Developmental Psychology: Its Definition, Stages, Scope, Function, and Methods

B.Ed. 1.5 (2nd Semester) Unit-1

Teacher: Muhammad Naeem Butt

Institute of Education and Research
University of Peshawar

PS: Notes compiled for online submission to the University/students during Covid-19 Outbreak

- **Developmental psychology** is the scientific study of changes that occur in human beings over the course of their life span.

- The pattern of change that begins at conception and continues through the life cycle.

- Early adulthood is not the endpoint of development; rather, no age period dominates development.

- Researchers increasingly study the experiences and psychological orientations of adults at different points in their lives.

Development is Multidimensional

- Whatever your age, your body, your mind, your emotions, and your relationships are changing and affecting each other.

- Development consists of biological, cognitive, and socioemotional dimensions.

- Even within a dimension, there are many components for example, attention, memory, abstract thinking, speed of processing information, and social intelligence are just a few of the components of the cognitive dimension.

Development is Multidirectional throughout Life,

- Some dimensions or components of a dimension expand and others shrink. For example, when one language (such as English) is acquired early in development, the capacity for acquiring second and third languages (such as Spanish and Chinese) decreases later in development, especially after early childhood (Levelt, 1989).

- During adolescence, as individuals establish romantic relationships, their time spent with friends may decrease.

- During late adulthood, older adults might become wiser by being able to call on experience to guide their intellectual decision making, but they perform more poorly on tasks that require speed in processing information (Baltes, 2009; Baltes & Kuntzman, 2007; Salthouse, 2009).

Developmental Science is Multidisciplinary

Psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, neuroscientists, and medical researchers all share an interest in unlocking the mysteries of development through the life span. How do your heredity and health limit your intelligence? Do intelligence and social relationships change with age in the same way around the world? How do families and schools influence intellectual development? These are examples of research questions that cut across disciplines.

Biological, Cognitive & Socioemotional Processes

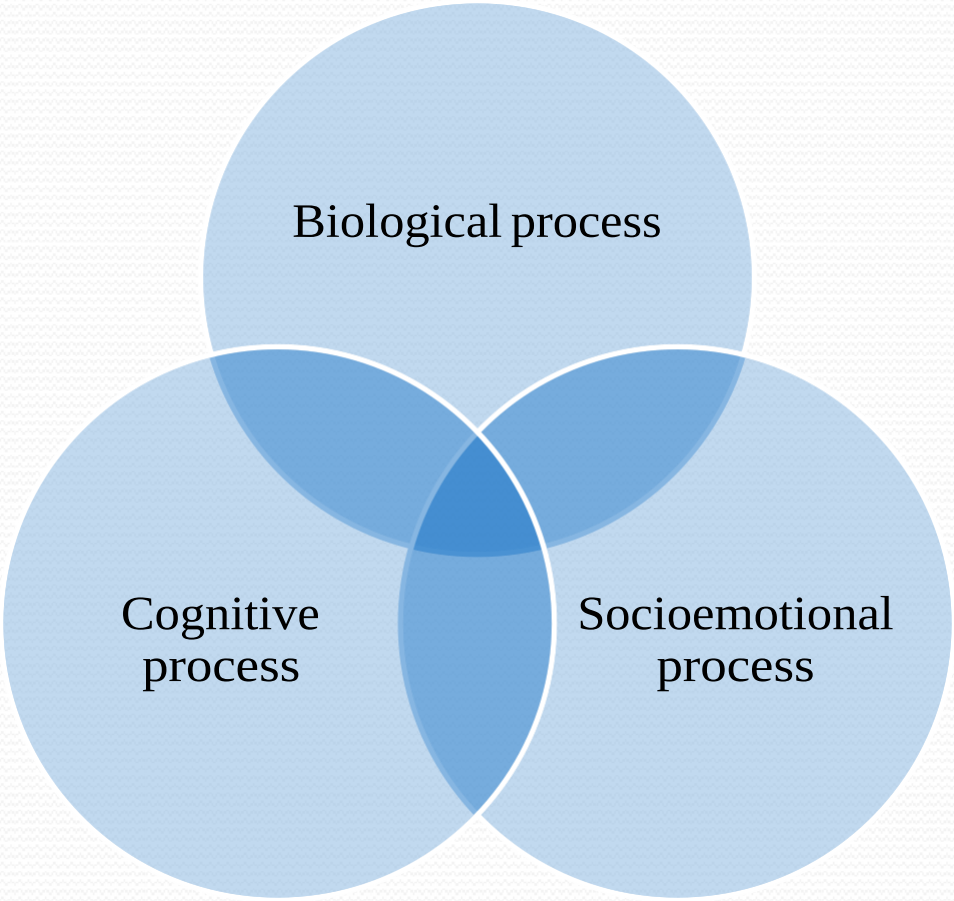
- We defined *development as the pattern of change that* begins at conception and continues through the life span. The pattern is complex because it is the product of biological, cognitive, and socioemotional processes.

Biological processes produce changes in an individual's physical nature.

- Genes inherited from parents, the development of the brain, height and weight gains, changes in motor skills, the hormonal changes of puberty, and cardiovascular decline are all examples of biological processes that affect development.

Cognitive processes

- These refer to changes in the individual's thought, intelligence, and language. Watching a colorful mobile swinging above the crib, putting together a two- word sentence, memorizing a poem, imagining what it would be like to be a movie star, and solving a crossword puzzle all involve cognitive processes.


Biological process
Cognitive process
Socioemotional process

Socioemotional processes

- They involve changes in the individual's relationships with other people, changes in emotions, and changes in personality.

- A child's response to a parent's touch, a toddler's aggressive attack on a playmate, a school-age child's development of assertiveness, an adolescent's joy at a party, and the affection of an elderly woman all reflect the role of socioemotional processes in development.

- Biological, cognitive, and socioemotional processes are inextricably intertwined (Diamond, 2007).

- Consider a baby smiling in response to a parent's touch. This response depends on biological processes (the physical nature of touch and responsiveness to it), cognitive processes (the ability to understand intentional acts), and socioemotional processes (the act of smiling often reflects a positive emotional feeling, and smiling helps to connect us in positive ways with other human beings).

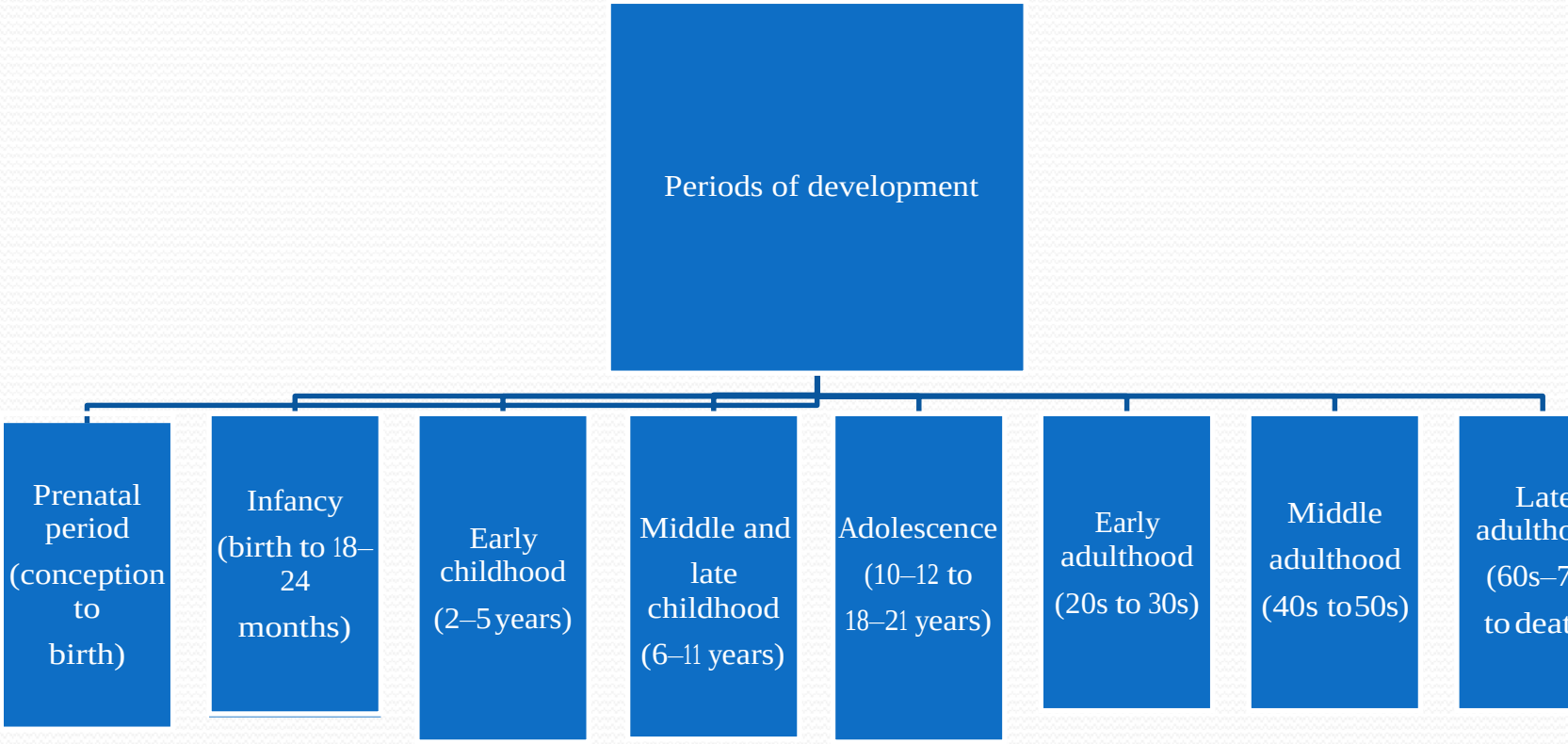
- In many instances, biological, cognitive, and socioemotional processes are bidirectional. For example, biological processes can influence cognitive processes and vice versa.

Periods of Development

- The interplay of biological, cognitive, and socioemotional processes produces the periods of the human life span.

- A *developmental period refers to a time* frame in a person's life that is characterized by certain features.
- For the purposes of organization and understanding, we commonly describe development in terms of these periods.

- The most widely used classification of developmental periods involves the eight-period sequence shown in Figure Approximate age ranges are listed for the periods to provide a general idea of when a period begins and ends.


Periods of development
Prenatal period (conception to birth)
Infancy (birth to 18–24 months)
Early childhood (2–5 years)
Middle and late childhood (6–11 years)
Adolescence (10–12 to 18–21 years)
Early adulthood (20s to 30s)
Middle adulthood (40s to 50s)
Late adultho
(60s–7
to deat

- The **prenatal period** is the time from conception to birth. It involves tremendous growth—from a single cell to an organism complete with brain and behavioral capabilities—and takes place in approximately a nine-month period.

- **Infancy** is the developmental period from birth to 18 or 24 months. Infancy is a time of extreme dependence upon adults. During this period, many psychological activities—language, symbolic thought, sensorimotor coordination, and social learning, for example—are just beginning.

- **Early childhood** is the developmental period from the end of infancy to age 5 or 6. This period is sometimes called the "preschool years." During this time, young children learn to become more self-sufficient and to care for themselves, develop school readiness skills (following instructions, identifying letters), and spend many hours in play with peers. First grade typically marks the end of early childhood.

- **Middle and late childhood** is the developmental period from about 6 to 11 years of age, approximately corresponding to the elementary school years. During this period, the fundamental skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic are mastered. The child is formally exposed to the larger world and its culture. Achievement becomes a more central theme of the child's world, and self-control increases.

- **Adolescence** is the developmental period of transition from childhood to early adulthood, entered at approximately 10 to 12 years of age and ending at 18 to 21 years of age. Adolescence begins with rapid physical changes—dramatic gains in height and weight, changes in body contour, and the development of sexual characteristics. At this point in development, the pursuit of independence and an identity are prominent. Thought is more logical, abstract, and idealistic. More time is spent outside the family.

- **Early adulthood** is the developmental period that begins in the early twenties and lasts through the thirties. It is a time of establishing personal and economic independence, career development, and, for many, selecting a mate, learning to live with someone in an intimate way, starting a family, and rearing children.

- **Middle adulthood** is the developmental period from approximately 40 years of age to about 60. It is a time of expanding personal and social involvement and responsibility; of assisting the next generation in becoming competent, mature individuals; and of reaching and maintaining satisfaction in a career.

- **Late adulthood** is the developmental period that begins in the sixties or seventies and lasts until death. It is a time of life review, retirement, and adjustment to new social roles involving decreasing strength and health.

- **Late adulthood** has the longest span of any period of development; the number of people in this age group has been

increasing dramatically. As a result, life- span developmentalists have been paying more attention to differences within late adulthood (Scheibe, Freund, & Baltes, 2007).

- A major change takes place in older adults' lives as they become the "oldest- old," on average at about 85 years of age. For example, the "young-old" (classified as 65 through 84 in this analysis) have substantial potential for physical and cognitive fitness, retain much of their cognitive capacity, and can develop strategies to cope with the gains and losses of aging.

- In contrast, the oldest-old (85 and older) show considerable loss in cognitive skills, experience an increase in chronic stress, and are more weak (Baltes & Smith, 2003).

- Considerable variation exists in how much the oldest-old retain their capabilities. Thus, Baltes and Smith concluded that considerable plasticity and adaptability characterize adults from their sixties until their mid-eighties but that the oldest-old have reached the limits of their functional capacity, which makes interventions to improve their lives difficult.

Conceptions of Age

- **Chronological age**—number of years elapsed since person's birth. Many developmentalisits argue that chronological age is not very relevant to understand a person's psychological development.

- A person's age does not cause development. Time is a crude index of many events and experiences and it does not cause anything.

Biological age—age in terms of biological health.

- Determining biological age involves knowing the functional capacities of a person's vital organ system.

- The younger the person's biological age, the longer the person is expected to live, regardless of chronological age.

Psychological age—individual's adaptive capacities compared to those of other individuals of the same chronological age.

- Thus older adults who continue to learn, are flexible, are motivated, control their emotions, and think clearly are engaging in more adaptive behaviors than their chronological age mates who do not continue to learn, are rigid, are unmotivated, do not control their emotions, and do not think clearly.

Social age—social roles and expectations related to person's age.

- Consider the role of a mother and the behaviors that accompany the role. In predicting an adult woman's behavior, it may be more important to know that she is the mother of a 3 year old child than to know whether she is 20 or 30 years old.

Developmental Issues

Nature and Nurture	Extent to which development is influenced by nature and by nurture
Stability and Change	Degree to which early traits and characteristics persist through life or change
Continuity-Discontinuity	Extent development involves gradual, cumulative change (continuity) or distinct stages (discontinuity)

Nature & Nurture

- The nature-nurture-issue revolves around the idea that both nature and nurturing may play a role in the growth and development of an individual. Some argue the *tabula rasa* theory, that every person's mind is a blank slate at birth, while others believe that some traits are inborn. Some researchers place a great deal of emphasis on the nurturing a child receives during his or her formative years, believing this nurturing results in the formation of traits and characteristics in an individual.

Stability & Change

- Whether the early traits and characteristics in life continue throughout the individual's life, or change. Some researchers believe that stability in traits is the result of heredity, or early-life experiences.

- Contrarily, researchers who lean more towards change believe that experiences later in life can lead to change.