

**APPLYING PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY TO SUPPORT
WELLBEING IN OLDER ADULTS WITH DEMENTIA: A
FOCUS ON ERIKSON'S PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORY AND
BEHAVIOURAL APPROACHES IN CARE HOMES**

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1. Introduction

The psychological wellbeing is a key factor of the quality of life of older adults, especially when this population is placed in long-term care facilities where the age processes, loss of control, and social isolation may negatively affect the mental state. Dementia is one of the most prominent psychological health issues among people of the aged 65 and above, and is typified by gradual loss of recollection, thinking capacity, behaviour and effectiveness of conducting daily tasks. Dementia also increases confusion, emotional distress and communication problems among older adults as the condition progresses. It is, therefore, important that care professionals should embrace psychologically informed strategies in assisting such residents.

This report aims to discuss how two psychological theories, which are Psychosocial Theory (in particular the stage of Ego Integrity versus Despair) by Erikson and Behavioural Theory, could be utilized in a dementia care home to promote the wellbeing of the elderly. The report will discuss the context of care of the report, in detail, the two theories and how they can be practically applied.

2. Context: Dementia Care Home Setting

A home of dementia care is a facility that offers specialised round the clock care to older adults with different levels of cognitive impairment. These homes are usually surrounded by systematic routine, customized living quarters, and professionally trained personnel who provide help in personal care, medicine, mobility and emotional care (Dinius *et al.*, 2023). Even though they are secure and welcoming environments, residents are faced with possible psychological issues of confusion, anxiety, agitation, and loss of memory. Unmet needs or disorientation can also lead to behavioural challenges which could be wandering, repetitive behaviours or even aggression. Cognitive impairments, e.g. the poor reasoning and language deficits, make the day-to-day functioning even harder (Castellano-Tejedor and Cencerrado, 2024).

The psychological theory is very applicable in the interpretation of these behaviours and towards a better result. Using the theoretical knowledge, the care professionals would be in a better position to interpret the causes of distress underlying their distress, respond with empathy, and prevent wellbeing with specific interventions (Islam *et al.*, 2023). The knowledge of ageing processes, memory, and behaviour patterns will assist the staff in delivering evidence-based person-centred care.

3. Overview of Two Psychological Theories

3.1 Erikson's Psychosocial Theory (Ego Integrity vs Despair)

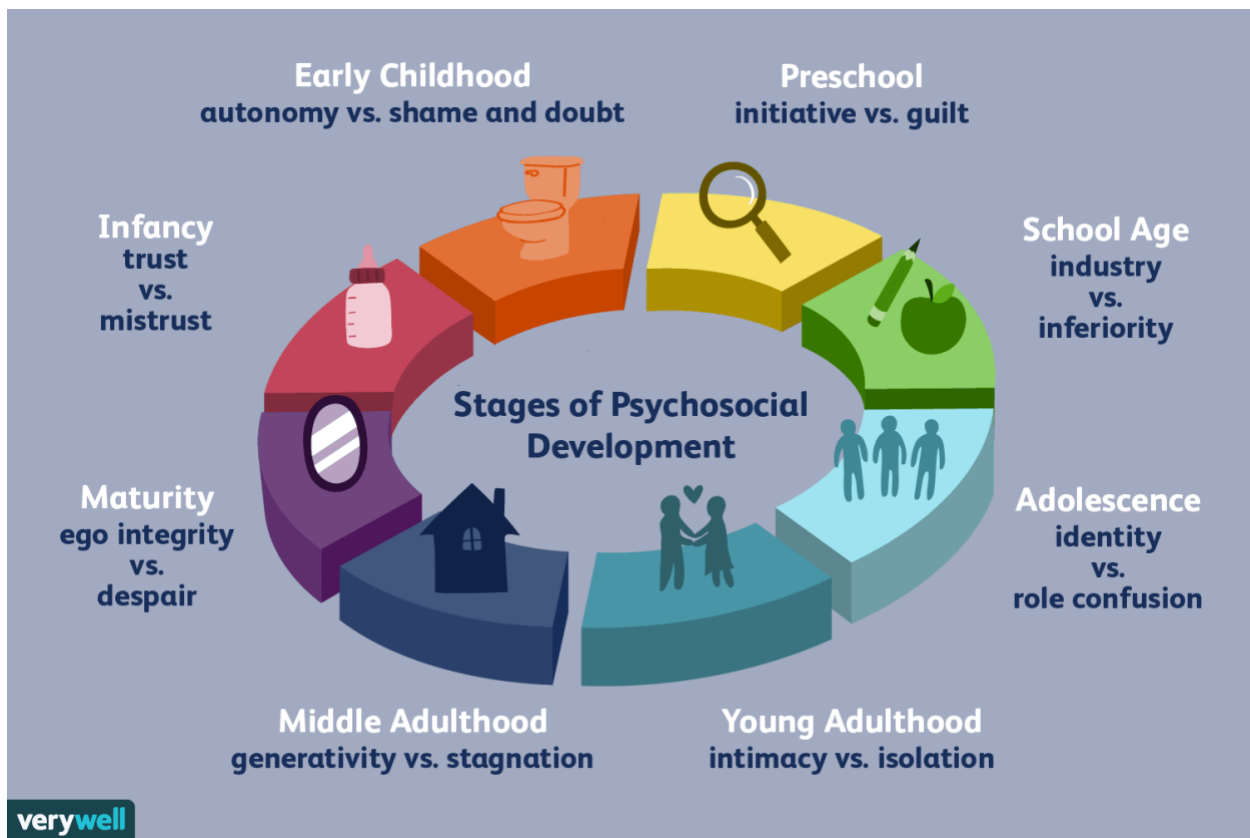


Figure 1: Erikson's Stages of Development

(Source: verywellmind, 2022)

The Psychosocial Theory by Erikson has illustrated eight stages of human development and the last stage, which is the Ego Integrity versus Despair, takes place during later adulthood. During this phase, elderly people of age 65 and older have an insight into their past life and see whether they have lived a fulfilling life (Stade *et al.*, 2024). This is Operation Ego Integrity, when the older adults come to terms with their life as it has occurred, which brings holiness in their personal experience. They can manifest themselves as wise, filled, and stable emotionally. On the contrary, Despair is the result of regretting the choices made in the past and not having something to be proud of or a conflict to be solved. This can result in sadness, frustration or anxiety especially at the point of facing the reality of ageing, loss and physical deterioration.

3.2 Behavioural Theory (Operant Conditioning)

The Behavioural Theory, especially, Operant Conditioning, highlights the fact that behaviour is reinforced, weakened, or influenced by consequences. Positive reinforcement involves the use of rewards which may be positive like praise, attention, or meaningful activities to promote desirable behaviours (Gkintoni *et al.*, 2022). Negative reinforcement or punishment can minimise the general unwanted behaviours, but in the dementia care ethical practice supportive and non-punitive approaches take a precedent. The Behavioural Theory also acknowledges that the environmental stimuli have an effect on the responses. Indicatively, loud sounds, new environments or lack of satisfaction to physical needs can trigger agitation or perplexities.

The Behavioural Theory can be applied in the treatment of dementia as well to understand the way in which older adults react to their environment and how behaviour acquired over a lifetime and continues despite losses of memory (Zhai *et al.*, 2023). Some of these actions might turn into habitual behaviors, whereas other actions might be a result of emotional disturbance.

4. Application of Theories in a Dementia Care Home

4.1 Applying Erikson's Theory in Dementia Care

The implications of the Psychosocial Theory developed by Erikson on dementia care is the facilitation of older adults to provide identity and emotional integrity in the face of memory deterioration. Care professionals also can assist residents by engaging in meaningful conversation, which can reaffirm them with their past experiences, relationships or accomplishments that mattered to them (Huang, 2022). Through reminiscence therapy, which involves the use of photographs, music, objects and familiar sensory stimuli, the residents are able to tap into long-term memories that tend to last long compared to short-term memory (Reynolds *et al.*, 2022). The ability to retain past and present with a sense of self can be offered by memory boxes that are set in the rooms of the residents and remind them of their personal possession (leading to positive emotions and continuity).

These habits are helpful in promoting emotional wellbeing since they decrease anxiety, improve mood, and allow social connection opportunities (Edwards *et al.*, 2023). Residents who feel valued and recognised will have more chances of enjoying ego integrity even when their concept diminishes. But there are also issues with the application of the theory of Erikson.

Care professionals may overcome these barriers by adopting more flexible communication styles, including the use of simpler language, giving additional time to responses, and non-verbal

communication (gestures or touch) (Saragih *et al.*, 2022). The short and spontaneous reminiscences may be built into everyday life and less formal sessions will be necessary. Caregivers should be provided with training to make certain that the importance of identity-centered care has an emotional value. Incorporating the ideas of Erikson into daily communication, the care home will be able to build an encouraging environment that fosters dignity and psychological well-being.

4.2 Applying Behavioural Theory in Dementia Care

Behavioural Theory provides a realistic concept of appreciation and management of behavioural changes in dementia. In order to promote cooperation and calm, the care staff can use positive reinforcement to promote behaviours that promote calmness and cooperation (Driscoll *et al.*, 2021). As a case in point, in situations where the resident is peaceful when giving personal care or is willing to engage in the activities, verbal praise or provision of a favourite activity can positively enforce such behaviour. By creating set routines, the residents gain a sense of security and thus alleviate any confusion and agitation (Bottomley and Lewis, 2024).

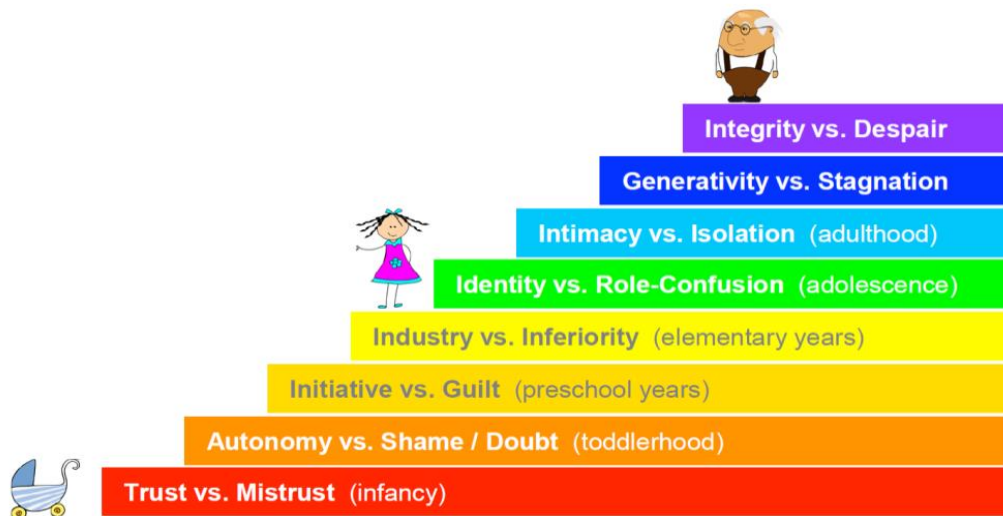


Figure 2: Psychosocial Theory

(Source: pressbooks, 2023)

ABC charts are often used by care teams, Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence, to establish the antecedent of the problematic behaviours, e.g. restlessness or aggression. Being aware of patterns helps the staff to make relevant modifications, like reduction of noise in the environment, reduction of instructions, or concerns on physical discomfort (Donaldson *et al.*, 2022). Certain

environmental adaptation such as low lighting, the presence of familiar stimuli and regular regimes of activity also influence behaviour and make it more comforting and predictable.

However behavioural approaches are faced with problems. Dementia behaviour is erratic and various personnel will react in a different manner (Bar-Tur, 2021). In addition, emotional needs that are not met can be the source of some behaviours and reinforcement will not be enough. Ethical considerations also arise since the behavioural approaches should not violate the autonomy and dignity of the residents.

It is possible to address these challenges by regularly training its staff, focusing on principles of person-centred care. Team meetings would help in getting consistent responses and culture-specific communication would help save the amount of respect (Qiu *et al.*, 2025). A combination of behavioural efforts and emotional support has ensured that the residents get compassionate effective care. This way, Behavioural Theory is an effective instrument of improving the everyday living experiences of the aging population at dementia care facilities.

5. Critical Evaluation

The Psychosocial Theory by Erikson and the Behavioural Theory provide valuable information in the support of older adults with dementia; nevertheless, both have their strong and weak sides. The theory by Erikson also gives a comprehensive explanation of emotional needs during late adulthood since it acknowledges the role of identity, review of life and development of meaning (Chen *et al.*, 2021). The practice believes in person-centered care and advanced dignity. However, since dementia severely affects cognitive performance and memory, it is possible that some of the residents will not be able to participate in life-review moments in a meaningful manner. The theory also assumes the existence of some reflective capacity which might also be impossible in severe stages of the condition.

The Behavioural Theory provides clear, practical techniques on how to manage day to day behaviours and deal with triggers. It gives employees the opportunity to change the environment and support positive behaviors with systematic and evidenced-based approaches (Aslan and Diniari, 2023). Its capacity is in its transferability into actual care practices, regardless of cognitive impairment. However, the limit of Behavioural Theory is that it may ignore the internal psychological or relational needs that shape behaviour because it is based on observable behaviour (Javed and Kakul, 2023).

6. Conclusion

This report has discussed the use of psychological theory in promoting effective practices of caregivers working with older adults who are aged 65 years and above in dementia care homes. Knowledge awareness in theoretical understanding of the care environment and challenges that the residents have puts even more emphasis on the importance of theoretical knowledge on the enhancement of psychological and behavioural outcomes. Psychosocial Theory by Erikson gives various insights into the emotional needs and identity whereas Behavioural Theory can offer practical strategies to support and shape positive behaviours. When combined together, these theories can help care workers to provide caring, stable and person centered care.

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