

ISSUES IN COUNSELLING THE MIDDLE AGED ON HEALTHY LIVING IN NIGERIA

BY

Abdullahi Hauwa Muhammad (Mrs): Department of Educational Foundations, Federal University Kashere, Gombe State; E-mail: hauwabdullahimuhamad@gmail.com

Dr. (Mrs.) S. Kolawole: Department of Educational Foundations, University of Jos, Plateau State &

Justina Nwokocha: Jema'a Local Government Education Authority Kafanchan, Kaduna State; E-mail: nwokochajustina00@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the concept of middle aged adults and aging in our society. In Nigeria today, the attitudes towards adulthood and aging are becoming very worrisome, because it has been observed that, many adolescents are physically and psychologically ill-prepared for the challenges that come with old age which could be due to ignorance. Middle age is a period of test of life experiences, and the life wire for social and economic development of the nation. People in this age bracket are known for adventure, innovativeness and zeal for advancement. Middle life adults contribute much to the national economy, as they constitute the bulk of the work force. In life, what a person fails to achieve during mid-life stage, might be difficult, or it might not be possible to achieve in later life. Planning for ageing today, entails more challenges and more opportunities without regrets in later life. It is of importance for an individual to take a bold step in determined efforts to plan, save and invest in order to secure a better standard of living even in old age. The paper analyzed the concepts of ageing and stages of adulthood, with the counselling and coping strategies on how to live healthy and satisfactory ageing processes.

Keywords: Ageing, Stages of Adulthood, Counselling and Coping strategies

Introduction

Aging, unavoidable biological changes that occurs in everything creatures and species on earth, with the passage of time and eventually the end results is death. Death during middle adulthood is more often as the result of natural causes than accidents. Aging is also a social and psychological processes, shaped by the cultural age system, which has increasing possible outcome, either positive or negative outcome, which cannot be predictable. Mid-life is a state in individuals life which is very sensitive and complex, middle age starts from 40 to 65 years of human development, advancement and beyond the end of one's existence. Erickson in Lannap (2017), human development is in eight stages, Erickson divided human life into eight stages, each phase marked specific developmental phases, characterized features, such as: having hope in infancy, will at early childhood, purposeful at play age, competence at young adulthood and wisdom at old age, which is the final stage of life. The middle aged has to prepare for the transition to old age (senescence). Midlife pose many obstacle, starting from developmental tasks to personal growth, failure to deal successful with these challenges may have a negative impact on a person's physical and psychological health. Aging is a stage, most people are afraid of getting into, it can be observed that people make use of all possible means to get younger, by using different kinds of anti-aging medicines, creams and toiletries (soaps) to keep fit and look youthful, than the real biological age which could be due to the treatment received by the aged people, such as negative feelings of rejection, frustration and depression which may lead to hypertension, stroke or even death.

The most common health problem experienced during midlife age are arthritis, asthma, bronchitis, coronary heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, mental disorder, cerebro-vasuclar accidents (strokes) and aids. Research on this middle age period of life is relatively new and many aspects of midlife are still been explored, however, longevity is not the only considerations, but how can the aged be expected to lead a healthy life? Counselling services is one of the strategies that can help the middle aged to cope and live a healthy and satisfactory life. It is the concerned about the aging process, the impact of life style on

health, productivity at work, and how to spend the second half of life on earth, without stress, tension and illness is the goal of this paper.

Concepts of Aging

Aging is conceived as the regular changes that occur in biologically mature individual as one advance in chronological age. According to Butter (1981) age may be referred to as “the changes occurring in the entire life span of an organism, that are common to all others in it’s species”. Some people viewed ageing as cumulative irreversible changes that take place in an organisms, organ, tissue or cell over life span based attachment. Ageing is the process of drawing near to the end of one’s live span and there seems to be mysterious signals that show up at certain times to tell the cells to stop performing their normal functions gradually as they grow old and later stop functioning at all i.e death. The ageing process is an undeniable feature in human growth and development that involves physical social and psychological transformations as the transition from young adulthood, to middle adulthood and late adulthood. Khan et al., (2017), confirmed that “ageing is a multifactorial process that is determined by genetic and environmental factors the genotype determined the variation in life span among species or individuals”. Individuals with the same chronological age and their organs exhibit differential course of age related decline, in order to distinguished between chronological age distinctly from chronological age, understanding the physiological degradation help informing researchers the assess to investigating health related diseases.

Many people believed that being older means being in physical decline, because of the meanings that culture assigns to these changes, however most older people are healthy, active and happy each person experiences age-related changes based on social, psychological and biological factors. Biological factors are the changes in molecular and cellular changes are called primary ageing, which represents innate maturational processes, that is the inevitable changes associated with aging and perhaps inherited biological traits while aging that occurs due to controllable factors are called secondary aging, the changes could be due to diseases, environmental factors, poor health practices, life styles activity and too much exposure to pollutants in our community, which can be preventable through life choice or medication (Khan et al., 2017).

Theories of Aging

Many theories have been proposed by psychologist, scientific and other areas of research tried to explain the processes of aging. Jin (2010) identified two modern biological theories of aging in human which fall into two categories – namely the programmed theory and damage or error theory also known as wear and tear theory.

The Programmed Theories – states that aging follows a biological timetable, that continuous to regulates childhood growth and development and these regulations depends on changes in gene expression, that affects the systems responsible for maintain, repair and defence responses, these programmed theory has three sub-categories:-

- a. Programmed longevity – implies that aging is the results of sequential switching on and off of certain genes.
- b. Endocrine theory – states that biological clock act through hormones to control the speed of aging.
- c. Immunological theory – the immune system is programmed to decline overtime, it is well known that the effective of immune system spike record high at puberty and gradually decline later as the individual advanced in age.

The decline overtime leads to an increased exposure to infections disease and thus aging and death. Papaha & Olds (1988), also explain that people may be born with genes that become harmful later in life, causing deterioration, which takes place in the immune system and later attack the body itself.

Wear and Tear Theory – maintains that cells and tissues have vital parts that wear out resulting in aging. It is like components of an aging car, parts of the body eventually wear out due to repeated use. Papaha & Olds (1988), also explains that as cells grow older, and ate less able to repair to replace

damaged components and so resulting to death, the theory compares the human body cell and tissues as a engine or machines whose parts wear out due to continuous use and it dies off. This is applicable to other cells and tissues in human life as we aged.

Middle-Aged and Characteristic of Healthy Living

Middle Adulthood (mid-life) refers to the period of life span between young adulthood and old age, which is from 40 to 65 years, this is a relatively new period of life, and there is an adage that says “life begins at forty”. Middle age is also a product of biological, social and psychological factors, as a period in the life circle of a person, it is the period of visiting the doctor for frequently serious or recurrent health issues, which is also known as midlife crisis, empty nest syndrome, second honeymoon, age of fulfillment, menopause and boom. The most common health problems experienced during middle age are arthritis, asthma, bronchitis, coronary heart disease, diabetes, genitourinary disorders, hypertension (high blood pressure), mental disorders and strokes (cerebrovascular accident) and aids. The middle aged is faced with challenges of raising a family, paying for mortgages, facing challenges at workplace, dealing with marital instability, all these stressors creates a chronic health ailments such as high cholesterol, depression and heart disease (National Center for Health Statistics, 1990).

The middle aged stage in human development precedes middle adulthood, a person in the middle adulthood stage ages starts from 40 years to 60years. Young adulthood draws to it's close with mid-life transition from roughly ages 40-45 producing a brand new page in the forties (40), there is an adage that say “life begins at forty” that's when early adulthood ends and middle adulthood begins. Middle – age adults are enjoying an abundance of social status and recognition, expectations of responsibility, self-accounting and commitment to life vision. Human ageing according to Atchley (1997) it's a broad concept, that includes physical body changes in adults life, psychological changes in our minds, mental capacities, social and psychological changes in way we think, believe and socialized changes in how we are viewed, what to expect and what is expected of us.

Categorization of Aging in Human Life Span

Human life span is categorized into three phases, which are as follows:

Early adulthood life (18 – 34 years): Early adulthood refers to the period of good health, physical changes in the body system, transition from the stages of life, i.e the early adulthood, middle and late adulthood. Physical activities flexibility, and dexterity, agility and abilities are at the peak, in the early period of 18 – 25years, sensory abilities, muscle strength, reaction period, changes in skin colours, clear vision are noticed and for females, the reproductive organs are active, and ready to conceive (fertility) at its peak. According to Erickson (1963) the early adult stage involves the personal need for intimacy and sex, failure to achieve this needs results in isolation, which need to be avoided, if not as a result, the young adults strives for love and compassion. At these stage, the adolescence had settled down financially and emotionally, career attainment, gain recognition, married and own families.

Middle adulthood (40 – 65 years): It is a mid life career period and a combination of life experiences, most of the health changes from young adulthood to middle age are relatively minor, the organ system are not as efficient as they had been, because it has lose some of its reserved capacity, men's sexual capacity declines and high blood pressures become a problem, body metabolism changes, both male and female tend to add more weight, women tend to be health conscious for themselves and families, while men tend to ignore health conditions, instead turn to diet and exercise frequently. Menopause occurs between 48-52 years for women, most men also experience some biological changes during mid-life, which are decrease fertility, frequent orgasm and potency due to infections. According to Erickson (1963) the adult in mid-life must deal with issues concerning the establishing and guiding the next generations, which can be expressed by nurturing ones own children to be productive and creative at work. Throughout ones' life known as generativity versus stagnation. What a person fails to achieve during adult stage, might be difficult, if not impossible to achieve in later life. Middle age is a period of test of life, and the life wire for social and economic development of the nation.

Late adulthood (60 – senescence): The late adulthood is the stage that refers to people of 60 – 65 years, it is the beginning of old age. The elderly may perform less, compared to the early middle adults the inability to work on task as quickly as the younger adults, impaired sight and hearing, decline in muscular strength stamina, sense of smell and taste are greatly reduced. Culture and individual personality play a vital role in affecting human development in adulthood, individual difference particularly in old age, the rate of aging differs between individuals, some people aged, healthy and better while with some people aging is worse than expected when a person grows old there is a wide range between biological age and chronological age, the individual difference is that knowing an adult chronological age does not speak much about that person, biology shapes individual during childhood. Erickson sees life crisis of old age as the establishment of ego integrity, the fact is accepting the life one may lived. The elderly experience conflict as they think of their past life experiences, which they either feel the sense of failure or fulfillment. Counselling is the service, which a professional counsellor renders to a client (counsee) to enable him/her adjust to life situations and make wise decisions for the purpose of effective living which could be on individual or in a group. These services are on wide range of themes among are educational, occupational, personal-social, (marital, mental health and geronological) issues related to old age problems (Mallum, 2000). Freud, 1960in believes that “all human behaviour is regulated by the tendency to reduce excitations created by unpleasant bodily tensions”: therefore each person should be aware that he/she has these different systems to contend with, taking action in any matter of importance to life. Situations counselling the middle aged youths for healthy living could be rendered on individual (face-face) and group counselling basis, specific themes to address includes the following:-

Coping Strategies for Healthy Living

Dieting: Modern nutritionists emphasized on eating good food to keep the body strong and healthy, eating balance diet is a necessary condition for good health. Nutritional needs changes throughout the life span interval of ages 19 – 30 years, 31 – 50, 51 – 70 and 70 years of age and beyond. Both male and female at the age of 50 years needs increase intake of calcium and also the needs for vitamin B-12, vit D changes at the age after 50 years food supplements and mineral supplements are necessary. At the age of 30 years beyond, need calcium and vitamins in our daily meal. Reduce intake of sugar and salt to prevent diabetes and hypertension, fruits, vegetable and grains intake helps to reduce the risk of poor vision among the middle aged.

Dehydrational/Water Therapy: Drinking of a lot of water, either cold or warm, helps in reducing the risk of dehydration. Intake of too much water helps to flush the body toxins and expelled blemished. Salt intake should be minimum in order to reduced the risk of diabetes, less sugar should be consumed, avoid coffee tea, coca-cola which contain diuretic caffeine.

Regular Exercise: Physical exercise is a major factor to healthy lifestyle, regular exercise can help prevent and reverse age related diseases, help to improve balance, flexibility and endurance, reduced the risk of falls among the mid-life. Physical activity and regular exercise keeps the body healthy and helps in circulation of blood, boosting of vital organs, reduced anxiety and also prevent depression and anxiety. Lack of physical activity or exercises causes a lot of problems such as to the health of the middle aged, health experts agrees on general guidelines for physical exercise thus:-

- ❖ Exercise regularly helps increase self-esteem, self confidence, reduced stress and anxiety helps improved the physical, psychological, mental stress and emotional well being of the middle aged.
- ❖ Exercise regularly and engage in some vigorous activity for at least 30 minutes three times daily. Integrates with social environment and participate in social activities such religious activities and also voluntary activities.
- ❖ At leisure times, always move about from one angle to another, make sure the activities involves exercise integrates with their social environment.
- ❖ Take a 100 meter distance walk, after working hours, its good for the body
- ❖ Profession that involves sitting down for a very long time, requires little physical activity, needs exercise by walking up and down around the office area for at least 30 minutes walking helps to release the nerves.

Avoidance of Drug and Substance Abuse

Midlife is a life span of advancement and socialization, most people at these stage are known to abuse drugs such as tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs to stress, tension or one illness or the other. Alcoholic and substances abuse are not healthy for the middle aged, as it weakens the general body system. Adults' consumption of illicit drugs causes kidney heart disease and cancer as it weakens the general body system. Tobacco smokers age faster and wrinkle earlier than non-smokers of the same age. Victims of cigarette should stop smoking.

Benefits of Financial Strategy: Mid life it's an excitement period and sometimes it's overwhelming, learn a simple budgeting strategy, set clear financial priorities, prioritize in this order use the 50, 30, 20 rule as your budgeting guidelines 50% of your salary for necessities like rent, children's school fees, utilities, transport and minimum loan payment. Save 30% for emergencies saving debt re-payment on loan for buying a house, then consistently make payment on time; 20% on "nice to have bucket" like gifts, travelling saving for the raining day etc. If at all 50% is not enough to cover living expenses, dip into "nice to have bucket" that is the essences of contributing enough, into the bucket, save, invest and pay off debt all at once and starts savings for retirement.

Avoid too Much Exposure to Sun and Bleaching Creams: Avoid too much exposure to sunlight, sunlight makes the skin wrinkle tougher and drier, skin care products are not advisable at midlife stage, bleaching cream should be avoided. The older your age, the drier the skin becomes, choosing the right moisturizers is essential, protect and care for your skin, Vaseline makes an excellent soothing and smoothing of the skin.

Suggestions

- i. Seminars and workshops should be organized for these middle aged citizens in churches, mosques and town halls, the counsellors can addressed the issues of middle aged to its members.
- ii. Mid life intensive education should be mounted by counsellors, government and voluntary organization (NGO), in order to enlighten the middle aged on the challenges and opportunities that exist during midlife aging.
- iii. Counselling services should be available for middle aged workers, which may assist them to face the realities of healthy aging.
- iv. The counselling services should be extended beyond the school setting, to Churches, Mosques and the larger society thus this services will help to create awareness of aging, for those adolescent coming up.

Conclusion

This paper discussed middle aging and variables that constitute to the changes in developmental tasks, causing stress, tension and even the untimely death of the middle aged, if care is not taken. At the ages 40 – 65 years are normal, still productive in contributing to promoting societal developmental changes, the paper would help discussed the benefits that come with healthy living, and the coping skills as required. Aging exist in all human beings and these stages of aging requires special awareness on staying healthy and taken care of oneself in order to age gracefully. The effects of ageing can feel discouraging as at times the fear of physical changes (loss of vision, gray hair) are more challenging to deal with than the changes itself the way and manner people perceived visible aging depend largely on socialization but when individual accepts the changes as a natural process of ageing, the changes seems not be frighten.

References

- Acheley, R.C. (1997). *Social Forces and Ageing: an Introduction to Social Gerontology*. Belmont Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition*, text revision Washington, D.C. American Psychiatric Association
- Atchley, R.C. (1989). "A Continuing Theory of Normal Ageing" *the Gerontologist*, 29(2): 183-190 doi: 10.1093/geront/29.2183 PMID 2519525.
- Baron, R.A. (1995). *Ageing and problem solving psychology 3rd edition* Allyn and Balon simin and Schuster company Needham Heights M.A. 02194.
- Butter, R.N. (1981). *Old age, in Encyclopedia Americana (International edition)*. Connecticut: Groliers Incorporation.
- Erikson, E.H. (1963). *Life cycle in international encyclopedia of social sciences*, 9, 286 – 292. Crowell and Macmillan, New York.
- Erikson, E.H. (1976). *Insight and responsibility*, Norton, New York.
- Erikson, E.H. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle a reissue*. New York: Norton.
- Freud, S. (1960). *The psychopathology of everyday life*. Standard edition. Hogarth. London.
- Jin, K. (2010). *Modern Biological Theories of Aging and Disease*, 8001 Redwood, Blud, Novato, California 94945, USA.
- Khan, S.S. Singer, B.D. & Vaughan, D.E. (2017). Molecular and Physiological Manifestations and Measurement of Aging in Humans, *Aging Cells*. 16,624 – 633 <https://doi.org/101111/ace/1260/>.
- Lannap, A.L. (2007). *Counselling theories and initiation of Adolescents to Adulthood in some parts of Nigeria*, Jos: Ichejuna Publication.
- Mallum, A. Y. (2000). *Guidance and Counselling: Beginner's Guide*. Jos: Deka Publications.
- National Institute on Ageing. (1980). *Senility: Myth or Madness*, Washington DC: US Government Printing Office.
- National Council for Health Statistics. (1990). *Health, United States 1989*. Washington D.C: Department of Health and Human Services (p.159).
- Okpede, E.O.D. (1998). *Counselling in government setting* Jos: Mino Expression Ltd.
- United Nation. (1994). *Ageing and the family*. New York: Dept of Economic and social information and policy analysis, www.un.org/esa/population/publication/ageing/graph.pdf.