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| <b>Subject</b>             | <b>PSYCHOLOGY</b>   |
| <b>Paper No and Title</b>  | <b>Paper No. 11: Human Development</b>  |
| <b>Module No and Title</b> | <b>Module No. 24: Developmental concerns during adulthood (Marriage and Family)</b> |
| <b>Module Tag</b>          | <b>PSY_P11_M24</b>  |

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**PSYCHOLOGY**

**PAPER No. 11: Human Development**

**Module No. 24: Developmental concerns during adulthood (Marriage and Family)**

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## 1. Learning Outcomes

After studying this module, you shall be able to

- Know about stability and change in marital and family relationships in adulthood.
- Learn about changes in marital satisfaction and its consequences from early to late adulthood.
- Learn about the role of marital satisfaction on family relationships.
- Evaluate the role of parenting and grandparenting on individual growth.
- Evaluate the cultural differences in the role of grandparents in family.

## 2. Introduction

In the first 20 years of life an individual undergoes extensive changes from an infant to an adolescent in all domains of development. The adulthood period of development begins in early 20s and lasts until death. This period involves extensive changes in the physical health, cognitive domain as well as in the social domain. It is in this period that an individual takes important decisions regarding career, enters into marriage, into the role of a parent, grandparent and loses one's partner. Since adulthood period is the longest period of all periods of development and involves extensive changes in every sphere, it is divided into the period of early adulthood (early 20s to late 30s), middle adulthood (40s to 60) and late adulthood (60 to death) (Santrock, 2011).

Early Adulthood is a period of establishing personal and economic independence, developing one's career, selecting a mate, learning to live with someone in an intimate way, starting a family and rearing children. In middle Adulthood which begins around 40 years of age to about 60, adults are expanding their personal and social involvement and responsibilities, assisting the next generation and trying to maintain and reach satisfaction in a career. Late Adulthood is the developmental period that begins in 60s or 70s and lasts until death. It is a time of physical and cognitive decline, life review and adjustment to new social roles.

## 3. Early Adulthood

### 3.1 Stability and Change from Childhood to Adulthood

Early years of life predict an adult's socio-emotional life and experiences in early adult years are important in predicting what an individual will be like later in adulthood (McAdams & Olsen, 2010; Sroufe, Coffino, & Carlson, 2010). Attachment that appears in infancy plays an important role in socio-emotional development in adulthood (Sroufe, Coffino, & Carlson, 2010). In a longitudinal study, infants who were securely attached at 1 year of age were found to be securely attached 20 years later in their adult romantic relationships (Steele & others, 1998) and adults who are securely attached are more satisfied with their relationships and their relationships are characterized by trust, commitment and longevity (Feeney, 2008). However it does not mean that a person who had insecure attachment as a child will have problematic adult relationships.

Attachment categories are more stable in adulthood but adults do have the capacity to change their attachment behavior.

### **3.2 Erikson's Theory: Intimacy versus Isolation**

According to Erikson's Psychosocial theory at each stage and individual is confronted with a crisis which can be seen as a turning point. Successful resolution of crisis brings with it a sense of mastery and prepares the person for the next stage otherwise a person feels a sense of inadequacy. In early adulthood when individuals have gone through the crisis of identity versus role confusion that occurs during adolescence, they enter a sixth developmental stage which Erikson (1968) called Intimacy versus Isolation. Erikson describes intimacy as finding oneself while losing oneself in another person and it requires commitment. If an individual is not able to develop an intimate relationship, isolation results.

### **3.3 Love and Cultural Experience of Love**

Finding a life partner is a major milestone of early adult development, and it greatly impacts one's self-concept and psychological well-being (Meeus et al., 2007). In many countries of the world especially western countries, adults select their own partners before marriage. People generally fall in love and select partners that are similar to them in attitudes, personality, education plans, intelligence, physical attractiveness and even height (Keith & Schaffer, 1991; Simpson & Harris, 1994). Men and women differ in the importance they place on certain characteristics that they desire in their partners. According to some researches, women assign greater weight to intelligence, ambition, financial status, and moral character, whereas men place more emphasis on physical attractiveness and domestic skills.

However the characteristics that women and men desire in their partners as well as the criteria for marriage can differ from culture to culture. Eastern cultures, such as in China Japan and India where dependency throughout life is viewed positively because the self is defined through role relationships—that of a son or daughter, brother or sister, husband or wife, the characters desired in their partners are very different. Students of Asian heritage also have to focus on companionship and practical matters—similarity of background, career promise, and likelihood of being a good parent. In countries with collectivist orientations, selecting a partner is often accomplished by the family rather than the individual and so there are many arranged marriages where the individual who is getting married has little choice in selecting a partner (Chang & Myers, 1997; Dion & Dion, 1993).

### **3.4 Marriage**

Marriage is the process through which two individuals make their union official and public. As adults marry, they assume roles and responsibilities that are prescribed by their family and culture and also mutually decided by the married couple. As adults after marriage relate to their social world as a couple, they modify their relationships with family, friends, siblings, extended family.

In India, Marriage is a family affair rather than an individual affair, where harmony and shared values that come from a common background are more important than individual fascination and love (Kakar, 2008). According to Kakar (2008), in India there is a less conscious cultural norm that perceives the relationship between father and son and other filial bonds as foundation of

family rather than the wife-husband relationship that is considered to be more important or glorified in other cultures.

### ***3.4.1 Marital Satisfaction***

Quality of marital relationship predicts physical and mental health. Individuals who are happily married live longer, healthier lives compared to divorced adults or adults dissatisfied with their marriage (Waite, 2009; Wilson & Smallwood, 2008). Studies indicate that men generally feel happier than women with their marriages (Dillaway & Broman, 2001; Kurdek, 2005). Women generally feel dissatisfied when the demands placed by their husbands, housework, children and career are overwhelming. A research done on adults from both western and non western industrialized nations reveals that marital satisfaction for both partners increases when the power and responsibilities in marriage are equally divided and shared among partners (Amato & Booth 1995; Xu & Lai, 2004).

In India, traditionally the joint family system has always been the preferred system. But because of modernization and globalization, nuclear family is the characteristic feature of Indian society. Although this has resulted in greater independence for the couple but also erosion of erstwhile social support in child care, domestic care and care in times of illness. But the changes in the family structure have not matched the changes in the spousal roles. The provider role in Indian society has always been given and remains by and large the role of husbands; the nurturer role has been the preserve of women which overlooks the working women's co-provider role. Thus for urban married couples, a dual earner pattern does not imply greater egalitarian relationships.

At their worst, marriages can become contexts for violence, abuse and dominance. Much of the research on violence against women in India has been done on the issue of domestic violence. Despite the legal recognition of domestic violence as a crime, very few cases are reported. A major factor that inhibits recognition of such violent act as a crime is the widespread acceptance of violent behavior as part of marital life and of male entitlement (International Council for Research on Women, Sriram, 2001). Studies in India show that factors that can lead to use of violence can be traced to individual dysfunctional characteristics such as suspicion, negativism, masked dependency, low self esteem of the perpetrator, suspicion, fear of abandonment, internalization of cultural beliefs and values such as acceptance of physical chastisement of women and male dominance in the family (Ahuja, 1988; Dhawan et al., 1999; Kulkarni, 1988; Mitra, 2002; Sriram and Mukherjee, 2001). Community services like crisis telephone lines, counseling, social support and therapy are needed to deal with such relationship difficulties.

### **3.5 Parenthood**

Earlier the decision to have children was either a biological given or a cultural demand (Michaels, 1988). When Americans in a study were asked about reasons to have children, the reasons that they cited were warm, affectionate, stimulating relationship that children provide. They also mentioned that having a child is a learning experience and helps them grow (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; O'Laughlin & Anderson, 2001). But now many adults in industrialized nations are choosing not to have children. The decision to have children is affected and influenced by many factors such as health, financial circumstances, religious, cultural demands and values.

### **3.5.1 Transition to Parenthood**

In the initial period when the baby enters the family is full of profound changes like constant caregiving, less time for couple's relationship, financial strain and added responsibilities. These demands and responsibilities cause the gender roles of husband and wife to become more traditional even in egalitarian relationships (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Salmela-Aro et al., 2001). But arrival of a new baby does not cause significant marital strain. Where both partners are satisfied with the relationship and the marriage is gratifying and supportive it remains so even after arrival of baby (Feeny et al., 2001; Miller, 2000). If the expectant couple anticipates lack of partner support in parenting, the adjustment is more difficult (McHale & Rotman, 2007).

### **3.5.2 Parenting**

In today's complex world parents are less certain about how to rear children than before. Child rearing styles are influenced by many factors such as ethnicity, SES, personal characteristics of children as well as the couple's relationship. Parents who work as a **co-parenting team** that is they cooperate and respect each other's role are more likely to have better marital interaction, use effective parenting strategies and feel more competent as parents (McHale et al., 2002; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004).

Earlier parents learned what they needed to learn to become effective parents through direct experience and modeling. In today's complex world parents are confused about how best to rear children and interact with the child. Thus many parents refer to parenting books, journals, articles from the net and talk to experienced couples. Fathers generally turn to mothers to understand how to interact and deal with the child. Parent education courses are necessary and important to help parents understand child rearing values, improve communication and use more effective parenting strategies.

### **3.6 Divorce**

If the marriage doesn't work or one or both the partners are dissatisfied then it can lead to divorce. In India among general population the divorce rate is very low, 1.1 %. There are many factors that can lead to divorce. Studies show that there are **demand-withdraw patterns** that are found in partners who split up. This means that when one partner raises concerns the other withdraws or reacts with defensiveness and resentment (Haltzman, Holstein, & Moss, 2007). In another typical style there is little conflict between partners but they do not share interests, activities and have very different expectations of family life and feel disconnected from each other (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). The other predictors of divorce were infidelity, spending money foolishly, drinking or using drugs, expressing jealousy, engaging in irritating habits and moodiness (Amato & Rogers, 1997). Generally after divorce, divorced adults have difficulty trusting someone else in a romantic relationship. Immediately after divorce, both men and women can experience increased anxiety, depression, impulse behavior, decline in social support, disrupted social networks (Amato, 2000). Job training, social support, continued education and career advancement can help and play a major role in psychological well being of divorced women.

### 3.7 Remarriage

Adults who remarry generally do so quickly and approximately 50 percent remarry within three years of divorce (Sweeney, 2009, 2010). In India marriage is considered to be a lifelong commitment to one's spouse, remarriage is less prevalent than in other western countries. But in India men are much more likely to remarry than women. Within Hindus two factors affect the likelihood of remarriage. Firstly the likelihood of marriage and society's approval for marriage declines with age and is very rare in Hindus after 40. Another important factor is whether the woman has had any children from the previous marriage.

The evidence from studies on benefits of remarriage is mixed. Remarried families are more unstable than the first marriages and there are higher chances of divorce in the initial years of remarriage (Waite, 2009). The higher chances of divorce can be because of varied reasons. Many adults remarry not for love but for financial reasons, to reduce loneliness and for help in rearing children. They also might carry into the step family those patterns that caused divorce in their previous marriage. Remarried adults have a lower level of mental health (Waite, 2009). But researches have also found that the remarried adult's marital relationship is more egalitarian than the previous ones (Waite, 2009).

## 4. Middle Adulthood

### 4.1 Erikson's Theory: Generativity versus Stagnation

According to Erikson (1968) in midlife, adults face a significant issue or crisis: generativity versus stagnation which is the seventh stage of his lifespan development theory. Generativity involves adults' want to create or nurture things that will outlast them by contributing to society and the next generation. But when adults feel that they have not done much for the next generation a sense of stagnation develops. According to Kotre (1984), adults can develop generativity in a number of ways. Through biological generativity adults have offspring, through parental generativity adults nurture and guide their children. Through work generativity adults learn skills and pass them down to their next generation and through cultural generativity adults not only create but also revive and conserve some aspects of their culture. Research support Erikson's theory that generativity is an important aspect in middle age (Whitbourne, Sneed & Snayer, 2009, Peterson, 2006).

### 4.2 Love and Marriage at Midlife

In early adulthood romantic love that is physical attraction, romance and passion are more important in new relationships while affectionate or companionate love increases during middle adulthood. As relationships mature in middle adulthood, mutual interdependence, loyalty and security becomes more important. One recent study revealed that marital satisfaction increased in middle age (Gorchoff, John & Helson, 2008). Compared to early adulthood, middle adults can spend more time with each other as there are fewer financial worries, household chores and responsibilities.

### 4.3 Divorce

The major finding of a survey done on 40 to 79 year old U.S adults was that most of the couples stayed marriage because of their children. Three in four of the divorcees said that they had made the right decision and had a positive outlook. The divorced women were much more afraid of having financial problems (44 percent than men (11 percent). The reasons that were cited by middle aged and older women for divorce were (1) verbal, physical or emotional abuse (23 percent); (2) alcohol or drug abuse (18 percent); (3) cheating (17 percent). The reasons cited by middle aged and older men for divorce were (1) fell out of love (17 percent); (2) cheating (14); (3) different lifestyles (14 percent) (AARP Survey)

### 4.4 Empty Nest and Its Refilling

When individuals reach middle adulthood their children are also generally entering into young adulthood. At this time, many children leave home to start their careers and parents have to adjust to their absence. Parents who are very attached to their children and vicariously live through their children may find the separation very difficult and experience **empty nest syndrome**- decline in marital satisfaction after children leave the home. But for most parents, marital satisfaction increases after the child rearing as when the children leave, marital partners have more time for each other and to pursue their careers and interests (Fingerman & Baker, 2006). But now because of economic uncertainties in recent time, young adult children often return home, the empty nests no longer remain empty. This phenomenon is known as "revolving door syndrome". There are both positives and negatives in children returning to their homes. The adult children complain that parents invade their privacy, treat them as children and restrict their independence. Parents although feel good that they can provide support to their children when they need it but they also complain that they have to worry their children's schedule and also feel that children invade their privacy as a couple.

The situation in India is different from those in Western countries. Young adults in India do not necessarily leave their homes to establish their career and become independent. Some may live with their parents throughout their life or move away from their parents to a new house with their family late in life. Even when people in India stay in nuclear families they maintain a sense of togetherness and emotional bond. Thus empty nest syndrome that is experienced by many adults in western countries is not experienced in India to the same degree. But adults from villages as well as urban cities are now migrating to other cities in India for better education and career prospects. Many children and young adults go abroad for further education and settle there while their parents remain in India. Thus parents in India are learning to cope and adjust to their children's absence and experiencing and witnessing the empty nest syndrome.

### 4.5 Grandparenting

The increase in longevity is influencing the nature of grandparenting (Shinovacz, 2009). Many adults become grandparents in their middle age and play important roles in lives of many grandchildren (Oberlander, Black, & Starr, 2007). In U.S now many children are living with their grandparents. Divorce, adolescent pregnancies, drug use by parents leads grandparents to adopt the parenting role they thought they had shed.

There are three prominent meanings that are attached to being a grandparent (Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964). For some adults being a grandparent is a biological reward and gives them a sense of continuity. For others it generates a feeling of companionship and gives them satisfaction and emotional self fulfillment that may have been missing in their own relationship with their children. While for others the role might be a remote role. Results of a study done to understand how grandparents interact with their grandchildren found three dominant styles of interaction (Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964). These styles were- formal, fun seeking and distant. In formal style, grandparents interacted in a prescribed manner; in fun seeking the relationship was informal and playful while in distant the grandparents were distant figures.

#### **4.6 Intergenerational Relationships**

A study done on middle aged and older adults in 21 countries found the strongest intergenerational ties in Saudi Arabia, India and Turkey (HSBC Insurance, 2007). Adults in midlife play important roles in lives of both the young and the old (Birditt & others, 2010; Ha & Ingersoll-Dayton, 2008; Fingerman & others, 2008, 2009). Middle aged adults want to share their experience and pass on their values to the next generation (Swartz, 2008). Gender differences also characterize intergenerational relationships (Etaugh & Bridges, 2010; Nauck & Suckow, 2006). Women have generally a more important role in connecting family relationships across generations and their relationships are thought to be closer than other family bonds (Merill, 2009). Middle aged adults are generally described as the “sandwich” “squeezed” or “overload” generation because of the responsibilities that they have towards their adolescent or adult children on one hand and their aging parents on the other (Etaugh & Bridges, 2010; Pudrovska, 2009).

##### ***4.6.1 Intergenerational Relationships and Role of Grandparents in India***

India is a collectivist society that emphasizes family integrity, family unity and family harmony. Even in modified extended family system, that is becoming popular in India, many functional extensions of the preferred joint family system have been retained. Compared to western nations where relationship between aging parents and their children is characterized by ambivalence (Birditt & others, 2010; Davey & others, 2009; Fingerman & others, 2008), children in India have and show enormous respect for their elders. Wisdom of elders is valued in Indian society. In a joint family a child is reared by a number of people including grandparents. Grandparents in India have an important role in child rearing and in passing on the values, ideals and traditions of their culture to the next generation. Grandparents act as a buffer between the child and his/her parents. Grandparents through stories inculcate values in children. In India children are open to their grandparents and can discuss their troubles, worries with their grandparents. Living with grandparents is very important for the growth of a child. It helps the child appreciate, understand different perspectives and love the elders and also observe how the traditions, customs have changed. It also teaches them to care for their family. The relationship between children and grandparents is mutually rewarding.

In India grandparents generally live with their children and so the problem of caring for the aged that is becoming worse in most of the western countries is mellowed in India. In India with dual earner couples, the children are being taken care of by their grandparents.. Also grandparents take and share the responsibility of childcare which reduces the stress experienced by parents.

Grandparents give their children and grandchildren their company, advice and support, help parents in handling parent-child conflict.

## 5. Late Adulthood

### 5.1 Erikson's Theory: Ego Integrity versus Despair

Ego Integrity Versus Despair is the eighth and the last stage of psychosocial development according to Erikson (1968). In this stage, adults look back and reflect on their past. Adults who feel that their life has been well spent feel whole, complete and content and arrive at a sense of integrity. They see all the hardships, struggles, failures and the achievements throughout their lives and find meaning in them. The negative outcome of this stage is despair. When adults are not satisfied with what they have achieved in life and their decisions in life, despair occurs. But in old age it is too late to correct old mistakes and find a path to integrity and so the person finds it hard to accept that death is near and feels disappointment, bitterness, defeat and hopelessness. According to Erikson these attitudes are often expressed as anger and contempt for others.

### 5.2 Married Older Adults

The percentage of divorces in late adulthood is very less. Most of the couples are married. One study revealed that marital satisfaction was higher in older adults as compared to middle-aged adults (Henry & others, 2007). Retirement leads to changes in the couple's lifestyle and demands adaptation (Higo & Williamson, 2009; Price & Nesteruk, 2010). After retirement, the husband has to adjust from being the provider to a helper in the house and the wife has to adjust to accept the help and delegate household duties.

There are many reasons for increase in marital satisfaction in late adulthood. Firstly in late adulthood there are fewer stressful responsibilities that can negatively affect relationships like balancing career and family, child rearing. Secondly as men contribute in the house work, there is greater satisfaction and sense of equity (Kulik, 2001). Thirdly the couple has more time for each other which can be spent in doing leisure activities which increases marital satisfaction (Trudel et al., 2008). Fourth, elders have greater emotional understanding and can better regulate their emotions.

### 5.3 Widowhood

Losing a partner is the most stressful event of any person's life. Being widowed means that the survivor has lost the role and identity of being a spouse. Because women generally live longer than men, there are more widowed women than men. In western countries most widowed elders want to live alone while in India widowed parents generally live in modified extended or joint families. India has the largest recorded number of widows in the world-33 million (10% of the female population, compared to only 3% of men), and fifty-four per cent of women aged 60 and over are widows and 12 per cent of women aged 35- 39. Only 10 percent of widows marry again (Chen, 2000). Widowhood in India is not just a personal status but a social institution. Widow stigmatization and deprivation is made worse by ritual and religious symbolism. In a patriarchal society like India, a women derives her identity through a man and in absence of a man, she

becomes a non entity, suffering a social death evident in her absence in traditional rituals and customs (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2000).

The greatest problem that widowed elders face is loneliness (Lund, 1993). Research shows that widowed elders who are outgoing and have high self esteem, high self efficacy are more resilient in dealing with loneliness (Moore & Stratton, 2002; van Baarsen, 2002). After losing one's spouse, widowed elders have to reintegrate and reconstruct an identity separate from deceased spouse. Research shows that men show more mental and physical health problems and greater risk of mortality than women for several reasons (Bennett, Smith, & Hughes, 2005; Pinquart, 2003). First because men rely on their wives for social connectedness, household work and tasks, coping with stressors, they are less prepared for challenges of widowhood. Secondly because of the gender role expectations men have more problems in expressing their emotions and communicating the need for help with household chores and relationships (Bennett, 2007; Lund & Caserta, 2004). Also, compared to women, men are less interested in religious activities which can be a vital source of inner strength and social support (Lee et al., 2001).

#### 5.4 Relationships with Adult Children

The quality of interaction between elderly and their adult children impacts adult's life satisfaction. Research shows that if older adults are unhappy with their children or there is conflict with children then this can contribute to poor physical and mental health (Ajrouch, 2007; Milkie, Bierman, & Schieman, 2008; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1991). In Western countries the level of assistance provided by adult children to their parents is very modest.

#### 5.5 Relationship with Grandchildren and Great Grandchildren

Older adults with adult grandchildren and great-grandchildren benefit from the support that they get from their grandchildren. Studies show that the majority of grandchildren felt obligated to assist grandparents in need. Grandparents also expected affection from grandchildren. Some older adults also have great grandchildren. Although compared to their role with grandchildren, the role of a great grandparent is more distant because of advancing age but older adults welcome the role with enthusiasm and feel that it reaffirms the continuity of their families.

The ability of older adults to deal with the changes in health, income and other social relationships depends greatly on the support that they receive from the younger generations. This support is more culturally based. In India, elders generally live with their families, are treated with honor and respect and given financial and emotional support. The incidence of elder maltreatment is much less in India as compared to the West because of the value given to the elders in Indian culture.

### 6. Summary

- The adulthood period of development begins in early 20s and lasts until death. This period is divided into early adulthood (early 20s to late 30s), middle adulthood (40s to 60) and late adulthood (60 to death).
- Infants who are securely attached are generally securely attached later in their adult romantic relationships.

- Finding a life partner is a major milestone of early adult development.
- There are cultural differences in characteristics that young adults look for in their partners and the criteria for marriage.
- Marital satisfaction predicts physical and mental health and does not cause marital strain with the arrival of a baby.
- Parenting helps adults in their growth, enriches their lives and expands their emotional capacities.
- Demand-withdraw patterns in marriage along with infidelity, loss of love, abuse, drug or alcohol abuse are some of the major factors that can lead to divorce.
- Marital satisfaction, loyalty, mutual interdependence and companionate love generally increases in middle adulthood.
- Interaction with grandchildren gives middle aged and older adults a sense of companionship, meaning in life and reaffirms continuity of their culture and values.
- Living with grandparents helps the child understand and appreciate different perspectives; love and care for the elderly and is essential for the overall development of the child.
- Losing one's marital partner in old adulthood is the most stressful experience of one's life and can lead to feelings of loneliness.
- Social support helps older adults in dealing with decline in their health, cognitive capacities and social changes.