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INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUALS AND THE ENVIRONMENT TO PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS IN OLD AGE

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ABSTRACT

Individuals and the environment influence the way humans perceive the stages of life as assumed in the Late Life Success Theory. This chapter aims to identify the different reasons behind feelings of success within the milestones of aging. This study utilized qualitative survey design. The researcher gathered data from 32 participants who are 60 years old and above, residing in Cebu City, Philippines. They are then asked to answer a survey questionnaire. They are asked to identify significant events at specific ages of their lives and identify the person influential to that event. After that, they were asked to rate how significant these events are. They are then asked to plot these on a lifeline. Data were then coded according to categories. Quantifying top layer coding results was done. Results revealed that individuals play a key role in the way a person perceives the events that happen in his/her life. Their presence at a certain period in the life of a person makes that period significant. Looking into the lifeline of a group of older adults, the research was able to identify these significant events in their lives based on the number of times they are being mentioned by the study participants. Marriage, Death, Birth of first child, Education, Illness, Accidents and reaching old age are the significant events identified. The family, spouse, and self are the influences to the perception of significance of the event. The review of the life events of older persons allows the opportunity to identify the individuals who are influential to the way humans perceive the stages of life. This also allows looking into where significant events occur in the life line of people thereby permitting for greater understanding why certain people matter most.

Keywords: Influences, Perception of success, Life Events, Life Line, Environmental Influence

INTRODUCTION

Individuals and the environment influence the way humans perceive the stages of life as assumed in the Late Life Success Theory (Garcia, 2016). The way people deal with old age comes from a number of influences (Watson, 1996). Gerontologists argue on the factors which lead to aging well. Many notions have been studied over the last half of the twentieth century. Early research on aging revealed the concern with becoming accustomed to the physical, psychological, and social losses of aging (Kendall & Bane, 2016).

Scientists have confirmed the wide diversity within populations and have taken different attentions to study older adults. Some proposed that personal goals lead an individual from one stage to another. Others measured actual capacity of older adults to function or perform. Some studied successful aging with an emphasis on adding meaning or richness. Still others explored the notion of control or power over one's course of life.

Other psychological methods proposed coping, choice and adapting as predictors of success. Other scientists scrutinized how the environment affects our "well-being" and how we viewed the experiences of our lives. They created methods to measure "life satisfaction" and the "quality of life" (Kendall & Bane, 2016).

Environmental conditions and exchanges with significant individuals within that environment have noteworthy influence on how each person profits from each developmental event (Child Development Institute, 2013). Study shows that an encouraging family environment including fun family activities, open parent-child communication and the reinforcement to partake in positive extracurricular and community activities aids people to navigate through life with relative ease (Child Development Institute, 2013).

Demonstration of successful aging is generally due to the social arrangements and policies espoused by their communities in the spheres of work, social relations,

stability in social roles and surroundings (Leviatan, 1999). In the early years, gerontologists recognized both the existence and importance of social support; in particular, they focused on: basic and instrumental support, or activities of daily living (ADL); emotional support (e.g., from both confidantes and companions); and assistance in the form of information and guidance from others. As the area grew in the 1980s, social support was acknowledged as complex, multidimensional and for the greatest part, advantageous for older adults (Chappell & Funk, 2011). Access to social capital permits older citizens to sustain fruitful, independent, and fulfilling lives (Cannuscio, Block & Kawachi, 2003). In addition, modern-day characteristics posited to influence successful aging include being married, working for pay, volunteering, practicing healthy behaviors, having ample social supports and upholding strong religious beliefs (Pruchno *et al.*, 2010).

The Late Life Success Theory suggests that as a person goes through life, exposure to individuals and the environment becomes inevitable. These exposures form part of the experiences which highlights certain ages and makes it memorable. Constant communication with family members, forming intimate relationships, marriage and divorce, death of a loved one, political issues, economic downfall, disasters and calamities, crafts a person's developmental stage. All of these points towards old age. Achieving successes in these periods of life make it a milestone (Garcia, 2016).

This study aims to identify the different reasons behind feelings of success within the milestones of aging.

Problem Statement

This study aims to validate the assumption of the Late Life Success Theory that individuals and the environment influence the way humans perceive the stages of life through exploration of the influences on the way humans perceive the stages of attainment in life.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized survey design. This type is appropriate wherever the subjects differ among themselves and one is interested to know the degree to which different conditions and situations are obtained among these subjects. A survey is beneficial in: (1) providing the value of facts and (2) focusing attention on the most vital things to be reported. In this type of survey, it is necessary to determine the psychological and social

facets of research by the manner of application or implementation of evidence to distinguish between facts and influence. The qualitative type of survey does not target at establishing frequencies, means or other parameters but at defining the diversity of some area of interest within a given population. This type of survey does not tally the number of persons with the same characteristic (value of variable) but it creates the meaningful variation (relevant dimensions and values) within that population. To sum up, the qualitative survey is the study of diversity (not distribution) in a population. Unexpectedly, the term qualitative survey (and/or the alternative diversity survey) is almost non-existent both in textbooks on general social research approach (Jansen, 2010). The researcher gathered data from 32 participants who are 60 years old and above residing in Cebu City. The participants were asked to sign an informed consent.

They are then asked to answer a survey form with items focusing on the level of influence of relationships, work, health, social involvement and support to their view of a specific stage. They are asked to identify significant events at specific ages of their lives and identify the person influential to that event. After that, they were asked to rate how significant these events are. This is a one-shot survey which includes only one empirical cycle (research question—data collection—analysis—report) analogous to the typical case of a statistical survey (Jansen, 2010). All data gathered were kept confidential. Data were then coded according to categories. Counting top layer coding results was done as a way of establishing the relative importance of diverse ideas or concepts in the data and aids to legitimize findings for quantitatively-oriented audiences. It is best, however, not to quantify results beyond the first layer of coding. This can provide a false sense of the nature of the data, by mislaying the emphasis on numerical representation; as opposed to the rich description they afford (Vanderbilt University, 2010). A holistic synthesis by core concept is then made and a deterministic explanation is made. Cluster analysis was also used to sort the variables into groups in a way that the degree of association between them is maximal if they belong to the same group and minimal otherwise. It looked into the life events, ages, significant people and perceived level of significance.

The significant life events were coded as follows: 1 – Accident, 2 - Assisted parents, 3 - Betrayal of spouse, 4 - Birth of children, 5- Birth of first child, 6 - Building a House, 7-Bullied at school, 8 - Cared for by

grandparents, 9 – Celebrations,10 - Church involvement,11 - Death of a loved one, 12 – Education, 13 - Engaged in vices,14 - Family Conflicts, 15 - Family hardships, 16 - Family time, 17 - Having a Lover,18 - Having Grandchildren, 19 - Helping at home, 20 – Illness, 21 - Involvement with activities, 22 - Lived with Sister, 23 - Living alone,24 – Marriage, 25 - Mischievous childhood,26 - Own a business,27 - Playing with Friends, 28 - Reaching old age, 29 – Retirement, 30 - Run Away, 31 - Separation with spouse, 32 - Started a job, 33 - Success of children,34 - Taking care of kids of sister, 35 - Transfer of residence, 36 – Travels, 37 – War, 38 - Work abroad. The significant people were coded as follows: 1 – Boss, 2 – Family, 3 – Colleagues, 4 – Child, 5 – Friend, 6 – Grandparent, 7 – Lover, 8 – Parent, 9 – Self, 10 – Sibling, 11 – Spouse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section explains the influence of the individuals and the environment to the perception of significance of events that happen throughout the life of an individual.

Environmental Influences

Looking into the lifeline of a group of older adults, the research was able to identify these significant events in their lives based on the number of times they are being mentioned by the study participants. The perception of these events is closely related with the environment a person is in because of the surrounding circumstance in the occurrence of the event.
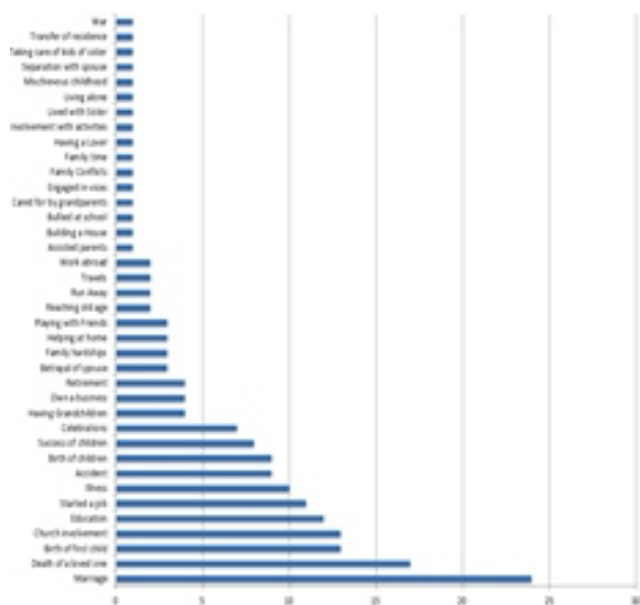
Figure 1. Significant Events

The figure above shows that marriage is the event occupying the second highest spot based on frequency of occurrence. This is followed by the events commonly happening to individuals such as death of a loved one, birth of first child, church involvement, education, starting a job, birth of children and illness. Completing the top on the list are events not usually occurring such accidents and success of children. These are the events chosen as significant to the participants.

Marriage is the event being identified with the highest frequency. Humans are expected to get married at a certain part of their lifetime. Marriage is among the goals set by most people once they reach an age wherein they are able to support a family.

Death is an inevitable part of human life. People are expected to experience deaths of loved ones throughout life. On the other hand, the birth of the first child is an experience highly celebrated by most families. The expectant parents feel a sense of extreme happiness at the sight of the child. The first child serves also as a reward for the couple. Occupying the same spot is the involvement in church activities. The belief in a supreme being is but part of every person's life. Service to that Supreme Being through involvement in church activities provides a feeling of satisfaction to most people. These serve as their way of acknowledging all the blessings received.

Education is believed to be the best gift parents can give to their children. This is also believed to help alleviate the poverty experienced by families. The greater part of the early lives of people is spent in school thereby making it a good period to experience significant milestones. This is followed by starting a job which is a result of being trained or being educated. People seek education in order to be able to work which in turn would help alleviate their current condition.

Illness though a negative life event significantly impacts the lives of individuals. It does not only alter the lives of people but it brings families to its lowest moment as well. It causes resources to be depleted and results to great emotional turmoil. On the positive side, however, illness brings together families and provides the sick the feeling of importance.

Accidents being an unexpected event leave memories that are difficult to erase. The traumatic impact of the event causes to be significant to those who experience it. It may be negative but its unforgettable nature allows a person to learn from it. On the bright side of it, birth of

more children is always a blessing to people. The birth of every child is a milestone to the lives of most couples. Every single child is considered a gift.

Reaching adulthood and seeing the children succeed is one of the most desired achievements of every person. It serves as an affirmation that a person is able to properly provide and guide the children. The success of every child is also the success of every parent.

Human Influences

Individuals play a key role in the way a person perceives the events that happen in his/her life. Their presence at a certain time in the life of a person makes that period significant.
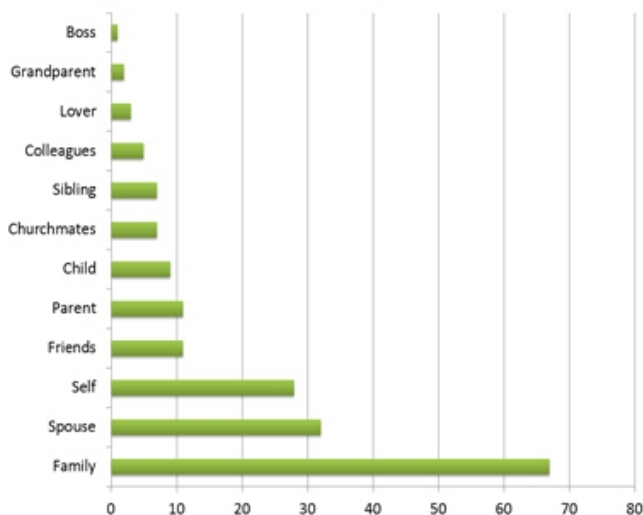

Figure 2. Significant People

The family, based on the frequency of occurrence of the word, is the most significant people to the lives of the participants. The role of the family in molding the lives of the individuals is undeniable. They are present from birth to death, making their contribution very significant.

Next to the family is the spouse. Spouses are important requirement in making a family. They provide unlimited support in most times of the couple's life. Being an integral aspect of the family, the spouse is as significant as the family.

The self is as important as any other significant person. In times when there is no other person to lean on, the self serves as the only foundation to facing life events. The life events were categorized into age groups to provide a better understanding of the influence of individuals to these events.

Table 1: Influences to Life Events in Childhood to Teenage

Significant life events (Environmental Influences)	Significant Persons (Human Influences)	Age	Perceived Significance
Assisted parents	Parent	6	10
Family hardships	Parent Self	6 (3-7)	3
Cared for by grandparents	Grandparent	7	5
Taking care of kids of sister	Sibling	8	10
Lived with Sister	Sibling	9	10
Mischievous childhood	Parent	10	10
Playing with Friends	Friends	11	10
Run Away	Self	12	0
Helping at home	Friends Self Sibling	14 (10-18)	10
Living alone	Self	18	10

Numbers in parenthesis are the range between the minimum and maximum ages

Playing with friends during a mischievous childhood is an aspect of life most memorable to all. The adventures and misadventures experienced by children are sources of wonderful memories when they grow old. Individuals always look back to the times they took risks together with friends. Even running away from home is part of this. Parents are significant to this period for they provide guidance to these mischievous children. This sometimes leads to living alone. This is part of the risk taking behavior and the desire for independence in adolescence.

Parents being the primary caregivers of children serve an important role in the events experienced by children. Children on the other hand look up to their parents. Assisting the parents and helping do household chores provide them a since of satisfaction and a feeling of achievement. In the same way, living with siblings or taking care of the children of siblings affords that feeling of happiness. Being with them and serving them is very much satisfying for they are among the most important people in childhood. Siblings are the first playmates and friends.

In addition, grandparents play a significant role in the lives of children for they provide care to children when parents are not around. Children love to be cared for by their grandparents for they provide the former the feeling of being pampered and loved.

A crucial moment in early childhood socio-emotional development is the period when attachment formation becomes critical (StateUniversity.com, 2016). Attachment theory proposes that individual differences

in later life functioning and personality are molded by a child's initial experiences with their caregivers. The worth of emotional attachment or lack of attachment, shaped early in life may function as a model for later relationships (StateUniversity.com, 2016). Adolescence indeed symbolizes one of the critical transitions in the life span and is categorized by a remarkable pace in growth (World Health Organization, 2016). At the start of their teenage life, they got focused on activities in school and with peers who will help them in their late life. As children grow, they start to devote more time with their friends and fewer times with their parents. As a result, friends can impact a child's thinking and behavior. This is the fundamental of peer pressure. Peer pressure can be a positive influence when it stimulates a child to do well in school, or to develop involvement in sports or other activities (The Cleveland Clinic Foundation, 2015).

While adolescence is a time of remarkable growth and potential, it is also a period of considerable risk through which social circumstances exert powerful influences (World Health Organization, 2016). Peer pressure can be a negative stimulus when it stimulates a child to try smoking, drinking, using drugs, or to practice unsafe sex or other risky behaviors (The Cleveland Clinic Foundation, 2015).

Table 2: Influences to Life Events in Early Adulthood

Significant life events (Environmental Influences)	Significant Persons (Human Influences)	Age	Perceived Significance
Having a Lover	Lover	20	1
Education	Friends Self Child Parent Lover Spouse	21 (7-49)	8
Marriage	Spouse Lover Self Family Parent	24 (16-38)	7
Started a job	Family Self Boss Colleagues	25	8
Birth of first child	Family Spouse Child	26 (17-39)	9
Own a business	Self Colleagues	31 (12-58)	10
Church involvement	Church mates Family	36 (15-65)	9
Birth of children	Family Spouse Child	39 (27-38)	9

Numbers in parenthesis are the range between the minimum and maximum ages

Being educated is an exciting period in life. Parents push children to achieve so as to succeed in life. In school, individuals meet friends, sometimes lovers. When in graduate education, parents are no longer the driving force but the spouse. This may not be as significant as the others, but this leads to more significant events in life.

Furthermore, having a lover may not be as significant as other events but this leads to chances of having serious relationships, eventually leading into marriage. The lover may not be as significant as others because of the possibility of them not being there up to marriage. A lover may just be part of the impulsivity in the younger years.

On the other hand, the lover which eventually becomes the spouse is a very significant person in marriage. However, it can't be denied that the parent and the family are equally important in the decision to get married. Marriage usually happens in the early adult stage coinciding with the need for intimacy at this stage of life. But, marriage provides significance not as high as others for it is an expected part of adult life and the circumstances that go with it affect how individuals view it.

Birth of first child happens in the same period, followed by the birth of more children in middle adulthood. People significant at this stage are the family which includes the spouse and children. These are the happiest moments in the lives of the couple at this stage.

Being in a family would mean establishing own means to sustain self and family which is very satisfying. Starting a job happens early adulthood, eventually leading to owning a business which usually happens in the middle adulthood. Being able to provide for the family offers a satisfying feeling. It provides more satisfaction to self, due to the effects on the esteem of this achievement. Colleagues play an important role on this event.

Church involvement happens in middle adulthood with family and church mates. Family is very influential in church activities. However, full understanding of the teachings of the church happens when a person is mature enough. This, when reached, allows the feeling of happiness and fulfillment.

The life stage known as early adulthood describes individuals between the ages of 20 and 35, who are normally vibrant, active and healthy and are engrossed on friendships, romance, child bearing and careers (QuinStreet Inc, 2016).

Table 3: Influences to Life Events in Middle to Late Adulthood

Significant life events (Environmental Influences)	Significant Persons (Human Influences)	Age	Perceived Significance
Travels	Family Colleagues	43	9
Work abroad	Sibling Colleagues	44	4
Illness	Family, Spouse, Child, Self	48 (23-67)	0
Family time	Family	51	10
Celebrations	Friends Family	57 (18-75)	8
Building a House	Family	58	10
Having Grandchildren	Family	58 (51-69)	10
Separation with spouse	Family	60	10
Success of children	Family Child	60	10
Retirement	Self Family	61	10
Reaching old age	Self	62	10
Involvement with activities	Self	64	10
Transfer of residence	Family	77	10

Numbers in parenthesis are the range between the minimum and maximum ages

Being away from family due to work is significant to most families. It is a period in middle adulthood when the family always remembers for the impact that it creates to them. People would resort to this to be able to establish self and family. It is positive for it allows an individual to provide for the family but it cannot take away the loneliness that comes with it. Families would opt to stay together despite hardships than having a family member work abroad for a better financial life.

On the other hand, travels provide opportunities for individuals to see the world in a new perspective, be it due to work or for pleasure. For families, it provides a chance to bond with each other. For colleagues, it serves the purpose of aiding professional growth.

It is inescapable for some relationships to end badly. This leaves memories too difficult to forget. The spouse, though giving a negative impact on the person's life, has created an impact. To most couples who have been in long term conflicts, the separation would give them that most awaited breather from problems.

As a person grows old, they start viewing things differently. Grandchildren become the best gifts a child can give to parents. It gives them so much happiness. It is the achievement a late adult would wish. That same feeling is felt by children when they are able to help

their parents at home. Tasks at home may be burdensome to children but seeing parents pleased, provide happiness.

Other source of success is remaining active in old age, which is a goal of older persons. It provides a sense of achievement that despite being old they were able to do the things they want. Similarly, seeing children succeed gives them that feeling of satisfaction. They are now given the time to do things they love for their children are now able to support their own. It is the parents' happiness to reach old age seeing the children successful. This also leads to opportunities to old parents to live separately to be able to spend time alone, in a home that they worked hard for in their younger years.

Building own house is a goal for most families. It becomes a reality late part of adulthood when families no longer need to spend for the education of children and when savings are enough to spend for family goals. Achieving this is very much significant to them.

Illness, being identified as a significant event, produces a neutral feeling. It becomes memorable because of the challenges it gives to the person and the family, specifically to the spouse and the children who give unconditional support in times of illness.

Celebrations are part of everybody's life. People celebrate every single memorable event in life. Birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, even in deaths, these are being commemorated. Every celebration tries to supersede the previous one, each becoming memorable. These are celebrated with families and friends.

Though childhood and adolescence are often marked by formal rites of passage, the transition from young adult to middle-aged adult is marked neither by special rites of passage nor by predictable sequential events. The transition from young adulthood to middle adulthood is often a steady one. Social cues, particularly changes in family and work areas, may be better gauges of developmental change than chronological age alone (Net Industries, 2016).

And as the person approaches late life, Erikson specified that the main psychosocial task of middle adulthood is to develop generatively, or the yearning to expand one's influence and commitment to family, society and future generations. In other terms, the middle adult is focused with forming and guiding the

next generation (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016). Possibly middle adulthood is best recognized for its infamous midlife crisis: a time of reassessment that leads to reviewing long-held views and values. The midlife crisis may also result in a person separation with spouse, leaving jobs or transferring from the city to the suburbs.

Table 4: Influences to Life Events which are Perceived Negatively

Significant life events (Environmental Influences)	Significant Persons (Human Influences)	Age	Perceived Significance
Bullied at school	Self	10	-5
Accident	Self Family Sibling Friends Parent	11 (3-23)	-7
Engaged in vices	Self	12	-2
War	Family	14	-10
Betrayal of spouse	Spouse Family	37	-5
Death of a loved one	Parent Spouse Family Grandparent Sibling	42 (7-77)	-3
Family Conflicts	Family	60	-2

Numbers in parenthesis are the range between the minimum and maximum ages

Accidents usually happen in the most active stage of life, the late childhood. The average age of participants who chose accidents as a significant event is 11 years old, that is, between 3 to 23 years old. Early childhood is a time of exploration. In school age, kids tend to be very active with games and physical activities. Adolescence is characterized by periods of risk taking activities and impulsivity. Siblings are the playmates early in life. Friends are there in the most risky activities. And, when accidents happen, these kids turn to family, most especially the parents for help. This event is viewed as significant but in a negative way. However, negative as it is, it provides opportunities for learning. In addition, bullying is also common to school-age children. Being bullied has a negative impact to self and creates a memory difficult to erase.

Certain significant event does not stick to a single period. The death of a loved one happens on different periods of life. The death of grandparents, a spouse,

parents, siblings and other family members, though an expected natural occurrence in life still creates an impact on the life of an individual. It brings people to their low moments.

Though, usually considered a happy period, family life is not deprived with sad moments. Family conflicts and hardships greatly impact individuals. Hardships are most felt by little kids who see the world as a perfect place. They sympathize with the hardships of their parents. Conflicts are more prominent in late adulthood, usually due to the generation gaps and the surfacing of previous conflicts. In contrast to this, moments with the family are of great importance for it provides chances to talk over things and to just enjoy the moment of being together. Betrayal of spouse usually happens in middle adulthood, congruent with the average age in the survey.

When a painful experience occurs to young children, their young brains get into emergency survival mode, much like it does for any person of any age. Children's brains do not have the equal degree of emotional ripeness as adults, which means that they are incapable to reason, rationalize or problem-solve like adults. They are also incapable to alter their emotional states as well as adults, and they have diverse comforters than adults (Dent, 2011). Far too many children who have experienced the demise of a parent find it hard to overcome fears of abandonment in later relationships (Stepp, 2012).

For others, the burdens that go along with the task of growing-up are overwhelming. Still yet, for others, it is hard for them to chase their goals despite aspiration and motivation for the reason that they are under-prepared and under-resourced. The absence of a clear pathway to adulthood, and the fact that typical and healthy growing-up occasionally involves moving back into a parents' home, leaving a job or returning to school, it may be more problematic to determine when an emerging adult is struggling, failing and in need of assistance (Tanner, 2009).

Table 5: Cluster Analysis

Variable	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Grand Centre
Event	16.5211	35.0000	37.0000	17.8421
Age	30.5070	77.0000	43.5000	31.8026
People	4.0423	2.0000	7.0000	4.1711
Level	4.8732	10.0000	6.5000	5.0263

To further validate the qualitative assumptions presented above, cluster analysis was done. It revealed that the family is the most significant people to the individuals even late in life. Success is felt the most in the late years of life when old people leave the family to transfer to a house of their own. This is the period when responsibilities over the children are already accomplished. Children can now stand on their own and live life with their own families. They are now freed from the tangles of parenthood. Together with this, is the decision to retire? They can now enjoy the things they worked hard for in their early years.

On the other hand, the transfer of residence in older persons may mean living again with children after being left in their own house. It is a time when the older person rejoices for the opportunity to be with children and grandchildren until the end of life. This is significant due to the chance to be cared for by people who matter. Being surrounded by familiar people in the last few moments provides the feeling of security and confidence to face the end of life. This is also reflective of the Filipino culture of close family ties. Family is always given utmost importance in all situations.

Synthesis

Throughout life, individuals experience significant events. The reason behind perceiving it positively or negatively is not because of how the event happened. It is influenced by how the people around made it turn into a positive or a negative memory. A happy and a sad event are of equal importance. They provide the same opportunities for growth. The presence of support during milestones of the lives of individual would greatly affect how they would view it later on in life.

The way the people around them transform the environment into something conducive for positive perception would greatly help them live a positive old age. It is but necessary to look at events as they are and likewise how the people contribute to the feeling that they offer.

CONCLUSION

The review of the life events of older persons allows the opportunity to identify the individuals who are influential to the way humans perceive the stages of life. This also allows looking into where significant events occur in the life line of people thereby permitting for greater understanding why certain people matter most. This also allows appreciation of the need for

presence of certain individuals at certain periods of a person's life.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended for future researchers to conduct a similar study but identifying participants with similar characteristics to allow uniformity in the experiences. A further study maybe conducted comparing homogenous groups. It is also recommended to conduct similar study on other cultures and races, those with different family orientation than Filipinos.

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