Chapter Seven
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Many renowned philosophers and scientific pioneers, including Roger Bacon, Benjamin Franklin, and Francis Galton, wrote about ageing during the 13th to 19th centuries. Sir Edmund Halley, on 18th century British astronomer, was the first to conduct a scientific analysis of life expectancy. Interest in sociological and psychological research on ageing was encouraged by other writers and investigators during the 19th century. The writings of the Frenchman Frederie Le Play, the surveys of the Englishman Charles Booth, and statistical studies of birth-rates, death-rates, and the relationships of age to crime rates and suicide by the Belgian Adolphe Quetelet were all instrumental in stimulating interest in the scientific study of ageing.

Old-age is generally viewed as beginning in the early to middle 60s, but this viewpoint neglects the fact that people age at different rates and that both biological and psychosocial factors must be taken into account in defining old-age. For a number of reasons, primary among which are the decline in infant mortality and a reduction in deaths caused by certain disorders of adulthood, life expectancy has risen steadily during the 20th century. The increase in average longevity has resulted in a greater proportion of older adults in the population. Many different factors – marital status, ethnicity, nationality, geographical area, exercise, diet, smoking, pollution and especially heredity – are related to longevity.

In-depth studies related to the well-being of elderly people have already been carried out with two types of variables, (a) those that
reflect socio-economic factors, and (b) those that refer to psychological and psychosocial variables.

(a) The first category indicates that well-being increases with such variables as: increases in the general level of wealth of the country of residence (Diener and Diener, 1995), higher income (Mack, Salami, Vivarais-Dressler, Porter and Garg, 1997) and socio-economic levels (Pinquart and Sorensen, 2000), as well as when the respondent is married (Essex and Nam, 1987), and female (Rousseau and Dube, 1993).

(b) Research bearing on the second category has shown that self-reported well-being is more positive when self-reported health status is more positive (Webster, 1997), respondents report regular physical exercise (McAuley et al., 2000), personality traits include high extraversion and high emotional stability (Adkins, Martin and Poon, 1996), respondents reports aspirations of self-development and interest in the well-being of others (Lapierre, Bouffard and Bastin, 1997), have more mature social understanding and wisdom (Ardelt, 1997), have religious belief or faith (Levin and Chatters, 1998), feel control over their environment (Smiths, Deeg, and Bosscher, 1995), feel independent (Mack et al., 1997), have higher numbers and quality of social relationships (Pinquart and Sorensen, 2000), and report a sense of belonging to a supportive social network (Gibson, 1986).

Although homes are important for the elderly, little research has examined relationships between life in the home and well-being. Because they have less involvement in outside activities, ageing people
may focus on or emphasise their residences and their feelings of well-being in their own homes as significant components of their general well-being.

Despite living in homes that are modest or even inadequate for their unique needs, most elders perceive their homes as restful, comfortable and safe spaces. This might occur because elder’s homes often become the sole and unique places where they maintain social bonds with individuals and their community and/or because women do not want to go to an eldercare home (Rioux, 2004). Some authors say that homes, as much as spouses, are the most important element in the lives of the elderly (Maltais, 1999). At the centre of their lives, the home can be an important source of well-being, or alternatively, an obstacle to quality of life – an element that facilitates or conversely undermines autonomy and social integration (Kendig et al., 1996), and a place that helps them to have control of everyday life or conversely prevents them from having it (Morin, Dansereau and Nadeau, 1990). Therefore well-being is strongly related to satisfaction with the home, neighbourhood, and level of residential embeddedness or connection (Rousseau and Dube, 1993). These relationships are found whatever the type of housing, whether individual houses (Klein, 1993) or large blocks (Casp and Christensen, 1986). Elders’ feelings of well-being in the home depend on such factors as state of health, degree of physical disability and sensory impairment (Klein, 1993), as well as on psychological variables such as self-esteem (Klein, 1993).

Considering the above the present investigation has been designed to study the physical environment, social environment and changing values of younger generation as perceived by the elderly residing in
home and family setting of Kolkata city of West Bengal. Accordingly, seventeen hypotheses have been formulated for this investigation (the details of which have been presented under Chapter IV). Apart from the 200 elderly people – who had been selected for the study phase-I for the tools development, another group of 400 elderly people, 200 from home and 200 from family environment were selected for study phase-II on the final full-scale study. The pertinent characteristics of the sample are – (a) above 60 years of age, (b) education of atleast primary level, i.e. Grade IV and (c) below and above five years duration of stay is in the same environment (the details of which have been given under Chapter-IV). Four instruments / tools, viz., (a) General Information Schedule, (b) Perceived Physical Environment Questionnaire (c) Perceived Social Environment Questionnaire and (d) Perceived Changing Values of Younger Generation Questionnaire were used in this investigation (the details of which have been given under Chapter IV). All the questionnaires were developed by the investigator. Appropriate descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation etc.) were calculated for each category and comparisons were made by applying ‘t’ test and Chi-square.

The major findings of the present study are as follows:

(1) By and large, the findings of the present study reveal that the elderly people living in old-age homes and in family settings of Kolkata city perceive the physical environment favourably. Such positive feelings about the existing environment as perceived by both the group is mainly due to identification with the living environment. The reasons for the favourable attitude towards the physical environment as perceived by both the group is mainly
due to availability of different types of facilities, adequate supply of water and electricity, proper sewerage and drainage system, opportunity for watching movie, cinema, theatre, etc. and good living arrangement. Although overall picture reveals the favourable attitude towards the physical environment as perceived by both the group still there is a variation in degree. Elderly people residing in family environment perceive the physical environment better in comparison to the elderly residing in old-age homes. When comparison was made between these two groups in terms of perceived physical environment significant difference was observed. In spite of that a group of elderly belonging to old-age homes have expressed their negative/unfavourable attitude towards the physical environment which is mainly due to poor conditions of the buildings, inadequate medical facilities, improper maintenance of toilet, lack of space for maintaining privacy and lack of space to worship God. On the other hand unfavourable attitude towards the physical environment as perceived by some of the elderly people belonging to family setting is mainly due to very old and dilapidated building, unhygienic outside environment, lack of privacy etc.

(2) Social environment as perceived by the elderly belonging to old-age homes and family settings of Kolkata city reveals that both the group have favourable attitude towards the social environment. The reasons for this attitude is mainly due to sympathetic and friendly neighbours, opportunity to participate in different social programmes within the locality, peaceful surrounding and good
social bondage. Here also, the elderly people living in family setting perceive the social environment better in comparison to the elderly living in old-age homes. Besides, some of the elderly belonging to old-age home exhibited some sort of negative or unfavourable attitude towards the social environment which is mainly due to poor interpersonal relationship, indication of quarrelsome and aggressive attitude among some of the boarders, habit of criticism, etc. On the other hand, lack of poor interpersonal relationship, dishonesty, corruption, lack of healthy social relationship etc. were the significant factors for unfavourable attitude towards the social environment as perceived by the elderly belonging to family environment. When comparison was made between these two groups in terms of perceived social environment significant difference was observed.

(3) Changing values of younger generation has not been perceived favourably by the elderly in general. This is mainly due to selfish attitude of the younger generation, neglecting attitude towards the elderly, lack of responsibility and lack of dedication towards God. They also expressed that the changing values of younger generation is not good and healthy for our society and it should be modified and to be changed. They also opined that parents and society are mainly responsible for this type of behaviour of younger generation. When comparison was made between the elderly living in old-age homes and family settings in terms of perceived changing values of younger generation significant difference was observed.
(4) No significant difference was observed towards the physical environment as perceived by the elderly whose duration of stay is below and above five years in the same home environment. In this context, it can be said that they are able to adjust with the existing physical environment. On the contrary, significant difference was observed in case of family setting. Here, the more the duration of stay, the poorer is the perception of the physical environment. Continuous stay in a deprived environment may create such type of attitude.

(5) Social environment as perceived by the elderly belonging to old-age homes of Kolkata city reveals that the more the duration of stay the poorer is the perception of social environment. Similar picture has also been observed in case of family environment. In this context it can be said that change of social structure may one of the significant factor for generating negative view towards the social environment.

(6) Changing values of younger generation as perceived by the elderly belonging to old-age homes and also in family settings of Kolkata city reveal that the more the duration of stay the more is the unfavourable opinion about such changing values of younger generation. In both the cases significant difference was observed when comparison was made between the two groups of elderly whose duration of stay is below and above five years in the same environment.

(7) It is remarkable to note that the elderly people who belong to joint families of Kolkata city perceived the physical and social
environment better in comparison to those who belong to nuclear families. In this context, it can also be said that the elderly people belonging to joint families are more adjusted in any existing physical and social set-up than those who belong to nuclear families. Besides this, although both the groups have unacceptable attitude towards the changing values of younger generation but relatively unacceptable attitude was observed among the elderly who belong to nuclear families than that of the counterpart.

(8) Room type in the home setting also creates an impact upon the elderly towards the perceived physical environment, social environment and changing values of younger generation. Those who belong to single room perceive the physical environment better in comparison to those who belong to dormitory set-up. Opposite pictures have been revealed in case of perceived social environment. Besides this, although changing values of younger generation has been perceived by the elderly belonging to old-age home as unfavourable but such feeling has also been intensely observed among those who are residing in single room than those who belong to dormitory setting.

(9) Elderly people whose duration of stay is below five years in the home and family environment respectively perceive the physical and social environment favourably. Although both the group have unacceptable attitude towards the changing values of younger generation but relative unacceptable attitude was observed by the elderly who belong to home environment.
No significant difference was observed between the two groups of elderly belonging to old-age homes and family settings of Kolkata city whose duration of stay is above five years in terms of perceived physical environment. Here both the groups are able to adjust with the existing physical set-up.

Elderly people whose duration of stay is above five years residing in family settings perceive the social environment better in comparison to the elderly who belong to home environment. Similar picture has been observed for changing values of younger generation as perceived by them. Both the group have an unacceptable attitude towards the changing values of younger generation.

Physical problems as suffered by the elderly residing in home and family environment are mainly blood pressure, arthritis and eye problem. Besides this, they also suffered from blood sugar, heart disease, asthma, kidney problem and spondilytis. Comparative picture reveals no significant difference between these two groups.

Mental problems as suffered by the elderly residing in home environment are mainly depression, helplessness, anxiety and hypertension, on the other hand, mental problems as suffered by the elderly residing in family environment are mainly feeling of loneliness, hypertension and depression. Comparative picture reveals the significant difference between the two groups. This may be due to their belongingness in two different environmental settings.
(14) Residential satisfaction as opined by the elderly under study, residing in old-age homes of Kolkata city are mainly low-cost living arrangement, good management, peaceful and routine life; on the other hand, their dissatisfaction are mainly due to lack of family contact, lack of privacy, inadequate infrastructural facilities, etc.

(15) Similarly, residential satisfaction as expressed by the elderly who belong to family environment are mainly own house, healthy family relationship and good living arrangement; on the contrary, their dissatisfaction are mainly due to old and dilapidated house, poor relationship with family members and lack of space for good living.
APPLICATIVE POTENTIALS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

(1) Majority of the elderly residing in old-age homes and family settings of Kolkata city have perceived their physical environment more or less good, still they expressed some inadequacies regarding the existing physical environment. So, measures should be taken to improve the physical environment as far as possible in both home and family settings, specially for home settings.

(2) Provisions for good interpersonal relationship should be incorporated so that the elderly people perceive the social environment favourably. There is also a dire need for maintaining healthy social relationship among the boarders, management and other staff within the home environment.

(3) As the changing values of younger generation as perceived by the elderly is unacceptable, so it should be modified from both the sides, i.e., from younger side and also from the elderly, for maintaining healthy relationship between these two groups who belong to family as well as home environment.

(4) As one home environment differs from another home environment in many respect, adequate measures should be taken for those who have poor management, poor interpersonal relationship and poor physical environment because the elderly who has left the family and has taken shelter in the home need to belong in a peaceful environment.
(5) The breaking-up of joint family system creates problems in many respect. Alternate provisions should be arranged as far as possible, viz., opportunity for watching T.V., adequate space to worship God, create opportunity for interaction with grand children, create opportunity for mixing with relatives and friends, etc., so that, they do not feel alone. In case of home environment same type of measures may be taken for the elderly.

(6) As the duration of stay in the same environment creates a negative impact upon the elderly in terms of perceived social environment and changing values of younger generation, so there should be lack of place-attachment among the elderly and it will create a negative impact on the mental health of the elderly. So, care should be taken in this regard.

(7) As it has been revealed in this investigation that physical environment as perceived by the elderly belonging to home and family setting is more or less good and duration of stay in the same environment has not created any significant impact upon them so it can be said that they are able to adjust with the existing environment. But, considering the priority need which has been revealed from their residential satisfaction-dissatisfaction reports measures should be taken to create a healthy and congenial living environment for them.