

Factor's Contributing to Learned Helplessness in the Institutionalized Aged: A Literature Review

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Theory of Learned Helplessness

- The theory is used to explain the declines in physical and psychological status.
- Learned helplessness is characterized by deficits in: Motivation, Cognition, and Emotion
- Deficits are due to a by-product of *ageing* and *environmental* interactions in which the residents experience loss of control and develops an expectancy for future inability to control relevant aspects of his/her environment



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Vulnerability to Learned Helplessness

- The ageing process is associated with many losses which are uncontrollable and can diminish a person's perception of control over daily activities
- Expected loss of control over future events is a critical determinant of learned helplessness
- Learned helplessness can be avoided by providing an environment that supports all the individuals capabilities
- Loss of opportunity to control significant aspects of daily living occurs in nursing homes, which serves as a strong counter-force for physical, psychological and social decline observed in the elderly



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Introduction

- Ageism: a stereotypical set of beliefs held by society and individuals
- Ageism includes a set of behavioural expectations based on the assumption that physical disability, mental decline, and withdrawal from normal activities are a normal aspects of ageing
- The image of the passively dependent adult clings to the institutionalized aged
- Negative beliefs are held about institutionalization



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The Phenomenon of Learned Helplessness

- The critical determinants of learned helplessness are: perceived loss of control over environmental interactions and an expected loss of control over future interaction



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Learned Helplessness Research with the Institutionalized Aged

Environmental Antecedents of Learned Helplessness

- Helplessness can be inferred from a variety of contextual factors surrounding the activities that an individual is involved in if:
 - those factors generate a belief that one is incompetent
 - a subsequent decreased expectation of one's ability to control future environmental interactions



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Con't Environmental Antecedents of Learned Helplessness

- Residents of a nursing home are often presumed incompetent until proven otherwise
- Incompetence is expected from residents of nursing homes and helplessness and dependency are rewarded, while competent behaviours are ignored



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Negative Attitudes

- Resident's social life within a nursing home is often limited to the staff of that nursing home
- The manner in which aged residents are treated by staff influences the resident's self-esteem and interpretation of expected behaviour
- Negative attitudes and stereotyping of elderly patients by health care workers can contribute to learned helplessness



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Con't Negative Attitudes

- Care for resident's by health care workers often becomes routinized and ordered
- The residents sense of powerlessness leads to the development and exacerbation of learned helplessness



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Perception of Control

- The restrictive environment of a long term nursing facility has a powerful influence over the resident's perception of control
- Staff members of nursing homes often misperceive what and what is not important to it's residents



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Perception of Control

- Inadequate knowledge about what can reasonably be expected from elderly nursing home residents contributes to the formation of negative and stereotypical attitudes that exist among caregivers
- Staff attention is often focused on dependent behaviours while efforts at independent behaviours receive inappropriate or no response



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Behavioural Contingencies

- Dependent behaviours among nursing home residents are produced or maintained by the quality of the interactions with the nursing staff
- Attempts at independent self-control behaviour by resident's often produces a dependent-supportive behaviour in response by the caregiver
- Institutionalization often produces loss of motivation and dependency among its residents, these behaviours are attributed to the staffs expectation that the aged residents will fulfill a sick role



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Functional Dependency

- Functional dependency can be reduced as a result of staff education about the aged and training in behaviour management
- Making staff aware of dependency problems alone without providing a tool for behavioural change would not affect positive behavioural results



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Self-Induced Dependency

- The perception of a disability can be as disabling as a true physical or psychological deficit and in another way learned helplessness can be induced
- Helping is one of a number of seemingly benign contextual factors that have a debilitating effect on competence in a variety of behaviors



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Con't Self-Induced Dependency

- Allowing someone to help can induce learned helplessness
- The effects of such a benign activity is not immediately apparent



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Physical Environment

- The physical environment within the nursing home can contribute to an elderly resident's loss of perceived control and sense of incompetence
- The efforts of the elderly individuals in a nursing home does not reinforce his/her efforts
- Apathy and giving up follow a perception of loss of control over the outcomes of significant daily, and the elderly generalize this perceived loss of control to other situations



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Con't Physical Environment

- Passivity and lack of motivation which characterize the institutionalized elderly are its consequences, and learned helplessness can result



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Control-Relevant Interventions with the Institutionalized Aged

- Perceived control, one's belief in having control and effectiveness over desired outcomes, is significant to the health and well-being of the institutionalized aged
- An increase in perceived control can lead to decrease in passive activity, increase in participation in different types of activities, and a decreased mortality rate
- Mechanisms should and can be established which change situational factors that reduce real or perceived responsibility in the elderly



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Con't Relevant Intervention

- Given the right to make decisions and experience feelings of increased competence may prevent some of the negative consequences of being an aged residents in a nursing home
- Loss of control and helplessness are significant factors in physical and mental declines associated with institutional elderly
- Autonomy is important in the environment of the aged individual and increased unpredictability and uncontrollability in environmental interactions may facilitate many of the negative consequences of ageing



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Factors Contributing to Learned Helplessness in the Institutionalized Aged: A Literature Review

Abstract: This paper is a review of the literature on learned helplessness with reference to the institutionalized aged. It includes the theory of learned helplessness, the phenomenon of learned helplessness, vulnerability, environmental antecedents, perception of control, functional behaviours, functional dependency, self-induced dependency, the physical environment, and control-relevant intervention.

Introduction

Ageism, a stereotypical set of beliefs held society and individuals. Ageism includes a set of behavioral expectations based on the assumptions that physical disability, mental decline, and withdrawal from normal activities activities are normal aspects of aging.

While this set of negative expectations has been challenged both by research on normal aspects of aging and by those able and active alder adults, the image of the passively dependent adult clings to the institutionalized aged. Older people themselves hold such negative beliefs about institutionalization

Theory of Learned Helplessness

The model of learned helplessness has been used to explain the declines in physical and psychological status beyond that is warranted by actual physical problems. Such declines can to some extent be understood as a by-product of the environmental interactions typically experienced by the institutionalized aged which the resident experiences loss of control and develops an expectancy for future inability and to control relevant aspects of his/her environment.

The Phenomenon of Learned Helplessness

Learned helplessness is a state in which an individual perceives a loss of control over the environmental interactions and an expected loss of control over future interactions.. The effects of learned helplessness cause disturbances of motivation, cognition and emotion .

Vulnerability to Learned Helplessness

The process of aging is associated with many losses which are both uncontrollable and can diminish the person's perception of control over daily activities. An aging individual may perceive an illusion of incompetence from external environmental cues. Evaluation of the self as incompetent is an attribution which global, state and internal. Expected loss of control over future events is a critical determinant of learned helplessness. All aging persons are vulnerable to learned helplessness. One important variable for success is an environment that supports full use of the aging person's capabilities. An environment that does not support full use of the aging person's potential is a is a second factor that makes the institutionalized aged vulnerable to learned helplessness.

Admission to a nursing home or institutional environment that publicly demonstrates that one is no longer competent and is in need to rely on others. Control over certain aspects of daily living are lost. Older persons themselves perceive nursing homes as a place of little freedom and rigid rules where they would have to give up self-determination and loses control over routine daily living. The institutionalized elderly are made vulnerable to learned helplessness because they lose some capability and many opportunities to control the significant aspects of daily living which serve as a strong counterforce for physical, psychological, and social decline frequently observed in the elderly. The expectation of inability to control significant aspects of daily life is a strong predictor of learned helplessness among the institutionalized aged/

Learned Helplessness Research With The Institutionalized Aged

Environmental Antecedents of Learned Helplessness

Helplessness can be inferred from a variety of contextual factors surrounding the activities in which one is engaged if those factors cause a belief that one is incompetent and a subsequent decreased expectation of one's ability to control future environmental interactions.

In a nursing home, residents are presumed incompetent until proven otherwise and that helplessness and dependency are, in fact, rewarded while more competent behaviors are ignored.

Negative Attitudes

Negative attitudes and stereotyping of elderly patients by health care workers as social antecedents of learned helplessness in the health care setting. A second antecedent was described as reinforcement of sick role behaviour. The review of collected Data by Solomon (1982) concluded the attitudes of health care workers toward the elderly are no less likely than the general population to apply negative views to their elderly patients. Care becomes routinized and ordered for the convenience of the staff. This is especially true in institutions where the needs of many must be met with a minimum of staffing time. The residents sense of powerlessness leads to the development and exacerbation of learned helplessness.

Perception of Control

Inadequate knowledge about what can reasonably be expected from elderly nursing home residents contributes to the formation of negative and stereotypical attitudes that exist among caregivers. Negative, stereotypical attitudes are translated into learned helplessness when the caregiver, believing the client to be sick and incapable of competent behaviors, responds to custodial or maintenance needs. Staff attention is focused on dependent behaviors while efforts at independent behaviors receive inappropriate or no response

Behavioural Contingencies

The major part of the dependence among nursing home residents is produced or maintained by quality of interactions with nursing staff. The damaging effects of institutionalization such as loss of motivation and dependency, are attributed to the staff expectations that aged residents will fulfill a sick roll.

Functional Dependency

functional dependency had been reduced as a result of staff education about the aged and training in behaviour management. Making staff aware of dependency problems alone without providing a tool for behavioural change would not effect positive behavioural results.

Self- Induced Dependency

The perception of disability can be as disabling as true physical and psychological deficits and is another way helplessness can be induced.

Helping is one of a number of seemingly benign contextual factors that can have a debilitating effect on competence in a variety of behaviors. Allowing someone to do something for you could induce learned helplessness. The danger for nursing home residents is that the effects of such seemingly benign activities are not immediately apparent.

Physical Environment

The nature of the physical environment has been cited by additional contribution to elderly residents' loss of perceived control and sense of competence (ie. Lack of privacy, style and arrangement of furniture which resemble a hospital.)

The elderly person in a nursing home lives in an environment which does not reinforce his/her efforts. Apathy and giving up follow a perception of loss of control to other situations. Learned helplessness is the result.

Control-Relevant Interventions with the Interventions with the Institutionalized Aged

Perceived control, one's belief in having control and effectiveness over desires outcomes, is significant to the health and well-being of the institutionalized aged. The mechanisms should and can be established which change situational factors that reduced real or perceived responsibility in the elderly. Given the right to make decisions and experience feelings of increased competence may, retard, reverse, or prevent some of the negative consequences of being an aged resident in a nursing home. Loss of control and helplessness are significant factors in the physical and mental declines associated with

institutional elderly. Autonomy is important in the environment of the aged individual and suggested that many of the negative consequences of aging may be facilitated by increased unpredictability and uncontrollability in environmental interactions.