

Subject : Psychology
Semester : 3
University : University of Mysore

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This Lesson will help understand the foundations of life span development which is fascinating and ever changing. After going through this Lesson, you will be able to:

1. To define life span development
2. To explain the development tasks based on the issues
3. To explain the behavioral tasks associated with the development patterns
4. To understand different aspects of development

1. Introduction to life span psychology

Life Span Development or Developmental psychology is the branch of psychology that studies intra-individual changes and inter individual changes within these intra-individual changes. Its task, as La Bouvie has pointed out, is "not only description but also explication of age-related changes in behavior in terms of antecedent-consequent relationships". Developmental psychologists study developmental change covering the life span from conception to death. By so doing, they attempt to give a complete picture of growth and decline. Others cover only a segment of the life span-childhood, adulthood, or old age. In this book an

attempt will be made to cover all segments and show the important developmental changes at different periods during the entire life span.

Developmental Psychology, also known as Human Development or Lifespan Development, is the scientific study of ways in which people change, as well as stay the same, from conception to death. You will no doubt discover in the course of studying that the field examines change across a broad range of topics. These include physical and other psycho-physiological processes, cognition, language, and psychosocial development, including the impact of family and peers.

Development means a progressive series of changes that occur as a result of maturation and experience. As Van den Daele has pointed out, "development implies qualitative change". This means that development does not consist merely of adding inches to one's height or of improving one's ability. Instead, it is a complex process of integrating many structures and functions. There are two essentially antagonistic processes in development take place simultaneously throughout life -growth, or evolution, and atrophy, or involution. Both begin at conception and end at death. In the early years growth predominates, even though atrophic changes occur as early as embryonic life. In the latter part of life, atrophy predominates, though growth does not stop; hair continues to grow, and cells continue to be replaced. With aging, some parts of the body and mind change more than others. The human being is never static. From conception to death, change is constantly taking place in physical and psychological capacities. As Piaget has explained, structures are "far from being static and given from the start." Instead, a maturing organism undergoes continued and progressive changes in response to experiential conditions, and these result in a complex network of interaction. As development is continuous, as Bower has pointed out, in the sense that it is a cyclic process with competences developing, and then disappearing, only to appear at a

later age, it is not continuous in the sense that it increases constantly but rather in a series of waves with whole segments of development reoccurring repetitively. Bower has explained, newborns walk, if held, and then this ability disappears only to reappear at eight or ten months of age. He explains that the "various explanations of repetitive processes in development thus seem to differ depending on the specific repetition to be explained. What all the explanations have in common, however, is that they preserve the assumption that psychological growth, in spite of its apparent reversals, is a continuous and additive process". When regression to an earlier stage occurs, there is usually a cause for it, as in the regression to awkwardness that occurs with the rapid growth at puberty.

2. Key issues in the study of Human Development

Research on human development is a relatively recent endeavor. Studies of children did not begin until the early part of the twentieth century. Investigations into adult development, aging, and change over the life course emerged only in the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, ideas about how people grow and change have existed for centuries. As these speculations combined with research, they inspired the construction of theories of development.

A theory is an orderly, integrated set of statements that describes, explains, and predicts behaviour. For example, a good theory of infant-caregiver attachment would (1) describe the behaviors of babies of 6 to 8 months of age as they seek the affection and comfort of a familiar adult, (2) explain how and why infants develop this strong desire to bond with a caregiver, and (3) predict the consequences of this emotional bond for relationships throughout life.

Theories are vital tools for two reasons. First, they provide organizing frameworks for our observations of people. In other words, they guide and give meaning to what we see. Second, theories that are verified by research provide a

sound basis for practical action. Once a theory helps us understand development, we are in a much better position to know what to do in our efforts to improve the welfare and treatment of children and adults.

Theories are influenced by the cultural values and belief systems of their times. But theories differ in one important way from mere opinion and belief: A theory's continued existence depends on scientific verification. This means that the theory must be tested with a fair set of research procedures agreed on by the scientific community and that its findings must endure, or be replicated, over time.

In the field of human development, there are many theories with very different ideas about what people are like and how they change. The study of development provides no ultimate truth because investigators do not always agree on the meaning of what they see. In addition, humans are complex beings; they change physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. As yet, no single theory has explained all these aspects. However, the existence of many theories helps advance knowledge because researchers are continually trying to support, contradict, and integrate these different points of view.

There are some major theories of human development and research strategies used to test them. We can easily organize them, since almost all take a stance on three basic issues:

- (1) Are genetic or environmental factors more important in determining development?
- (2) Is the course of development continuous or discontinuous?
- (3) Does one course of development characterize all people, or are there many possible courses?

Let's look closely at each of these issues.

2.1 Nature or Nurture:

Each theory describes the course of human development, and also each theory takes a stance on a major question about its underlying causes: Are genetic or environmental factors important in determining development? This is the age-old nature-nurture controversy. By nature, we mean inborn biological givens-the hereditary information we receive from our parents at the moment of conception. By nurture, we mean the complex forces of the physical and social world that influence our biological makeup and psychological experiences before and after birth. Even though all theories grant at least some role to both nature and nurture, they vary in emphasis. For example, consider the following questions: Is the developing person's ability to think in more complex ways largely the result of an inborn timetable of growth? Or is it primarily influenced by stimulation from parents and teachers? Do children acquire language rapidly because they are genetically predisposed to do so or because parents tutor them from an early age? And what accounts for the vast individual differences among people-in height, weight, physical coordination, intelligence, personality, and social skills? Is nature or nurture more responsible? The theories take a stand on nature versus nurture affect their explanations of individual differences. Some theorists emphasize stability- that individuals who are high or low in a characteristic (such as verbal ability, anxiety, or sociability) will remain so at later ages. These theorists typically stress the importance of heredity. If they regard environment as important, they usually point to early experiences as establishing a lifelong pattern of behavior. Powerful negative events in the first few years, they argue, cannot be fully overcome by later, more positive ones. Other theorists take a more optimistic view. They emphasize plasticity-that change is possible and likely if new experiences support it.

2.2 Continuous or Discontinuous Development

The best way to describe the differences in capacities between small infants, young children, adolescents, and adults is how the major theories recognize two possibilities. One view holds that infants and preschoolers respond to the world in much the same way as adults do. The difference between the immature and mature being is simply one of amount or complexity. For example, when Shanthi was a baby, her perception of a piano melody, memory for past events, and ability to sort objects into categories may have been much like our own. Perhaps her only limitation was that she could not perform these skills with as much information and precision as we can. If this is so, then change in her thinking must be continuous—a process of gradually augmenting the same types of skills that were there to begin with. A second view regards infants and children as having unique ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving, ones quite different from adults'. In other words, development is discontinuous—a process in which new and different ways of interpreting and responding to the world emerge at particular time periods. From this perspective, infant Shanthi was not yet able to perceive and organize events and objects as a mature person could. Instead, she moved through a series of developmental steps, each with unique features, until she reached the highest level of functioning. Theories that accept the discontinuous perspective regard development as taking place in stages—qualitative changes in thinking, feeling, and behaving that characterize specific periods of development. In stage theories, development is much like climbing a staircase, with each step corresponding to a more mature, reorganized way of functioning. The stage concept also assumes that people undergo periods of rapid transformation as they step up from one stage to the next. In other words, change is fairly sudden rather than gradual and ongoing.

2.3 Course of Development

Stage theorists assume that people everywhere follow same sequence of development. Yet the field of human development is becoming increasingly aware that children and adults live in distinct contexts or unique combinations personal and environmental circumstances that can result different paths of change. For example, a shy individual, fears social encounters develops in very different contexts from those of a social age mate who readily seeks out other people.

Children and adults in village societies encounter experiences in their families and communities that differ sharply from those of people in large cities. These different circumstances foster different intellectual capacities, social skills, and feelings about the self and others. Contemporary theorists regard the contexts that shape development as many-layered and complex. On the personal side, they include heredity and biological makeup. On the environmental side, they include immediate settings, such as home, school, and neighborhood, as well as circumstances more remote from people's everyday lives-community resources, societal values, and historical time period. Finally, a special interest in culture has made researchers more conscious than ever before of diversity in development.

2.4 Active versus Passive

Active versus Passive: How much do you play a role in your own developmental path? Are you at the whim of your genetic inheritance or the environment that surrounds you? Some theorists see humans as playing a much more active role in their own development. Piaget, for instance believed that children actively explore their world and construct new ways of thinking to explain the things they experience. In contrast, many behaviorists view humans as being more passive in the developmental process.

2.5 Stability versus Change:

How similar are you to how you were as a child? Were you always as outgoing or reserved as you are now? Some theorists argue that the personality traits of adults are rooted in the behavioral and emotional tendencies of the infant and young child. Others disagree, and believe that these initial tendencies are modified by social and cultural forces over time.

3. Domains of Development

Development is described in three domains, but growth in one domain influences the other domains.

3.1 Physical Domain:

The physical domain covers the development of physical changes, which includes growing in size and strength, as well as the development of both gross motor skills and fine motor skills.

The physical domain also includes the development of the senses and using them.

Physical development can be influenced by nutrition and illness. A healthy diet and regular wellness check-ups are key for proper child development.

3.2 Cognitive Domain:

The cognitive domain includes intellectual development and creativity. Kids gain the ability to process thoughts, pay attention, develop memories, understand their surroundings, express creativity, as well as to make, implement, and accomplish plans.

Thought processes and intellectual abilities including attention, memory, problem solving, imagination, creativity, academic and everyday knowledge, metacognition, and language.

3.3 Social/Emotional Domain:

The social-emotional domain includes a child's growing understanding and control of their emotions. They also begin to identify what others are feeling, develop the ability to cooperate, show empathy, and use moral reasoning.

The child also begins to develop attachments to others and learns how to interact with them. Children and adolescents develop many relationships, from parents and siblings to peers, teachers, coaches, and others in the community.

Children develop self-knowledge during the social-emotional stage. They learn how they identify with different groups and their innate temperament will also come into play in their relationships.

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