

PROBLEMS OF AGED

Human beings are constantly changing. In early phase of life span the changes evolutionary in nature or functional. In the later part of life the changes are individual. In the individual shows decline in body + activities. These changes are referred as aging.

Aging is thus defined "progression of adult changes, characteristic of the species & which should occur in all individuals if they live long enough."

As aging sets in - the old age begins. Usually 65 yrs. is taken as an arbitrary line dividing the middle + old age but as criterion of taking chronological age as an index is not very correct as there are marked differences among the individuals in the age at which aging actually begins.

Problems of Old Age:-

Sexual Problems:-

Both males + females undergo sexual changes as age progresses. With menopause the woman loses fertility + men in the late fifties exhibit decline in sexual potency. These changes cause immense psych problems like anxiety, fear, depression. The woman may become hostile + self critical + may also develop a feeling of guilt. For males reduced sexual potency typifies the waning of masculinity, which they find hard to accept. These changes can have negative impact on interpersonal relationships. If the man believes his growing impotence comes from lack of responsiveness on the part of his wife she in turn finds his impotence a handicap to the satisfaction of her sexual desires, it will strain the relationship that

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already strained by the lack of common interest & boredom. Sometimes old men & women want to have sex but social & cultural norms act as barrier to sex or remarriage & thus their sexual urges may remain unsatisfied, causing trauma.

Handling of Sexual Problems:-

A bit of liberal approach & sympathetic attitude towards the sexual needs of the aged can solve this problem. By revolting against the customs prohibiting the marriage of old widows & divorcees & allowing aged the freedom to have sex with their wives the problem can be solved.

Problem of age & life crisis:-

1- Retirement

2- Widowhood (loss of spouse)

Widowhood or loss of spouse:-

Old age happens to be the period when the couple need each other the most. The death or the divorce of spouse creates a lot of problems for men & women in old age. If the death of the spouse comes shortly after man's retirement from work it greatly increases the difficulties of adjustment for him. The problem is much more for the person who depends too much on their spouse for emotional security.

Builer & etal found that the loss of significant person & most importantly the loss of spouse was considered by the aged as most important factor for the deterioration of their health.

Has to cope up with Emotional Problem of widowhood 9 -4

Cultivate new areas of interest - active involvement

② Retirement -

It is the compulsory relinquishment of the paid job after the successful completion of certain period. - or voluntary

Erickson says that retirement brings about identity crisis in the same fashion as that faced in adolescence.

Problems following Retirement.

1. Retirement brings about economic problems that have serious effects on the individual's concept of self + the status he holds in the family. A person finds it difficult to ask his son for money but at the same time he needs it for his survival. The fact that parent is no longer earning also reduces the respect in the eyes of his son.

2. Most retired persons prior to their retirement have played certain role, + they have derived certain satisfaction from it. Now after the retirement he is expected to play new roles, which are less satisfactory + less prestigious + less interesting, they find it difficult to adjust in the new role.

Retirement also means reduction in social circle + giving up of one hobby due to nervous crunch. This may increase loneliness + risk of depression.

Measures to cope up with retirement problems -
1. People should systematically plan their life so that they are left with sufficient money to cater to their old age needs.
2. One has to accept that retirement has to come one day therefore he should be well prepared to face it.

3. It is nice to cultivate some purposeful interest or hobby during the younger period of ones life, so that the person can switch on to it after the retirement. T.V. etc.

How to cope up with ^{1st} Emotional Problem of widowhood ⁷⁰ 8

1. ~~Remarriage~~

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old age recreation homes, ¹⁵⁷ # 9 meeting friends etc are
can fill up gap.

(4) For those whom retirement brings financial hardships, they can take up some small business venture.

Intellectual change + the problem it poses :-

It is commonly believed that old age results in mental deterioration, ^{the} ~~these~~ studies do not support it because of this. Many studies have been conducted on the impact of aging on intellectual capacity & conflicting results have been obtained.

A longitudinal study by Blum, Jarvita + Clark (1976) reported that there is small decline in intelligence test scores between 65 and 73 + much steeper from 73 to 85. This decline was different for different types of intelligence. On the tests of pure information + vocabulary no decline was observed till age of 85, whereas for the test involving perceptual spatial reasoning decline was sharp.

Cattell says that there are 2 types of intelligence

1 - Fluid intelligence

2 - ~~Crystal~~ Crystallized intelligence

It is the fluid intelligence that declines with age + crystallized intelligence being substantiated with experience increases over a period of time. Thus old people do better in things which involve crystallized intelligence.

~~It has been acknowledged that lack of motivation is~~ ^{inter}

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Contemporary psychologists agree that professions like teaching where mind is under constant work & stimulation, the effects of mental aging are not evident in the old age. It has also been found that

- (i) lack of motivation & interest
- (ii) disturbed emotional states
- (iii) lack of practice & constant stimulation of mind
- (iv) improper work habits

are the important factors that are responsible for ~~cause~~ intellectual decline than actual loss of intelligence or cognitive ability. Studies also show that creativity doesn't decline with age, though beyond the age of 80 decline in intellectual performance becomes a rule rather than exception. The late 60's is marked ^{with} the decline in abilities that involve speed & power.

The common belief is that old people are unfit for jobs because one cannot teach old dog new tricks. ^{This} causes lot of frustration & discontent. ^{Often} they are side tracked just because of their age even where they have the capacity to deliver goods more efficiently than a young man can do. Such apathetic & rejecting attitude is not only upsetting for oldies who want to share with the young generation their experiences but also reinforces the feeling that their life is meaningless, useless & dependent. Their

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self esteem is lowered & self confidence
shattered when they are neglected & rejected
just because they are of their age.

Measures/-

The need is for better understanding of the various facets of the intelligence of the aged by the young people so that they can get rid of their traditional stereotypes & cash on the experience of old for their benefit. This will give old people a sense of participation & meaning in life besides providing right direction to the young & inexperienced people.

Physical & Physiological Changes & Associated

Problems/-

Common physical changes accompanying

old age are

- (i) improper eating habits leading to over or under weight
- (ii) sagging muscles, flabby flabby arms, brittleness & loss of hair, loss of muscular tone & eye brows & hair becoming white.
- (iii) Nails become thick, joints become stiff & teeth are lost.

All these physical changes contribute to the

- (i) disfiguration of the body
 - (ii) slowness in movement & reflexes
 - (iii) loss of agility
- & these changes cause emotional disturbances

depression, anxiety, & grief. It also develops in them a sense of inferiority & dependence.

The common physiological changes in the old age are

- (i) fall in volume of blood & urine
- (ii) reduced muscle strength, elevated B.P., reduced respiratory capacity & hardening of arteries
- (iii) fall in body metabolism, enzyme production, & hormone secretion.
- (iv) Temperature fluctuations, & weakened immunity

All these developments contribute to

- (i) Decreased work efficiency
- (ii) frequent illness
- (iii) loss of control over mind & body.

All these frequent illness, lowered work efficiency & loss of control means

- (i) excessive display of emotions like anger & hostility & frequent irritability
- (ii) social withdrawal & emotional insulation.
- (iii) Depression, grief & feelings of helplessness.

Measures:-

Physical & physiological decline is inevitable as age progresses. Their rate can however be reduced by proper diet & other precautions. The best counselling of old people so that they can understand their problem & also can also help - especially to check their over-reaction to their problems

Sensory Decline and Associated Problems:- 75 (13)

This decrease becomes more pronounced with advancing age.

- (1) Change + loss of taste occurs because of atrophy of taste buds + especially those at the end of the tongue. Sense of smell is also reduced.
- (2) Decline in sensitivity to pain + sensation of touch due to loss of receptors + drying + hardening of skin.
- (3) Decline in efficiency of eyes. Perception of colour + colour vision also declines.
- (4) Upset in labyrinthine + kinesthetic sensations make elderly people liable to falls, trippings + imbalance.
- (5) Deterioration in hearing occurs in old age. This decline in hearing ability is generally for high pitched sound or high tones.

Due to aging there is deterioration in various sensory systems especially auditory + visual. This makes the person more suspicious because it reduces the probability of reality testing + this perhaps the reason for developing the paranoid tendency among older people.

National institute of mental health studies show that there is strong relation between hearing loss + depression. Hearing loss causes greater social isolation than blindness. It has been seen that during communication deafness + badly articulated speech are potentially more conflicting with social interaction. This also creates misunderstandings.

Diminished visual capacities also increase dependence of oldies on others + thereby their freedom is curtailed.

Decline in taste buds kills the pleasure of eating & this may cause digestive problems, since the food is not chewed but engulfed. Loss of sensitivity makes old people less responsive & alert

However it must be conceded decline in sense organs in general causes decline in alertness, agility & responsiveness of old people.

Problems of Aged in India:-

1) There is no state sponsored social security system. The central Govt. has delegated the constitutional duty of protection of the old to the state govts. (under Art. 41) but later dole out pensions ranging from unspeakable Rs 30/- to miserable Rs 100/- per month & almost 90% of the aged remain outside the purview of pension system.

There are no special windows & handling facility for the aged in govt. offices, banks, railways & bus station. No separate queues, no reserved seats. There are travel concessions, but these are meagre. ITC hotels offer weekend concessions but a miniscule minority of aged can afford them.

We still do not have a integrated organised & comprehensive national policy for the aged.

The number of voluntary agencies concerned with the old are embarrassingly small & none of them except the truly destitute which constitute 20-25% of the old. Hardly any of them admit old people above 75 yrs - precisely the age when their need is greatest. The atmosphere in ^{most} old age homes is cold & apathetic. Thus they provide merely physical security to the aged & not no care is taken of emotional well being of the aged. Often there are severe problems of social

readjustment. Unsatisfactory as these

homes are, they are ^{also so limited} so scarce that it is virtually impossible to get admission to them except on very special recommendation. There are even cases of people who have had to solicit foreign embassies recommendations.

The number of Indians above 60 has trebled since 1951 as average longevity has increased from 32 yrs to 61 years.

However traditional community & family structures that favoured the old have broken down, people have become more individualistic & achievement oriented & a strange kind of Social Darwinism has spread which believes in the survival of the fittest & hence inevitably indifference & callousness towards the weak.

This society has not learnt how to cope with the reality of aging.

NIMHANS in a study found "The mother in law today feels doubly threatened. The daughter in law is not only financially independent but emotionally too. The ageing woman can not compete against her. Often the father in law depends more on her than his wife which is painful for the old women."

Steps + Suggestion for rehabilitation -

1. Clear out comprehensive policy for age - which addresses to all aspects of their problems. ^{National Bank for} ~~World Bank~~ ^{Care of Aged} - setup for review of policies & programmes.
2. Periodic researches to assess magnitude of various problems of aged & measures for ^{their} improvement.
3. Increased participation of voluntary agencies & organizations - awareness building. Community should be made aware of curative & rehabilitative needs of aged.
4. Geriatric wards in hospitals & special windows in dispensaries & hospitals should be provided for aged.
5. Concessions to the aged for travel, inter state & city buses & also for special medical camps for them.
6. Courses for geriatric study in medical, so doctors can understand their problems, and have deeper knowledge about them.
7. More lucrative insurance schemes & employment opportunities.

REHABILITATION OF AGED

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1) Geriatric Measures:

a) Preventive Geriatrics

1) Old people when middle age should be forewarned about possible health problems & how can they be minimised. This can be done by propaganda by mass media, debates and seminars.

2) Community should be made aware of preventive & curative needs of aged.

Mass media can be used for community education in this regard.

(b) Geriatric Monitoring

1) Carrying out periodical surveys to know which problems are being faced by aged & how they are coping with it. Surveys should also suggest the measures to overcome these problems.

2) We can set up geriatric departments in the medical colleges.

(c) Geriatric Nursing

1) Treating old people for their diseases. This can be done by organising medical camps, mobile hospitals, setting geriatric clinical service and train nurses & caretakers so that they can handle the aged.

2) Social gerontological measures: -

(a) Providing the aged financial security:

(1) We can have Retirement training program in which participants can be told the ways for judicious investment of their savings.

(2) Old age pensions.

(3) Concessions in travel + medicine.

(4) Lucrative insurance schemes.

(b) Providing physical security :-

(1) This can be done by setting old age homes.

(2) Day care centres with diverse activities.

(3) Laws to protect the old stringent punishment be given to those who mistreat the old.

(4) Area wise service teams for the care of lonely + sick.

(c) Providing Socio Emotional Security :-

(1) This can be provided by removing unhappiness from the lives of the aged. For this a club for senior citizens can be formed.

In this club old people can meet and discuss their problems share their joys + remove their tensions.

(2) Family care giving - young people should be made to realize that they will also grow old one day + therefore must respect elders.

(3) Rewarding exemplary work.

(4) Organising tours + picnics for aged people.

(d) Leisure activities :-

Aged have problems in using their free time to use it productively because

- encourage them to take up some hobby or cultural activity

- go for further education.

- skill bank + skill sharing (4) Spiritual activities