

PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF AGING

OBJECTIVES/RATIONALE

Fear of aging in Western European/American cultures results in the proliferation of negative stereotypes. Therefore, it is important for health care providers to separate the stereotypes/myths from the real needs of the elderly. The student will conduct an interview with an elderly person, compare the life of that person with existing stereotypes and analyze that person's success with aging.

TEKS 121.23 (c) 1A, 1B, 1C, 1E

TAKS ELA 1, 4, 5

KEY POINTS

PowerPoint

I. Views of aging

- A. American/Western European view of aging is less positive than the remainder of the world's cultures.
 - 1. Aging viewed negatively – looking and acting young is positively viewed
 - 2. Elderly are not respected or revered as they are in other cultures.
 - 3. Western world tends to fear growing old.
 - 4. Tends to have a nuclear family system that does not include the elderly.
 - 5. Tends to practice ageism – discrimination and prejudice against individuals on the basis of their age.
 - 6. Elderly frequently seen as sick, senile, and useless.
 - 7. More positive attitudes are developing as the older population increases.
 - 8. Today the aged view themselves more positively because they are generally better educated and financially more secure than their predecessors.
- B. Asian view of aged different, somewhat similar viewpoints shared by Hispanics.
 - 1. Respect age.
 - 2. Have a more defined extended family system – which includes older people.
 - 3. If a big family decision is to be made, all members are included in that decision, especially the elderly.
- C. In African American homes the grandparents often raise their grandchildren. The extended family often extends to respected members of the church.
- D. Some cultures (i.e. South American Indian culture), view each person as a contributing member of the tribe or group. If someone does not keep up, they are left behind (age, disability).

II. Myths of aging in the American culture

- A. There will be people who represent each of the myths, but they are myths because the basically represent a fairly small part of the population.
- B. Myth 1: Aging brings illness and disability
 - 1. Over the past few decades chronic diseases i.e. coronary heart disease have become less common and better managed.

2. Three-fourths of people aged 75 – 84 report no disability
 3. In studies of twins, only one third of the loss of physical function with age can be blamed on heredity – the rest stems from poor health habits.
 4. Because the body functions tend to decline, the risk of disease does rise with age.
- C. Myth 2: Change of habits when you're older does not help, because the damage is already done.
1. Older people who make dramatic changes in their health habits can add years to their lives.
 2. Older people who start doing aerobic exercises can boost their cardiovascular fitness by 10-30%.
 3. Older people who started muscle building in their 80's and 90's have doubled or tripled their strength.
 4. Exercise and body building cuts the cardiovascular and total death rates as much as 25 – 50%.
 5. Weight loss and exercise reduces arthritic pain at any age.
 6. Strength training can reduce osteoporosis.
- D. Myth 3: Aging means a reduction in mental sharpness.
1. 20% of the elderly population does suffer from Alzheimer's.
 2. In approximately 50% of the population there is some decline in cognitive functioning, as well.
 3. Still the normal mental decline is milder than most people think.
 4. Memory decline seems to be most limited to storing new information.
 5. Recall of information, recognition and performance of things previously known see little decline.
 6. Physical exercise seems to help cognitive sharpness.
 7. Mental exercise seems to enhance and preserve cognitive ability.
 8. Some mental deterioration is linked to alcohol abuse, depression, vitamin B12 deficiency, sleep disorders, and underactive thyroid gland. These should be investigated first, since some of them can be treated.
- E. Myth 4: Getting old means being sad, lonely, and unproductive
1. Only 5% of people over 65 live in institutions
 2. About 1/3 of seniors are employed
 3. About 1/3 volunteer regularly
 4. Isolated older people have death rates 2-4 times higher than those with strong social ties.
 5. In a study of 375 people, 15% stated that they are lonely and unhappy.
 6. In the same study only 8% lived in institutions.
 7. Of the same 375, 87% contribute effectively to society.
 8. In a NCOA survey, 35% of those under age 65 said that loneliness was a problem in the elderly. Only 4% of the elderly of that study said it's a very serious problem in their lives.
 9. Depression is experienced by the older population, but is under-diagnosed and under-treated.
 - a. Depression is usually to blame for the high suicide rate in the elderly.
 - b. Depression can be due to changes in the neurotransmitters.

- c. Physical limitations and sleep disturbances might also contribute.
 - d. Losses in life can contribute to depression
 - i. rejection and/or isolation from family.
 - ii. absence of a role in life.
 - iii. loss of partner.
 - iv. loss of sexual function or other physical function.
10. White men 65 and over are at greatest risk of suicide
- a. highest risk are those over 85
 - b. Women attempt more suicide, but the rate of men committing suicide is three times the rate of women.
 - c. Suicides among the elderly (those over 65) are twice the national average.
 - d. There is some evidence of an increase of murder-suicide in elderly couples, with the male being the initiator.
- F. Myth 5: Older people aren't interested in sex and couldn't perform even if they were
1. In a Consumers Union survey of 900 people, 70-90 79% of men and 69% of women either masturbated or had sexual contact with a partner.
 2. It is felt that the number of women would be higher, but the ratio of men to women over 80 years is 2:5.
 3. In a study of 375, 86% expressed an interest in sex.
 4. 72% of all respondents in a NCOA survey said that a 75 year-old man could be considered sexy. The same number said this about a 75 year-old woman.
 5. 2/3 of married respondents older than 65 said that having a sexual relationship was important in making their later years meaningful.
- G. Myth 6: Belief in religion increases with age, and the fear of death increases.
1. In the study of 375 individuals, 65% acknowledged an increase in religious belief with age.
 2. 59% of those surveyed expressed a decrease in the fear of death. 32% reported an increase.
 3. Fear dependency, pain, and loss of function and control more than death.
- H. Myth 7: Old people rarely take baths or wash their clothes
1. 84% of the respondents deny this.
 2. Elderly as a rule were raised in a time where daily bathing was not a rule.
 3. As people age their need for daily/frequent baths decreases, since they produce less perspiration and secrete less oil.
- I. Myth 8: Old people tend to be victims of crime
1. 52% stated this was true
 2. 39% denied this to be a problem.
- J. Myth 9: Old people only want to talk about the past.
1. 68% of those surveyed stated that this was not true
 2. Successful aging means participation in meaningful activities or having a hobby that sustains them. Most do not live in the past, but rather are well informed in the present.
- K. Myth 10: People become more rigid and narrow-minded with age.
1. Longitudinal studies have found that personality traits remain relatively consistent throughout one's adult life.

2. Many anthropologists believe that the “self” is essentially ageless.
 3. Older adults report that their own self-images have changed relatively little as they age.
- III. Successful versus Unsuccessful Aging
- A. There are several theories of successful aging; each represents a group of people who are satisfied with their lives.
 - B. None of the theories totally describes all successfully aging people.
 - C. There are, however, certain factors associated with successful aging that have been identified.
 1. Life satisfaction
 - a. Feel like life has been rewarding
 - b. Few regrets
 - c. Positive attitude about the past and the future
 - d. Life remains stimulating and interesting
 - e. Can be active or more relaxed depending on the needs of the individual
 2. Social Support System
 - a. A positive retirement experience is related to a network of family and friends.
 - b. Fills the need for affection, attachment, belonging, and a positive sense of well being.
 3. Good physical and mental health
 4. Financial security
 - a. Lack of money can intensify many of the problems associated with growing old.
 - b. Need to be familiarized with community programs i.e. senior discounts, prescription subsidies, etc.
 5. Personal control over one’s life
 - a. Well-intentioned intervention from family and friends can rob people of the sense of personal control.
 - b. Independence is essential to the maintenance of positive self-concept, sense of dignity and self worth.

ACTIVITIES

- I. Prior to beginning the lesson, take the Quiz on Aging. Keep it as a reference as the lesson progresses.
- II. Interview an elderly person in the community, preferably someone, with whom they have a relationship, using the Interview of an Elderly Person form. Collate this information and compare findings with the myths of aging learned in this lesson and decide whether the person has successfully aged or not. Tape the interview and give a copy to the person as an oral history. Either create a picture journal to accompany the interview or make a poster depicting the person’s life.
Teacher Note: *The students must have the elderly person complete the Liability Release form prior to conducting and taping the interview, as well as creating the picture journal of the individual.*

Teacher Note: for additional Activities related to *Psychosocial Aspects of Aging*: Have the students watch one of the following movies – Cocoon, Driving Miss Daisy, and/or On Golden Pond. Students will write a journal entry, analyzing one of the characters using the myths of aging and the five factors of successful aging as criteria. Another additional activity would be reading When I am an Old Woman, I Want to Wear Purple, by Sandra Haldeman Martz (Editor) and Jenny Joseph, and again making a journal entry

MATERIALS NEEDED

PowerPoint Presentation of Psychosocial Aspects of Aging

PC Computer with PowerPoint program

Interview of an Elderly Person form

Liability Release Form

www.ncoa.org/news/archives/experts_see_suicide.htm

Good, brief synopsis of suicide in the elderly.

www.pol.org/features/healthworks/

Good, but brief, overview of 5 myths of aging. This should bring up the hyperlink. Click through to healthy aging.

www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/wims/wims4c.html

Access to the source called Walk in My Shoes. Activities to sensitize individuals to the changes that occur with aging.

Video: “Never Say Die: The Pursuit of Eternal Youth” obtained from Films for the Humanities and Sciences. www.films.com Excellent source of videos. There are many about the aging process, both physical and emotional.

Purnell, Larry D. and Paulanka, Betty J. *Transcultural Health Care: A Culturally Competent Approach*. Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1998. ISBN 0-8036-0208-1

Cahill, Matthew, et al. *Mastering Geriatric Care*. Pennsylvania: Springhouse Corporation. 1997. ISBN 0-87434-871-4

Turner, Jeffrey S. and Helms, Donald B. *Lifespan Development*. Philadelphia: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1991.

ASSESSMENT

Successful completion of the interview and journal/poster. The grade will be an average of the interview/Writing Rubric and journal-poster/Project Rubric.

ACCOMMODATIONS

For reinforcement the student will make a poster listing the myths of aging in one column. In two more columns, list the supporting information of the myth in one column and the non-supporting information in another column. In a final column, list the aspects generally identified as successful aging. Using the poster, participate in a group discussion comparing the myths of aging with the aspects of successful aging.

For enrichment the student will investigate the community support structures that exist for the elderly and develop a pamphlet listing the agency, describing the support, and giving the address and telephone number.

REFLECTIONS

LIABILITY RELEASE FORM

I, _____, give my permission for _____
(Individual's Name) (Student's Name)
_____, a student of Health Science Technology with _____
(Name of School)
_____, to conduct and tape an interview with me about my life. I

understand that I will receive a copy of the taped interview. Furthermore, I agree that any photographs of me (and/or other personal memorabilia that I share) will be used in a poster or journal representing my life. I also understand that I will be shown the poster/journal when it is complete.

Signature of Person Being Interviewed

Date

Signature of Student Conducting the Interview

Date

Signature of HST Instructor

Date

QUIZ ON AGING

For each of the following questions, determine if it is true or false and write your answer in the space provided.

- _____ 1. Age brings illness and disability.
- _____ 2. Change of habits (i.e. aerobic exercises, etc.) when one is already older, results in no physical benefit.
- _____ 3. Aging means reduction in mental sharpness.
- _____ 4. Being old equals being sad, lonely, and nonproductive.
- _____ 5. Elderly are not interested in sex and could not perform if they were.
- _____ 6. Religious beliefs increase and fear of death decreases with age.
- _____ 7. Older people rarely take baths or wash cloths.
- _____ 8. Old people are victims of crime.
- _____ 9. Elderly only want to talk about the past.
- _____ 10. People become rigid and marrow-minded with age.

INTERVIEW OF AN ELDERLY PERSON

Adapted from University of Illinois extension program: Walk in My Shoes

-The following are questions that cover the life span of the individual whom you will be interviewing. Select an individual who is at least 65 years of age. It is easier to conduct the interview with someone you already know, but this isn't a prerequisite.

-Tape the interview and make a copy for the person as an oral history.

-Create a picture journal to accompany the written interview, or make a poster that depicts the various aspects of your elderly person's life.

-Share your creation with this person before submitting it as an assignment.

-Use each of these questions as a guide, but let the person digress and reminisce (as long as they appropriately stay on topic). You will have a much better interview that way and it will make your analysis much easier.

Childhood

1. Did you have a favorite toy? If it was a doll, stuffed animal, or something similar, what was its name?
2. What was your favorite candy? Do you associate it with a particular person, event, or time?
3. Did you have pets as a child? What kind and what were their names?
4. Did you have a nickname? How did you get it?
5. Did you have chores around the house?
6. Do you remember a favorite bedtime story or poem?

7. What was your favorite subject in school? Was homework hard or easy for you?
8. Can you remember a historic event that happened when you were in school? Who told you about it? Your teacher? Your mother when you got home?
9. Did you ever want to run away? Why?
10. Did your father have a favorite saying you can remember him repeating? How about Your mother? Do you sometimes find their words coming out of your mouth?

Young Adult

1. What was your first job?
2. Did you date a lot? What did you like to do for fun/
3. Do you remember your first big romance? Did you get married, or how did the relationship end/
4. Is there a particular song you associate with that time of your life?
5. What was your first home like? Describe your household appliances.
6. Did you have children? Who was the first person you called to say “It’s a girl” or “It’s a boy”?

7. What was the funniest experience you ever had with a child (yours or someone else's)?

8. What was your scariest moment as a parent? Or the scariest moment you experienced with any child?

9. What was the best trip or vacation you ever took? Why was it so special?

10. What was the best thing about this part of your life? The worst thing?

Older Adult

1. What is your favorite hobby or activity?

2. Do you enjoy a slower pace now, or are you as busy as ever?

3. If you have had to slow down because of age, what activities do you miss?

4. Has retirement been a good or bad experience?

5. Do you have grandchildren? Do you see them often?

6. What is the best part about being or not being a grandparent? The worst part?

7. What things do you get to do now that you couldn't do when you were younger?

