

# Developmental Theories for Geriatric Social Work Practice

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**Abstract:** In this article the researcher would like to discuss theories applicable in the field of Geriatric social work practice and enable the practioners to understand relevant aging theories. Moreover this study will help us to understand how aged people reflect their behavior in their walks of life at various stages. These theories focus on social, psychological, physical and medical conditions of aging and its interconnectedness. They also seek to explain the positive and healthy aspects of aging for the professionals working in geriatrics, social services and policy making. Human ageing may be classified into three main aspects of human development which can be articulated through biological, psychological and social ageing theories to bring out how life moves on in the process of aging. Theories give answers, substantiated by authentication obtained by methodical scientific inquiry. Theoretical perspectives also explain why something happens and helps us to justify actions and also to modify the course of action for effective delivery of services. It is found that there are many theories helps to practice Geriatric social work profession, but the researcher found that following theories were highly applicable to the professional arena such as System theory, Disengagement theory, Activity theory, Gerotranscendence, Age stratification theory Cumulative advantage/disadvantage theory ,life course theory, role theory ,continuity theory and Psychosocial development theory.

**Keywords:** geriatric social work practice, aging theories, System theory, Disengagement theory, Activity theory etc.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The field of gerontology acknowledges that elderly has unique qualities that can be differentiated from earlier stages of adulthood. Social work practice with elderly includes a broad range of functions. Whether working in micro or macro settings, the most important objective of the social worker is to tackle particular challenges of the aging process by promoting freedom, autonomy, and self-esteem in later part of the life (NASW).The author attempted to study various aging theories and put forth a comprehensive view for theoretical exposition.

## 2. THEORETICAL EXPOSITION FOR GERIATRIC SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### DISENGAGEMENT THEORY:

Disengagement theory was developed by Elaine Cumming and Warren Earl Henry in their 1961 book "Growing Old" described that Disengagement is mutual and natural withdrawal from active life; bring changes in the interactions, perceived to be deterioration in knowledge and skill, further, results in complete disengagement or disjunction. Crisis occurs if unable to adapt to play socially expected roles in the disengaged state. Readiness for disengagement occurs if the individual is aware of the shortness of life and scarcity of time, the individual perceives his or her life space decreasing, and the individual loses ego energy. It is bound by culture, which differs from place to place (Knapp, J., & Knapp, 2009).

### SYSTEMS THEORY:

Systems theory originated from the works of Emile Durkheim and also from the works of Talcott Parsons. Inspired by the works of Von Bertalanffy and Uri Bronfenbrenner, Social Work professionals developed a holistic view on individuals and

his surroundings well connected to several other such systems entangled in a web of social interactions, susceptible to change, when man is constantly in relation and has the capability to persuade one another. (Brandell, J. R., 2011). Systems Theory explains human behavior as the meeting point of numerous interconnected systems. This theory helps the geriatric social work professionals to understand how clients or person with problems who are connected to individuals, families, organizations, societies, and other systems which are essentially drawn in and well thought-out when attempting to recognize and assist the clients with problems. According to this theory, all systems are interconnected parts constitute an ordered whole and each subsystem influences other parts of the whole. (Payne, M., & Campling, J, 1997). Systems Theory is used to develop a holistic view of individuals within a situation and hence, best applied to situations where several systems were inseparable and connected to influence one another. Better understanding on the behavior will help geriatric social work practitioners to provide the most appropriate practice interventions.

#### **ACTIVITY THEORY:**

Activity theory is about successful ageing and contends that people develop ideas about themselves and their identity from two major sources: the activities carried out by the individuals and the functions they discharge in life. Havighurst and Albrecht in 1953 came out with one of the first aging theories by doing a research among a group of adults. They concluded that society expects retirees to remain active in their communities. Further, they published the Activity theory in 1963, which states that staying occupied and involved is necessary to having a satisfying late-life did not, however explain what sorts of activity are linked to life satisfaction but clearly believed that activity was associated with psychological health. They suggested that being active helps to prolong middle age and thus delay the adverse effects of old age (In Mauk et al., 2014).

#### **CONTINUITY THEORY:**

Continuity Theory postulates that, in making suitable choices, middle-aged and elderly individuals attempt to care for and sustain prevailing internal and external structures; and thus choose to achieve their goals by utilizing methods using their previous experiences of themselves and their social environment. The theory also believes that change is associated to the individuals perceived past, developing continuity in personal psychological traits as well as in social conduct and in social situation. Hence continuity is considered as an impressive adaptive approach that is encouraged by both individual choices and social sanction. (Robert C. Atchley, 1989).

#### **ROLE THEORY:**

Role theory is formulated to describe how persons take up meticulous social positions are suppose to carry out the social aspirations towards their behavior and how the individuals expect others to carry out similar defined roles. Role theory proposes to explain the way in which human beings behave more predictable in their socially assigned roles in the given situation. Every role played by the individual is very much associated with age and the stage of human development. Hence, age related capacity to carry out the social functioning process and associated challenges are imminent. More over elderly persons shall take fresh assignments to deal their situation and sometimes they will be subjected to disapproval from the family and the society (Hindin, Michelle J, 2007)

#### **GEROTRASCENDENCE THEORY:**

A Sweden based Gerontologist, Tornstam postulated the theory of Gerotranscendence and he describes it as individuals in the aging process adopts a rational way of looking at the world rather than a materialistic point of understanding and thus a move in expectation of how others believe and attribute, in viewing the world to a more cosmic and transcendent view. In this state the individual emotion of affinity substantially grow with previous generations, further, reduction in importance to excessive social interface and materials of this world, and aspire a larger space for prayer and meditation. The theory of Gerotranscendence also explains that it is a spontaneous reaction and change in individual's life towards greater understanding and more satisfied life. It also considers Gerotranscendence as radical change followed by new thinking process reflecting in their activity and oneself. Tornstam L. (2005)

#### **AGE STRATIFICATION THEORY:**

The author explained age stratification theory by claiming in every place a layered pattern of society exists whereby social interaction occurs. The stratification of the members of the society is based on age. Furthermore; the status of person achieved in the society also contributes for the value of a person decided by their age, considered as an ascribed status to a

certain extent than an achieved status. Since society considers age as the major factor for the individuals to avail opportunities and utilize resources in both political and economic scenario, leads to differences and inequality in accessing resources in the society. Moreover, in this theory, it also explains that the rights, freedom, to utilize resources in the society diminish based on age. To conclude, the aged also experiences rapid growth in depending family members and community to have a better space to utilize all the available resources for one's personal development. This theory also opines that the society will set the standards of behavior to be exhibited by the aged while they access all the social resources. (Riley, M., Johnson, et al, 1972).

#### **LIFE COURSE THEORY:**

Life course theory is an approach towards the course of life and its interconnectedness to the past to explore the individual's life entangled in the web of social relationships. This theory draws ideas from various field of study such as psychology, economics, history, sociology, demography, biology. This theory more precisely connects the individual's present problems towards his past experiences. Life course theory describes that a series of socially defined actions and roles that the people demonstrates over time, sometimes it may not happen in a systematic sequential order, but it is important to understand the sum total of experiences undergone by the individual should be taken in to consideration for effective understanding of problems faced by individuals concerned. Life course perspective opines that in the process of human development it is important to understand the time and space in the ever-changing social attributes. Further it also says that human development and aging is a continuing process and how an individual's future decisions have historical relevance and experience. Thus the concept of life course suggests the existence of disproportionate aging phenomena in the society and on the other side there exists standardized life-cycle stages and the life span. Hence it is understood that life span varies across time and space (Elder, G., 1998).

#### **CUMULATIVE ADVANTAGE/DISADVANTAGE THEORY:**

Cumulative advantage theory was first articulated by Derek Price in the year 1965. This theory is evident reasonable, theoretical, and have empirical associations, because both are essential and unavoidable in the course of time. The interconnectedness of age and time were observed for several years resulted in better understanding on cumulative advantage and cumulative disadvantage towards its application on social gerontology and more specifically to the elders in the society. This theory also discusses the similarities of events in one's life time and the inequalities in social discourse with relevance to time. This theory has a great relevance in Gerontological study the issues concerning age with relevance to time. This theory has opened the Pandora's Box by probing the interconnectedness of age on various disciplines; work place; Institutions and inquiry for more research. The cumulative advantage and disadvantage theory understand the significance of individual action and associated activities expressed in the society within the framework established by social control. Such understanding on the society will throw light for Gerontologists to seek more understanding and research for the future course of action. (Dale Dannefer, 2003)

#### **PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY:**

Erikson articulated Psychosocial development Theory to describe how internal and external forces work together to persuade psychological development. It is a theory considering the human development to undergo nine stages of development, to be precise, emotional development of identity. Erickson assumed every individual must pass through nine stages of psychosocial development during their life time. Erickson divided the stages of development based on the age ranges from infancy to older adults. During the ninth stage an individual will undergo different problems in life, which is called as psychosocial crisis. Firstly, important issue to be addressed is the capacity of the individual to trust on his own capabilities due to physical weaknesses and a greater aspiration for hope is much required. Secondly, the incapableness to control one's own body will lead to shame and doubt. Thirdly the individuals will undergo lowliness in their life, believing that they lack in ability and feeling not skilled enough to take on their challenges. Further they also feel like unhappy kids. Fourthly, as they believe that they fall short of social standards and while they are confused in knowing redefined social roles, expecting them to search for their identity in the society. Fifthly, during this phase one must be feeling separated and feels lonely and longing for intimacy and love. Sixthly, Erickson also emphasized that the individuals at this phase will be in a greater requirement for care and the void will generate stagnation in one's life. Seventhly, in this stage of life every individual needs wisdom and understanding towards their life but the lack of wisdom will leads to hopelessness and aversion. The eighth stage of psychosocial development includes looking back at one's life that can stir up anguish and loss of capacity and breakdown. Thus, theory of psychosocial development helps to understand different stages of life and associated issues. (Erikson, E. H., & Erikson, J. M., 1997).

### 3. CONCLUSION

Every individual in this world will undergo the phase of late adulthood across the world. Various factors affect the older adults in the process of aging. It is important for the policy makers, Social workers, Sociologists, Psychologists, Doctors to understand how the dynamics in human growth and development takes through in the later part of life. To be precise, this theoretical exposition is a time for introspection and retrospection for the betterment of older adults.

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