

Effects of Age on Intensity and Priority of Life Needs

Hardeo Ojha and Meena Pramanick

T.M. Bhagalpur University, Bhagalpur

In order to see the effect of age difference on intensity and priority of life needs viz., physiological, security, belongingness, esteem and self-actualization a large group of 1800 subjects equally divided into six age groups viz., early young (21-30 yrs), late young (31-40 yrs), early middle (41-50 yrs), late middle (51-60 yrs), early old (61-70 yrs) and late old (71-80 yrs), who were employed in or retired from govt. services and educational institutions were administered Hindi version of Goebel and Brown's Life Motivation Scale (LMS) with some minor modifications to suit Indian conditions. The ANOVA revealed that age is the significant predictor of variation in life needs. The intensity and priority of all needs changed with change in age periods. However the hierarchy of needs as conceived by Maslow was not found to exist. This has been interpreted intuitively.

Keywords: Life Needs, Need Hierarchy, Age period

The research is concerned with the changes in intensity and priority of life needs as a consequence of changes in age. Because all needs develop in their own way and at their own rate, it is understandable that at different ages certain needs will stand out more conspicuously than others. Here age changes have been considered only after attainment of adulthood. Adulthood is usually achieved at the age of twenty-one years. Adulthood means "growth to full size and strength" (Hurlock, 1968). After this the growth becomes almost static upto 30 years and then after starts declining which is not clearly visible till the age of 40 years. Therefore it is quite appropriate to call it young age. The decline after 40 years is perceptible but it is slow till 50 years, after which the decline becomes a bit faster. However in this period the person is active and enthusiastic in his work and ageing has little effects. After the person attains the age of sixty his biological capacity deteriorates and he retires from the job and then after the real calamities begin. As such persons over 60 years are termed as aged. After the

age of 70 years the biological ageing reaches its climax.

Maslow (1970) attempted to explain motivation as a developmental process. His hierarchical system of basic needs represent an attempt to find the dynamic principles that tie together and interrelate all the separate behavioural episodes and make sense of development through the life time and across cultures. He believed motivational needs to be cross-culturally common to all human beings. According to Maslow all needs of human beings can be grouped under five heads and can be arranged in hierarchical order going from the higher need of self-actualization down to the physiological needs. The needs in the hierarchy from the highest to the lowest are:- 1- the need for self actualization, 2- esteem needs, such as needs for recognition, success and self-respect, 3- belongingness and love needs, such as needs for affection, affiliation and identification, 4- safety needs such as needs for security, stability and order and 5- physiological needs, such as hunger, thirst, sex, avoidance of pain, etc. These needs

appear in the order from the lowest to the highest with physiological needs first and self actualization need last during a person's normal development. In other words physiological needs must be satisfied before any of the others can be met. Safety needs come before those higher in the list and so on.

Maslow's theory has been researched by many disciplines including anthropology (Montagu, 1970), political science (Bay, 1968) education (Roming & Cleland 1972), psychology (Lollar, 1974; Schwartz & Gains, 1974) and the fields of management and organizational behaviour (Chernik & Phelan, 1974; Wahaba & Bridwell, 1976). But there seems to have been little attempt to investigate the applicability of his theory to Developmental Psychology. However one such study was carried out by Goebel and Brown (1981) who tried to know the changes in motivation related to age differences and their relationship to hierarchy of needs. However their findings provided limited support for Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs as a developmental model. The present research is a further attempt towards verification of this model on a large group of people of varying ages.

Method

Sample:

The sample consisted of 1800 subjects of urban areas of Bhagalpur, Jamui, Munger, Banka, Deoghar, Dumka and Sahebganj towns of Bihar and Jharkhand, equally divided into six age groups- early young (21-30 yrs), late young (31-40 yrs), early middle (41-50 yrs), late middle (51-60 yrs), early old (61-70 yrs) and late old (71-80 yrs). All were employed in or retired from govt. jobs or educational institutions. As the sample was a large one the selection of subjects was made on availability basis.

Tests:

The subjects were contacted by six investigators (who were engaged in the Major UGC project on contract basis) and were administered Life Motivation Scale (LMS) of Goebel and Brown (1981) along with a short Personal Information Sheet (PIS) prepared by the authors. The description of the LMS is as follows:

Life Motivation Scale (LMS): The life motivation scale of Goebel and Brown (1981) was used in the present study with certain modifications especially with regard to life components. Instead of 11 life components only 9 life components which seemed appropriate in Indian context were used. Seven out of eleven components viz. friends, free-time, money, childrearing, family, job and health were retained in the modified test and remaining four viz; activities, domicile, government and school were dropped. Additionally education and society were added. The statements representing five needs remained the same except that they were translated in Hindi. The statement across the nine components of life was varied randomly as had been done in the original test.

The modified version of the life motivation scale was first administered twice with an interval of 3 weeks to three age groups viz. young (21-40 yrs), middle aged (41-60 yrs) and old (above 60 yrs) each consisting of 100 subjects to determine its internal consistency and temporal stability reliabilities. The test-retest correlations for the young middle aged and old groups were 0.70, 0.66 and 0.71 respectively. The internal consistency of the modified scale was determined by calculating correlations of the need scores on each of the 9 components with the appropriate need total score. It was found that the correlations ranged between 0.51 and 0.73 in the total sample (N=300) and all were significant at .01 level. Thus the internal consistency reliability of the scale was also sufficient.

Results

The objective was to see if intensities of five basic needs are affected by age changes. It may be recalled that order of five statements representing Maslow’s five basic needs was varied across nine life components and for each component subjects were sacked to rank the five statements from most important (4-point) to least important (0-point). The sum of points assigned to the statements representing a particular need across nine life components was treated as score for that need. Thus the intensity of each or the five needs was determined by the scores received by the subject on that particular need. The sum total of the scores of the subjects or the group on the whole test could be thus 90 and it was a check weather the scoring had been done correctly. It was examined by ANOVA whether the age is the significant predictor of variations in the intensity of five basic needs. The results revealed that age had significant effects on all five needs viz., physiological (F (5,1794)= 69.06, p<.01), security (F (5,1794)= 31.29, p<.01), belongingness (F (5,1794)= 50.94, p<.01), esteem (F (5,1794)= 45.36, p<.01) and self-actualization (F (5,1794)= 261.34, p<.01). However we need to see in what direction changes have taken place. Table 1 provides the mean need scores by age. The significance of difference between two means was determined by t-test (following F-test) by the formula given by Guilford (1956, p.264).

Table1 Mean score on need variables by age.

| Age | Need Variables | | | | |
|--------------|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | PH. | SEC. | BEL. | ES. | SA. |
| Late Old | 22.37 | 14.47 | 22.96 | 18.38 | 11.82 |
| Early Old | 21.40 | 13.73 | 22.20 | 19.92 | 12.75 |
| Late Middle | 19.30 | 12.26 | 18.42 | 22.05 | 17.97 |
| Early Middle | 19.10 | 11.34 | 18.98 | 22.50 | 18.08 |
| Late Young | 22.92 | 12.10 | 20.12 | 19.29 | 15.57 |
| Early Young | 25.18 | 12.25 | 20.51 | 18.14 | 13.92 |

From Table-1 it may be noted that the relationship between age and physiological need is curvilinear with lower scores in the middle and higher scores at the two ends of age period. Early young adults have obtained the highest score followed by a lower score of late young and they are significantly different (p<.01). In the early middle age the score further declines significantly (p<.01). Although a little increase in physiological need in the late middle age is witnessed but the two middle age groups do not differ significantly (p>.05). However, the re-emergence of physiological need is found in the early old age as it is significantly higher (p<.01) than the scores of two middle age group. Further we find that the physiological need in the late old age further rises and is significantly higher (p<.01) than those of two middle age groups and early old age group, but significantly lower than those of late young group (p<.05) and early young group (p<.01). Thus the results indicate that there is demergence of physiological need after young age followed by its re emergence after middle age. A need was considered as emergent if the increase in the scores was significant between two adjacent groups and similarly it was considered demergent if the fall in the scores was significant between two adjacent groups.

Further Table 1 indicates that in the early middle age the need for security is the lowest but there is significant rise (p<.05) in the need in late middle age. The need for security is found to rise significantly (p<.01) in early old age and becomes the highest in the late old age. The security need scores in the early young age and late young age are significantly lower (p<.01) than the scores obtained in the two old age periods but significantly higher (p<.01) than that of early middle age. Thus it appears that the relationship between the security need and age is also curvilinear with lower scores in the middle and higher scores at the two ends

of age periods. Further it can be said that there is demergence of security need in the middle age and its re-emergence in the old age.

It is also noted from Table 1 that belongingness need is the highest in late old age and the next highest in the early old age and the two groups differ significantly ($p < .05$). The belongingness need scores obtained by the early young and the late young are not significantly different from each other ($p > .05$) but significantly higher ($p < .01$) than those of early middle age and late middle age and significantly lower ($p < .05$) than those of early old and late old ages. Thus it may be asserted that there is demergence of belongingness need after young age and re-emergence of this need after middle age. The relationship is again curvilinear with lower scores in the middle and higher scores at two ends.

Table 1 further reveals that early middle aged persons have secured the highest score on esteem need, followed by the next highest score of the late middle aged persons. However the difference between the two middle aged groups is not significant ($p > .05$). Further we find that the lowest score on esteem need has been obtained by the early young subjects and the next lowest score has been obtained by the late old subjects and the two groups are not significantly different ($p > .05$). The early old subjects have recorded higher score significantly different ($p < .05$) from that of early young but not of late young ($p > .05$). It is thus obvious that in general there is emergence of self esteem need after young age and demergence of this need after middle age. The relationship between age and esteem need is thus inverted U shaped with higher scores in the middle and lower scores at the two ends.

As regards self actualization need it is noted from Table 1 that self actualization is the highest in the middle age. The early

middle aged and late middle aged have obtained mean scores which are not significantly different ($p > .05$). The early olds have shown a score which is significantly higher ($p < .05$) than that of late olds. However the scores of two old age groups are significantly lower than those of two middle age groups ($p < .01$). The scores obtained by early young and late young are too significantly higher ($p < .01$) than those of two older groups. Here it may also be noted that there is sharp rise in the score of late young compared to early young. Thus it is obvious that there is emergence of self-actualization need after young age and demergence of the same after middle age. Here too the relationship is inverted U-shaped with higher scores in the middle and lower scores at the two ends.

Further in order to see the priority of needs given by each age group, needs were ranked on the basis of scores from higher to lower. Table 2 presents the rankings of needs in order of importance.

Table 2 Priority given to different needs by age groups.

| Needs | Age group | | | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| | Late old | Early old | Late middle | Early middle | Late young | Early young |
| Physical | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Security | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Belong | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Esteem | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Self Act | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

From Table 2 it may be obvious that the results obtained do not give support to Maslow's hierarchy as a developmental sequence. The early young and the late young subjects have given similarly first priority to physiological need, second priority to belongingness need, third priority to esteem need, fourth priority to self-actualization and fifth (or last) priority to security need. The early middle and the late

middle' aged subjects give similar priorities but their priorities are different from those of early and late young subjects. They have given first priority to esteem need, second priority to physiological need, third priority to belongingness need, fourth priority to self-actualization and fifth (or last) priority to security need. The two older groups (Early old and Late old) are also similar in their priority but different from middle age and young age groups. They have given first priority to belongingness, second priority to physiological need, third priority to esteem need, fourth priority to security need and fifth (or last) priority to self-actualization. Therefore we may conclude that Maslow's hierarchy does not get support from the priorities given by any age group and the priority of need changes according to age.

Discussion

The results give statistically significant evidence of age differences in motivation for all needs but only limited support to Maslow's hierarchy as a developmental sequence. The two higher priorities given to physiological and belongingness needs by the younger and older subjects indicate that for both these needs are more important than esteem and self actualization needs. The middle aged subjects feel that esteem is more important for them and belongingness and self-actualization which have been given third and fourth priorities are less important. However we find that physical needs are important for all age groups as it has received either first or second preference by all. Esteem need has received first preference by the middle aged but the third preference by other age groups. Security need which is second in order of priority according to Maslow (1970) has received fourth priority by the older subjects and the last priority by the younger and middle aged subjects. On the whole thus it is evident that Maslow's need hierarchy concept does not conform to that of either of the groups. Although Maslow did not propose

age related changes in motivation, his theory conveys the implication that longitudinal studies would reveal individual progression through the sequence. The relative lack of support for Maslow's sequential hierarchy raises serious questions concerning its adequacy as a developmental theory of motives.

The data revealed that the esteem need peaks at the early middle age and then decreases at the later stages of development and reaches its minimum level at the late old age, whereas belongingness need reaches its peak in the old age. Maslow had recognized the occurrence of reversals within the hierarchy of need and noted the esteem-belongingness reversal to be the most common in the United States. In contrast of the growth implications of Maslow's hierarchy this study found that in old age there is a significant decline in need for self-actualization and a significant increase in the physical and security needs. These findings reflect trends similar to those theorized by developmental psychologists such as Buhler (1967) who suggests that there is a regression in need satisfaction during old age and Havighurst (1972) who suggests that the developmental tasks of old age are more oriented towards maintenance than expansion. This raises a question as to the ability of a growth model to explain life-span motivational development. Because in Maslow's theory a decline in the dominant need usually implies the rise of a new motivational determinant of behaviour, it is possible that the hierarchy represents in effect a truncated developmental sequence that does not provide for the possible emergence to dominance of a new higher-order growth motive during later-adulthood (old age).

The safety need next in the developmental sequence of Maslow's hierarchy has been given minimum importance by the subjects of all age groups.

This might occur due to the fact that all young and middle aged subjects were employed in government or semi government jobs and the older subjects had retired from such jobs. It will not be out of context to mention that government and semi government jobs provided security to the subjects in terms of salary and pension and therefore security had little importance for them. The felt priority of belongingness and physical needs among the older subjects may be understood in the context of their reduced physical energy and loss of status, income and reduced social support and their dependence upon Kith and Kin. Old age is a period associated with loneliness, dreadedness and being alienated in familial and social aspects (Birren & Schaie, 1982). If this is the fact we can understand why elderly males in this study have opted for greater belongingness need. In fact, the need for the belongingness in later years is associated with the desire to be part of a group and to experience sharing in social and familial aspects of life.

References

- Birren, J.E. & Schaie, K.W. (Eds.) (1977). *Handbook of the psychology of ageing*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Buhler, C. (1967). Human life in goals the humanistic perspectives. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 6, 1-17.
- Chirnik, G.A. & Phelan, J.G. (1974). Attitudes of women in management. *International Journal of School Psychiatry*, 20, 94-96.
- Goebel, B.L. & Brown, D.R. (1981). Age differences in motivation related to Maslow's need hierarchy. *Developmental Psychology*, 17, 809-815.
- Guilford, J.P. (1956). *Fundamental statistics in psychology and education*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Havighurst, R.J. (1972). *Developmental tasks and education*. New York: McKay.
- Hurlock, E.B. (1968). *Developmental psychology*. Bombay; New Delhi: Tata McGraw Hill.
- Lollar, D. (1974). An operationalization and validation of Maslow's need hierarchy. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 34, 639-651.
- Maslow's, A.H. (1970). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Montagu, A. (1970). *The direction of human development (Rev. ed.)*. New York: Howthorne Books.
- Roming, D., & Cleland, C. (1972). Educational applications of humanistic psychology. *Journal of School Psychology*, 10, 279-298.
- Schwartz, M.M., & Gains, L.S. (1974). Self-actualization and the human tendency for varied experience. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 38, 423-427.
- Wahaba, M.A., & Bridwell, L.G. (1976). Maslow's reconsidered: A review of research on the need hierarchy theory. *Organizational Behaviour and Human Performance*, 15, 212-240.

Received: June 30, 2008

Accepted: October 03, 2008

Hardeo Ojha, PhD, Former Professor & Head, University Department of Psychology, T.M. Bhagalpur University, Bhagalpur.

Meena Pramanick, PhD, Professor of Psychology (Retd.), S.M. College, Bhagalpur

This article is based on part of the results of a Major Research project granted by U.G.C. in 2001. The authors thankfully acknowledge the financial support.