

The Historical and Social Context of Aging



One of the most studied area in human life is the area of human development since psychologists are interested in understanding what influences human development. In his studies on the same area, Elder came into a conclusive argument that development outcomes and processes are influenced by various principles. To start with, Elder argues that prior or past development exerts great influence in later development. Apart from past developments, other things that influence development according to the same author include historical and social contexts since they shape and influence experiences all through a person's life. In other words, Elder argues that the sequencing and the timing of development together with other social transitions also greatly influence development at the latter stages (Blank, Dabady & Citro, 2004). Together with other researchers' argument, Elder's arguments on human development can be used in understanding the aging experience. Just like human development is affected by past developments and social factors, aging is also affected by many factors such as cohort effects, age and period. In order to understand how the name factors affect age, an interview with an adult above 65 years helps in understanding how historical events impacted the old person's life.

The presented interview was conducted with Jane, a single female who is 70 years. Jane has not been single all through her life. Instead, her husband died when she was 65 years old. Since then, Jane has lived with her family at the neighborhood who are caring and who help her to cope with life. The purpose of this interview was to understand how historical events impacted the old person's life.

The Interview Questions and Answers

1. When were you born?

1944

2. What can you remember from your childhood experiences?

I was born in a period of distress as there were wars and everyone lived in the fear of war. However, I was born in a rural setting since most of the infrastructure that are there today were yet to develop.

3. From your age, it seems you were born in a time of war. How did this impact your life?

As explained earlier, I was born in a time of war and my life was greatly affected since people used to live in fear.

4. What can you describe educational opportunities during your time?

During this time, education started being recognized. Therefore, most parents found it important to educate their children though not to higher level as it is today. In fact, I only came to own a college certificate. I could have continued further but my parents did not have enough money.

5. The great depression started earlier before you were born, but its effects were felt for a long time. How did the great depression impact your life?

The great depression as you have said affected the economy greatly. However, by the time I was born, its effects were not as tremendous as before from what I have come to learn. However, I can still admit that life was tough and my family was a middle class family.

6. Discrimination was very high during your time, how did it affect you?

Yes discrimination affected me in many ways. Although I am a white and most whites were not subject to discrimination, seeing fellow human beings being discriminated against was not a good experience.

7. Did the civil rights movement affect you in any way?

The civil rights movement affected me as I almost saw my country crumbling down. The sadness that filled the streets is still memorable to this day. The division that existed in the society was also great and I would not love to pass through the same period again.

8. Everybody's life is affected or shaped by social experiences.

How did social experiences shape your life?

Some social experiences shaped me while other delayed my life. For example, I believe that I could have performed better in college than I did were it not for the influences from my friends. In addition, I believe that I would not have married at early stage were it not for the influences from my age mates. However, I do not regret since my life took the right course after sometime.

9. Did you have a stable job and how can you describe your family in terms of social status?

Although I had a permanent job, it is not the job I would have loved to have as it did not take me past the middle family class level.

10. Has religion influenced your life in any way and if it has, how.

Religion has influenced my life as it has given me hope. As a Christian, I hope for another life and I am not afraid to die. In addition, religion has also helped when I did not know what to do or where to go.

11. When did you get married?

1967

12. How many children do you have?

5 children

13. Did marriage and children affect your life in any way?

Marriage was tough. However, I am happy as my husband was my best friend.

14. Has modernization and globalization changed your life in any way?

Globalization and modernization has changed how everything is being done. What we once used to see on the TV is not what we see today. Immorality has increased and the gap between parents and children has grown bigger.

15. How can you describe your life choices, are they consistent have they changed over time?

Yes, in the past family was important, and then came work. Today, family is important again.

16. Which life changes have been affected by any life experiences?

The death of my husband left a void in my heart that I have been unable to fill. I have also not been able to pay for an old people's house, which is why I stay with my children and my grandchildren. However, I am still happy since I was not separated from them.

According to the cumulative advantage theory, some of the early life advantages or disadvantages can easily be translated into the present life

(Kolb, 2014). Using cumulative advantage to analyze Jane's life at the present, there is no doubt that some of the past experiences still haunt her today. Jane was born in a period of economic disadvantage and also a period of war. Although she claims that she was educated, she also claims that her decisions during the college years affected her grade. Consequently, Jane did not continue with college. In addition, Jane did not get the job she desired to have. These series of events have affected Jane in her old age as her family cannot afford money to take her to the old people's home. However, she is still grateful since she lives with her family as family is one of the priorities in her old age. From what can be learned from Jane's experiences, disadvantages in life can be overcome through education, family and religion.

In conclusion, just like human development is affected by past developments and social factors, aging is also affected by many factors such as cohort effects, age and period. For example, Jane's aging is being affected by some things that happened many years ago including her choices. For example, Jane was born in an economically trying time, which affected her education. In addition, peer pressure and other social experiences such as marriage and family also affected Jane's life at the present since she has children to take care of her in trying times.

Summary

In summary, the development phenomenon has aroused the interest of many. Particularly, the aging process has aroused the interest of many scholars such as Elder who wish to explain how life experiences have affected the aging experiences. Among the theorists, there is a common belief that the aging processes together with current experiences are affected by factors in an individual's life prior to this important event. For example, historical events, sociological events as well as individual choices and factors affect aging

person's process. An interview with Jane, a 70 year woman proved these assertions as it was clear that some past experiences affected her present experiences. For example, peer pressure during her years in school affected her grades and her job. Jane was not able to get the job she desired because she did not get a good grade. In addition, she did not further her education as she was married at a young age. Jane's experiences past experiences and their effects on the present day experiences can be explained using the theory of cumulative disadvantage. According to this theory, some past experiences can negatively affect the present. Jane's lack of a good job and of enough funds to pay for an old persons' facility was caused by her earlier disadvantages.