



Gerontology: The Study of Aging

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Abstract

Gerontology is the study of aging and older adults. The science of gerontology has evolved as longevity has improved. Researchers in this field are diverse and are trained in areas such as physiology, social science, psychology, public health, and policy.

Keywords- Gerontology, Study, Aging

Introduction

Gerontology is the study of the physical aspects of aging, as well as the mental, social and societal implications of aging. The word was coined by Ilya Ilyich Mechnikov in 1903, from the Greek γέρων, geron, "old man" and -λογία, -logia, "study of".

Unlike geriatrics, which concentrates on the medical aspects of aging bodies and how they change and adjust to change in elder years, the field of gerontology has a multidisciplinary focus. Gerontology is the study of the physical aspects of aging, as well as the mental, social and societal implications of aging.

What Is Gerontology?

As we grow older, our minds and bodies begin to change slowly. Some of these changes might sneak up on us so slowly that we may not even notice them at first, but they do happen. These changes may include typical physical problems that come with old age, such as wrinkles, hair loss, diseases, and loss of muscle and bone loss.

Psychological problems also become more common as we age, and many older adults typically experience some sort of mental and emotional disorders. Some of these problems might be caused by physical changes, like mood swings that accompany menopause or depression caused by chronic illness. Other psychological problems, however, might be caused by life experiences, such as grief over losing their close friends or spouses.

Gerontology is the study of the aging process and the problems that elderly individuals might encounter. Professionals in this field typically study and find ways to treat physical, mental, emotional, and social problems.

This field of gerontology is very broad, and there are many subfields. Social gerontology and bio-gerontology are two of the most common subfields of gerontology. Social gerontology is the subfield of gerontology that deals with the social aspects of aging, and bio-gerontology is the subfield of gerontology that deals with the biological aspects of aging.

It was in the beginning of the 20th century that the term "gerontology" was coined by Elie Metchnikoff. In the 1940's, James Birren began organizing the field of gerontology. One of his most important accomplishments was the theory of primary, secondary, and tertiary aging.

- Primary Aging - Refers to the natural physical deterioration of the body over time.
- Secondary Aging- Refers to the illnesses and diseases that can hasten the aging process, such as Alzheimer's and cancer.
- Tertiary Aging- Refers to the increase in cognitive and physical deterioration of a person in the short time before death.

History

In the medieval Islamic world, several physicians wrote on issues related to Gerontology. Avicenna's The Canon of Medicine (1025) offered instruction for the care of the aged, including diet and remedies for problems including constipation. Arabic physician Ibn Al-Jazzar Al-Qayrawani (Algizar, c. 898–980) wrote on the aches and conditions of the elderly (Ammar 1998, p. 4). His scholarly work covers sleep disorders, forgetfulness, how to strengthen memory, and causes of mortality. Ishaq ibn Hunayn (died 910) also wrote works on the treatments for forgetfulness (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 1994).

Countering Misconceptions About Working With an Aging Population

Many people have a fear that working with older people will be discouraging, acknowledging a stereotype about seeing people at the end of life who are facing death and dying issues. But many people find working with elders to be a positive experience. Older people have learned many lessons about life and pass them on. Caregivers' support groups and working or volunteering with hospice are often very inspiring. Many people are living longer, healthier lives now.

There is a high demand for human services workers in gerontological facilities as the population continues to age. Most often, a human services or gerontology degree holder works in administrative roles – such as a rehabilitation case worker, housing director or eligibility counselor – to connect patients and clients with direct service providers.

The individual differences among older people, even those who are in the same age group, illustrate the vitality of the field of gerontology. Career opportunities will be driven by the needs, abilities and interests of our elders as well as those of their loved ones and caregivers.

Why Study Gerontology?

With an understanding of gerontology, an individual can make plans for her or his own life course and needs, and communities and legislators can make necessary public policy choices. Public policy decisions are critical because of the tremendous growth of our population aged 65. The demand for professionals with expertise in gerontology will mirror these increases.

Reference

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