



Case Study: Barbara

Introduction

In a world of ageing generations, it has come to attention that an increase in social exclusion, especially during late adulthood has emerged. Late adulthood is a phase where individuals show physical decline, ranging from ages 65 years old and above (Beyer & Lazzara, 2020). In my perspective, social exclusion is when an individual is prevented from being a part of society due to external factors, such as grief, communication, and lack of support. Other sources define social exclusion as a process that impedes one's ability to actively participate in society and is linked to mediocre health and decreased standards of life (Barnes, Blom, Cox, & Walker, 2006; Becker & Breham, 2009, as cited in Dahlberg & McKee, 2018). In later life, individuals are prone to developing social exclusion due to many factors, for example, based on the provided case study of Barbara, she experiences it as she is grieving the loss of her husband and was once fully dependent on him to provide needs in the form of companionship and her needs. This essay will explore the potential cognitive, social, and emotional effects of social exclusion as one continues development in their later life, how psychological developmental theories can inform us on social exclusion, and future implementation to reduce the occurrence of social exclusion during the late adulthood phase. The use of Erik Erickson's psychosocial theory will be implemented to future discuss the effects caused by social exclusion.

The Cognitive effects

Based on the case study of Barbara, she portrayed various consequences in terms of her cognitive ability. It has been informed that Barbara is going through a phase of social exclusion and this may be due to her recent loss of her husband. The possible cognitive effects encountered by individuals in Barbara's age group may be executive functioning, a sense of belongingness, and a sense of loss of identity and efficacy.

Executive function

Throughout our lifespan development, we are taught to master our executive functions such as problem-solving, attention, storing memories, and assisting in understanding complex problems as well as managing our social interactions (Cristofori et al., 2019). In terms of the case study, Barbara did manage to master them during her middle adulthood, nevertheless, after the passing of her husband, she faced difficulty in navigating them. Since she was mostly dependent on her husband, she never needed to get anything done by herself. Thus, during this moment, she can't manage her social interactions with her friends and family by herself. Being socially excluded has made Barbara challenge her abilities to form meaningful relationships and maintain them. However, studies have found that individuals in their later life tend to have positive and stronger social relationships compared to younger individuals (Luong et al., 2010).

Sense Of Belongingness

The case study provided mentioned that Barbara once felt seen by people in her community and was often asked about her well-being. Currently, she feels left out and the attention towards her has decreased, this could be a possible effect of social exclusion. Chen et al. found that individuals going through social exclusion exhibited higher levels of negative emotions and a stronger need for a sense of belonging in the community (2017). A sense of belonging is recognized as a feeling of a deep connection between society and individuals, which impacts one's behavioural outcome (Allen et al., 2021). Barbara's invitations were rejected by her friends, and as a result, she developed a sense of not belonging to society and this made her feel excluded. Thus, an increased need for belonging and this may affect her development throughout life. Another reason for the lack of belonging is the failure to build social relationships (Chen et al., 2017). It is known that Barbara was a former educator and she was well-known once, and yet she spent most of her time with her husband. This shows that Barbara failed to build a strong bond with her friends and family members.

Theory

According to Eric Erickson's psychosocial theory, individuals in the stage of late adulthood (Integrity vs Despair) are to have a reflection of life's accomplishments (Orenstein, 2022). However, according to Barbara's case study, it can be seen that she may be going through a phase of despair, which is also the cause of social exclusion. Erickson (1963), expressed the need for an individual during later life to ascertain that their past life experiences can fit into a "life puzzle" (as cited in van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2021). Barbara's past experiences with her community were amazing until her husband's passing. The potential of Barbara's feeling of despair may be due to her failure to take control of her executive functioning. Historically, based on the socioemotional selectivity theory (SST, Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999), it states that when an individual ages, they have set boundaries of time on who to socialise with and what to prioritise (as cited in Löckenhoff & Carstensen, 2004). Thus, looking into both perspectives of developmental theory, Erickson's theory looks into the definite state of what an individual may experience in their later life and SST elaborates on how it is common for older adults to reduce their social interactions and ways to improve their cognitive process.

Social Effects

The occurrence of social exclusion during later adulthood contributes to various social effects, which may or may not impact their social functioning and well-being. As we speak of Barbara, individuals in her age group must have a positive social belonging and connection with their surroundings. On the contrary, if she is being excluded or ignored from participating in social activities, the consequences may go beyond just feeling lonely or isolated.

Loneliness & Isolation

The National Health Service (NHS) highlights that individuals in the UK aged 75 and above are more susceptible to loneliness and over a million people go over a month not speaking to their friends, family, and neighbours (National Health Service, 2022). In the same way, her only son lives away and isn't able to visit her as frequently, and only gets occasional calls from him. Loneliness is stated to have 2 causal models, internal and

external factors, where external are commonly caused by social networks not being present, and internal, mainly psychological and personality issues (Singh & Misra, 2009). Moreover, a study made by Hansson et. al. (1987), found that a part of individuals experiencing loneliness is based on poor psychological adjustment, and discontentment with family and social relationships (as cited in Singh & Misra, 2009). The chances of Barbara feeling lonely can be either of the causal models, as she has been going through the loss of her husband and has also been rejected by her friends. Subsequently, researchers found that individuals may feel less lonely among someone their age or visiting a neighbour, instead of family members (Singh & Misra, 2009). Additionally, several researchers have found that a change in marital status has been a cause of heightened levels of loneliness (Aartsen & Jylha, 2011; Dahlberg et al., 2015; Dykstra et al., 2005; Nicolaisen & Thorsen, 2014; Tijhuis et al., 1999, as cited in Dahlberg et al., 2021). Despite being socially excluded and going through the effects of feeling lonely, Barbara took the opportunity to distract herself by gardening and reading.

Fatigue

Next, being socially excluded means being disregarded or rejected by the social population. As we age, it is common for individuals to feel tired. It was found that fatigue is one of the main indicators of ageing and in certain parts of the world, it indicates health issues (Su et al., 2022). As per Barbara's case, she indicated feeling cold and tired lately and goes to bed earlier than usual. A part of social exclusion is feeling left out, Barbara may seem to drift into isolation thus causing her to feel more restless than usual. Apart from this, isolation is also known as a significant stressor, and long-term isolation may cause future neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease (Shafighi et al., 2023).

Theory

Following the development of social exclusion amid the late adulthood phase, the concept of successful ageing has brought differing views. From the point of view of Rowe and Kahn, successful ageing is characterised by optimal psychological, physical, and social well-being in later life, without serious medical illnesses (Annele et al., 2019).

In terms of historical perspective, the disengagement theory proposed by Cumming and Henry (1961) explains the teleological and operational process of natural ageing consisting of physiological, psychological, and social changes that occur (Achenbaum & Bengtson, 1994). The theory further elaborates on how as people age, they tend to detach from earlier activities. To some extent, this may be true as Barbara shows her disinterest in continuing her dancing activities. Nonetheless, as further research has been made, and a more contemporary approach has been introduced, the continuity theory (1987) suggests the opposite. It argues that while making adaptive choices, older adults seek to maintain similar strategies used during their past encounters (Atchley, 1989). Despite going through social exclusion and experiencing fatigue and loneliness, Barbara was able to figure out an alternative way of keeping her entertained and fulfilled.

Emotional Effect

The chances of experiencing emotional effects from social exclusion in late adulthood can be profoundly impactful on their mental well-being and quality of life development in later years. As Barbara goes through exclusion in her later life, several effects may take place during her life development. Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and low self-worth are some of the few emotional effects of being socially excluded among individuals in their later life.

Depression & Anxiety

According to various studies, social exclusion has been linked to an increase in mental health issues among individuals in their later life. Researchers have also supported this, stating the prevalence of exclusion in women was higher, mostly those who are widowed, unemployed, and living alone (Hossain et al., 2022). Depression has been one of the common psychological causes worldwide and studies found that depression has been the main cause of disability and mortality among the population of individuals in their late adulthood (Zenebe et al., 2021). Social exclusion in late adulthood oftentimes causes loneliness, which is an indication of depression. Barbara has been excluded from participating in any social relationships, which may cause her to have negative thoughts and beliefs about herself. This can also contribute to feeling a vast

amount of anxiety. When exclusion occurs, individuals may begin to overthink the possible outcome of future events or situations, and if this continues over time it may lead to generalised anxiety. In contrast, based on a study done by Aslan & Kant (2022) they found that the Geriatric Anxiety Inventory and Social exclusion scale had a negative and significant relationship.

Low self-esteem & Self-worth

Social exclusion erodes people's confidence in themselves and their talents, reducing their feelings of self-worth while contributing to low self-esteem. When older individuals feel isolated or excluded from social relationships, they may develop negative attitudes about their worth and relevance, leading to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Chronic social exclusion can promote poor self-perceptions, resulting in a downward spiral of self-criticism and mistrust. Generally, an individual's self-esteem plays an important role in indicating to what extent they are accepted in society (Leary, Terdal, Tambor, & Downs, 1995, as cited in Allen et al., 2013). Studies also stated that certain structures regulating an individual's self-esteem concerning exclusion are known to be harmless, for instance, once social exclusion takes place, they tend to search areas where they may feel seen and valued (Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993, as cited in Allen et al., 2013).

Theory

Historically, Erikson's psychosocial theory (1963) plays a crucial role in explaining the transition of life. In connection with this case study, it specifies late adulthood, thus the last stage integrity vs despair would be further elaborated. Erikson's final stage signifies an individual's capability of going through their previous life accomplishments, intending to live a fulfilling life (Bishop, 2013). Based on the effects stated, it may not be entirely true but Barbara may have not fully accomplished her previous development causing her to spiral into depression and anxiety. Erickson termed ego integrity as having to accept past life experiences without unresolved issues (Bishop, 2013). Another essential point from a study suggested that the outcome of an individual from the last stage is significantly dependent on the previous 7 stages of Erickson's psychosocial

theory (Chen et al., 2021). Thus, this might answer the various emotional effects Barbara may be facing. Despite this, there have been contemporary views that may be explained further compared to Erikson's theory. The Identity process theory explains the 3 identity processes an individual experiences (Identity assimilation, Identity accommodation, and identity balance) (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). The study also found that individuals in their later life with high levels of identity accommodation reported the likelihood of engaging in negative self-evaluation and rumination, especially in women, which can lead to depression (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003).

How can negative effects be improved?

The majority of individuals in their late adulthood are susceptible to either one of the major mental health disorders or diseases. The World Health Organization (WHO), reported that over 14% of the older population goes through a mental disorder and the most common mental disorders among them are depression and anxiety (World Health Organization, 2023). Since Barbara's bereavement, she did not receive the support and care she needed from her social circle, thus the existence of social exclusion and feelings of loneliness. To reduce the effect during later life, it is suggested to promote social inclusion in their daily lives. This includes conducting community and support groups, providing volunteering opportunities tailored to older adults, and organising social activities such as Bingo Night, exercises, or any based on their interests. A study carried out by some Chinese researchers found a significant relationship between older adults' social participation and their mental health (Chen et al., 2022). Furthermore, another way to improve the negative effects of social exclusion would be to reduce ageism and discrimination. There has been an increase in ageism towards older adults, leading to a myriad of cognitive, social, and emotional issues. One key contribution to reducing these effects is to equip educational knowledge in society, to reduce negative biases and stereotypes (Burnes et al., 2019; Samara et al., 2013, as cited in Apriceno & Levy, 2023).

Conclusion

To sum up, as we age it is common for individuals like Barbara to experience social exclusion. Various effects in terms of cognitive, emotional, and social have profoundly made an impact during later life as she continues her lifespan development. Theories like Erickson's psychosocial stages have explained the importance of achieving the integrity vs. despair stage to evaluate life's choices. On the other hand, disengagement theory and continuity theory both explain contrasting perspectives on the development of an older individual. It states how as we age we tend to either stay on the same routines as past life or disengage from them. This explains how during late adulthood, feelings of disconnection and lack of meaningful connections take place thus leading to social exclusion. Being aware of the possible interventions of negative effects from social exclusion may assist those like Barbara to go through healthy ageing and overall improved well-being.

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