

# Psychosocial Development of Women : A Critical Review of the Literature

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## Abstract

The purpose of this critical review of the literature is threefold: (a) to provide an in-depth description of the literature on the psychosocial development of women; (b) to assess the extent to which alternative developmental models for women have emerged; and (c) to critique the soundness of the research and suggest possibilities for future study and practice. Three kinds of studies which address these issues are reviewed: literature in which authors analyzed or conceptualized the psychosocial development of women, empirical investigations of developmental issues with all-female samples, and material which explored possibilities for future research and practice. From this critical review, three major themes emerged: Diverse and non-linear patterns of development characterized by discontinuities and periods of stability and transition are the norm for women; intimacy and identity are key issues throughout women's lives; and importance of relationships and a sense of connectedness to others are central to the overall developmental process. Although these themes are drawn from both the conceptual and empirical work, these observations, due to the nature of the review and the limitations of the empirical studies, are not generalizable to all women.

## Basic to Social Psychology:

A wealth of research has been undertaken over the last many years or so to assess the changing social position of the aged women, and its effects on their life in India and abroad. Social perception of the individual is also attached to the status of the individual. Changed socio-economic position of the aged women also results in the perception of other people with whom they live. In an early and influential study Tuckmand and Large (1952) reported that at least one-third respondents perceived old women people as stubborn, touchy, engaging in frequent quarrels with their children and relatively bossy and meddling in other people's affairs. Colde and Koyan (1959) also found that young women people having negative perception of the old. Bakker and Taylor (1966) reported

mixed views. They found that students living with great grand-parents endorse fewer negative stereo-types about the aged women than do those living with grandparents only.

It is to be noted that there are conditions which promote successful ageing which must be considered. Psychology has much to contribute to public awareness of healthy ageing and the diversity of human experience in ageing patterns, family support structures and meaningful community involvements in later life. Aging population need to given focused attention on their physical, social and emotional well-being. Nevertheless, the ageing women experience a range of changes, physical as well as psychological and this period is known as the period of serious crises.

### ***Aging and Psycho-social Well Being: Theoretical Framework***

A few studies (Steverink et al., 2001) indicates that people with better subjective health, higher income, less feeling of loneliness, higher educational level, and greater optimism would tend to experience a healthier aging process in terms of continuous development than of physical deterioration or social losses. This healthy aging in older people further leads to a higher emotional well-being and a better aging experience (Prieto-Flores et al., 2008). Similarly, the psycho-social variables such self-acceptance; positive relationships with other people; autonomy; domain of the environment; purpose in life; and personal growth plays important role in healthy aging. Ryffs has rightly pointed out that psychological well-being is the effort to perfect one's own potential. Thus it would have to do with life acquiring meaning for one self, with certain efforts to overcome and achieve valuable goals. The central task of the people in your life is to recognize and make the most of all your talents. He stressed the responsibility of the individual to find the meaning of one's existence, even in the face of harsh or adverse realities. Hence, it must therefore be understood that psychological well-being as personal construction rests on the psychological development of each individual who has the ability to interact amicably with their environment (Ortiz Arriagada & Salas, 2009).

## ***Elderly Women and Well being***

Generally old age is supposed to be the golden age for elderly as at this age all responsibilities are done. During the sunset years, when all their responsibilities as parents are fulfilled and when they are looking forward for adequate care and support from their children, they are deprived of it due to economic, social and psychological factors. However, women are more vulnerable as compared to men in their old age for various socio-cultural and economic reasons in general and in Indian context in particular. Asharaf (2005) discusses about the factors creating hardship for women namely; the feminine nature of ageing, society's discriminatory treatment towards women's education and employment and social discrimination and ill treatment because of the traditional roles attached to women in society. Such traditional attitudes and discriminations have made lives of women vulnerable especially in their old age. Penhale and Kingston (1995) in their study noted that to be old in the UK, is to be marginalized which is single jeopardy; to be old and abused is double jeopardy; and to be old, abused and female is triple jeopardy. Prakash (2001), points out that problems of elderly women are not due to age per se, but due to psychosocial environment, diminishing supports and changes in life situation. Kalyan (1998) has also pointed out that even though both elderly men and women goes through the same biological process of ageing with progressive functional decline, women from womb to tomb leads a life vulnerable to numerous hazards of direct and indirect in nature and one of them is gender discrimination and widowhood. This further aggravates their misery due to acute economic dependency and social isolation. However, little research has been done on the psycho-social well being of persons in old age within the discipline of gerontology, sociology, Social work and Gender Studies. Hence, this paper is an attempt to explore the psycho-social well being of elderly people from multidisciplinary perspectives. In other words, this paper does not deal with scientific facts of Psycho-social well being but rather more concerned about the material representation of abstract experiences and concept of well being of the elderly women.

### **Results and Discussion**

With age women suffer major health related issues associated with hormonal changes, metabolism changes and degrading bone and muscle health. Thus it becomes necessary to have a balanced diet rich in supplements and do some physical activities. This section highlights various dimensions of

health and well being of the women under study that includes: physical and mental health, diet and physical activities, sleep pattern, me time or leisure, along with changing family dynamics in terms of relationship and decision making.

## **Conclusion**

The age group is considered as the transcending age where, in the words of the respondents they were aged, elder, senior citizen or not so young and attractive. For some however this age was an age to reinvent themselves and their social roles, along with retirement in case of working women. Increase in health related problems and mobility issues along with depression were seen more in this particular age segment. Dependence on other family members for emotional, financial and social needs were also seen increased in respondents and came out as major cause of depression and anxiety. Family bonding and social acceptance were the major source of happiness for the women under study. Safety security and elderly abuse were the major concerns of the women under study which need attention from all concerned especially the state and civil society. Those who were at the lowest income and literacy level were further marginalized and needed help from state.

Role of state in terms of ensuring timely old age and widow's pensions was desired by them. Not being able to benefit from and access to these schemes led to frustration which had an adverse affect on their well-being. They were seen more drawn to religion which was a source of community participation to overcome various factors affecting their well being. To safe guard these women's well-being from further deterioration, there arise a need to strengthen the deliverables in each government schemes.

It is important that the state, civil society and community recognizes the rights and needs of the elderly women and make suitable polices legislations and effective implementation of health and security schemes that already exist. Specific state interventions are required for the aged women, they being most vulnerable and for the aged who are below the poverty line. There is a need to protect the human rights of the elderly and have gender just laws and policies to ensure adequate economic and social protection during old age. Thus, to conclude problems of the elderly vary from society to society and have many dimensions especially in our country where aging is gendered. However, the disintegration of the joint family system and the impact of economic change have brought significant changes and in the traditional value system and hence, the duty and obligation of

the younger generation towards the older generation is being skewed. At the same time due to these socio-economic changes the elderly especially the women are caught between the decline in traditional values on one hand and the absence of an adequate social security system by the state on the other hand thus, finding it difficult to adjust in the family in their later age.

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