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Production of Courseware

-Content for Post Graduate Courses

Paper No. : 15 Bio-social Gerontology

Module : 14 Productive Ageing



Development Team

Principal Investigator

Prof. Anup Kumar Kapoor
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi

Paper Coordinator

Dr. Rashmi Sinha
Faculty of Anthropology, School of Social Sciences,
IGNOU, Delhi

Content Writer

Ms. Urvashi Gupta & Dr. Meenal Dhall
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi

Content Reviewer

Dr. Satwanti Kapoor (Retd Professor)
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi

Description of Module	
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Learning Objectives:

1. To understand the notion of productive ageing
2. To accept and encourage the concept of productive ageing in India
3. To appreciate the role of productive ageing
4. To examine the idea critically

Introduction

Old age is characterized by declining health, limited mobility, stress and anxiety, feeling of seclusion and loneliness. Ageing is also related with insufficient social and economic resources, besides the health-related issues and concerns that may arise due to retirement, living on fixed income, falling health, or death of spouse. Taking care of the economic security and fulfilling all the needs related to health and long-term care of older people pose great challenge for population aging.

Apart from taking a problem-focused approach to deal with all these challenges, one must also consider about the solution-focused approach – a social development approach. This is the reason strategies, policies and educational approaches that promote health are now shifting their focus towards the aging population more. Not only this but numerous activities have also started being conducted in senior centers, congregate housing, life care facilities, retirement villages and at every possible place. However, prolonged health and wellbeing of the elderly remains a big problem for the health care institutions.

For maintaining health and acquiring further old age in a self-dependent manner, these days more of adults, specifically older adults are gaining knowledge, becoming aware; and are readily making themselves available to make changes in their behavioral aspects regarding physical activity, dietary habits, etc. Interventions made for social and behavioral aspects could successfully enhance eating habits and nutritional status along with physical fitness levels, thus ultimately helping to achieve active ageing.

What is productive ageing?

Productive ageing constitutes the promotion of positive attitudes and behavior towards the elderly and ageing process, using strategies to increase the well-being and quality of the life if the senior citizens. The theory behind productive aging is that the capacity of older adults must be better developed and bring out to be utilized in activities that could make economic contributions to society. So, any activity by an elderly that can produce a good or service for society, whether paid or unpaid, could be addressed under productive ageing. So, it stresses upon the:

- opportunities

- engagements
- contributions
- capacities
- choices

Productive aging could be understood as the contribution made by elderly population in different activities benefitting to generation of goods/ services or developing the capacity/technology to produce goods or services. The activities might be inclusive of full-time or part-time employment, formal or informal volunteering, grand-parenting, or care-giving to the infants or children in their early childhood phase to the family members and friends. Demographic realities and conditions put pressure upon job markets, public service sectors, families; society could therefore, utilize a greater portion of older adults who can be productively engaged as workers, caregivers, or volunteers. Under correct circumstances, this increased engagement would lead to multiple positive ends such as offsetting the financial strains of a large older population, adding to the betterment of families and society, maintaining health and economic well-being of the older adults.

Positive/ productive ageing could be encouraged successfully by the community development processes. The productive ageing strategies tend to appreciate the skills and contributions of the senior citizens that they can make towards their community. Developing that capacity at a community level demands knowledge of processes that could support the elderly population to spend their lives with dignity. Engagement of the elderly in a prolific manner is not new in the history of mankind. Actually, the trend of getting retired or disengagement from productive activities is a very recent practice commonly observed as a part of the so called 'industrialized' societies. However, in agricultural societies, till now the older people are observed continuously being involved in productive activities of the family farms throughout their life.

Interpretation of the West about productive ageing

In the west, the term productive ageing was first used by Robert Butler in 1982 to promote the notion of change in the picture of elderly from the negative idea of dependency that must take place from the

present point of time onwards. In China itself, the notion of productive engagement of older people was recorded more than 2,500 years ago. It is taken as an asset in the Chinese culture to provide older people with opportunities to add to their families and societies. The concept of productive aging was introduced into the Chinese communities in a string of conferences in Shandong (2009) and Beijing (2011), as well as in Taipei (2012) and Hong Kong (2012). Even the first Chinese book on productive aging was published after the first conference in Shandong and is an up-coming concept and practice in Chinese societies.

Over the last few years, public discussion over productive ageing has slowly shifted from advocating the productive ageing issue to scientific research that could document the rate, type, and intensity of productive ageing activities. Also, it is argued that such research must identify the factors affecting participation in productive ageing activities along with demonstrating the effects of all of these activities on the well-being of the older people. Majority research on productive aging in the West has concentrated on elderly population volunteering for ageing in a productive manner because they believe that volunteering improves the lives of older people and also strengthens the society . Also, researchers are trying to find the optimal level of activities meant for productive ageing that could help in the well-being of older people and mechanism that may lead to positive effects on productive aging activities in the recent years.

The two terms- positive ageing and successful ageing are often used interchangeably. These two terms have been defined loosely to include civil engagements such as volunteering, healthy lifestyle and good health, good psycho-social adjustment, financial security in old age.

Developing a positive perception about ageing

Over a few decades concept of healthy/successful/positive/active/productive ageing have emerged. During 1980s the notion of healthy ageing was promoted by the World Health Organization, where it focused upon ‘the potential to overcome the problems of older age through medical advances’. Along with productive ageing, it also stressed upon active ageing with an increasing focus on the economic implications of population ageing. Productive ageing considers older people as a resource and therefore emphasize on importance of their ongoing participation in society. Active ageing that was promoted by

the United Nations (1999), suggests that stereotyping of older people as weak and dependent could be challenged as active older people became more visible and better integrated into society. Concepts of 'successful' and 'positive' ageing also take into consideration physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, in addition to psychological adjustment and autonomy, and also incorporate a focus on the rights of the older people. Good health, independence, intellectual stimulation, self-fulfillment are some of the valued outcomes of productive ageing.

Promoting attitudes which respect and value older people

For productive ageing it is instrumental that the societies address ageist attitudes to value older people, award them, provide them with respect and dignity and acknowledge their contributions. For example the Australian strategy calls upon governments, business, media and communities to promote and support more positive images and attitudes towards ageing and older people.

Recognizing and supporting elderly' participation and contribution

There must be opportunities for older people to participate and contribute in the way that they want to, the manner they choose. However, the goals link such opportunities to paid work (economic activity) or community contribution (volunteering), with major emphasis on the former. While complete participation might be prevented due to lack of access to resources and facilities, which is indicative of the need to examine the policies or changing the attitudes of society towards the elderly. Also there could be limitations based on ill health or frailty while working over in the direction of maintaining productive ageing.

Accessibility to education and training opportunities are closely related with efforts to extend workforce opportunities. Increasing the thrust upon opportunities for personal growth and community participation can work comparatively much rapidly than others like increasing educational opportunities, although it is instrumental at the same time.

Role of family in productive ageing

Elderly is considered an important but ignored resource in many families across cultures and nations. However, a family could play a crucial role in the elderly care and support, worldwide. A family has always been recognized as the best institution for giving care and support to the aged in India. The elderly family members are even honored and respected in traditional Indian families. But after industrialization and urbanization, due to rapidly changing lifestyles, fewer intergenerational interactions and work load, the identity of joint families is somewhere getting missing out and nuclear families are emerging at their place. However, at the same time just a family must not be considered as the only unit that can fulfill the needs of the elderly. So, alternative care mechanisms and means must be explored and needed to be considered in such a case.

Need for productive ageing

A longer lifespan accompanied with successful ageing experience can be an ideal combination that can be achieved by constantly employing opportunities for health, security and participation. According to WHO productive/active ageing is a concept applicable to both individual and population groups, whereby the purpose is accomplished by optimizing the chances of health, security and participation, maintaining social, physical and mental well-being throughout the course of life, thereby improving their life as they get aged. This is achieved keeping in mind the needs, capacities and desires of the individuals with sufficient protection, security and care.

The notion of Productive/active ageing has been popularized by the World Health Organization according to which the elderly must be considered as a pool of human resource that has a high potential for national development. It is a common belief that the older population is useless and actually need to be spent for. However, majority of them everywhere continue to be an asset not only for the nation but also for their families. If we keep on treating them as 'non-productive' then we would be underestimating such a vast resource and experience. In such background, productive ageing policies and programmes are required to facilitate the seniors to work as per preferences and capacities, as they grow older. At the same time this would prevent/delay the discomforting phase in their lives that costs a lot to them, their families and the welfare system. It is important to acknowledge the productive

contribution of the older group in terms of their rich experience, support and guidance extendable to the young group also.

A healthy and active ageing could be managed by keeping count of the following aspects:

- health-care, well-being and social service system
- physical environment
- social environment
- economic factors
- behavioral factors
- personal factors
- cultural factors

Acceptance and encouragement of the concept of productive ageing is very important to be done in India, since its introduction. Elderly population in India is in a weak position due to inadequate financial and social security system.

- It could help to put off and postpone the onset of age-related diseases.
- It can contend with the stereotypic attitudes towards old age.
- The approach encourages independence, participation, dignity, care and active engagement with life for the elderly on both the individual as well as the societal levels.
- The share of the older age group is gradually increasing in the total population. It is therefore, important to pay attention and make sincere efforts to combat the situation, promoting the policies and programmes for the welfare of the senior citizens.
- For improving health at homes, work and in the community, it is instrumental to encourage strong supportive networks, good social relations and friendship ties.
- Living in compact neighborhoods can provide barrier free movements (a common limitation seen among the elderly population) and better social interactions.
- Accession to services and information give independence and a sense of security. Promoting independence and self-care also encourage healthy ageing.

Criticisms about the approach of productive ageing

- Shifting major focus upon independence and activity, the strategies and policies tend to underplay the experience and needs of people who suffer frailty and dependence in later life.
- The discussion over productive ageing or positive ageing fails to admit the significance of later life. This makes the society unable to think about and create a respected place for the old population in society.
- Under this notion older people are always portrayed as able to counteract the effects of ageing through personal efforts, identifying them as being responsible for their fate.
- The concept of productive ageing over-presents the image of elderly as active and healthy that for some may not be achievable. This consequently reduces the visibility of ‘old age’ and ‘risks’ enhancing a negative view of dependency and frailty.
- Over-promotion of the positive image may thus, result in insufficient attention being given to the needs of the older population in policy and planning and increased denial of ageing amongst individuals. This may result in individuals not prepared adequately for increasing dependency and may find it harder to adapt.
- The approach has also been criticized for an emphasis on economic activity that fails to incorporate notions such as work/life balance and does not deal with the societal benefits of recreational, creative and spiritual pursuits.
- The overall focus on workforce participation detracts from a holistic approach to wellbeing and reduces the visibility of those who by choice or circumstance are not enabled to do so.
- This approach may sometimes increase the risk of social exclusion amongst older people who are ‘economically inactive’.

Summary

Productive/active ageing demands regular participation in productive activity that gives individuals to accept responsibility for maintaining health and economic activity so that when they get aged and become older, they may remain independent, thereby reducing pressure over health-care and social

services. Elderly in good health and engaged in productive activities may be benefitted from increased opportunities about productive ageing if the strategies achieve their objectives. However, the approach might be problematic for those who are not, or those who could no longer be self-reliant and independent. Those who demand health and welfare services may be stigmatized and blamed for not making sufficient preparation or taking due responsibility for their health and wellbeing. The strategies must therefore provide an opportunity to improve the situation of older people in society by attending the negative effects of age discrimination and exclusion from opportunities to participate. However, some aspects of the underlying concepts of active, productive and positive ageing still remain questionable. Without broadening these concepts there is a risk that the weak, old might be further marginalized and it may be only the active old who get benefitted.

