

**Course Name:** B. Sc Home Science (Honours)

**Subject Title:** Human Development & Family studies

**Year No.:** II

**Semester No:** III

**Paper Name:** Lifespan development

**Lesson No.:** Unit 7, Lesson 10

**Title:** Middle Adulthood



---

**Middle Adulthood**

---

## Introduction

The objective of this lesson is to understand the concepts, characteristics, and developmental tasks of middle age, to understand the physical, cognitive development during the middle adulthood, and the third objective is to understand the socio emotional development during the middle age.

**Middle adulthood:** It is the period from 40 years of age to about 60 years. Middle adulthood is the time for expanding personal and social involvement and responsibilities. It is the time at which assisting new generation in becoming competent and mature individuals. It is the time for reaching and maintaining satisfaction in a career. And it is a time when there is a decline in physical skills and balancing of work and relationship occurs. And it is a time when reassessment of life priorities happened. So, this about the Middle adulthood. Let us now see, what are the developmental tasks of the middle age.

### Developmental tasks of middle age

The developmental tasks are, achieving adult civic and social responsibility, establishing and maintaining an economic standard of living, assisting teenage children to become more responsible and happy adults, and the next developmental task is developing adult leisure-time activities, and the next one is relating oneself to one's spouse as a person, and accepting and adjusting to physiological changes during the middle age. And the next developmental task is adjusting to the aging parents. These are the developmental tasks related to Middle adulthood. Let us now see what are the characteristics of the middle adulthood.

### Characteristics of middle adulthood

As Middle adulthood is a long period in the lifespan, we can be divided into early middle adulthood, which extends from the age of forty to fifty years. And advanced middle adulthood, which extends from the age of fifty to sixty years.

During the advanced middle adulthood, lots of physical and psychological changes that first began during the early forties become far more apparent. Like every period in the lifespan, the middle adulthood is also associated with certain characteristics that make this a distinctive. One of the most important characteristics is, that Middle adulthood is a dreaded period.

### **Middle adulthood is a dreaded period**

It is a dreaded period in the lifespan. Because it is recognized that, next to old age, it is the most dreaded period in the total lifespan and the adult will not admit that they have reached until the calendar and the mirror force them to accept to do. There are many unfavorable stereotypes about middle-aged people, and traditional beliefs concerning the mental and physiological deterioration that are the symptoms accompanying the cessation of the reproductive life, and the emphasis on the importance of youth as compared with the reverence for age and also the cultural influence also happens. These influences the adults attitude unfavourably as they are approaching the middle adulthood period in their lives. The next characteristic of middle adulthood is a time of transition.

### **Middle adulthood is a time of transition**

Just as a puberty is the time of transition from childhood to adolescence then to adulthood, so also, the middle adulthood is the time when the men and women leave behind the physical and behavioral characteristics of adulthood and enter into a period of life when new physical and behavioral characteristics will become prevailing. It is the time when men undergo a change in virility and women a change in fertility.

These patterns of role changes for both men and women there must be a change to pair entered relationship as compared with the family-centered relationship. During the early years of adulthood when the main roles of men and women in the home are those of parents. The middle adulthood is a time of stress.

### **Middle adulthood is a time of stress**

Radical adjustments to the changed roles and patterns of life, especially when accompanied by the physical changes, and it leads to a period of a stress, a time when number of major adjustments must be made in the home, in the business, and also in their social aspects of their lives. So, these are some of the characteristics of middle adulthood. After having understood the time period of middle adulthood, and the developmental tasks and the characteristics related to this middle age, let us now move on to see what are the categories of stress during this middle adulthood.

### **Categories of stress in middle adulthood**

Categories of stress in middle adulthood can be Somatic stress, it is because of

the physical evidences of aging. Then the next stress is the Cultural stress, it is stemming from the high value placed on youth, vigor, and success by the cultural group.

Next one is the Economic stress, it is resulting from the financial burden of educating children, providing a status symbol for all the family members. Then the next stress is the Psychological stress, which may be the result of death of spouse, departure of children from the home, boredom with the marriage, or a sense of loss of youth and approaching death.

Most women, experience a disruption during their forties, when normally they go through the menopause and that their last children leave the home. Thus, forcing them to make the radical readjustments in the pattern of their lives. For men, by contrast, the climacteric comes later generally in fifties, as does the imminence of retirement with its necessary role changes. Then, the middle adulthood is a Dangerous age.

### **Middle adulthood is a "Dangerous age"**

The usually the way of interpreting "dangerous age" is in the terms that the males who wants to have the last fling in life, can catch up with him. It is a time when individuals break down physically as a result of overwork, or because of careless living. The incidence of mental illness rises rapidly during this middle adulthood among both men and women, and it is also a peak age for suicides, especially among the men.

The threats to good adjustment that makes middle adulthood dangerous are intensified. Then the next characteristic is the middle age is "age of revolt of men". Usually they coincide with the upsets caused by the menopause of the women. This not only strains the husband-wife relationship, but sometimes leading to separation or divorce, but it often predisposes both men and women to the physical and mental illness, alcoholism, drug addiction, and also suicide. Next characteristic of the middle adulthood is an awkward age.

### **Middle adulthood is an "Awkward age"**

Just as adolescents are neither children nor adults, so is the middle-aged men and women are no longer "younger" nor are they yet "old." The middle-aged person "stands between the younger 'Rebel generation' and the 'Senior citizen generation'-both of which continuously in spotlight and suffers from the discomforts and embarrassments associated with both these age groups. Next

characteristic of the middle adulthood is a time of achievement.

### **Middle adulthood is a time of achievement**

According to Erikson, it is a crisis age in which the "Generativity" - the tendency to produce "stagnation". Stagnation means the tendency to stand still will dominate. People either become more and more successful or they will become stand still and accomplish nothing more. If middle-aged people have a strong desire to succeed, they will reach their peak at this time and reap the benefits of the years of preparation and hard work that preceded it. Women, like men, who have worked throughout the years of early adulthood, generally reach their peak during the middle adulthood. However, this peak, until very recently, was far below than that of the males. Women who spent their early adulthood in homemaking and re-entered the vocational world after their children were grown and on their own, they find, forced to reach the peak in the middle adulthood because the employers regard them as "too old" as they approach the sixties. Next characteristic of the middle adulthood is a time of evaluation.

### **Middle adulthood is a time of evaluation**

It is a peak age of achievement; it is a logical that it also would be the time when they would evaluate their accomplishments in the light of their earlier aspirations and expectations of others, especially the family members and friends. Next characteristic of the middle adulthood is evaluated by a double standard.

### **Middle adulthood is evaluated by a double standard**

The eighth characteristics which is important is that middle adulthood is evaluated by a double standard, a standard for men and a standard for women. In spite of the growing trend towards the equal roles of men and women in the home, in business, or industry, or profession, and in social life, there still exists a double standard regarding the aging. While this double standard affects many aspects of lives of the middle-aged men and women, and especially which are common. The first relates to the physical changes. When men's hair become grey, when they develop lines and wrinkles on their faces middle-aged pouch in the place of a slender waistline, they are regarded as "distinguished." Similar physical changes in women are judged as unattractive. The major emphasis of this "middle-age spread."

### **Middle adulthood is a time of the emptiness**

The time when the children no longer want to live under the parental roof; Except in cases when men and women marry later when their average age, or postpone having children until they are well established in careers, or have a large family spread out over a decade or more time, middle adulthood is a "empty nest" stage in the marital lives.

### **Middle adulthood is a time of boredom**

Many, if not most of the men, but women definitely experience boredom during their late thirties and forties. Men become bored with the daily routine of work and with a family and women, who have spent most of their adulthood caring for the home raising the children, and wondering what they will be doing the next twenty or thirty years. So, these are some of the points related to the middle adulthood.

### **Physical development**

During the mid-life, people experience a range of external and internal physical changes. External changes include the appearance of grey hair, hair thinning, increasing in facial wrinkles, and a tendency to put on weight around the waist or lower body. The internal changes include reduction in the efficiency of cardiovascular, respiratory system and the nervous system. There are changes in sensory capacities, also. One of the most noticeable for the most middle-aged people is the onset of presbyopia. It is a condition of farsightedness due to a progressive change in the shape of the lens of the eyes. This leads to difficulty in reading small print.

**Hearing:** Hearing particularly sensitive to higher frequency sounds. It is also prone to weaken during the middle age. This is the time when women experience the menopause, that is the cessation of the menstruation. Many women suffer some level of physical and psychological discomfort because of this. Like the hot flushes, mood changes, loss of libido and insomnia. But the intensity of these symptoms vary considerably from among the individuals. Then, the next change is in the height, weight and strength which are the bench marks of the changes in middle adulthood.

### **Height, weight and strength**

Height reaches maximum during the 20's for most of the people, and remains stable till the age of 55. After the age of 55, bones become less dense and

ultimately women lose 2 inches and men lose 1 inch in height. People get shorter with aging because of the bone loss in vertebrae.

Weight: Weight typically drops after we reach the age of 50; likely because of the loss of muscle tone. Joint stiffness, difficulty in movement, accompanies the progressive loss of bone in the middle age. Then the next important point in the middle adulthood is that, the female menopause.

### **The female menopause**

Starting at about the age of 45 years, women enter a period known as the female climacteric; it is the transition from being able to bear children to being unable to do so. This period lasts for about 15 to 20 years. The most notable sign in menopause is, cessation of the menstruation.

The production of estrogen and progesterone will drop. Now we will see what are the changes that happens to men in middle age.

### **Men in middle age**

Do men experience equivalent of menopause? Not really so. Men do experience some changes during the middle age that are collectively referred to as male climacteric conditions or andropause, the period of physical and psychological changes relating to the male reproductive system. And the next changes that occurs during the middle age is that of the mortality rates.

### **Mortality rates**

The chronic diseases are the main cause of death during the middle adulthood. The leading cause of death during the middle age is the heart diseases. And the second leading cause is cancer. Cerebrovascular diseases is, the third leading cause for the death during the middle age. In the 1st half of the middle age, cancer claims more lives than the heart diseases and the trend is reversed during the 2nd half of the middle age. Accidents because of the decreased visual acuity is also a reason of high during the middle age. Men have higher mortality rates than women. So after having understood, the physical developmental changes that are taken place during the middle age, let us now see what are the Cognitive development takes place in middle adulthood.

### **Cognitive development in middle adulthood**

During the middle adulthood, some intellectual abilities they decline, but others

increase.

**Crystallized intelligence**, that is acquired store of information, skills, and strategies this increases during the middle adulthood.

**Fluid intelligence**, that is ability to deal with new situations it begins to decline in middle adulthood. Let us see what are the changes in mental abilities.

### **Changes in mental abilities**

At the age of 50, when one occasionally couldn't recall a name or had a pause in a lecture or a speech to think about what to say next, this could be the first sign of aging in mind. Majority of aging research has focused on deficits, because they cause a concern for a while neglecting the cognitive abilities and gains.

The different aspects of cognitive functioning show different patterns of change. Although the decline occurs in some areas, most people display cognitive competence, especially in familiar contexts, and some attain outstanding accomplishments. Overall, the evidence supports the optimistic view of the adult cognitive potential. This is about the cognitive development changes during the middle adulthood.

### **Social and emotional development**

Each phase of life brings new challenges, and for many people in mid-life it brings multiplicity of them from all quarters. By this time, the people's histories are very varied. In their personal and occupational lives, many different options may have been chosen. Many different events and circumstances have affected their progress. So, we cannot pin down any particular pattern of social and emotional development associated with middle age. Despite this variety in individuals' personal background, some lifespan developmentalists maintain that the middle age as a period when adults have to face a conflict between the Generativity and stagnation. As we have already studied, generativity is making the process of contributing to the next generation. And can be always realized in variety of ways through personal, that is the family or by career attainments that provides a basis for others to progress.

And another person might find a sense of generativity through having reared children that she is proud of and who are now entering the adult world well equipped to meet the challenges. A 'link between the generations', as maintained

by Erikson, is 'as indispensable for renewal of adult generation's own life, and as it is for the next generation'.

**Stagnation:** Stagnation is opposing feeling of having achieved relatively little and of having little to offer to the next generation. Some people in their mid-life, for example, conclude that they have not met the family or occupational goals that once they were motivated for. Some respond to this sense of 'standing still' with a period of self-absorption, and an acute awareness that time is limited.

The individuals are likely experiencing both types of feeling, that is the feeling of generativity and the feeling of stagnation. And the core developmental process of mid-life, according to Erikson, is resolution of this conflict. Those who resolve this conflict successfully attain a sense of care, that is both about the present and about the future; and those who fail to develop a sense of reactivity, that is they turn away from society and have little interest in contributing to the society. Now let us see what are the Emotional development during the middle adulthood.

### **Emotional development in Middle adulthood**

The Erikson's seventh stage, in individuals leaves a legacy of themselves to the next generation, which we call it as generativity. Active involvement in teaching and guiding the next generation and stagnation involves not seeking outlets for involvement or they are being more self-centered. Guiding the next generation or improving the society in general may be self-centered, isolated unable to participate meaningfully in a meaningful world. This is about the socio emotional development.

### **Erikson's theory - Generativity versus stagnation**

Erikson's psychological conflict for the midlife is called the generativity versus stagnation. Generativity involves reaching to others in ways that give and guide the next generation. Generativity is under the way in early adulthood, typically through child bearing, child rearing and establishing a niche in the occupational world. It expands greatly during the midlife life. At this stage, the commitment expands beyond oneself and one's life partner to a larger group-family, larger group community, and society also. The generative adult combines the need for self-expression with the need for communion, integrating the personal goals with the welfare of the larger social world. The resulting strength is the capacity to care for others in a broader way than in any other previous stages. Erikson

selected this term generativity to encompass everything generated that can outlive the self and ensure the society's continuity and improvement; like the children, ideas, products, works of art everything comes under generativity. Although parenting is a major means of realizing generativity, some people, because of misfortune or special gifts, do not express it through their own children. Adults can be generative in other family relationships like mentors in workplaces, or volunteers, and through many other forms of productivity and creativity.

Generativity brings together the personal desires and cultural demands. On the personal side, the middle-aged adult feels a need to be needed; they want to attain a symbolic immortality that is, make a contribution that will survive even after their death. On the other cultural side, society imposes a social clock for generativity in middle life, requiring the adults to take the responsibility for the next generation through their roles as a parent, as a teacher, as a mentor, as leaders, and coordinators. And according to Erikson, a culture's "belief in species"; that is the conviction that life is good and worthwhile, even in the human destructiveness and deprivation is a major motivator for generativity action. Without this optimistic world view, people would not have any hope of improving the humanity.

The negative outcome of this stage is stagnation. Erikson recognized that once people attain certain life goals, such as marriage, children, career success, they become self-centered and self-indulged. The adults with a sense of stagnation cannot contribute to the society's welfare because they place their own comforts and security above the challenge and sacrifice. Their self-absorption is expressed in many ways through lack of involvement with and concern for the young people, through their focus of what they can get from others rather than what they can give, and through taking little interest in being productive at work, they develop their own talents, or bettering the world in other ways. So, this is about the stagnation or negative outcome of middle age.

We have understood that middle adulthood is best known for its infamous midlife crisis. It is a time of re-evaluation that leads to questioning of long-held beliefs and values. The midlife crisis may also result in person divorcing his or her spouse, changing jobs, or moving from city to suburbs. Typically beginning in the early or mid-50s, the crisis often occurs in response to the sense of mortality, as the

middle adults realize that their youth is limited and they do not have accomplished all the desired goals in their life's. Of course, not everyone experiences this crisis or stress or upset during the middle age; instead they simply undergo a transition, a change, rather than the emotional upheaval of midlife crisis. The other middle adults prefer to reframe their experiences by thinking of themselves as being prime for their lives.

---