

Personality and successful ageing: a review

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ABSTRACT

Longevity of life among the older population has been witnessed since last century in developed and developing countries. Maintaining a positive and healthy life is more required than a longer life. Major challenges of ageing are social, economical and health. Successful ageing remains a doubt when an older adult is not able to live a healthy life with reduced risk of disabilities and increased physical and mental functioning. On the other hand old age is the age of cognitive and physical transitions. In an age of transformation older adults could not be free from any one of the social-economic and health related challenge. With the rapid increase of life expectancy when initiatives have been taken to maintain the existing characteristic for a successful ageing, researches are considering the role of personality in health. The purpose of the review is to study the role of personality as the predictor of successful ageing.

Keywords: *Old age; older adults; personality; successful ageing.*

Ageing is the process of structural and functional change in an organism due to passage of time. Old age is manifested as decline in peak fertility and physiological function. However, the age at which one's productive contribution declines and one tends to be economically dependent can probably be treated as the onset of the aged stage of life. "National Policy on older persons 1999" defines person of 60+ age group as elderly. According to a 2016 report by the ministry for statistics and program implementation, India has 103.9 million elderly, people above age 60, about 8.5 per cent of the population. There has been rapid increase of life expectancy since last few years.

Old age is supposed to attract more challenges. Socio demographics and psychosocial aspects play a crucial role in healthy ageing. Although old age is defined as decline in cognitive and physical functioning, still there are also evidences maturity and cognitively dealing with emotions. Thus, individuals differ when they are to define their status as older adults. Socio cultural environment do play a role in successful ageing. But studies found that even older adults staying in the most vulnerable conditions away from family have a positive perspective towards their living.

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With the increasing influence of modernization and new life styles resulting in transitional changes in value system in recent times, the joint family is breaking down into several scattered nuclear families. Providing care for the aged has never been a problem in India where a value based joint family system was dominant. Misbehavior of children, financial crisis often lead to feeling of ignorance and lack of emotional support in elderly which often compel them to opt other places for living a problem free life. And, in present scenario along with other reasons old age homes are being considered as a better alternative to reside.

The older population is more vulnerable to develop health problems including physical and psychological. The prevalence of emotional adjustment problems, mental health problems and physical health problems are likely to occur more in inhabitants of old age homes than the community older adults. It's very important that steps are taken to improve their condition. It is the crucial time to understand their perception of their own emotions, and how they use, understand, and manage their emotions to enhance their personal growth and social relations. Healthy ageing has been the question for the older adults than living longer. Therefore, the need of the age is to prepare the older generation for a positive life. Everyone wants to age well. But what are the criteria to be fulfilled for a successful ageing.

Another most important way of promoting successful ageing is by understanding their personality traits. Among the efforts over the past decades to understand what contributes to successful aging studies have found that personality prospectively predicts longevity and successful ageing. Schemes for effective health outcomes by recognizing the needs of elderly women have been taken by the community and state. But specific interventions are required for adequate economic and social support.

Older Adult

Growing older is a condition which we are familiar since early age. Ageing is the structural and functional changes in an organism with time. "National Policy on older persons 1999" defines "senior citizen" or "elderly" as a person who is of age 60 or above. According to a 2016 report by the ministry for statistics and program implementation, India has 103.9 million elderly, people above age 60, about 8.5 per cent of the population. Worldwide the older population is growing faster as any other age group. In India like other countries life expectancy of older adults are increasing with proper medical improvement and diet. (Dubey, 2011). With remarkable increase of older adults the study of health and well being has become very important. Old age is also considered dark; as people don't try to see old age from the broader perspective. (Dubey, 2003). The theoretical frameworks of ageing well are healthy, productive, successful, active and positive. The WHO defines *active aging* as "the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age including those who are frail, disabled, and in need of care."

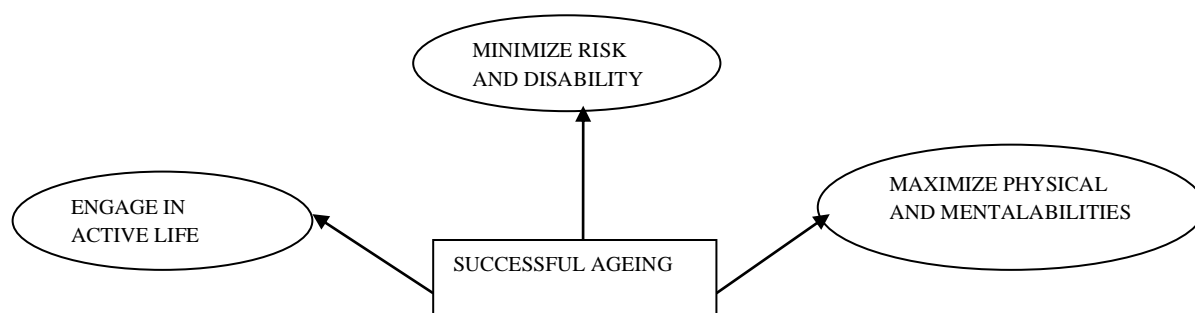
Old age attracts more illness. Life satisfaction is the determinant of quality of life in old age and successful ageing. (Dubey, 2011). Socio-demographic and psycho-social aspects play a crucial role in a healthy ageing. (Iyer, 2003). Old age is mostly defined as declined physical health, declined cognitive functioning, reduced memory and deteriorating social relationship and declined economic status. (Dubey, 2011). Acceptance of old age is the form of old age complex. (Bhasin, 2011). According to some people old age is used as criterion of failing eye sight and hearing, decline in sexual potency, increased fatigue, no motivation to work, lack of interest in competition, reminiscing and dwelling on the thoughts of the past.

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“Some people use their chronological age as a criterion for their own aging whereas others use such physical symptoms as failing eye-sight or hearing, tendency to increase fatigue, decline in sexual potency etc. Still others assess their aging in terms of their capacity for work, their output in relation to standards set in earlier years, their lack of interest in competing with others, lack of motivation to do things or a tendency to reminisce and turn their thoughts to the past rather than dwell on the present or the future.” The acceptance of the fact that they are old develops in the aged an “old age complex” (Antonelli et al. 2002)

Successful Ageing

A healthy life has become more important than a longer life. Longevity and surviving old age doesn't define successful ageing. In this context the term “successful ageing” has been used most frequently by the researchers. Successful ageing is the criterion for ageing process. (Baek, 2018). Despite the economic and social challenges older adult faces it is essential to identify the mechanisms of successful ageing. (Baek, 2018). Rowe and Kahn's model of successful ageing emphasizes on personal control over one's later life outcomes, and neglect the contexts of culture, historical and social relationships in influencing later life functioning. The model provides scientific parameters for health across life span and construction of interventions. Rowe and Kahn described successful ageing in reference to avoidance of disease and disability, maintenance of high physical and cognitive functioning and active engagement with life. Gerontological theories, empirical evidence and research had laid immense passion for the model of successful ageing. Proponent of the paradigm minimized disease and disability, kept the fact in mind that disease and disability is not completely under the control of human. Kahn and Rowe further suggested that ageing is completely dependent upon individual behavior and choices. Maintaining high physical and mental health become problematic, when the relationships and social aspects particularly for older adults in old age homes. Older adults may be in an out over time with success but resilient older adults achieve success by meeting the criteria of successful ageing.



To develop a complete model of successful ageing, recent consideration has been on personality. (Eaton et al., 2012).

Personality in Successful Ageing

For some of the elderly population living in different institution away from their family due to isolation is a source of socialization. They start finding positivity in their life by interacting with their fellows who are going through the same socio-economic circumstances. (Bergeron, 2001). for them individuals who see alternative accommodation due to isolation or loneliness, relocation of congregate style accommodation may increase their social contact and have a positive.

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Personality has been considered a core factor that reveals the causal structure of successful aging (Eaton et al., 2012). As individual differences in thinking, coping, and behaving are often determined by personality, exploring one's personality may provide an answer to the question of why and how some individuals and not others fit the criteria of successful aging. Research in areas of personality traits, Cognitive emotional regulation and emotional intelligence will be helpful to plan interventions accordingly for the old people living away from their family.

Personality is the consistent way of behaving towards particular situations. Successful ageing could be defined from the constructs of personality traits. (Ryff, 1982).

Personality traits can be used to explain the ageing process and longevity. (Versey, Stewart, & Duncan, 2013). Big five personality traits have been used to define the effects of personality traits on the successful ageing. (Martin et al., 2006).

Neuroticism is the vulnerability to experience negativity from all negative stimuli; extraversion is the tendency to be social and energetic; openness to experience is the willingness to welcome new things and have intellectual curiosity, conscientiousness represents organized, responsible, goal oriented and agreeableness indicates empathetic and cooperative.

Big five personality traits have been introduced as two factors alpha and beta which represents personal growth. Low levels of neuroticism and higher levels of conscientiousness are the alpha factor while extraversion and openness to experience is the beta factor. (Digman, 1997). The two factors have been very useful in studying personality and its outcome. (Young et al., 2002).

According to Rowe and Kahn's model cognitive functioning is the highest component for successful ageing. Studies found that personality traits plays a s a predictor of cognitive ageing and variation of cognition. (Curtis et al., 2015).

Depressive feelings or feelings of negative emotion have effect on the brain functioning whereas feelings of positive emotions work as helping in cognitive decline by facilitating a positive attitude. (Hertzog et al., 2009). Another study examined the higher levels of openness to experience in older adults is positively related to higher level of cognitive functioning, which remains the same throughout. (Galtz et al., 2010).

Other studies have found conscientiousness reduces the risk of Alzheimer's disease and cognitive impairment in older adults. Highly conscientious individual gain more exposure to educational experience and their personality characteristics reduces the risk factors of Dementia. (Scheider, 2007).

Personality provides a individual dimensions on copying, thus personality could provide patterns on wellbeing. On that case personality is linked with successful ageing. By providing genetic environmental influences, personality gives a developmental direction of successful ageing. (Chapman et al., 2011). Personality has also been classified as resilient and non-resilient, resilient scores high on extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness and scores low on neuroticism. (Rosa, 2012). This approach provides an explanation for successful ageing.

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Attempts have been made to combine the personality traits with the components of Rowe and Kahn's successful ageing model of cognitive functioning, physical health and social engagement. Neuroticism and conscientiousness have been well built with successful ageing. (Chapman et al, 2011). Conscientious and neuroticism are calm and organized. These personality traits lead to higher cognitive functioning and no disease by avoiding unhealthy behavior. (Friedman et al., 2010). Studies on the other personality traits have been very limited. Extroversion has lower risk of diseases due to positive emotions and higher social engagement. (Carlo et al., 2005). Openness to experience has higher cognitive abilities. Agreeableness also has lower cognitive decline and higher social engagement. Not a single personality trait but a combination of traits contributes to successful ageing. (Martin & Poon, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The long debate of successful ageing could end with the understanding of the individual personality traits. A contradiction exists between the vulnerabilities and challenges the older adults are facing and the interventions used to manage their problems. Often importance is laid on the objective situation they have to deal with. There is the objectification of old age as an age of dependency. Older adults try to accept their situations and start living a life of negativity towards their situations and people. Successful ageing is what everyone prefers. But substantial body of the personality-health literature has shown that personality traits not only directly affect physical health but also serve as both mediator and moderator on the relationship between environmental stress and physical disease. Moreover Research in the field of adult development and aging has provided ample evidence that the emotional lives of older adults are well maintained or even improved. For instance, older adults report increased positive, and diminished negative, affect greater mood stability and emotional maturity. However prospective studies and clinical trials are needed to determine the directions of implications for intervention.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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