



Beyond the Medical Model: A Critical Analysis of Gerontology Frameworks

Udatri Shye*

Department of Emergency Medicine, Beaumont Health System, 3601 W. 13 Mile Rd, Royal Oak, MI 48073, USA

INTRODUCTION

The field of gerontology has historically been dominated by the medical model, which emphasizes biological aging and disease management. However, this perspective often neglects the social, psychological, and environmental factors that significantly influence the aging process. This article critically analyzes various frameworks in gerontology, including the social model, life course perspective, and critical gerontology, advocating for a more holistic approach to understanding aging. By exploring the strengths and limitations of these frameworks, we aim to encourage a shift toward a more inclusive understanding of aging that considers the diverse experiences of older adults.

Aging is a complex process that encompasses not only biological changes but also psychological, social, and cultural dimensions. Traditionally, gerontology has been rooted in the medical model, focusing on health care and the treatment of diseases prevalent among older adults. This framework has led to an emphasis on pathology, often sidelining the lived experiences of older individuals and the broader societal contexts that shape their lives. This review seeks to critique the prevailing medical model and explore alternative frameworks that provide a more comprehensive understanding of aging. The medical model views aging primarily through a pathological lens, centering on diagnosis, treatment, and the management of age-related diseases. This perspective often leads to a narrow focus on physical health, resulting in policies and practices that prioritize medical intervention over the holistic well-being of older adults [1-3].

The medical model has contributed significantly to the understanding of various age-related diseases, improving the quality of medical care for older adults. Research advancements of this model have driven substantial research into the biological mechanisms of aging, leading to advancements in pharmacological treatments and interventions. The medical model reduces aging to mere biological decline, neglecting the importance of social, emotional, and environmental factors. Ageism The focus on pathology perpetuates stereotypes of older adults as frail and dependent, reinforcing ageist attitudes in society. By concentrating on disease management, this model often overlooks aspects of quality of life, such as social engagement and psychological well-being.

DESCRIPTION

The social model emphasizes the role of societal factors in shaping the experiences of older adults. It argues that many challenges associated with aging are not inherent to the aging process itself but are the result of social structures and attitudes. Social Determinants of Health This model recognizes that factors such as socioeconomic status, education, and social support networks significantly impact the health and well-being of older adults. Empowerment and participation social model advocates for the active participation of older adults in society, emphasizing their rights and capabilities. Holistic Approach The social model broadens the focus beyond medical issues, encouraging a more comprehensive understanding of aging. This perspective has influenced policies aimed at improving the social conditions of older adults, such as enhancing accessibility and promoting social inclusion. Overlooking Biological Factors While it emphasizes social determinants; the social model may downplay the importance of biological processes in aging. Variability of Experiences The model can sometimes generalize the experiences of older adults, failing to account for individual differences [4,5].

The life course perspective offers a framework for understanding aging as a lifelong process shaped by historical, social, and cultural contexts. This approach emphasizes the interplay between individual experiences and broader societal influences over time. Timing and Duration It considers how the timing of life events (e.g., retirement, bereavement) affects individuals' aging experiences. This perspective focuses on the transitions that individuals face throughout their lives and how these transitions influence aging.

Contextual understanding life course perspective provides a rich understanding of how different life stages and historical contexts impact aging. It recognizes the role of personal agency and decision-making in shaping life outcomes, allowing for a more nuanced view of aging. Complexity The life course perspective can be complex and difficult to operationalize in research and policy. Potential for Overemphasis on Individual Responsibility While highlighting agency, this framework may inadvertently place excessive responsibility on individuals for their aging experiences. Critical gerontology critiques traditional views of aging and challenges the dominant narratives surrounding older adults. It seeks to address power dynamics, social injustices, and the impact

Correspondence to: Udatri Shye, Department of Emergency Medicine, Beaumont Health System, 3601 W. 13 Mile Rd, Royal Oak, MI 48073, USA; E-mail: s.udatri@yahoo.edu

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of neoliberal policies on aging populations. Power and Inequality This framework emphasizes the ways in which power structures shape the experiences of older adults, particularly those from marginalized groups. Social Justice Critical gerontology advocates for social justice and equity in aging policies and practices.

CONCLUSION

The medical model of aging has played a crucial role in advancing our understanding of age-related diseases; however, it is insufficient for capturing the complexity of the aging experience. Alternative frameworks such as the social model, life course perspective, and critical gerontology offer valuable insights but also have limitations. An integrated approach that combines elements from these frameworks is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of aging. As we move forward, it is vital to advocate for policies and practices that recognize the diverse experiences of older adults, addressing their health needs while also considering social, psychological, and environmental factors. By embracing a holistic perspective on aging, we can better support the well-being and dignity of older individuals, fostering a society that values and respects the contributions of all its members.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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