

# Ignored Engagement: A Piloted Theory about Social Aspects of Aging

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## Abstract

The society and culture of Bangladesh are quite different from the other countries of the world. It is difficult to receive a theory fully for explaining the condition of our own. However, the purpose of this paper is to review major sociological theories on aging and propose a new one. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Content analysis and survey methods were used in this study. Through the baseline survey of four villages in the Bogra District of Bangladesh, 609 older people have been identified. Among them, 203 older people including 96 males and 107 females have been selected as a sample randomly and interviewed intensively. The contents of aging-related theories have been analyzed. The results of this study show that existing theories of aging are inadequate to explain the social aspects of older adults in Bangladesh; rather Ignored Engagement (A Piloted Theory) may be suitable to do this. This study may give future direction to academicians and policymakers to formulate and amend evidence-based policies and practices for the well-being of our older people.

## Keywords

Theory, Aging, Wellbeing, Role, Status

## 1. Introduction

According to Sultana (as cited in Ferdousi 2019), Bangladesh is a South Asian country with the largest number of older people population [1]. Zafrani and Nimrod think that “population aging is expected to be the most significant demographic transformation of the 21st century, with implications for nearly all sectors of society” [2]. This issue is becoming very complex in rural society as well. According to Skinner & Winterton, “In examining the global contexts in which people grow older, rural places are assuming greater significance for un-

derstanding the processes, outcomes, and representations of aging” [3]. World Population Projects 2019 highlighted that in 1990, the population aged 65 or over was 6%, in 2019, it was 9%; by 2050, it will be 16% [4]. At present the number of older people 60 and above in Bangladesh is 9.28% [5]. People around the world are thinking about this issue. For this reason, many methods, techniques, theories, perspectives, models, paradigms, etc. have emerged. As Bangladesh is now trying to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, it is high time to rethink these methods and theories for conducting empirical research with a view to bringing about successful aging. Therefore, an attempt has been made in this paper to review some theories on aging and try to propose a new one. There are numerous theories on aging. These are: biological, psychological, and sociological. The biological theories of aging describe the inevitable process of aging. Wear and tear theory, Neuroendocrine Theory, Free Radical Theory, Membrane Theory, Cross-linking Theory, Mitochondrial Decline Theory, etc. are mentionable examples. Continuity and personality are the psychological theories of aging. On the other hand, social conflict theory, exchange theory, subculture theory, age stratification theory, life course theory, cumulative advantage/disadvantage theory, social constructionist, phenomenological, activity theory, disengagement theory, and feminist theory are examples of the sociological theory of aging. These theories cannot merely explain the position of older people in our society due to their scope and nature. It is also a fact that these theories are Western-centric. The nature of society and the severity of the problem are not alike. So, we should have some theories of our own which will locate the position of our older people in the present world. However, in this paper, an attempt has been made to propose a new theory that may be best fitted to the explanation of older people in Bangladesh society.

## 2. Objective and Methodology

The aim of this article is to review the major sociological theories of aging and match them with the condition of older persons with a view to proposing a new one. However, this study has been conducted using multiple dispatches. Methodological mixes have been used in this study. Content analysis and survey methods have been conducted. However, older people-related documents have been used as the unit of content analysis. On the other hand, face-to-face interviews were conducted to collect quantitative data. Secondary data was collected from 2009 to 2022 and primary data was collected from 2011-2012 for PhD work which has been approved by the academic council and syndicate of the University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh. Four villages of Dhunat Upazila in the Bogra district of Bangladesh were selected purposively. The names of the villages are Konagaty, Sholiabari, Razarpur, and Ariamohan. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) about 7.4 percent of our population was older people in Bangladesh, the percentage of older people in these villages is 8.0, 7.6, 8.8, and 8.1 [6]. The respondents have been selected after a preliminary baseline survey. Out of 609, 203 older people including 96 males and 107 females have been se-

lected as respondents. Following the lottery system, 203 respondents have been chosen and the rest of them have been excluded considering time and budget. That is one third respondents have been included following a simple random sampling technique. After obtaining consent respondents have been interviewed. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

### 3. Results and Discussions

Population and development are closely related. Older people have become a serious problem in the world. Bangladesh is trying to achieve the goals of SDGs by 2030 and actualize the vision of 2041. The government of Bangladesh is also trying to establish from digital to smart Bangladesh. So, it is urgent to determine the relevancy of theories of aging and propose a new one. Keeping this in mind major theories of aging are briefly discussed to narrate the relevancy of proposing a new theory. However, the **wear and tear theory** explains the impact of aging considering the destruction which occurred in cells and body systems over time. As it wears out, it is not possible to longer function exactly. This theory actually explains the results, but not the causes of aging.

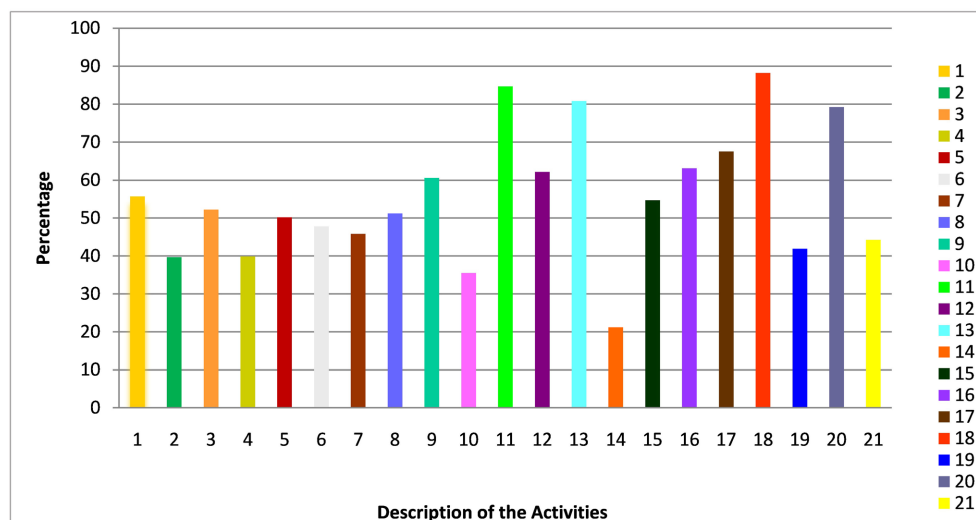
**Neuroendocrine theory** elaborates on the idea of functional decline in neurons and their associated hormones. If neurons and hormones do not function accordingly, people will face early aging.

**Free Radical theory** describes that aging happens when cells and tissues are damaged oxidatively due to aerobic metabolism. With this result, older persons face many problems when they perform their roles. **Membrane theory of aging** highlights that when we grow older, our cell membrane cannot transfer chemicals, heat, etc. due to our metabolism, lifestyle, and other associated problems. **Cross-linking theory of aging** focuses on the problem which is created due to the binding of glucose to proteins. Proteins cannot function properly if binding occurs. With this result, people face many health-related problems. Moreover, people face early aging. **Mitochondrial Decline theory highlights that** mitochondria, the powerhouse of energy in every cell of an organ, is the factor to face early or late aging. If the organs of the human body cannot borrow energy, the effectiveness of organs becomes less. If particular organs fail, it can lead to death. **According to continuity theory**, the playing roles, as well as the behavior of human beings, are linked to the average length of time [7]. Atchley also thinks older people retain a continuity of lifestyle following strategies related to previous experience [8]. **The essence of social conflict theory** is that one social group can contest with the other social groups due to power and resources. Likewise, older people face conflicting conditions with other members of the family and society.

**The exchange theory of aging** focuses on the social status, behavior, and activities of older people depending on the reward. For satisfaction, anything may be included with a reward. In 1975, James Dowd proposed this theory. **Subculture theory of aging** states that older people who face common problems con-

sider them as a group. They interact with other older people who have almost the same background, experiences, attitudes, norms, values, beliefs, and lifestyles. This happens due to segregation, differentiation, and discrimination on the basis of age. **Age stratification theory** focuses that age strata and society are perceived in a way that it shapes the behavior of the individual due to age. **Life course theory states that** aging happens from birth to death. It involves social, psychological, and biological processes. It is shaped by cohort and period effects during the life course. **Activity theory of aging** originated from the symbolic interactionist perspective by a group of sociologists at Chicago University. Havighurst described it as role flexibility [9]. He thinks that some roles are discontinued, some are intensified, and others are intensified with effort [10]. This theory narrates that productive aging occurs when older adults remain active and maintain social interactions. Pande thinks that older people who remain active in life are well-adapted [11]. Barrow and Smith explain that the individual's activity in the social arena is the substance of life for people of all ages [12]. Burgess describes the condition of older persons in the light of Western society. Older adults in Western societies are excluded from their due to the nature of their society. They are pushed into a condition of supine and which he explained as role less role. To Burgess, it is a condition where older persons pass their life meaningless [13]. **Disengagement theory** discusses that becoming old is natural. People will be old if they live long. So, it is suitable for society to disengage older people from societal activities. Older people, on the other hand, should abstain from these activities. So, it is better for older people to withdraw from society and it is better for society to keep older people away from these activities. This **theory also** narrates that people lose their activity and play inactive roles due to their age [14]. According to Cumming and Henry, disengagement is an inevitable step because many relationships between older persons and other members are altered [15]. Becoming old includes a mutual withdrawal from the social system where they pass their lives. According to Stein and Moritz, almost all cultures of all times, societies, and individuals are not prepared for our perceived engagement [16]. Significant number disengages from society as they become old. They disengage from income-generating activities and previous posts and positions. In spite of that, they play many activities. These are: Taking care of animals, grandchildren, and garden; participating in seasonal works; supervising houses, cultivable land, etc. The older people in our rural society play multifaceted roles. Their engagement in these activities relieves other family members. The engagements of rural older people are shown (**Figure 1**).

[1 = Family head, 2 = Income earners, 3 = Decision makers, 4 = Income earners and Decision makers, 5 = Decision making in buying and selling, 6 = Decision making in building and repairing, 7 = Decision making in receiving treatment, 8 = Compelling family members 9 = Invited relatives 10 = Participation in rural dispute settlement 11 = Activities for family 12 = The ability to activities 13 = Helping other members of the family 14 = Washing cloth 15 = Arranging bed 16 = Carryout simple chores 17 = Going outside 18 = Participation in



**Figure 1.** Percentage of engagement of older people in various activities. Field Data, 2012.

religious activities 19 = Engagement in rural developmental activities 20 = Taking part in solution of family disputes 21 = Taking part in solution of dispute outside village]. So, the older people are playing many roles which are imposed, voluntary, and nonpaid. Again, it is not possible to appoint or reappoint them in job sectors as young are not getting a job in spite of having literacy, age, certificate, etc, it is impossible to provide a job for the older persons. This is because the unemployment rate is increasing day by day. In 1991, it was 2.20%, in 2001 it was 3.96%, in 2011 it was 3.71%, and in 2020 it reached in 5.30% (World Bank, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/BGD/bangladesh/unemployment-rate>, Retrieved 2022-04-05).

Social statuses are getting complex and family members are becoming so busy to earn more. Who will look into these activities? Of course, older people are real people. Many roles are imposed upon them, but it has also become normal for the family members. The various engagements of older people in these sectors are ignored by the people of the family, society, as well as country. Existing theories of aging are not directly related to their engagement. Therefore, the proposed **Ignored Engagement Theory** will be well-fitted to explain their condition. It will deal with the older people who play a substantial range of familial and societal day-to-day essential roles in spite of their physical ability or not but ignored by the people of the family, society, and country.

This theory is not fit for all older people in the rural society of Bangladesh. There are some families where the older people are highly respected or older people who have bank balances, previous reputations, property, etc. Considering the engagement of older people in various activities, this proposed theory will be applicable. Although male and female older adults of the urban society in Bangladesh are more or less involved in these activities, the nature of work and type of engagement are not alike to the rural society of our country. Apart from these limitations, this proposed theory has value to rethink the activities and status of rural older people.

## 4. Conclusion

The society and culture of Bangladesh are not alike to other countries of the world. Theories developed by other countries are not fully applicable. Therefore it is needed to develop a theory for explaining the situation of older people matching with their settings. The older people of Bangladesh society are engaging in multidimensional essential activities. Their engagements in these actions are helpful to other members in passing their lives smoothly. Despite ability or inability, the rural older people of Bangladesh society are playing many roles. Unfortunately, these engagements have no acknowledgment. Therefore, the proposed **Ignored Engagement Theory** may be suitable to explain the condition of older people in the context of the rural society of Bangladesh.

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## Data Availability Statement

The data which supported the findings of the study are available to the corresponding author. It will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

## Conflicts of Interest

Although this paper was partially prepared from my Ph.D. thesis funded by the Social Science Research Council, Ministry of Planning, Planning Division, The People's Republic of Bangladesh, there is no conflict of interest.

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