CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY
INTRODUCTION

The present chapter is concerned with the findings of the study after analyses and interpretation, thereafter the discussion of results obtained, followed by the educational implication of the study and finally, the suggestions for further study.

5.1 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings mentioned below are drawn on the basis of a careful analyses and interpretation of the data obtained, made in conformity with the objectives and hypothesis formulated by the investigator, during the course of the study:

1. The attitude of the youth towards the elders in relation to their value system is slightly favourable.

2. There exists a significant difference in the attitude of males and females towards the elders in relation to their value system. The attitude of females is more favourable than the males towards the elders.

3. There exists a significant difference in the attitude of undergraduates and postgraduates towards the elders in relation to their value system. The attitude of undergraduates is more favourable than the postgraduates towards the elders.

4. There exists no significant interaction effect of gender and education in respect of attitude towards the elders.

5. There exists a significant interaction effect of gender and education in respect of value system.
5.2 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

All living beings love and defend their off-springs with similar disregard for their own welfare. This similar feeling lies at the heart of all religious practices. If we can keep this feeling alive and expand it towards all beings, our practice will certainly be not in vain. In the human sphere, we all have the kindness of our parents, teachers and elders to be grateful for. Hence, we are exhorted to repay this kindness. Parents love for children is perhaps the strongest human feeling. After our parents have raised us through our earliest years, our teachers and elders continue to transmit their wisdom to us. We are not self-contained or self-created. What we are now is the result of many people's painstaking efforts in nurturing and instructing us. An African proverb states it succinctly. "It takes a whole village to raise a child." Considering what our parents, elders have done for us, what is the attitude we should take towards them, and by extension, towards all living beings.

Findings of the study presented in the previous section 5.1, have been further critically examined and discussed in this section in the light of the evidence from other studies.

Analyses of findings revealed that the attitude of the youth towards the elders in relation to their value system is slightly favourable. This finding was in general supported by the foreign findings of Glass, J. Conrad, and Trent, Curtis(1978), Marks, Ronald, Newman, Sally and Onawola, Roland (1985), Sanders, Gregory F. and Pittman, Joe F.(1987) and Lin, Chih-Tu (2008).

Glass, J. Conrad, and Trent, Curtis (1978) in their paper "4-Hers Learn... We Shall All Be Old!" revealed that adolescent 4-Hers who have a more
positive sense of meaning and purpose in their own lives hold more positive attitudes towards their elderly.

**Marks, Ronald, Newman, Sally, and Onawola, Roland (1985)** in a study of latency-aged children (8-10 year-old), indicated that although youngsters have negative perceptions of the aging process, they have “generally positive attitudes toward elders, and would go to elders with their classroom problems.” Data revealed that one-third of the children in this study conceptualized old people in terms of physical problems or appearance. In addition, it was reported that the “Behavioural Descriptions” category was very positive, which was “consistent with the Hickey et al. (1968) study, which found that children were three times more likely to see the elderly behaviours as positive than as negative.”

**Sanders, Gregory F., and Pittman, Joe F. (1987)** conducted a study on “Attitudes of Youth toward Known and General Target Elderly.” Half of a sample of two hundred and seventy five high school and college students rated “generalized” elderly targets, described only by gender and age, and half rated known elderly. Known elderly were rated more positively than generalized elderly. Within the generalized group, younger targets were rated more favourably than older targets and females more positively than males. This pattern was not replicated in the known target group. The results suggested that given the opportunity, youth use information other than gender and age to evaluate the elderly, but in the absence of additional information, stereotypes of elderly emerge in attitudes of youth towards the elderly.

**Lin, Chih-Tu (2008)** conducted “A Study of Medical and Non-Medical College Student’s Knowledge and Attitudes toward Older People in a University in Southern Taiwan.” The research concluded that the college students have a moderate level of knowledge on the elderly people, with a
mean score of 53.30, which is lower than the result of similar researches with medical students in US in recent years. As to the general attitudes towards elderly people, the subjects in question have a slightly positive attitude (mean score of each question=3.33) , which is better than the results of recent researches in the US and in Spain, that demonstrated negative attitudes among college students (both medical and non-medical) towards elderly people.

In India, this finding was supported by Reddy, P. Jayarami (1992) and Srivastava, A.R.N. (2005).

Reddy, P. Jayarami (1992) cited from his studies that the family members and other care giver's attitude in Indian context are favourable to the elderly.

Srivastava, A.R.N. (2005) in his paper ‘The Aged: Their Problems, Social Interventions and Future Outlook in the Western U.P.’ revealed that over 75% aged have independent households and also extended family types. In the case of independent households, decision-making process is regulated by the aged themselves but in the cases of dependent households only the non-financial issues are discussed with them. It is very surprising to know that majority of the aged persons have no serious health related problems. Majority of the aged persons would like to help members of the family in one or the other way. The attitude of the family members towards the aged was also found positive.

Following this was the next finding which revealed that there exist a significant difference in the attitude of males and females towards the elders in relation to their value system. The attitude of females is more favourable than the males towards the elders.

It is believed that males cannot take time off, cannot live nearby and help out their elders. They remain emotionally distanced; hence their elders
cannot rely on them for 'soft aspects of support.' They have unfavourable and less intimate relationships with their elders; this is due to the sex role standard prevalent in our society, based on the differential ways of treatment given to boys and girls. The way a female is raised, the society she lives in, or the experiences she has in life makes her have more of a nurturing instinct, more tender in nature, and emotionally more inclined towards her parents, elders, family and their needs. She remains emotionally more concerned for her mother or grandmother as she is going to be in the same shoe in future and more close to her father and grandfather as it is by nature. Relationships always matter more to a female. Reason being, female brains tend to focus on and remember details longer, and because the oxytocin they produce has the effect of causing them to care more about connections and relationships than do males: they notice it more, they remember it more and they care more! On the other hand, males have a rejective, demanding and disobedient attitude towards their elders. Son's love for his parents, his elders often gets diluted with his own family-wife and kids, but a daughter no matter what, will always be there for her parents, her elders. She will always be at their 'beck-and-call.' Intergenerational affection remains the factor that most motivates daughters to provide support, while filial obligation, legitimation of inheritance, and frequency of contact most motivate sons, if, up to any level.

This finding was in general supported by the foreign findings of Troll (1979), Olejnik, Anthony B. and LaRue, Asenath A. (1981), Sanders, Gregory F. and Pittman, Joe F. (1987), Silverstein, Merrill, Parrott, Tonya M. and Bengtson, Vern L. (1995) and Lin, Chih-Tu (2008).

Troll, P. (1979) in his survey on “Socialization of Women to Direct care of Family Members” found that women are socialized to focus more
emotional energy on family ties and indeed devote more time and energy to
direct care of family members than men do.

Olejnik, Anthony B., and LaRue, Asenath A. (1981) conducted a study on
“Changes in Adolescent’s Perceptions of the Aged: The Effects of
Intergenerational Contact.” The results revealed that boys had more negative
stereotyped perceptions of the aged than girls, and the girls indicated greater
willingness to interact with the elderly. Girls changed their perceptions of
the aged more than the boys, and younger adolescents changed their
perceptions more than the older adolescents. Most of the changes in
perceptions occurred in response to two types of items: those focusing on
physical characteristics and those dealing with aspects of insecurity.

Sanders, Gregory F., and Pittman, Joe F. (1987) conducted a study on
“Attitudes of Youth toward Known and General Target Elderly.” Half of a
sample of two hundred and seventy five high school and college students
rated “generalized” elderly targets, described only by gender and age, and
half rated known elderly. Known elderly were rated more positively than
generalized elderly. Within the generalized group, younger targets were
rated more favourably than older targets and females more positively than
males.

Silverstein, Merril, Parrott, Tonya M., and Bengtson, Vern L. (1995), in
the article “Factors That Predispose Middle-Aged Sons and Daughters to
Provide Social Support to Older Parents”, examined gender differences in
the factors that predispose middle-aged children to provide instrumental
social support to their elderly parents. The findings indicated that
intergenerational affection is the factor that most motivates daughters to
provide support, while filial obligation, legitimation of inheritance, and
frequency of contact most motivate sons.
Lin, Chih-Tu (2008) conducted “A Study of Medical and Non-Medical College Student’s Knowledge and Attitudes toward Older People in a University in Southern Taiwan.” College students in this research proved to have negative images or erroneous stereotype about elderly people: while the male students stressed on the mental and physical deterioration of elderly people such like “lack of interest of capability in sexual activities, too slow for modern society, less organized and more confused, despairing”, the female students focused more on the character stereotyping: “angry, crabby, unfair, pessimistic”.

This finding was supported by the Indian study of Rani, Rita and Sharma, Shubhangna (2004). They conducted a study on “Attitude of Teenagers towards their Grandparents.” The study was undertaken with the objective to examine the different attitudes of male and female teenagers towards their grandparents. The findings indicated that females are comparatively more protective, loving and involved with their grandparents while males are rejective, demanding and disobedient to the rules of their grandparents.

The next finding of the study revealed that there exist a significant difference in the attitude of undergraduates and postgraduates towards the elders in relation to their value system. The attitude of undergraduates is more favourable than the postgraduates towards the elders.

An individual’s attitude stands partly on rational footing and partly on emotional footing. He is not born with a favourable or unfavourable attitude. Rather, he develops it due to his own experiences since his early childhood. Education has failed to make an impact on the youth to take better care of their elders. On the contrary, the more the educational qualifications of a youth, the greater is the likelihood of his neglecting them. The increase in the hierarchy of education is accompanied by not only an increase in the age factor and maturity level but also a change in the thinking process of the
individual. When new experiences are acquired, they are differentiated or segregated from the already acquired experiences. This segregation or differentiation tends to change the attitude, making it more specific. Attitude at any stage is essentially a product of the interaction of one’s self with one’s environment. Hence a change in the environment brings about a change in the attitude. With age, an individual develops wider social contacts, he is influenced by many social institutions and groups and as a result he tries to pick up nature and motives. Turning more career-oriented at postgraduate attitudes of those groups for which he has stronger allegiance or that suit his own level, he feels the need for taking independent decisions for himself and not remains dependent on his elders for taking his decisions especially concerning his life and career. Moreover, he doesn’t even appreciate their interference, thus detaching him further from his elders, thereby increasing the gap and of course influencing the attitude towards their elders. Attitude of postgraduates seems to be standing more on empirical, critical, practical and rational footing as compared to the attitude of undergraduates who still seem to rely more on emotional footing, thereby leading to a more favourable attitude towards their elders.

This finding was supported by the foreign studies of Matthijs, Kalmijn (2005) and Lin, Chih-Tu. (2008).

Matthijs, Kalmijn (2005) conducted a study on “Educational Inequality and Family Relationships: Influences on Contact and Proximity.” He examined how educational differences across and within family relationships affect the content of the relationship, thereby focusing on proximity and contact between parents and adult children and between siblings. The results revealed sharp but nonlinear educational effects on proximity and distance, although most of the educational effect on contact was indirect, via distance. Educational differences within family relationships lead to greater distances
and less contact, confirming the classic mobility thesis, but the effects are generally weak and the effects on contact are indirect.

Lin, Chih-Tu (2008) conducted “A Study of Medical and Non-Medical College Student’s Knowledge and Attitudes toward Older People in a University in Southern Taiwan.” The findings indicated that there was no statistical difference between the knowledge level of senior medical students and junior ones (p=0.448); but in both general and geriatrics attitudes, senior medical students had a statistically more negative attitude than junior ones (p<0.05). The factors affecting college student’s general attitude towards elderly people were: “Gender, Family structure, Interaction with their grandparents and Overall perception about interaction with elderly people.”

In India, there was no study supporting the already mentioned finding.

Following this was the next finding which revealed that there exist no significant interaction effect of gender and education in respect of attitude towards the elders.

Interaction effect represents the combined effects of factors on the dependent measure. When an interaction effect is present the impact of one factor depends on the level of the other factor. Interaction between two independent variables namely gender and education affecting a dependent variable namely attitude was studied using ANOVA (Analyses of Variance). The significant main effects for both gender and education revealed that there existed significant differences in the attitude (scores) between males and females and between undergraduates and postgraduates. Further the non significant interaction effect indicated that the differences in the gender category i.e. between males and females does not depend on the education category i.e. undergraduates and postgraduates. To provide a complete picture of the result, the need was to explicitly state what the
difference between the means were (table 4.6). Since, there were only two levels of independent variables namely gender and education, it was not necessary to conduct comparison between the marginal means, the F value already revealed that they are significantly different.

There was no study, neither foreign nor Indian, supporting the above mentioned finding.

The next and the last finding of the study revealed that there exist a significant interaction effect of gender and education in respect of value system.

The interaction between two independent variables namely gender and education affecting a dependent variable namely values was studied using ANOVA (Analyses of Variance). The significant main effects for both gender (scores) between males and females and between undergraduates and education revealed that there existed significant differences in the values postgraduates. Further the significant interaction effect indicated that the differences in the gender category i.e. between males and females does depend on the education category i.e. undergraduates and postgraduates. To provide a complete picture of the result, the need was to explicitly state what the difference between the means were (table 4.7). Since, there were only two levels of independent variables namely gender and education, it was not necessary to conduct comparison between the marginal means, the F value already revealed that they are significantly different.

Eetta, Prince-Gibson, and Shalom H. Schwartz (1998) conducted a study on "Value Priorities and Gender." They used theories of gender and research on values to generate hypotheses about the impact on value priorities of gender differences and of interactions of gender with possible sociodemographic moderators of gender experience: age, education, and
ethnicity. An Israeli national sample revealed no main effects of gender on the importance attributed to any of the ten different types of values, nor any interactions with age, education, or ethnicity. The latter all showed substantial, predicted effects on value priorities. Structural analyses of value systems revealed that the values had quite similar meanings for both men and for women.

There was no Indian study supporting the above mentioned finding.

5.3 EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

The most outstanding characteristic of any research is that it must contribute something noble to the development of the area concerned, hence it was in the right of the order of things to find out how this study would be useful to the youth, elders, teachers, curriculum framers, educational planners and society in general. The present research was carried out to study the attitude of the youth towards the elders in relation to their value system. It was encouraging to see that the youth in this study held a slightly positive attitude towards their elders in relation to their value system. However, there is still work to be done in helping today's youth gain more positive attitude towards their elders. If attitudes are learned, it's possible to design learning experiences to help the youth of today and tomorrow develop better and more positive attitude towards their elders. Any contribution made to improve society's attitude towards older people or elders will benefit us all, for, unless we die young; we shall all be old! On the other hand, only for the sake of showiness all youth present themselves concerned for their elders but if we analyse the behavioural attitude the real picture lays no hidden. They may say they have no problem with it to sound as if are up with the times or politically correct. However, their behaviours may not reflect their
attitude. Elder people are seen as an increasing burden on society because they are unproductive, increasingly frail, and vulnerable with their decreasing ability to perform activities of daily living, and frequently poor mobility. Negative myths and stereotypes are at the heart of age discrimination. Elder people are often portrayed as frail, tired, self-pitying, dull, unhappy, intolerant and unproductive, and yet many have been most useful in society and capable of much more but not allowed to develop or contribute their skills and potential. The media has a great influence on beliefs and attitudes. It influences both ways, positively as well as negatively. The way elderly people are represented in the media can greatly affect the public’s perception of ageing; for example, the specific choice of words used to refer to an older person can convey a strong negative connotation. (WHO, 1989). The role of the older person as seen by the media may be very demeaning. Williams (1989) asserted that Australians, as a whole, believe that the elderly should live in a limited way, often stripped of possessions, bereft of status symbols, and with no say in the community.

The persistence of not very positive attitude perpetuate the myths, which is a tragedy when the majority of elderly people live at home, lead purposeful lives, and often see their contemporaries as old, but not themselves. With the aged population increasing, and the government’s financial “cake” decreasing, there will be less money for pensions and other assistance. The negative view of the elderly which has developed probably due to the image of youth and vitality promoted particularly by the media must change. Old people should feel valued, be respected for their knowledge and experience, and be given opportunities to make choices. Possession of good health is probably the most important element for a meaningful old age, because it induces activity. Elders must not be seen as a decrepit, debilitated lot, draining the country’s resources, but as useful, contributing members of the society. They must be encouraged and allowed to develop and contribute
their skills and potential, not be squeezed “out of sight, out of mind.” Our elders are a storehouse of experience. With due care, they can be an invaluable asset to the society, leading a productive, peaceful and dignified life in the evening of their sojourn.

The youth must acknowledge this healthy segment as a resource. Considered thus, the notion that the elders are a social and economic burden should be thrown overboard. It is totally unrealistic. In fact, it is this seasoned potential of the elders that needs to be tapped. Whatever maybe the social problem, youngsters must realize that they should care for their elders in the family and learn to respect them and their experience. Sometimes, the wisdom and experience of the elders maybe invaluable in solving their problems, but not always. The youth should understand the feelings and sentiments of the elders and care for them. It is in the winters of one’s life that a person needs greater care, love and affection. It is not enough for the youth merely to provide for the elders. It is more important to show them affection and respect. There is no doubt that the joint-family system has many advantages such as the experience of elders, their time and effort in taking care and looking after the household and of course their advice when the youngsters are at fault. The elders themselves are no doubt benefited as they are not left alone. This contributes to their mental and physical well-being. Also, in times of sickness and need, the younger generation is there to care for them.

Grandparents and grandchildren have a special bonding that enriches the lives of each other. The elder one is the centre of the family. He / She is the spiritual and emotional head of the family. It is up to us to make the family what we want it to be hell or heaven, one from the heart. At the same time, it cannot be denied that when certain social and family circumstances act as barrier against the joint family system, then it is better that the elders and the
youngsters live separately. This way the relationship is still cordial and not disturbed. However, efforts should be made for occasional meetings and conversations as often as possible. It is not necessary to always accept what they say, but it makes them feel wanted. This prevents an unwelcome conflict. One should always remember that the wheel of life is constantly turning and the youngsters themselves will have to one day face the same phase of life. And by the law of nature, sooner or later, whatever we do to others boomerangs on us.

It is said in the Vedas that devotion to elders is like devotion to God. We owe our physical existence to our parents. What we are now is the result of many people’s painstaking efforts in nurturing and instructing us. Considering what our elders have done for us, what is the attitude we should take towards them, and by extension, towards all living beings? Our parents give us our physical bodies and nurse us through our early years. Yet, all too often, we take their care for granted, and seem to keep better count of the comforts they were unable to provide us than of the care they lavished on us for so many years. We humans have a very long childhood: it takes almost twenty years to raise a child to adulthood, and even then many children are still dependent on their parents, both economically and emotionally. Repaying our parents is not an easy task. Unfortunately, as the old saying goes, “a parent can raise ten children, but ten children often are not able to support a single parent.”

Taking care of an elderly and ailing parent may take so much of time and effort and may require so many sacrifices that many grown-ups are not willing to make necessary changes in their life style. By distancing themselves from their parents, their elders, they actually cut themselves off from one of the basic human experience-the cycle of generations and the cycle of intimate, mutual care that we owe to each other. We may have an
idea that we should be filial towards our parents, our elders, but how often
do we feel genuinely grateful towards them.

We owe a general debt of gratitude to all our elders, to all past generations. By gratitude I do not mean obsequiousness or external show of deference, but a quiet, inner appreciation. Constantly through our lives we use the fruits of other’s labour. All the commodities of our need, all the knowledge we gain, all the material wealth in this world comes from the work of previous generations. Only few of our achievements are totally original, totally unprecedented. This knowledge should help us stay on guard against arrogance. Young people need to find their own way, learn to make their own judgments, and examine things critically. They also need to know and understand the great religious and philosophical traditions of the world so that they can distil the essence of all these teachings of wisdom. Ignorance of the past and lack of respect for the struggles our elders have gone through and the wisdom it has brought, doom us into extremely short-sighted and self-centred existence. It is said that every generation stands on the shoulders of the previous one. If we can appreciate the wisdom of our elders, the wisdom of our past, we can stand taller and look farther than any generation before us. If we spitefully ignore this collective wisdom of humankind, we are likely to understand not very much of the world, or even ourselves.

A profound feeling of gratitude lies at the very heart of all religious practices. If we can keep this feeling alive and expand it towards all beings, our practice will certainly be not in vain. In the human sphere, we all have the kindness of our parents, teachers and elders to be grateful for. At all stages of life we are both in love with and terrified by the idea of unscheduled time. We picture a secret garden and a whistling prairie at once, and we imagine we could either find or lose ourselves there, depending on
the perception we chose to fulfil. In this sense retirement and gap year fall prey to the same forces of emotional anarchy

5.3.1 Caution for Elders

A word of caution for the elders, that, they must accept the changes in social value, social structure and economy resulting from industrialization, urbanization and consequent mobility, poverty, unemployment and inflation. They must serve as a helping hand to the family, to their children and not a dominating one, so that they are welcomed in the family. What happens invariably is that older people tend to keep on preaching. They must realize that today's lifestyle is far moved from theirs and they should accept the same. They should give more independence to both their children and the grandchildren. Elders should first of all make an effort to understand the socio-economic conditions, careers and family life of their children. They should try to adjust and not interfere in the day to day affairs and problems of their children's family. Unless asked, they should patiently refrain from giving advice. They should not compare the attitude of the youngsters of today with their own attitude when they were young.

Elders need to understand the fact that as a child grows older and has wider social contacts, he is influenced by many social institutions and groups and as a result he tries to pick up attitudes of that group for which he has a stronger allegiance or that suits his own nature and motives. This way the youngsters will come to respect and love them. Elders should not expect affection on demand, they should earn it! The elders of the family, of the society, and of the nation as a whole should realize the fact that they possess a wealth of experience, skills which they can contribute to the overall well being of not only of the family but also of the society and nation as a whole.
They should be mentally and economically prepared for their old age so that they don’t have to look upon their children as their guardians. Life is another name for adjustment, so the elders must learn to adjust with the new generation inspite of the generation gap, so that the congenial environment of the family is not disturbed. All in all, ‘elders need to ask themselves how they would like to spend the few years they are left with-brooding, complaining and crying or working out ways that would improve the situation and enrich their twilight years,’ says the sage septuagenarian.

5.3.2 Old-Age Homes

In Indian minds, old-age homes are synonymous with abandoning the aged. Surprisingly, none of the western elder concurs with this interpretation. They happen to be so fiercely independent that they are just not willing to live at the mercy of their children. They have independent means of their own and prefer to live separately, knowing fully well that they would have to make unwanted lifestyle changes for the luxury of staying with their children. The children too would have to make a similar sacrifice. We need to take a second look at the phenomena of specialized homes for the elderly. So, why be a meddlesome, unwanted nuisance at home when they can live with dignity in the company of their own peer group. Children who would come to visit them once a week or month would be any day more preferable than those who would be with them all day but treat them as burdens. No wonder, more and more senior citizens are taking to old age homes, which is evident from the growing number of such homes in cities and even small towns.

Most of the responsibilities of the elders rest in the hands of their families. The state took advantage of the wide adherence to filial pity, where caring for elders is regarded primarily as a family responsibility, an unavoidable
part of a contract between the generations. Hence, despite the constitutional provision in Article 41 which recognizes the needs of the elderly and enjoins upon the state the responsibility of making effective provisions for public assistance in old age, the state did not come forward with effective programmes and policies for supporting the old. The low profile approach of the state on this front is, however, better than a state which becomes proactive for the elderly for a few years and then walks out of its responsibilities. The prevalence of such government support programmes, albeit unsatisfactory, may make the children shy of not supporting their elderly parents.

In 2007, the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act were passed to impose a few disincentives on the children failing to provide pecuniary support to the elder parents. The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is also working hard to create the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, for a simplified system of imposing such penalties on defaulting children through their own parents under the existing bureaucratic arrangements. While not many academic inputs are available on the efficacy of such laws, it is doubtful whether many parents would go against their own children to the court for maintenance. Often we see that the neglected senior citizens curse their fate and bear the brunt but most of them remain tight-lipped about their sons and daughters, who have relinquished their duty towards them.

The key to such programmes lies in the commitment of local authorities. Where disincentives may not work, incentives may do the job. In countries like Malaysia and Singapore, there does exist some financial incentives like income tax exemption for children caring for their parents, their elders. The modus operandi maybe simple: they will need an affidavit from their parents that they have been well cared for during the financial year along with the
income-tax returns. Furthermore, policies that allow elderly persons to retain their independence are equally important. We only need political commitments to attain the goals, and a strong will to bring about a difference.

5.3.3 Aim of Education

Education should teach not only Heads, but also Hands and Hearts. The main aim of education is to modify the behaviour of the child according to the needs and expectancy of the society. It is not a mere certificate course but forms an integral part of a child’s life, as such, every effort should be made to create a cordial and congenial environment that facilitates cordial relations between the teacher and the taught. A child grows according to the prevailing atmosphere, hence, he should be taught from the very beginning how to behave with his elders, maybe his teachers, parents or even grandparents. This way he will prove to be an ideal citizen of the country. Those who grow up in adverse conditions become a curse to the society as well as to the nation. That is what many youths have become for our country today. They have to mend themselves. They need to be shown the right way because only the worthy can make a family, a society, and a nation great.

Moral education should be made a compulsory part of the curriculum to inculcate in the child a sense of responsibility, belongingness, sharing and caring attitude so that when he goes to the society as a grown up individual, he is not found wanting the same traits to be a responsible citizen. After all, handsome is he that handsome does. Irrespective of the type of school, proper care should be taken about the healthy growth and development of the child making him fully aware of the need to have healthy interpersonal relations, co-operative living and harmony. Inculcation of values that
develop a sort of parent-child relationship where impairment is nationalized by ‘the Confucius concept of filial piety’, which mean everything from paying verbal and gesture respect to parents and pleasing their whims, to supporting them in old age, should be encouraged. The schools should inculcate in the students, through the adoption of suitable curricula and appropriate teaching methodologies, such qualities that would ultimately improve their adjustability. Education needs to be a positive force in building peaceful communities in a rapidly changing world. Parents sacrifice the most important part of their life for the betterment of their children but in return they are ignored, neglected, set aside and at times even badly treated. This is rather unfortunate for they deserve a better deal having put in their best for their family, society and nation, in their productive years.

No doubt, we are looking for law, but will the law suffice the social needs of the elders and provide them a proper security system. The hard social reality is that the desirability of respecting elders can be taught to children but cannot be enforced by the government in all cases. Responsibility towards parents cannot be uniformly enforced either. Even pressure from NGO’s and social organizations can go only thus far. There is no hard and fast definition of what constitutes a good care. A son may very well keep the aged mother and father in his house, even take care of their health, but he may not speak to them. Isn’t that cruelty too? While such emotional torture cannot be stopped on the pain of law, the plight of the elderly can be improved considerably by ensuring financial, social and health security and other benefits to them.

Maintenance of competent living and enhancement of self-esteem are the basic needs of the elderly population. To meet these needs the policy makers at the government level as well as the social workers must take decisions, and provide services and benefits from a base of accurate information.
Strategies should be worked out to meet the challenges posed. If this is not done, the growing population of the aged would become a cause of concern for the country. It is already worrying China that is home to the world's biggest fraternity of senior citizens. But it isn't even raising an eyebrow with the government in India that has at present the world's fourth largest segment of the senior citizens. What a pity?

As Prof. D.S. Kothari, an eminent Indian educationist put it: "Knowledge is vitally important; but if it is to transform society from a state of relative stagnation to one of dynamism and progress, there must be a general willingness and determination to make use of it in the service of the community." This statement made more than thirty five years ago, finds favour with individuals who are concerned about the direction Indian education is moving towards.

Education is not merely narrow or limited to classroom experiences but, a holistic and experiential learning aimed at social transformation. The collective and collaborative efforts of social institutions including families, educational institutions, state, voluntary sectors and most importantly, people themselves can bring about community effectiveness. The policy makers need to move beyond debates about curriculum and governance to consider the effects of social capital. Education has to become people-centric. Further, we should focus on designing special programmes and events to promote inter-generational bonding throughout the length and breadth of the society, the state, the nation and of the world as a whole. An intensive block-wise campaign should be undertaken so that the mindset and acceptance of the programme can be smoothly implemented.

HelpAge India promotes inter-generational bonding by organizing several events with schoolchildren and their grandparents, such as walkathons, outings with grandparents and quiz for the old and the young alike. It
encourages school children to visit older people in old age homes and spend quality time with them.

Dignity Foundation is yet another step in the same direction. The foundation, with “productive ageing” as its motto, comes up with workshops that enable senior citizens to answer with pride a question they usually dread after retirement- “what are you doing these days?”


5.3.4 Desirable Attitude

In Gandhiji’s words, “there is enough for every man’s need but not enough for his greed.” It is the concept of sharing and caring that people need to adopt to bridge the widening gap between the generations. A distinctive change in mindsets can bring about equilibrium in society where the gap between the youth and the elders can be minimized, bridging it with a positive attitude. Development of desirable attitude or reshaping of undesirable attitude, being a gigantic task, includes cooperation of all the forces of environment. At the social level, voluntary organizations can launch public education campaigns making the youth aware about their social obligations towards their elders. Establishment of family counselling centres would go a long way in arresting the family problems and strained
relationship among family members, thus, resolving conflicts and misunderstandings, if any, thereby, developing a desirably positive attitude of the youth towards their elders. Parents, members of the society, teachers, schools and government authorities all need to join hands in this task of desirable attitude formation among the youth.

5.3.5 Let’s Get Together

Let’s get together to do something for our elders: parents and parents-in-law, aging aunts and uncles. For, October 1 is World Elder’s Day. A day when every child in India must bond with his/her parents/grandparents and take a vow: “I protect your security with dignity.”

Mr. George, president, Senior Citizen’s Club, planned several events to celebrate World Elder’s Day like the Walk of Dignity. He initiated the idea of ‘Suraksha-bandhan’ where people would tie a band of promise on their parent’s and grandparent’s wrists, vowing to protect them and assure them a life of dignity. Similar events and ideas can do wonders if worked out honestly and sincerely.

Often, in our preoccupation with our lives, our work and our children, we forget that our parents have made us what we are. They’ve made sacrifices, big and small, so that we could have a life better than theirs. It is now our turn to look after them and cherish the values, good habits and culture they inculcated in us. Our elders have given their best to us. Now, it’s our turn to keep them happy, cheerful and peaceful in their twilight years.

As an investigator, a researcher and a daughter, I feel that every effort should be made to modify education in such a way as to enable the child to look for a tradition where there is love, respect and regard for the elders and
caring and sharing attitude towards them. Every youth should remember that unless they die young, they, too, would pass through old age sometime or the other and so be kind to the elders in the family.

After all, what they need is the feeling of their being wanted and welcomed in the family, being loved and honoured, and being given the due they really deserve being elders of the family.

5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Suggestions for further study can be enumerated as follows:

• The present study was done on a sample of 400 youth from the college and university student population of Calcutta, a similar comparative study can be done on a sample taken from the rural and urban segments of the society.

• Some other districts of West Bengal can be taken into consideration to conduct a comparative study of the attitude of youth towards the elders.

• A study can also be carried out on the problems faced by the elders living in old-age homes in Calcutta and strategies for tackling them.

• A comparative study of the problems faced by elders living with their children and those living in old age homes in Calcutta can be carried out.
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