. Elders generally complain of loss of appetite or sometimes difficulty in chewing. A soft diet

should be given to elders, with inclusion of fruits and vegetables in their diet. Calcium rich foods like dairy products (low fat), milk (toned) and green leafy vegetables should be included in the daily diet to maintain bone health, so as to prevent osteoporosis and bone fractures. Consume pulses, toned milk, egg-white etc. in good quantities as they are rich in proteins. The diet for elderly people needs to be well cooked, soft and should be less salty and spicy. Ensure to eat small quantities of food at more frequent intervals and drink water at frequent intervals to avoid dehydration and constipation.

- (ii) **Total rest and sleep :** In general, sleep becomes more fragmented and lighter with an increase in the number of arousals and awakenings. There is a reduction in the amount of slow wave sleep. Sleep efficiency and total sleep time are reduced with age and there are an increased number of sleep stage shifts. Treatment should address the primary problem rather than the complaint itself and may result in significant improvement in quality of life and daytime functioning in the elderly.
- (iii) **Residence :** Home is somewhere that is both desirable and exists in the mind's eye as much as in a particular physical situation. Sometimes due to some economical and family reasons elderly have to leave their house and stay in old age home and faces adjustment problems due to changes in place. This adjustment is very difficult. The room for aged should not be very cool. Big windows, airy rooms, proper lighting, and peace required for the room of aged. There should be material for the entertainment of aged near the room.
- (iv) **Medical facility :** Immunity power reduces at old age and they become ill easily. They are surrounded by the diseases like heart problem, respiratory problem, diabetes, osteoporosis. Therefore they need regular medical facility. If these facilities are near their house they themselves goes for the regular checkups

otherwise other member of family have to take this responsibility. Some time due to economic problems they don't afford medical treatment. One should always accumulate money for the old age.

- (v) **Activeness :** Old age consists of ages nearing or surpassing the average life span of human beings. Many people develop disabilities in later life related to the wear and tear of ageing (e.g., arthritis) or the onset of a chronic disease, (e.g., lung cancer, diabetes and peripheral vascular disease) or a degenerative illness (e.g., dementia). But disabilities associated with ageing and the onset of chronic disease can be prevented or delayed.
- (vi) **Economic help :** The traditional Indian society and the age-old joint family system have been instrumental in safeguarding the social and economic security of the elderly people. However, with rapid changes in society and the emergence of nuclear families in India in recent years, the elderly are likely to be exposed to emotional, physical and financial insecurity in the years to come. In view of the increasing need for intervention in area of old age welfare, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, adopted a 'National Policy on Older Persons' in January 1999. The policy provides broad guidelines to the State governments for taking action for the welfare of older persons in a proactive manner. It defines 'senior citizen' as a person who is 60 years or above and strives to ensure their well-being and improve the quality of their lives by providing specific facilities, concessions, relief and services and helping them cope with problems associated with old age. It proposes affirmative action on the part of government departments for ensuring that the existing public services for senior citizens are user-friendly and sensitive to their needs.

Over the years, the government has launched various schemes and policies for older persons. These schemes and policies are meant to promote the health,

well-being and independence of senior citizens around the country. Economic help, free medical facilities, less fair in train n buses on travel and pension plans are also introduced by the government. Some seats are also reserved for the aged persons so that they can travel comfortably. Every member of family should take special care of aged. Aged should adjust with the youth and children so that their prestige in the family maintained.

Important points :

1. Early adulthood extends from age 18 to approximately age 40, when the physical and psychological changes, which accompany the beginning of the loss of reproductive capacity, appear.
2. Youth and mature are commonly known as adults and after the end of adolescent period to the period before the starting of aging is known as adulthood.
3. Early adulthood is the period when youth finishes their studies and their career is almost decides. During this various changes like physical, mental, social and emotional changes slow down.
4. Adulthood is a period of economic and social stability. This time adults are on peak on their social and economic growth and they are emotionally stable, calm and experienced at this period. They guide various people of the society.
5. Old age is a period of decline, comes partly from physical and partly from psychological factors. There is change in body cells due to the aging process.
6. Old age is a period of slow and steady decline. This decline can be compensated.
7. In old age the hair on the head becomes thin and turns grey or white, and tough, bristly hair appears in the nose, ears, and eyebrows. Changes in Physiological functions include decline in the ability to see, hear, marked changes in taste, sense of smell becomes less, and also that of sensitivity to pain.

8. Immunity power declines and thus suffers from communicable diseases.
9. Activeness in social activities declines as the age increases in old age.
10. Family group is core of the social life for aged.
11. Main cause of emotional instability is retirement. For the stability aged needs to engage them in interesting work. Understand the feelings and needs of children and coordinate with them.
12. They need special care due to the problems and changes in old age.
13. Balance diet should be given according to the physical changes, health and interest of aged.
14. Due to the lack of coordination with other family members, aged likes to stay alone in their house, but it creates problems related to their care.

Question :

1. Choose the correct answer for the following questions:
 - (i) Adulthood is normally a period of
 - (a) 18-19 to 40 years
 - (b) 19-20 to 40 years
 - (c) 18-20 to 40 years
 - (d) 20-21 to 40 years
 - (ii) Period of economical and social stability is:
 - (a) Young age
 - (b) Adulthood
 - (c) Childhood
 - (d) Old age
 - (iii) Loneliness increases in old age due to:
 - (a) Death of the spouse
 - (b) After the marriage of children
 - (c) Leaving home for the job by children
 - (d) All of above
 - (iv) Diet to the aged should be given according to:
 - (a) Physical changes
 - (b) Interest
 - (c) Health
 - (d) All of the above
 - (v) In old age amount of lubricant of the bone joints becomes:
 - (a) Low
 - (b) High
 - (c) Unchanged
 - (d) None of the above

2. Fill in the blanks :
 - (i) is the period when adolescent achieves full physical growth and development becomes a mentally mature youth.
 - (ii) Youth and adults commonly known as
 - (iii) If childhood is period of life than old age is
 - (iv) For the aged is the core of social life
 - (v) Start of aging is from the period of Years
 3. Comment on following :
 - (a) Young age
 - (b) Adulthood
 3. What kind of problems usually person faces after retirement?
 4. Write down in detail about the physical changes and problems of aged.
 5. How will you care aged women? Describe.
- Answers :**
1. (i) d (ii) b (iii) d (iv) d (v) a
 2. (i) young age (ii) Adult
(iii) Morning, evening (iv) 50
(v) 60 years