

Environmental Stressors on Psychological and Physical Well-being on Mid-Life

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Abstract

The mid-life stage is a critical period characterized by significant physiological, psychological, and social changes. During this stage, individuals often face various environmental stressors, such as work demands, financial difficulties, and family responsibilities, which can impact their overall well-being. This paper provides an in-depth review of the concepts of environmental stressors, psychological well-being, and physical well-being, and the complex relationship between these factors at the mid-life stage. Environmental stressors can have a direct impact on both psychological and physical well-being, as well as an indirect impact through the interactions between these two domains. Maintaining psychological and physical well-being is crucial during the mid-life stage, as individuals may face increased risk of chronic health conditions and mental health problems. Understanding the interplay between environmental stressors, psychological well-being, and physical well-being is essential for developing effective interventions and strategies to support individuals during the mid-life stage. By addressing both psychological and

physical well-being, practitioners can take a more holistic approach to promoting overall health and well-being.

Keywords: mid-life, environmental stressors, psychological well-being, physical well-being.

Introduction

The mid-life stage, typically spanning from ages 40 to 65, is a critical period in an individual's lifespan that is characterized by significant physiological, psychological, and social changes (Lachman, 2004). During this stage, individuals often face a range of environmental stressors that can have a profound impact on their overall well-being. Environmental stressors refer to external factors or conditions in an individual's physical or social environment that can contribute to stress and negatively impact their well-being (Cohen et al., 2016).

The mid-life period is often marked by increased responsibilities, such as caring for aging parents, supporting adult children, and navigating career transitions (Heckhausen et al., 2010). These demands can contribute to heightened levels of stress and strain, which can, in turn, impact an individual's psychological and physical well-being (Ryff, 2018). Psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct that encompasses an individual's subjective perception of their emotional, cognitive, and social functioning (Ryff, 1989), while physical well-being refers to the overall state of an individual's physical health (Huppert, 2009).

Understanding the relationship between environmental stressors, psychological well-being, and physical well-being is essential for developing effective interventions and strategies to support individuals during the mid-life stage. Research has shown that chronic stress can have a detrimental impact on both psychological and physical health, leading to increased risk of mental

health problems, such as depression and anxiety, as well as physical health issues, such as cardiovascular disease and obesity (Juster et al., 2010).

By exploring the interplay between these factors, researchers and practitioners can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by individuals during the mid-life stage and develop targeted interventions to support their overall well-being. This is particularly important given the significant demographic shifts occurring in many societies, with the mid-life population representing a growing proportion of the overall population (Lachman, 2015).

Review of Concepts

Environmental Stressors

Environmental stressors refer to external factors or conditions in an individual's physical or social environment that can contribute to stress and negatively impact their well-being (Cohen et al., 2016). These can include a wide range of factors, such as job demands, financial difficulties, relationship conflicts, exposure to pollution or natural disasters, and major life events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Research has shown that chronic exposure to environmental stressors can have a profound impact on an individual's psychological and physical health. For example, studies have linked job-related stress to increased risk of cardiovascular disease, depression, and cognitive decline (Sliwinski et al., 2009; Siegrist, 1996). Similarly, financial stressors, such as job loss or housing insecurity, have been associated with higher rates of mental health problems, such as anxiety and substance abuse (Mezuk et al., 2013, Onyemaechi, et al, 2022, 2017).

Psychological Well-being

Psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct that encompasses an individual's subjective perception of their emotional, cognitive, and social functioning (Ryff, 1989). This includes factors such as life satisfaction, positive affect, personal growth, and a sense of purpose and meaning in life (Huppert, 2009). The mid-life stage is often a critical period for psychological well-being, as individuals navigate a range of personal and professional transitions (Lachman, 2004). Factors such as work-life balance, family responsibilities, and physical health can all contribute to an individual's psychological well-being during this time (Heckhausen et al., 2010).

Physical Well-being

Physical well-being refers to the overall state of an individual's physical health, which includes factors such as physical functioning, the absence of disease or illness, and the ability to engage in physical activities without limitations (Huppert, 2009). Maintaining physical well-being is particularly important during the mid-life stage, as individuals may face increased risk of chronic health conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer (Heaney et al., 2008).

Relationship between Psychological and Physical Well-being at Mid-life

The relationship between psychological and physical well-being at mid-life is complex and bidirectional. Environmental stressors can have a direct impact on both psychological and physical well-being, as well as an indirect impact through the interactions between these two domains (Juster et al., 2010). For example, chronic stress can lead to the development of physical

health problems, such as cardiovascular disease and obesity, which can, in turn, negatively impact an individual's psychological well-being (Juster et al., 2010). Conversely, poor physical health can contribute to feelings of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, which can further exacerbate physical health problems (Huppert, 2009, Onyemaechi, et.al, 2017).

Empirical Review

A substantial body of research has examined the impact of environmental stressors, psychological well-being, and physical well-being on individuals during the mid-life stage. These studies have provided valuable insights into the complex interplay between these factors and their implications for overall health and functioning.

Environmental Stressors and Mid-life Well-being

Numerous studies have documented the detrimental effects of environmental stressors on the well-being of mid-life adults. For example, a longitudinal study by Sliwinski et al. (2009) found that daily work-related stress was associated with increased negative affect and decreased positive affect among a sample of middle-aged adults. Similarly, a study by Mezuk et al. (2013) revealed that financial stressors, such as job loss and housing insecurity, were linked to higher rates of depression and anxiety in mid-life. The impact of environmental stressors on physical health during the mid-life stage has also been well-established. Juster et al. (2010) found that chronic exposure to work-related stress was associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and metabolic disorders in middle-aged adults. Furthermore, a systematic review by Cohen et al. (2016) demonstrated that exposure to various environmental stressors,

including natural disasters and social conflicts, was associated with a range of negative physical health outcomes, such as impaired immune function and accelerated cellular aging.

Psychological Well-being and Mid-life

Researchers have consistently found that psychological well-being is a crucial component of overall health and functioning during the mid-life stage. Ryff's (1989) influential model of psychological well-being, which includes dimensions such as self-acceptance, personal growth, and purpose in life, has been widely used to assess well-being in mid-life adults. A longitudinal study by Lachman (2004) found that higher levels of psychological well-being in mid-life were associated with better cognitive functioning, lower rates of depression, and greater life satisfaction. Similarly, Huppert's (2009) review of the literature suggests that psychological well-being is a strong predictor of physical health outcomes, including reduced risk of chronic diseases and longer life expectancy.

Relationship between Psychological and Physical Well-being

The interplay between psychological and physical well-being during the mid-life stage has been a central focus of research in this area. Numerous studies have demonstrated the bidirectional nature of this relationship. For instance, a study by Heckhausen et al. (2010) found that mid-life adults who engaged in health-promoting behaviors, such as regular exercise and healthy eating, reported higher levels of psychological well-being, including greater life satisfaction and a stronger sense of purpose. Conversely, Heaney et al. (2008) showed that poor physical health, such as the presence of chronic conditions, was associated with increased rates of depression and anxiety in middle-aged adults.

Furthermore, research has highlighted the role of physiological mechanisms in the relationship between psychological and physical well-being. Juster et al. (2010) proposed the concept of "allostatic load," which refers to the cumulative wear and tear on the body's physiological systems due to chronic exposure to stress. This allostatic load has been linked to a range of negative health outcomes, including cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, and premature mortality.

Theoretical Framework

The Lifespan Developmental Perspective by Paul et al (1974)

The lifespan developmental perspective provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the complexities of well-being during the mid-life stage. This approach, pioneered by renowned psychologists such as Paul Baltes and Margret Baltes, emphasizes the dynamic and multidimensional nature of human development across the entire lifespan. At the core of the lifespan developmental perspective is the recognition that individuals undergo a series of age-related changes and challenges throughout their lives, which can profoundly impact their psychological, physical, and social well-being. The mid-life stage, in particular, is characterized by a unique set of developmental tasks and transitions that require individuals to adapt and cope with various environmental and personal factors. The lifespan developmental perspective offers several key principles that can guide the understanding of well-being in mid-life:

1. Multi-directionality of Development

The lifespan approach acknowledges that development is not a linear process, but rather multidirectional, with the potential for both gains and losses across different domains of functioning. In the context of mid-life well-being, this means that individuals may experience improvements in certain areas (e.g., emotional regulation, career stability) while simultaneously facing declines in others (e.g., physical health, cognitive abilities).

2. Plasticity and Contextual Influences

The lifespan perspective emphasizes the plasticity of human development, whereby individuals have the capacity to adapt and change in response to both environmental and personal factors. This underscores the importance of considering the social, cultural, and historical contexts that shape the mid-life experience, as well as the role of individual characteristics, such as personality, coping strategies, and socioeconomic status (Okoye, et.al 2018).

3. Contextual and Age-Graded Influences

The lifespan developmental perspective recognizes that well-being is influenced by both normative, age-graded factors (e.g., biological changes, social roles) and non-normative, contextual factors (e.g., unexpected life events, societal changes). In the case of mid-life, these factors may include the onset of chronic health conditions, the transition to grandparenthood, or the impact of economic recessions on career and financial stability.

4. Selective Optimization with Compensation

A central tenet of the lifespan approach is the concept of "selective optimization with compensation," which suggests that individuals adapt to age-related changes by selectively focusing on the domains of functioning that are most important to them, optimizing their resources and strategies in those areas, and compensating for declines in other areas. This process of adaptation is particularly relevant to mid-life adults as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of this stage of life.

By anchoring the investigation of mid-life well-being within the lifespan developmental perspective, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex and dynamic nature of this life stage. This theoretical framework encourages the exploration of individual differences, contextual factors, and adaptive strategies that shape the experience of well-being during the mid-life period. Furthermore, the lifespan developmental perspective can inform the development of targeted interventions and policies that support mid-life adults in maintaining and enhancing their overall well-being. This may involve the implementation of holistic programs that address physical, psychological, and social needs, as well as the creation of age-friendly environments that foster the successful adaptation and optimization of mid-life individuals.

In conclusion, the lifespan developmental perspective provides a robust theoretical foundation for investigating the multifaceted nature of well-being during the mid-life stage. By embracing this approach, researchers and practitioners can gain deeper insights into the complex interplay of factors that influence the well-being of mid-life adults, ultimately informing more effective strategies for promoting positive outcomes throughout the lifespan.

Implications and Future Directions

The empirical evidence reviewed in this paper underscores the importance of addressing both psychological and physical well-being during the mid-life stage. By understanding the complex interplay between environmental stressors, psychological well-being, and physical well-being, practitioners can develop more effective interventions and strategies to support individuals during this critical period of the lifespan.

Future research in this area should continue to explore the mechanisms underlying the relationship between these factors, as well as the role of individual and contextual factors in shaping mid-life well-being. Additionally, longitudinal studies that track the trajectories of psychological and physical well-being over time would provide valuable insights into the dynamic nature of this process. Overall, the empirical review presented in this paper highlights the need for a holistic approach to promoting well-being during the mid-life stage, one that acknowledges the interdependence of psychological and physical health and the impact of environmental factors on these domains.

Conclusions

Environmental stressors can have a significant impact on the psychological and physical well-being of individuals during the mid-life stage. The complex interplay between these factors highlights the need for a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to supporting individuals during this critical period of their lives.

Recommendations

Based on the empirical review, it is recommended that there is need to;

1. Develop comprehensive stress management programs that address both psychological and physical well-being.
2. Implement workplace policies and initiatives that promote a healthy work-life balance and reduce environmental stressors.
3. Provide access to mental health resources and support services for individuals experiencing mid-life crises or other psychological challenges.
4. Encourage regular physical activity and healthy lifestyle habits to promote overall well-being.

Limitations of the Study

The current review is limited by the relatively narrow scope of the literature, which focuses primarily on the mid-life stage. Additional research is needed to explore the impact of environmental stressors on well-being across the lifespan.

Suggestions for Further Study

Future research should explore the long-term impact of environmental stressors on psychological and physical well-being, as well as the effectiveness of various interventions and strategies for supporting individuals during the mid-life stage.

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