

Hello students, welcome to the program Bachelor of Arts, Third year

Subjects Psychology, Semester 6, the course title is Developmental Psychology.

I am Mukta Karamadi, will be presenting on the module Middle Adulthood: Personality throughout adulthood and Generativity.

This module is from the 4th unit that is Emotional and Social Development

Outline of this presentation;

- Erikson's Stage of Generativity versus Stagnation
- Levinson's Seasons of Man's Life.
- The Life-Events Approach
- The Empty Nest and its Refilling

At the end of this module you will be able to;

- Explain the Erikson's stage of generativity versus stagnation.
- Analyze Levinson's seasons of man's life theory.
- Examine the influence of life events on the individual's development.
- Describe the empty nest syndrome.

There are many theories which have described personality development during the adulthood.

These adult stage theories have contributed to the view that midlife brings a crisis in development.

We'll be focusing on two prominent theories in this presentation.

They are Erik Erikson's lifespan view and Daniel Levinson's seasons of man's life.

So first we will look at Erikson's stage of generativity versus stagnation.

According to Erikson, middle aged adults face a significant issue that is generativity versus stagnation.

Generativity encompasses adults' desire to leave legacies of themselves to the next generation.

Through these legacies adults achieve a kind of immortality.

By contrast, stagnation which is also called as self absorption, develops when individuals sense that they have done nothing for the next generation.

Middle aged adults can develop generativity in number of ways.

That is, through biological generativity, that is adults have offsprings. Through parental generativity the adults nurture and guide their children

Through the work generativity, they develop skills that are passed down to others.

And also through cultural generativity adults create, renovate or conserve some aspects of culture that ultimately survive.

The adults promote and guide the next generation by parenting, teaching, leading and doing things that benefit the community.

Generative adults commit themselves to the continuation and improvement of society through their connection to the next generation.

They also develop a positive legacy of the self and then offer it as a gift to the next generation.

Now let us move on to the next theory that is Levinson's seasons of man's life.

According to Levinson, at the end of one's teens, the transition from dependence to independence should occur.

This transition is marked by the formation of a dream. That is an image of the kind of life the youth wants to have especially in terms of a career and marriage.

Levinson sees twenties as a novice phase of adult development. It's a time of reasonably free experimentation of testing the dream in the real world.

In early adulthood, the two major tasks to be mastered are Exploring the possibilities for adult living and Developing a stable life structure.

According to Levinson from about ages 28 to 33, a man goes through a transition period in which he must face the more serious question of determining his goals.

During the 30s, he usually focuses on family and career development.

In the later years of this period, he enters a phase of 'becoming one's own man' or BOOM as Levinson calls it.

By age 40, he has reached a stable location in his career and now must look forward to the kind of life he will lead as a middle aged adult.

The transition to middle adulthood lasts about five years according to Levinson, that is from 40 to 45 years, and it requires the adult male to come to grips with four major conflicts that have existed in his life since adolescence.

These conflicts are;

Being young versus being old,  
Being destructive versus being constructive,  
Being masculine versus being feminine,  
Being attached to others versus being separated from them.

When the adults are successful in resolving these conflicts, they can make this transition very successfully.

According to Levinson, the success of mid life transition depends on how effectively the individual reduces the polarities and accepts each of them as integral part of his being.

He proposed that a majority of Americans, especially men experience a midlife crisis.

However, research indicates that midlife crises are not pervasive. There is considerable individual variation in development during the middle adulthood years.

To see and verify how pervasive a midlife crisis is, a longitudinal study was conducted by George Vaillant, which was known as Grant study.

And the participants of this study were Harvard University men. From his study Vaillant concluded that only a minority of adults experience midlife crisis.

Thus, for most people midlife crisis is not there.

Apart from these crisis situations there are also positive aspects to this transition.

Many cognitive skills such as vocabulary, verbal memory and inductive reasoning peak in mid life

Many individuals reach the height of their career success in midlife.

Further, in midlife, reports of general well being and life satisfaction tend to be very high.

Adult development experts are virtually unanimous in their belief that midlife crises have been exaggerated. That is, mid life is more positive than negative according to many researchers.

Now let us move on to the next approach to understand the personality during the mid life or middle adulthood.

This is known as the life events approach.

In the early version of the theory, life events such as death of spouse, divorce, marriage were viewed as taxing circumstances for individuals, forcing them to change their personality.

In the contemporary life events approach how life events influence the individual's development depends on mediating factors.

These are physical health and family support. That is, the individuals who have good physical health as well as family support can deal with the stressful situation or major life events successfully, and they may not experience the stress.

Similarly, the individual's adaptation to the life event also is very important. The individuals who can appraise the situation well and have coping abilities to deal with this life event can make better adjustments.

And also the life stage context is very important. That is at what time or the time at which the particular life event or a change in the life is taking place.

Let us take divorce as an example. If divorce occurs in the initial years of marriage, it could be less stressful when compared to the divorce coming in after a long period of married life and that too when the people are in their 50s.

And also the socio historical context influences how well the individuals can make adjustment to the major life events.

Taking the same example of divorce, adapting to the divorce is easier in today's time when compared to what it was in the past, because divorce has become more common as well as it is accepted in the society.

So the social historical context plays very important role in what kind of stress the individual experiences through his life events.

There are some drawbacks to this Life events approach. Let us look at them now.

It places too much emphasis on change, not adequately recognizing the stability that characterizes adult development.

It may not be life's major events that are the primary sources of stress, but even the day-to-day hassles or daily experiences could be stressful. But this theory doesn't emphasize on the day-to-day less stressful events. It focuses mainly on the major life events.

Many Developmentalists described midlife as empty nest mainly because at this particular period the children leave their families and start their own life.

So an important event in the family is launching of a child into adult life.

When this happens, parents face new adjustments as a result of child's absence.

Especially parents who live vicariously through their children might experience the empty nest syndrome.

Empty nest syndrome is 'a decrease in marital satisfaction after children leave home', because parents derive considerable satisfaction from the children.

For most parents, however, marital satisfaction does not decline. That is, empty nest syndrome doesn't occur when children leave their homes, but rather it increases.

This has been finding of some researchers. So they are of the opinion that marital partners have time to pursue career interests and more time for each other.

Of course, empty nest can be refilled, especially in today's uncertain economic climate.

The adolescents may return home after several years of independent life. And when they come back, it is like a refilling of the empty nest.

Refilling of empty nest also has positive aspects as well as negative aspects to it.

Though the middle generation has always provided support for the younger generation through loans and monetary gifts for education and through emotional support, they may continue doing so after refilling of the empty nest.

However, as with most family living arrangements, there are both advantages and disadvantages when their children return to live at home. That is, both the generations may have privacy issues as well as adjustment issues.

With this we have completed this particular module wherein we have looked at three different approaches to understand the personality through mid life.

Thank you.