

## Chapter 3

# Positive Psychology and Aging

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The present chapter will help in understanding the role of positive psychology and intervention in approaching towards a healthy aging. Aging is inevitable. The clock cannot be turned backwards. At first glance, it seems that generally the growing population enjoy what they face which is true to a certain extent but at the same time it is important not to overlook or discount the stresses they face when they start to age. How they age depends how they look at their life. Positive intervention has its effect in all ages. Taking the help of positive psychology as a primary prevention can help eliminating various effects of aging. In the same way, it can also help in reducing the exiting trouble occurring in elderly. By taking preventive steps, one can take care of the body and the mind, and that can help stave off some of the devastating illnesses associated with age and live a full, meaningful and energetic life. Elderly person must acknowledge that their roles in life will change as their former lifestyles are replaced by new schedules, approaches and relationships.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Aging is a gradual and slow process and generates significant changes in one's life. A person completes all the responsibility that comes in their way, completes education, work, raises children, retire from work and so on. At first glance, it seems that generally they enjoy what they face which is true to a certain extent but at the same time it is important not to overlook or discount the stresses they face when they start to age. Many a times these changes can be discouraging and may lead to feelings of insecurity and loss of self-worth. How they age depends how they look at their life. Positive psychology has its significant role to play in the process of aging and helps in overcoming various challenges that they face. Elderly person must acknowledge that their roles in life will change as their former lifestyles are replaced by new schedules, approaches and relationships.

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Worldwide, the population is ageing rapidly. World Health Organization (WHO), (2016) report says that between 2015 and 2050, the proportion of the world's population over 60 years will nearly double from 12% to 22%. The share of India's population aged 60 and above is projected to rise from 8% in 2010 to 19% in 2050, according to the United Nations Population Division (United Nations, 2011). This phase comes not only as an additional number to a person's life but as a chapter with significant contributions from the surroundings. The higher the positive environmental inputs, the better the outcomes. There is a slow decline in the overall functioning of the body system as the person ages. They are more likely to experience several changes and disabilities at the same time (WHO, 2015). In 2011, approximately 22.7 million (62%) of community-dwelling older adults in the United States aged  $\geq 65$  years had at least one basic functional disability (National Center for Health Statistics, 2013). It is that life-cycle stage where individuals are forced to face life's most stressful experiences. They become more sensitive to criticism, become emotionally weak and dependent. However, there are some factors like lack of economic security, loneliness, loss of loved ones and limited social interactions that adversely affect aging process. However, positive psychology contributes significantly to the outcome of aging process. It focuses on the potentials and optimal functioning of human beings. The approach of positive psychology is not towards fixing problems, instead focuses on exploring things that make life worth living. This is not a distinct field, but rather a distinct way of viewing the human conditions. It focuses on people as having the potential to thrive given the right skills, strengths and social context (Kashdan & Ciarrochi, 2013).

It consists of interventions for promoting resilience, positive emotions, engagement, meaning, curiosity and social connectedness (Ciarrochi & Kashdan, 2013; Parks & Biswas-Diener, 2013).

The Gerodynamics/ Branching theory of aging explains about the branching behavior of an individual at the psychological, biological or social level of functioning. As an example, traumatic life events may result in lower order structures and a healthy life style may result in higher order structures, and consequently higher and lower probabilities of dying respectively. However, it may not hold true for everyone. There are exceptions. Some people are strengthened by illness, and divorce may have a positive rather than a negative effect on mental health in terms of life expectancy and quality of life for some people (Schroots, 1996). Similarly, in a theoretical continuum, with severe mental illness on the left and optimal human thriving on the right, Seligman pointed out that previous research had focused on the left half of the curve and that the right side of the curve mostly had been neglected. He focuses on more to mental health than the absence of mental illness. This field is dedicated to the rigorous scientific study of "strengths, well-being and optimal functioning" (Duckworth et al., 2005) and flourishing (Keyes & Haidt, 2003). Thus, aging with positive psychology helps a person to live a healthy life with a healthy approach.

## **AGING PROCESS**

Tornstam (1989) suggested that the process of living into old age that is human aging visualizes a general potential towards gerotranscendence: that is a shift in metaperspective from a materialistic and rational vision towards a more cosmic and transcendent vision. This is normally followed by an increase in life satisfaction. Thus, there is a need to understand the basic requirements of elderly. This phase of aging has become much more a social phenomenon rather than merely a being a biological one. This process depends upon various components. It is a multidimensional construct where self-perception and attitude plays an essential role. The term "self-perceptions of aging" has been increasingly used to refer to adults'

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