

ADULTHOOD AND AGEING THROUGH A LIFESPAN PERSPECTIVE: LATE ADULTHOOD CASE PROFILES

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Introduction

Late adulthood begins at sixty and extends till the end of life. The ageing process can be viewed from three major perspectives i.e. biological, sociological and psychological ageing.

Biological ageing: It is associated with decline in the proper functioning of the vital organs and organ systems of the body. The degree of decline is different for different individuals.

Sociological ageing: As humans are socially constructed creatures, the ageing process depends on various social factors.

Psychological ageing: Is based on the perspective of individuals of whether they consider themselves younger or older than their chronological age.

Case Study Method

Harris (1986,p 13) states, "Case study research is the extensive investigation into the behavior of a single person". This method provides a deep understanding of the participant's behavior through intensive observation, interactions on several occasions.

Objective

The main objective of this case profile is to get an in depth perspective and understand the developmental milestones of late adulthood.

Methods to analyze the overall developmental norms of the subjects were the priority of this research, encompassing physical, emotional, psychosocial and cognitive development.

An in depth interview was conducted which was semi-structured in nature wherein the interviewer asked open ended questions instead of following a structured preplanned list of questions. Semi-structured interview is more flexible and provides scope to frame questions based on the response of the participant.

Along with interview method, observations were also made which facilitated the process of data collection. The data was collected from an old age home which is privately run in New Delhi.

One male and female senior citizen participated in the process of data collection. This way one could distinguish and get different perspective/views of the changes occurring in both genders during the phase of late adulthood.

CASE PROFILE 1 : CHITRA JHA

FAMILY HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Chitra belongs to Kolkata, India and was married to an Assamese man. After marriage she moved in with her husband and continued to live with him in Guwahati, Assam. She is a homemaker with one daughter and one son. The son is married and lives with his wife and his son (Mrs Chitra's grandson) in Guwahati, Assam itself, while her daughter currently resides in Hyderabad.

Chitra is 61 years old, falling into the category of young old population. She used to live with her son but after her husband's death, which was two years back, she became emotionally unstable and was unable to cope up with the loss that she went through. She also described that her relations with her daughter-in-law were not good. The reason to which as quoted by her was the cultural and language differences as they both belong to two diverse states of India.

She stated that her life used to revolve around her husband and when he passed on, it was a tough situation for her. She had tears in her eyes mentioning the situation as she went down the memory lane. It can easily be concluded by observing how much she has been affected by the incident of the loss of her husband.

Later she moved in with her daughter who back then worked in Delhi. She described her stay in Delhi as one of the loneliest periods of her life. She had nothing to do and no one to interact with as her daughter used to go for work during mornings and came back in the evenings. She reminisces that back home in Guwahati, at least she had her grandson with who she spent a lot of time and who she describes as her "best friend". But when her daughter would come back from work Chitra felt relieved and stress free. She stated that she never told this to her daughter or family of how lonely she was when her daughter left for work each day.

After a while her daughter got transferred to Hyderabad for work and when it was

decided that they will move to Hyderabad, Chitra refused to move in with her daughter and decided to stay in an old age home in Delhi itself. And after few requests from her daughter when Chitra did not budge from her decision, is when her daughter agreed to let her stay in an old age home. Since then she has been living in the old age home for the past year and a half.

Lifestyle

Currently Chitra resides in an old age home in New Delhi. She lives alone in a bedroom with an attached washroom and a balcony. She also has a TV and a table where she has arranged all her fruits and nuts very neatly and organized it well. She seemed welcoming and when asked about whether she likes living where she currently is, she said that “of course I like living here, it feels like I got my childhood back”. When asked why she thinks so, she replied that “we have a schedule here and I follow it religiously. She added that she attends all the social gatherings, prayers each evening, physiotherapy classes, etc.”

Physical development

Chitra is physically active and can perform all of her work herself, from daily chores to going to banks for verification of documents or anything else. She thankfully doesn't face any sort of physical challenges or difficulties as of now and which is fair enough as she comes under the young old population and this is the beginning of the period of senescence for her. Overall she is physically fit for her age.

Endurance and Strength: Chitra shared that she felt decline in stamina, strength and endurance.

Skin and Hair: Her skin is visibly wrinkled and started to look aged, graying of hair and hair loss.

Disease/Disorder: She does not have any disease or disorders. But as stated by her she has pain in her knees. Chitra also had body pain during her menopause.

Senses:

Vision: Chitra does not have any problems with vision.

Hearing: Chitra does not have any problems with hearing as well.

Taste/Smell: No problems are noted in the smell and taste senses as Chitra reported.

MENOPAUSE

During menopause, as described by her she had joint pain which is normal as osteoporosis is an inevitable consequence of menopause. She also noticed mood swings, irritability and stress in herself during that period which is all a consequence on hormonal changes as part of menopause. She stated that these problems lasted for about a year but after that everything was back to normal and currently she doesn't feel any physical or emotional challenges.

Cognitive development

Cognitive development starts declining as one enters late adulthood. In Chitra's case, one thing which was more prominent than her slow speed of processing and interpreting the questions asked was her short term memory and she herself admitted that she forget things easily and it's difficult for her to remember the details.

Memory Loss: Memory loss or short term memory is observed by Chitra. She seemingly has difficulties in remembering details. She answered all the questions asked during the interview in brief and she could only recall of the major incidents.

Emotional development

Emotions can be both negative and positive. Chitra depicts both negative and positive emotions. She described that she keeps herself engaged in one thing or the other, so she doesn't get time to think about anything. She is on the stage of accepting reality from the period of denial, in which she earlier was. It was and still is difficult for Chitra to cope up with the loss of her husband that she went through. So tries to keep herself busy with things so she has minimal time to ponder over her emotions and feelings. Moreover, she is positive about life which shows that she is on the path of acceptance. She is self dependent as she said during the interview, "that we should do our things ourselves till we can", which is a sign of positive attitude and inner strength on Chitra's part.

Social development

Chitra stated during the interview that she interacts with people as much as she can during meal times, walks on terrace gardens, social gatherings, etc. It doesn't seem that she is living alone and she prefers being social over living in solitude. She keeps in constant touch with her daughter and she also described that her grandson calls her each day in the evenings. She quoted a few times during our conversation that "my daughter and my grandson are my best friends". This reflects a strong bond that she shares both with her daughter and her

grandson.

Psychosocial development

According to her age (61 years) she falls into the seventh stage of Erickson's theory i.e Generativity versus Stagnation. She showed generative nature once in awhile but in general she is stagnant, as it can be clearly noted that she is emotionally unstable and somewhat restricted in her movement. The most obvious reason to which seems the loss of her husband and family problems aswell. Her speech trembled, she was constantly tightly closing and opening her fists. She almost behaved like a preschool kid, this can be explained by her saying that she got her childhood back, she likes to spend her time religiously according to schedule from waking up, taking baths, eating and then to joining physiotherapy sessions timely. She answered every question like a child does, and at the end of the interview she also asked "so, how many marks does she get?" and in response when she was told "you surely get full marks". To this she clapped her hands and said, "thank you".

When asked "are you satisfied with the life that you have led till now?", she simply said "yes" with nothing else added. It was left to that as she was not that comfortable in divulging further details.

CONCLUSION

Chitra surely is a brave and self dependent lady to live on her own, even though she has an option to live with her daughter. Her physical and social development is how it is supposed to be according to her age. Chitra is gradually getting used to the major loss of her husband that she had in her life. Her story is one of courage and it truly is a huge inspiration.

Case profile 2 : Mr Hira Patil

FAMILY HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Mr Hira Patil belongs to Bangalore, Karnataka. He is 61 years old, retired from NSG (National Security Guard). He served in the engineering branch for the NSG. During his service he was posted into different states. So he has been posted to many parts of India but as of now he is based out of New Delhi. He spent his entire childhood in a joint family in Karnataka. He recalls how he and his cousins used to go to school and get along at home. He described that as he lived in a joint family there, he had quite a few cousins so in the mornings the house used to be so chaotic while all the children would be getting ready for school. He stated that one of his aunts' used to get them all bathed, pack lunch boxes and would also feed them all breakfast. The joy in

his eyes while describing these incidents can be noticed clearly. He shared that his daughter also lives in Delhi but he doesn't want to stay with her because she is married now and has her own life. He shared that he himself is so independent that he can do his work on his own and this quality is a must have for each and every one of us. He visits the doctor periodically as he is a heart patient. He stated that his doctor is very cooperative and friendly. His daughter books cabs for him or sometimes she also accompanies him to visit the doctor for regular checkups. He was posted in Guwahati, Assam, when he figured out that he has some heart ailment for the first time and at that time he was on duty. He has been living in the old age home for the past 1.5 months. When asked about his current lifestyle, he described that language barrier is one of the problems which he faces in Delhi. He understands Hindi language very easily and can talk fluently as well but he stated that people here (in the old age home) use a lot of words and phrases from Haryanvi language which he does not know and is not used to. Other than that being from South Indian, the food is also one of the major challenges that he has been facing. The session with him was very interesting and interactive as he also asked questions and when a satisfying answer was not put forth, he did express his disappointment, which was appreciated.

Hira has two smart phones that he uses on a daily basis and remains up to date with what's happening in the world. He wakes up early in the morning and highly suggests everyone to wake up early. He is very wise and holds a positive approach towards life. One can learn a lot from him only by listening and observing.

LIFE AFTER RETIREMENT

He stated that he misses his work life after his retirement. He now also follows his disciplined schedule like he used to during his service. He is also applying for other jobs. He shared that he was offered a job at a bank but he had to refuse as he is on medication, and has to periodically visit his cardiologist.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Hira is physically active and is able to do his daily chores on his own. He goes for daily walks on the terrace garden every day. He manages all his visits to the doctor on his own. He is actively able to take care of any documents and any financial matters. No physical challenges are faced by him except for the fact that he is a heart patient and so Hira has to pay attention to his regular checkups, medicines and diet.

Endurance and Strength: A slight decline in stamina, strength and endurance were observed, which are normal signs in the young old population.

Skin and Hair: His skin is quite visibly wrinkled and started to look aged. Graying of hair and

hair loss is also evident.

Disease/Disorder: Hira has a heart condition related to which proper medical care is being provided. Other than that no joint pains or any other physical challenge is observed in his case.

Senses:

Vision: Hira has slight hyperopia and wears glasses.

Hearing: No problems with hearing is observed as reported by Hira.

Taste/Smell: Both taste and smell senses are functioning normally in Hira.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

In this case there is no visible decline or challenges in cognitive development of Hira. In fact Hira has a really brilliant memory which is quite surprising. He remembers even the not so usual years but months and years as well of any incidents that had occurred in his life.

Memory Loss: No memory loss is noted in Hira's case.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

People in old age can feel helpless and hopeless due to physical challenges, living arrangements or negative events or incidents. But Hira mostly depicted positive emotions like happiness, pride, gratitude, satisfaction, kindness, optimism and more.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Hira interacts with people as much as he can, he is active on social media like facebook where he is constantly in touch with business ventures and what's been happening around in the world. He encourages others senior citizens to be open to learning through experiences and by interacting with people.

PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

As for social development is concerned, Hira keeps himself engaged in interactions and activities. According to his age, he comes under the seventh stage of Erickson's psychosocial theory i.e. Generativity versus Stagnation. Hira is quite generative in nature and likes to be productive and helpful by passing down his knowledge about life and other topics to the next generation. The main theme during this stage is passing down wisdom, wishing to see a change, be productive and have passion and purpose in life to inspire the next generation so they do

well. In fact Hira at his age is appearing for exams and finding a job to work, which explains how passionate and productive he is. He even showed his admit card for the exam which is scheduled in a week. Hira quoted that “youth are the future of our nation and they should have their aims clear in life. One should learn from experiences as much as one can. Going out in the real world can teach more than any institution can, so talk to people, learn from them as much as you can.”

When asked “are you satisfied with the life you have led till now?” Hira replied that is really very happy and satisfied with his life. He further added that we should never stop learning and should keep striving to be better in life.

CONCLUSION

Hira is a highly optimistic person. He tries to help and give others around him as much as he can. He is very wise and knowledgeable and the good thing is that is not at all resistant to sharing his views, experiences and thoughts with others. He truly adds value to society. Even though he has few challenges in his life, he faces them with great care and passion. Hira can be a great inspiration for others, especially for other senior citizens.

REFERENCES

Harris, A.C. (1986). *Child Development*. USA: West Publishing Company