Life Course Perspective

Aging must be understood in the context of the entire life history in order to make sense of later life.

- Early life experiences influence later life outcomes
- Biological, social, psychological, historic and economic factors shape human development

Examples:

Having a child at 25-26 vs at 35-36:
- short-term – ability to buy a house, higher education, career advances
- long-term – saving for retirement vs. supporting the child - potential of adult child as caregiver

Children in homes with domestic violence are more likely to have mental health issues later in life
Transitions – role changes
(e.g., getting/losing a full-time job, health crisis, becoming a mother)

Counter-transitions – change effected by others
(e.g., becoming a grandparent, widow, becoming a caregiver)

Trajectory – series of transitions

Bernice Neugarten Study in 1960s --

Asked people 40-70 years about timing of life events

“Age-norms” are embedded in cultural belief systems

Today’s circumstances have changed

Relevance of Neugarten’s study for today?

Assumptions:
-- Middle age men to be at their “prime” years
-- Women accomplishing with their families.

Currently,
• More than 70% women working
• People are having children later
• Fewer children
• Staying in education longer
• Starting jobs in later years
Browning and Laumann study (1997)

Women who were sexually abused as children…

• Had sex at earlier age
• Had more sexual partners
• More likely to have sexually transmitted diseases

Gender Issues in Life Course

• Gender is an important characteristic of individuals
• Nature vs. Nurture
• Gender – socially constructed to certain extent

Historically, life course has been gendered

Men:
• began working after school
• work full time until retirement

Women:
• life dominated by domestic tasks
• work outside home secondary to domestic work

[exception: farm setting, where women’s work directly contributed to family income]
Late 20th Century

- Gendered public/private sphere distinction broke down
- Women much more into paid workforce
- However, workplace still dominated by males
- Unpaid work at home undervalued

Retirement has a different meaning for women

When does a woman retire if she is a full-time homemaker?

Also, domestic work continues for a woman working full-time.

Overall:
Life course continues to be gendered, but in a different and nuanced way than in the past
Gender wage gap:

Full-time full-year employment:

Women earn 72.5% of what men earn
1967 the figure was 58.4%

Why?

Less than half of the gap is due to the different wage-determining characteristics between men and women, such as:

Education
Work experience
Industry

Rest of the wage gap – attributed to gender discrimination

Gap is smaller for younger workers than for older workers

Women’s increasing educational attainment –
grounds for optimism about the gender wage gap

Greater likelihood of working part-time
-- about 30% of women work part time vs. 11% of men
-- part time work tends not to have pension benefits

Labour force segregation:

Women and men tend to work in different occupations

Women are concentrated in relatively few types of jobs
E.g., nursing, secretarial work, teaching, etc.
more “help” oriented professions

Men concentrate on “do” oriented jobs
Not necessarily “good” jobs, e.g., manual-labour intensive work

Men are more likely to be found as owners and/or managers
Household work: Which job is whose?

Mopping floors, Woman’s Work.
Emptying the big mop bucket into the sink and filling the bucket with clean water and soap, Man’s Work.

Cooking is always Woman’s Work, unless you are talking about Grilling.
That is Man’s Work.
Bringing the meat outdoors on a platter for the Man to Grill, Woman’s Work.
Bringing the cooked meat indoors after grilling, Man’s Work.

All indoor cooking is Woman’s Work, unless a jar lid needs opened. That is Man’s Work.

Taking out the garbage, Man’s Work.
Taking out the garbage that contains diapers, Woman’s Work.

Washing the outside of the car, Man’s Work.
Cleaning the inside of the car, Woman’s work.
Changing a tire, Man’s Work, unless he can get AAA to do it.
Calling AAA, Woman’s Work.

Washing windows... this one was tricky... inside of the windows, Woman’s Work.
If she needs a ladder, then the Man holds the ladder for her while she washes the inside of the windows.
Outside of the windows, Man’s work. And he doesn’t need help holding the ladder.

Why is this difference?

Armstrong and Armstrong study (1994)

Three possible reasons:

1. Biological differences between men and women
   E.g., physical strength
   But, brute strength is needed in very few jobs

2. Social construction of appropriate jobs for men and women
   Ideas transmitted across generations and socialization

3. Home and work intersecting stronger for women
   • Flexible hours
   • Marginal jobs
Marriage and Cohabitation

Women tend to marry men who are older than they are.

Median age for first marriage:

- Men – 29 years
- Women – 27 years

*Mating Gradient* – age when people marry and resulting effects

Younger spouse (wife in most cases) have fewer resources:

- less schooling
- less job experience
- less income

Small differences accumulate over time

- Husbands job given priority for family finance
- Couple may move because of husband’s job

Women are much more likely to experience widowhood.

In 65+ widower : widow = 1: 5

Reasons:

- Women outlive men
- Women marry older men
- Higher rates of remarriage among widowers
Family Life Course of Today’s Seniors (75+):

• Parents of baby-boomers
• Grew up in gendered social structure
• People married at relatively young age
• 3 children on average

Family Life Course of Today’s Seniors:

• Divorce was not common
• Most marriage ended with death of husband
• Women’s limited role in the paid labour force
• Expectation that men would “work” and women would look after the home and people in it
• When widowed, women tended to fall into poverty

In 1970s when today’s seniors were middle-aged:

Things started to change

• Large scale increase in women’s labour force participation
• Fertility started to decrease
• Age at marriage began to increase

Overall:
Decrease in gendered division of labour and increase in women’s opportunities/life options
Intersection of family and work life course:
They do not intersect very well
Women are still primarily homemakers and carers
Workplace is based on one-earner (male) model
Women make personal accommodations
  e.g., fewer children, lowering homecleaning standards,
  market substitutes (homecleaning service, fast food
  working part time, refusing promotion

Workplaces:
Care of children and elders are not time-based
Most workplaces do not provide child care
Some employers are beginning to recognize the
family-work conflict
Responses: flex time, family related leaves, child care

Issues for the future --
  • Govt. cutback in social services – reinforces women’s
    obligation for care
  • Low fertility – fewer children to assist at the time of frailty
  • Family life course of tomorrow’s seniors are
    much more diverse than today’s seniors
  • Proportionately more of tomorrow’s older women
    will have a life course involving paid labour
Aging and Ethnicity

Ethnicity – ancestral origin, homeland, racial and cultural background

Ethnicity versus culture?

Major defining factors:
• Language
• Food
• Beliefs
• Religious practices
• Values
• Holidays

Ethnicity

Canada is a multicultural society

30% of 65+ are from different ethnic groups

Ethnicity influences aging through culture, language, lifestyle, living arrangements, family support, ethno-specific health and social services

Differences within same ethnicity:
Immigrants with South-Asian descent

Why study aging and ethnicity?

1. Aging experience is partly constructed by ethnicity/culture
   • value of independence
   • family obligations/filial piety
   • access to care services
   • etc.

2. Important to understand the effect of aging vs. culture
   e.g., physical activity in seniors
   – is it culturally defined?

3. Implications for policy and practice
   e.g., provision of culturally competent health care, community outreach programs, etc.
Immigration

Age of entry may affect ability to adopt language of new country (age 30-40s vs 50-60s)

In 2001 -- 29% of 65+ were immigrants

Majority have grown old in Canada, relatively few have come to Canada as old people.

“Visible Minority” – Demographic category used by Statistics Canada and “Employment Equity Act”

Defined by the Canadian Employment Equity Act as "persons, other than Aboriginal people, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.

7% of current 65+ is Visible Minority

2006 Census: 16.2% of the total population is visible minority

Largest groups of visible minority:
  1.3 million South Asian
  1.2 million Chinese.

Changing Patterns of Immigration

First half of century -- Great Britain, France, etc.
Shift from the 1960s – more immigrants from Asia

1999: Europeans: 21%
  Asia and Pacific : 51%
  Africa and Middle East: 18%

New cohorts will be more diverse.

By 2017 the South Asian and Chinese population will reach 3-4 million.
In Metro Vancouver (2006):

31% of 65+ were visible minorities
56% were Chinese (56%)
24% were South Asian (24%)

Majority (88%) arrived as Family Class immigrants

Between 2002 and 2006, 65% of foreign-born older adults arrived in B.C. without official language ability

Healthy Immigrant Effect

Immigrants have better health behaviours and better self-reported health than Canadian-born or longer-term immigrants

But, they lose this advantage over time

Prevalence of chronic diseases in Chinese elders same as older Canadian population in BC (Chappell et al. 1997)

Immigrant older adults have poorer health than long-term immigrants and the Canadian-born population
Double or Multiple Jeopardy Hypothesis
Perception that being old and minority results in Double Jeopardy or increased disadvantage (or triple: ethnic, elderly, female)
Possible inequalities (housing, education, income) expected to be reflected in lower psychological well-being, less income, poorer health, etc.
Some evidence support this hypothesis

The Opposite View: The Buffer Hypothesis
Ethnicity as “compensation”
Ethnic group provides resources that --
Assist with aging
Can be used to resist the negativity of ageism
Ethnic identity, ethnic networks, social capital

Assimilation Theory
Technology, urbanization and exposure to dominant culture effect –
Minority groups will assimilate and lose their ethnic identities to a “melting pot” with the dominant group
In reality --many levels of assimilation/acculturation
Elders manage ethnic identity in the face of aging

Change from first generation to second and third generations

Data on foreign-born Chinese (average age 55) coming to Vancouver and Victoria:

• 49.3% stated they felt more Canadian than Chinese
• 36.9% felt more Chinese than Canadian
• 14.1% felt equally Chinese and Canadian

Assimilation theories lost some grounds –

Wide variations between and within ethnic groups

Pluralism:

Suggests that ethnic groups retain a separate identity and still manage to live amicably in the Canadian community

E.g., maintenance of religious/language education

Canadian multicultural mosaic – values diversity

Modified Assimilation

Separates different aspects of cultural assimilation:

-- cultural assimilation: change dress, diet, language
-- structural assimilation: immigrants entry into political, economic, religious, educational systems of host,
Age-Leveling Hypothesis:

- Age-effects cut across all racial and ethnic lines leveling out inequalities in earlier life
- Some support for income and self-rated health
- Little support for psychological well-being
- Minority elders reported higher levels of psychological well-being
- Social psychological processes of group identification
- Important indicator of well-being in ethnic seniors
- Little evidence to support this hypothesis

Visible minority and First Nations elders live in larger sized households than do their counterparts

- Chinese seniors are less likely to live alone
  - 11% of 65+ live alone
  - All immigrant seniors: 25%
  - Canadian born seniors: 29%

Intergenerational households common in Chinese families

- In Greater Vancouver and Victoria, about half of the Chinese Elderly lived with at least one child (Gee, 1999)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5DeRZ9yfbk
Generational Shift in Ethnic Communities

Each succeeding generation appears less ethnic in thought and behaviour than its predecessors

Both parents working outside – a challenge to take care of grandma/grandpa

Ethnic elders’ changing perceptions in about living in seniors’ housing, assisted living or residential care

Implications for Policy and Practice
(e.g., jobs, access to healthcare, housing)

Challenges/Barriers include:

• Language
• Lack of knowledge of services
• Ethnically sensitive services and professionals
• Transportation,
• Affordable housing
• Financial services

Implications for Policy and Practice

Training programs for health care professionals to increase their “cultural competency”

Targeted health care outreach programs for ethnic seniors

Language support in health care settings

Ethno-specific supportive housing and residential care facilities
Resources in Metro Vancouver for Immigrant Seniors:

S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
(The United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society)

Services:

• Settlement and Public Education
• Family and Youth Counselling
• Business Training and Development
• Employment
• Adult Day Centre
• Long-Term Care Facility

SUCCESS: Senior's Project

Objectives

To know more friends and to build up the mutual help network;
To help access to community resources and mainstream services;
To learn about community development;
To help adjust to the new environment;
To integrate into Canadian life

Activities

(a) Seminars and workshops, topics include community life, social issues, cross-cultural understandings, and life skills
(b) Healthy exercise and fitness
(c) Community orientation, community visit, and outdoor activities
(d) Social gathering and community functions
(e) Birthday parties, game days, karaoke, and festival celebration
P.I.C.S.
(Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society)
South-Asian Community oriented services and programs
Three Seniors’ Centres
“Guru Nanak Niwas” – Seniors Independent Housing and Assisted Living

Facilities for Seniors from Various Ethno-cultural Communities in Greater Vancouver:
• Villa Carital
• Simon K.Y. Lee Seniors Care Home
• Finnish Care Home
• Nikkei Home
• Guru Nanak Niwas
• Finnish Home
• German Canadian Home
• Others