**SOCIALIZATION AND THE LIFE COURSE (Stages of Socialization)**

**Life course: “Sequence of socially defined roles that an individual enacts over the course of their lifetimes”**

Life course is a biological process. In this process there is a personal change from infancy through old age and death brought about as a result of the interaction between biographical events and social events. The series of major events, the stages of our lives from birth to death, may be called **life course.** Movement through life course is marked by a succession of stages by age

Analysts have tried to depict the typical stages through which we pass, but they have not been able to agree on standard division of the life course. As such life course is biological process, which has been divided into four distinct stages: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Life course stages present characteristic problems and transitions that require learning new and unlearning familiar routines. Through the process of socialization society tries to prepare its members for taking up the roles and statuses associated with life course stages. Each life course stage by age is also affected by other factors like social class, gender, ethnicity and human experience.

People's life experiences also vary depending on when, in the history of society, they were born. Some specific historical events like the creation of Pakistan, terrorist attacks of 9/11, economic prosperity/depression, war, or some other natural calamity (an earthquake, epidemic, and flood) may become significant in the personal development of individuals as well as their attitudes toward life and other people. Although childhood has special importance in the socialization process, learning continues throughout our lives. An overview of the life course reveals that our society organizes human experience according to age ­childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age.

**CHILDHOOD**

Despite increasing recognition of the entire life course, childhood (including infancy) certainly remains the most important stage of most people’s lives for socialization and for the cognitive, emotional, and physiological development that is so crucial during the early years of anyone’s life.

Childhood usually covers the first 12 years of life: time for learning and carefree play. Nevertheless, what a child "is" differs from one culture to another. Presently we defend our idea of childhood because children are biologically immature. But a look back in time and around the world shows that the *concept of childhood is* *rooted in culture*.

The concept of childhood as such is of recent origin, which appears to be more pronounced in the developed countries compared with the developing countries. Even in the developed countries, say a couple of centuries back, children of four or five years were treated like adults and expected to earn for themselves. A century back, children in USA, Canada, and Europe had much the same life as children in poor countries. That is how we come across the issue of child labor, which is associated with the developing countries

Children in lower class have always assumed adult responsibilities sooner than their other class counterparts. Due to the demands of the circumstances children in the lower class start earning earlier than the children in other classes. Their childhood finishes too quickly and may be their childhood remains invisible. In childhood an individual is made to learn the skills needed in adult life.

What happens during childhood can have lifelong consequences. Traumatic experiences during childhood—being neglected or abused, witnessing violence, being seriously injured, and so forth—put youngsters at much greater risk for many negative outcomes. They are more likely to commit serious delinquency during adolescence, and, throughout the life course, they are more likely to experience various psychiatric problems, learning disorders, and substance abuse. They are also less likely to graduate high school or attend college, to get married or avoid divorce if they do marry, and to gain and keep a job.

**ADOLESCENCE**

Just as industrialization helped create childhood as a distinct stage of life, adolescence emerged as a buffer between childhood and adulthood. In earlier times, and in Pakistani society even today, societies did not mark out adolescence as distinct time of life. People simply moved from childhood into young adulthood with no stopover in between. Adolescence usually overlaps teen age though it is also a social construction. We generally link adolescence, or teenage years, to emotional and social turmoil, when the youth try to develop their own individual identities. As they try to carve out an identity distinct from both the "younger" world being left behind and the "older" world still be out of their range, adolescents develop a subculture of their own. Again we attribute teenage turbulence to the biological changes of puberty. Adolescence is more a phenomenon of industrial societies. Although these outward patterns are readily visible, we usually fail to realize that adolescence is a social creation; it is contemporary industrial society, not biological age that makes these years a period of turmoil. In these emotional and social spheres the young people appear to be in conflict with their parents.

Establishing some independence and learning specialized skills for adult life. Adulthood again depends on culture, and accordingly there could be a smooth or difficult change from childhood to adolescence. The 18 years old may have different statuses and roles in Pakistani society. They have the voting rights, they can get an ID card, they can get a driving lenience, and they work in offices.

**ADULTHOOD**

Adulthood, which begins between the late teens and the early thirties, depending on the social background, is a time for accomplishment. They pursue careers and raise families. These youth embark on careers and raise families of their own. They reflect on their own achievements---Did the dreams come true?

**Early Adulthood**: It covers the period from 20 to about 40 years, and during this period personalities are formed. They learn to manage the day-to-day responsibilities personally. They try to make an adjustment with spouse, and bring up their children in their own way. They often have many conflicting priorities: parents, partner, children, schooling, and work.

**Middle Adulthood**: Roughly covers the period from 40 to 60 yrs. During this period the individuals assess actual achievements in view of their earlier expectations. Children are grown up. Growing older means facing physical decline. During the late middle years (50 to 65 years), people attempt to evaluate the past and come to terms with what lies ahead. They compare what they have accomplished with how far they had hoped to get.

During this time of life, many people find themselves caring for their own children and also their aging parents. Health and mortality also begin to loom large. People feel physical changes in their bodies, and they may watch their parents become frail, ill and die.

**OLD AGE**

*Old age* ­ the later years of adulthood and the final stage of life itself ­ begins about the mid-sixties. The societies attach different meaning to this stage of life. Pakistani society often gives older people control over most of the land and other wealth. Since the rate of change in Pakistani society is not very fast, older people amass great wisdom during their lifetime, which earns them much respect. On the other hand in industrial societies old are considered as conservative, unimportant, and obsolete. In a fast changing society their knowledge appears to be irrelevant.

Old age differs in an important way from earlier stages in life course. Growing up typically means entering new roles and assuming new responsibilities; growing old, by contrast, is the opposite experience ­leaving roles that provided both satisfaction and social identity.  Like any life transition, retirement from employment or even the handing over of the personal business to one's heirs, demands learning new, different patterns while at the same time unlearning familiar habits from the past.