

Examining the Multifaceted Process of Ageing

The influence of psychological factors on the ageing process has been a subject of great interest and debate among scientists and researchers. As people around the world live longer, the number of people aged 65 and over is growing faster than any other age group (WHO, 2022). On a biological level, ageing is caused by the effects of molecular and cellular damage that accumulates over time, leading to declines in physical and mental capacity, increased risk of disease, and ultimately death (Misra, 2020). Ageing, as an inevitable biological phenomenon, is a multifaceted process that manifests at myriad levels, from the cellular to the organismal system. The understanding of its causative mechanisms has captivated the interests of scientists, psychologists, and the masses throughout history as it bears implications for health, longevity, and the human experience. The social construction of age adds another layer of complexity to this understanding as the meanings attached to being "young" or "old" often reflect prevailing social biases (Libretexts, 2021). Thus, the process of ageing is a result of biological, psychological, and chemical processes and mental factors provide a window into understanding the complexities and changes at the crux of ageing.

As people age, they undergo a number of changes and adjustments that can significantly affect their mental health landscape. New mental health challenges can arise from physical health problems or major life changes associated with ageing. That's why it's important for people to prioritise their mental health as they age. One prominent problem is the emergence of feelings of hopelessness and isolation. Especially after retirement, people experience a decrease in social relationships, which leads to deep loneliness and depression. In addition, retirement can act as a catalyst for identity loss, especially for those who have lost their sense of self-worth due to their

work or caregiving responsibilities (Spini & Jopp, 2014). This loss becomes a dual-edged sword, serving as both a cause and symptom of depression. Additionally, the physical toll of ageing, including chronic pain and health challenges, contributes to mental exhaustion, anxiety, and depression. Certain conditions, such as Parkinson's or strokes, directly impact mental health, with medication side effects further influencing emotional well-being. The fear of ageing, illness, or death amplifies the emotional burden, particularly for those confronting health issues, as anxiety about losing independence or the inevitability of death takes a toll (Rupprecht et al., 2021). Moreover, the loss of loved ones becomes increasingly prevalent with age, and while grieving is a natural process, the emotional effects can linger.

Engaging in meaningful activities becomes crucial for emotional well-being, yet many face difficulties finding their purpose in life. Financial wellness poses another substantial challenge, with rising healthcare costs and financial instability affecting retirees' ability to maintain their standard of living, causing stress and anxiety. Mobility can also become increasingly challenging due to physical limitations, impacting daily activities. Changes in daily life and lifestyle due to age-related physical and cognitive changes can lead to a loss of independence and the need for help with routine tasks (Fike, 2018). Cognitive decline and brain health are also important issues affecting thinking and decision making. Responding to these challenges is critical to ensuring a better quality of life for an ageing population.

The natural process of ageing is impacted by lifestyle decisions, environmental variables, and genetic predisposition. While everyone's cells degrade with age, because of the benefits and drawbacks of social and physical circumstances, people age differently. The rate at which people age is largely determined by their genetic predisposition. A person's diet, level of exercise, and use of alcohol and tobacco products all affect how old they get. Additionally, living in toxic or

highly polluted environments can hasten ageing. Ageing is also impacted by social contexts, such as having access to high-quality healthcare and strong social relationships.

Age-related diseases such as cardiovascular disease, neurodegeneration and cancer are emerging as leading causes of death in industrialised countries. Several environmental, demographic, biological, behavioural, and social factors determine the development and onset of age-related diseases (ARDs). While it remains challenging to assess the cumulative effect of environmental influences on human ageing, growing evidence indicates that both ARDs and non-pathological ageing processes are driven by environmental influences. Plagg and Zerbe (2020) examine the influence of various environmental factors, including air, climate, water, soil, urban green, social, and individual environments, on common ARDs and other life-limiting pathologies. Understanding the interactions between these factors is of major public health relevance, as it is crucial to develop preventive strategies to support healthy ageing. ARDs are generally thought to be triggered and develop around age-related physiological decline. In addition, mental factors such as stress, anxiety and depression significantly affect a person's physical health and quality of life as they age, as they can lead to feelings of hopelessness, leading to deterioration, poor food choices and lack of self-care. This can increase vulnerability to illnesses and diseases, accelerating the ageing process. Chronic stress can over-activate the body and stress response system, leading to increased inflammation and risk of chronic disease. Mental factors also weaken an individual's immune system, making them more susceptible to infections and illnesses. These feelings can lead to social isolation, withdrawal from activities, and a lack of motivation to engage in meaningful experiences. Therefore, maintaining a positive mindset is crucial as one ages, as it can have a significant impact on one's physical, emotional and psychological health.

Ageing can be categorised into biological, psychological, and social ageing. Biological ageing refers to the natural changes in the human body such as in the immune system, digestion, and vital organs. It can be managed by maintaining a healthy weight, regular exercise, and consuming fresh foods. Psychological ageing is related to behaviour and perception, affecting problem-solving, emotions, and subjective reactions. It can be managed by having healthy emotional outlets and receiving support for life changes. Social ageing refers to growing older within a social context, and how individuals are impacted by social factors. It encompasses the experiences, roles, and relationships that people encounter as they progress through different stages of life.

Social exclusion as a phenomenon is linked to factors including exclusion from work and discrimination. It reduces opportunities to contribute to society and the stress of social exclusion can negatively impact personal relationships, leading to social isolation. The participation of vulnerable social groups, such as the elderly, in economic, social and political life has decreased, as has access to education, work and resources. Lack of economic independence due to meagre pensions, health issues, lack of family support, inadequate housing, and inability to adapt to modern lifestyle can lead to social isolation and exclusion. Reducing this social exclusion requires effort from the elderly, their close ones, and society as a whole through better understanding of elderly needs and skills.

Samarakoon et al. (2011) examined potential factors that may accelerate the ageing process, such as dietary habits, lifestyle, occupation, and mental state, surveying 120 individuals aged 30-60 showing signs of premature ageing, with most participants being middle or lower class women who were married, had secondary education, and were engaged in physically demanding jobs. Many had constipation, low digestion, and vata-kapha constitution. Factors like

sedentary lifestyle, excessive salt/sour intake, smoking, and stress were common. Analysis found insomnia, depression, memory loss, and skin/hair problems potentially linked to dhatu (tissue) depletion. Thus, means to attain healthy ageing could point to adopting a stress-free lifestyle enriched with moral codes of conduct and healthy dietary habits.

Social prejudices have also been found to have a profound impact on ageing, and studies show that adults with disabilities experience frequent mental distress more often than adults without disabilities, due to societal biases and discrimination. These inequalities are exacerbated by public health issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic which impacted individuals' mental well-being, and there is a need for programs funded by CDC that focus on improving quality of life for people with disabilities through inclusive health and wellness activities (CDC, 2023). Societal inequalities have a profound impact on mental health, with certain groups facing higher levels of stress, discrimination, and limited access to resources, particularly among the elderly population. Older women are often less happy and at higher risk of developing mental health problems than men (Mahmoodi et al., 2022). This is influenced by factors like gender discrimination, unequal access to healthcare, disproportionate caregiving responsibilities, and higher rates of chronic illnesses. Addressing these systemic inequities can help create a more inclusive and positive environment for vulnerable groups.

Healthy ageing involves taking care of both physical and mental health, engaging in preventive healthcare, and developing adaptive strategies to navigate key challenges (Yen et al., 2022). It includes embracing the opportunities that come with age and making the most out of the later stages of life. According to research supported by the National Institute on Aging, healthy ageing involves adequate exercise, diet, sleep, limiting alcohol, participating in social activities, and seeking medical care to ensure better physical, cognitive, and mental health.

The essay's main points centre on how ageing is a multifaceted process that involves social, psychological, and biological aspects. It is a complex process influenced by genetic, environmental, and mental factors. The biological perspective explores the impact of molecular and cellular damage on physical and mental capacity, while the psychological perspective delves into the challenges individuals face in their mental health landscape as they age. Social constructions of age reflect prevailing biases associated with being "young" or "old," shedding light on social exclusion and inequalities. Therefore, it is important to examine ageing from a multidisciplinary lens so as to develop nuanced strategies to support healthy ageing and create a more inclusive society. The multifaceted nature of ageing calls for a comprehensive approach that addresses not only physical but also mental and social well-being.

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