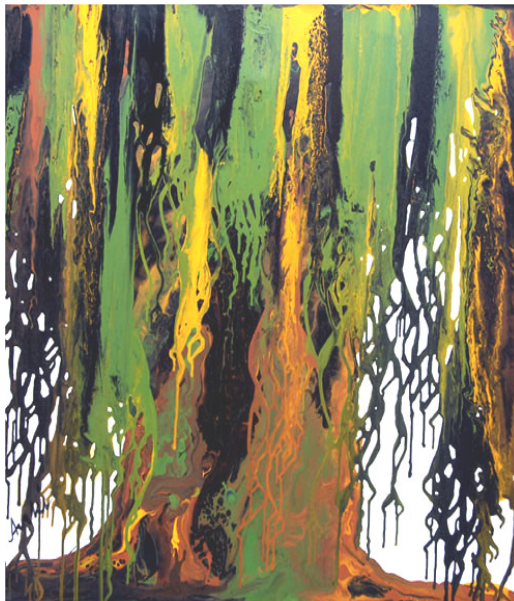


**Agewell Research & Advocacy Centre**

**AGEWELL SOCIAL STUDY**  
**ON**  
**WISDOM OF OLD AGE**  
**(MAY 2010)**



**NATIONAL**

**Agewell Foundation**

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# **WISDOM OF OLD AGE**

## **– A national study**

### **OVERVIEW**

Wisdom is not inevitably a product of old age, though reaching an old age increases the chances of acquiring the life experience and emotional maturity that nurture wisdom. Wisdom is generally defined as accumulated learning i.e. knowledge, ability to discern inner qualities and relationships, insight, good sense and judgment. These qualities are gained and enhanced through experience. Life experiences alone give older people an edge in the arena of wisdom. Older people have undergone many experiences that help them become insightful.

In India, older people have always been respected as source of wisdom. It is Wisdom of Old Age that makes older persons respectable in the society as well as in their respective families. But with changed socio-economic and demographic scenario older persons are being marginalized in the society. Resultantly, younger generations have fewer opportunities to get benefited from wisdom of old age.

Traditionally, knowledge has been passed on orally from one generation to the other for thousands of years in India. The concept of modern education is a completely new phenomenon. Old people in particular are still a store-house of traditional knowledge.

### **OBJECTIVE**

The study was carried out with the objective to assess the acceptance of older persons as source of wisdom in society and relevance of wisdom of old age in modern society. At the same time, it was also tried to identify /understand the factors responsible for reduced level of respect towards older persons.

## **STUDY BACKGROUND**

There is a growing need to identify the peculiar and varied needs and problems of over 90 million old people of India and the Agewell Research and Advocacy Centre's aim is to help bring about a support system for them which not only provides love, kindness, sympathy and compassion but also establishes and protects their medical, legal, social, financial & psychological rights & interests.

**Research & Advocacy Centre** at Agewell Foundation (*a consortium of over 1500 NGOs and 6500 volunteers spread across 540 districts of India, committed to initiate better interaction between generations and extend a helping hand*) has recently carried out a nationwide survey to study and identify / understand the role of Wisdom of Old Age in day-to-day life of older persons in present scenario.

Agewell volunteers' network spread across the country worked as interviewers for the survey. The interviews were conducted during the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> week of May, 2010.

### **Extensive survey**

Agewell Research & Advocacy Centre has designed survey schedule for Agewell volunteers so that they can interview older persons (60+) and collect necessary information /impression/views from selected older persons.

Under the survey a representative sample of 15000 older persons (approx. 7500 each from rural and urban areas) was interviewed spread across 150 districts of 20 states of the country. Volunteers were directed to include every sections of the society, specifically –

- Retired older persons
- Non-pensioners
- Old Labourers
- Old farmers
- Old housewives
- Old businesspersons
- Old Professionals
- Etc.

### Geographical spread

The sample units were selected based on random sampling but taken care to incorporate the representative views of the country from 20 major states of the country as per following;

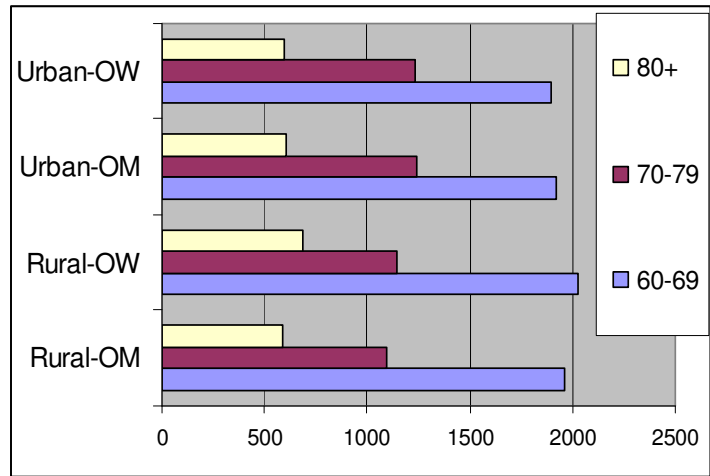
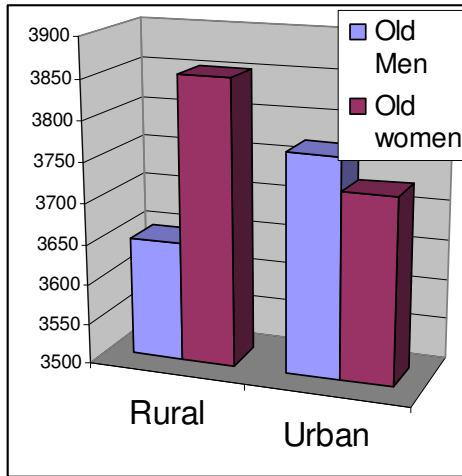
- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1- Delhi & NCR – 3000     | 11- Orissa - 500         |
| 2- Uttar Pradesh - 1000   | 12- Andhra Pradesh- 500  |
| 3- Haryana - 500          | 13- Tamil Nadu - 500     |
| 4- Punjab - 500           | 14- Kerala - 500         |
| 5- Himachal Pradesh - 500 | 15- Karnataka - 500      |
| 6- Uttarakhand - 500      | 16- Maharashtra - 1000   |
| 7- Bihar - 1000           | 17- Madhya Pradesh - 500 |
| 8- West Bengal - 500      | 18- Chhattisgarh - 500   |
| 9- Assam - 500            | 19- Rajasthan - 1000     |
| 10- Jharkhand - 500       | 20- Gujarat -1000        |

### Age, Residence & Gender wise Classification

Respondents were further categorized in age group to study the level of wisdom in old age in various age-groups.

Category	60-69 years	70-79 years	80+ years	Total
Rural-Older Men	1963	1098	587	3648
Rural- Older Women	2027	1141	684	3852
<b>Total Rural elderly</b>	<b>3990</b>	<b>2239</b>	<b>1271</b>	<b>7500</b>
Urban- Older men	1924	1241	606	3771
Urban- Older Women	1897	1235	597	3729
<b>Total Urban elderly</b>	<b>3821</b>	<b>2476</b>	<b>1203</b>	<b>7500</b>
% of Respondents	52.07	31.43	16.49	100

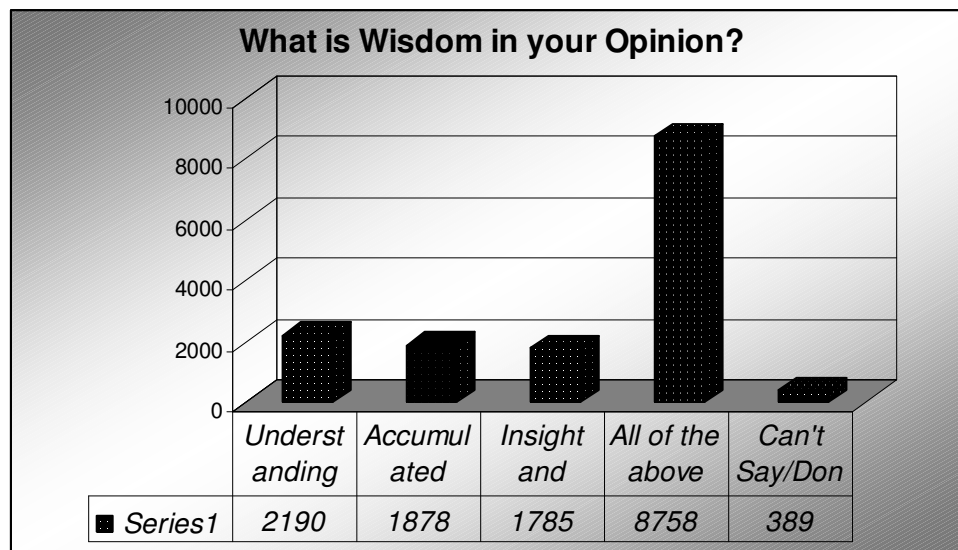
- Percentage of older persons in the age groups of 60-69 years is quite higher (52.07%) because of their comparatively more active lifestyle and their higher proportional population.



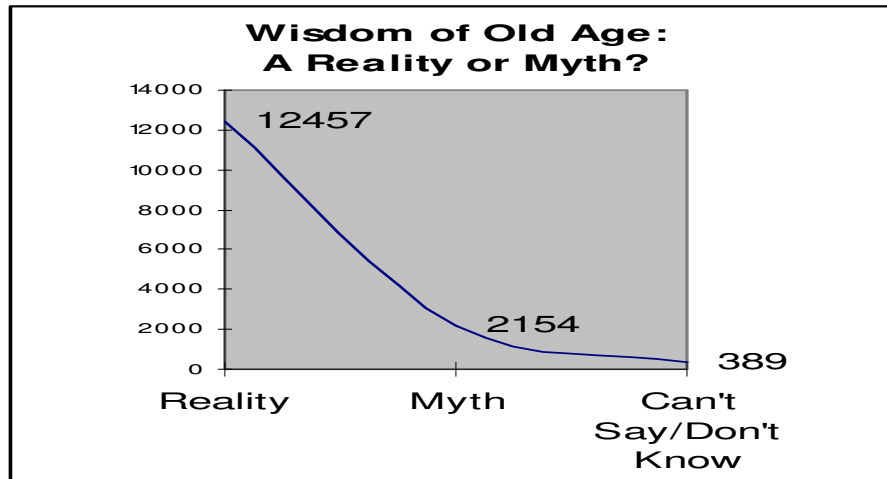
## Major Findings

### Wisdom of Old Age – Older Persons’ Perspective

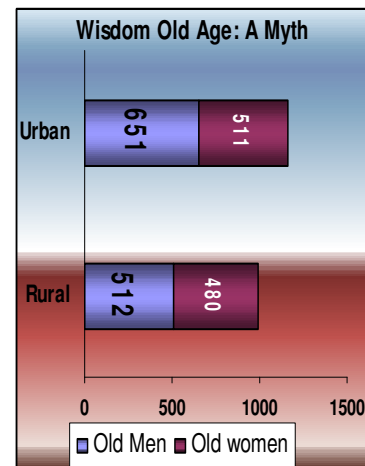
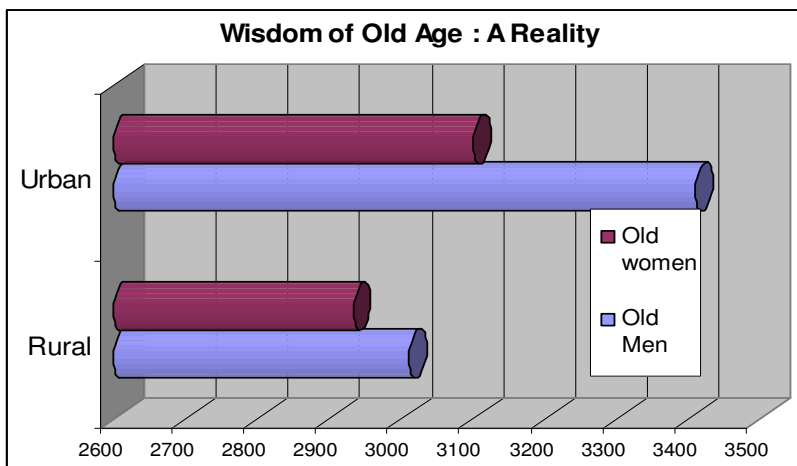
- According to 58.39% older persons, wisdom means a good combination of understanding gained by experience, accumulated knowledge or learning and insight and judgment.
- 14.6% older persons said that understanding gained by experience is wisdom in itself, whereas 12.5% older persons think accumulation of knowledge and learning is wisdom.



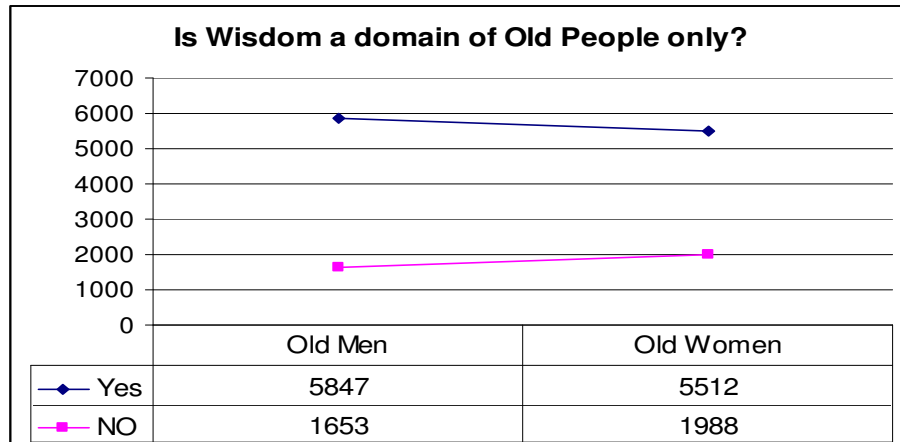
- To understand the fact that to what extent is wisdom is associated with Old Age, when survey team asked to older persons, 83.05% older persons said that Wisdom of Old Age is a natural phenomenon. Only 14.36 % older people think wisdom of old age is a myth.



- 86.8% Older people living in urban areas said that Wisdom is reality in old age. In rural areas 79.26% older persons were of the view that wisdom has direct connection with Old Age.

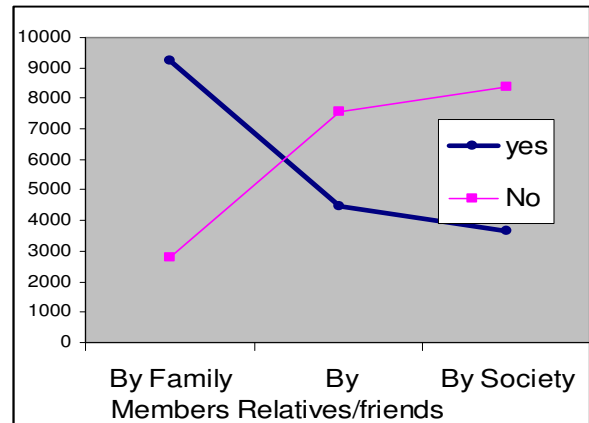
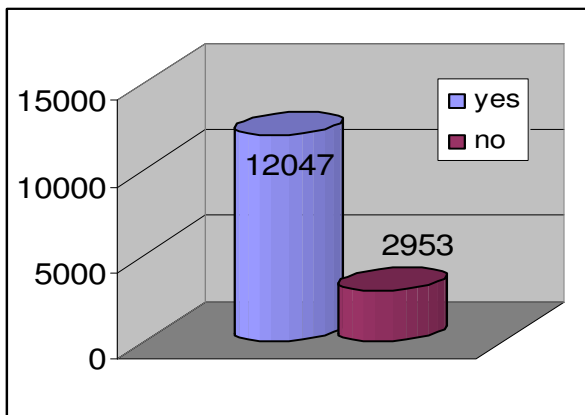


- In India older persons are treated as much wiser. According to survey analysis, 3/4<sup>th</sup> older persons said that wisdom is domain old people only. Old men think themselves wiser than others (78%) in comparison to older women (73.49%).



### Appreciation of Wisdom of Old Age

- Majority of older persons 80.31% older persons said that their wisdom is appreciated by their family members/friends/relatives in particular or by society in general.
- 76.82% older persons agreed that their family members appreciate their wisdom and ask for guidance/direction in family matters from time to time.



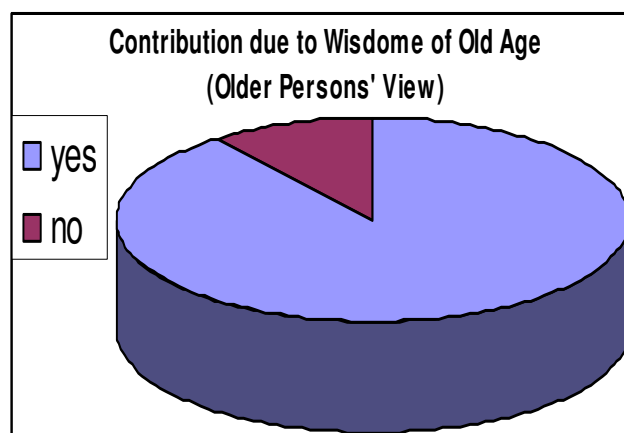
- 37.25% older persons think that their relatives/friends give them importance due to their wise advice.
- 30.36 % respondents accept that their society accepts their wisdom.

## Contribution of Wisdom of Old Age

- Approx. 1/5<sup>th</sup> older persons (19.69%) said that they are being constantly ignored /neglected by their family members/society.
- This trend was seen more critical in urban areas of the country where 22.01 % older persons said that they have no say in their family matters. In rural areas 17.36% older persons realize the same.

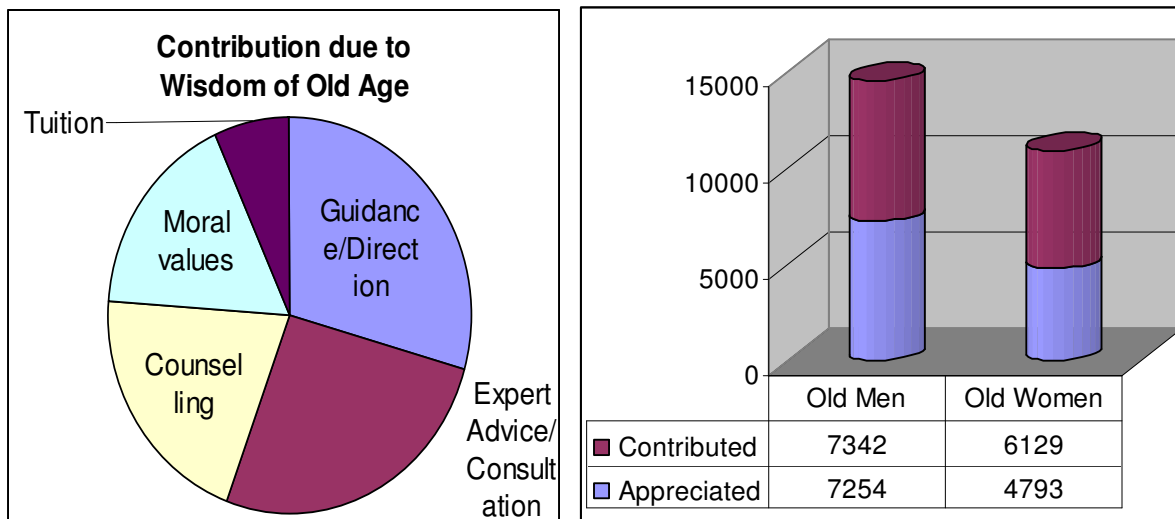
Wisdom of older persons	Not asked ever	General Guidance/ Direction/ religious matters	Tuition/ Home Work/	Counselling for family related matters	Expert Advice/on specific subjects	Total
Rural	1302	1701	875	2202	1420	7500
Urban	1651	1144	1241	2024	1440	7500
	2953	2845	2116	4226	2860	15000
%	<b>19.69</b>	<b>18.97</b>	<b>14.11</b>	<b>28.17</b>	<b>19.07</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Rural	17.36	22.68	11.67	29.36	18.93	
Urban	22.01	15.25	16.55	26.99	19.20	

- In rural areas 22.68% older persons were helping their families/societies by giving general guidance or direction. This percentage was again lower in urban areas.
- In urban areas more than one-third older persons were busy in giving tuitions to children or expert advice to seekers.





- Older persons with expertise in their fields agreed that their family members/ friends/relatives and others take expert advice from them from time to time. In urban areas percentage of such older persons was found quite higher (19.20%).
- During the survey 89.81% older persons agreed that they are playing an important role in their societies / families due to wisdom of their old age. Though all older persons are not being appreciated for their contribution.



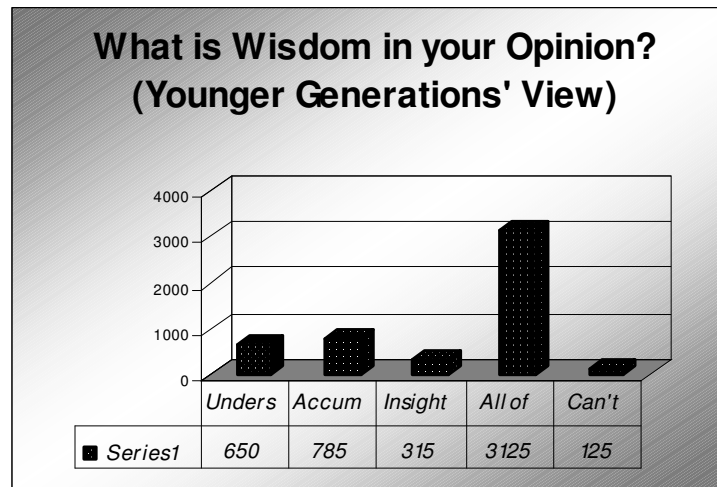
- When level of wisdom of older women and men was compared, it was found that 60.21% older men accept that their wisdom was appreciated where as below 40% older women were of that opinion.
- At the same time where 54.5% older men said that they contributed to the society or their families due to their wisdom, there are only 45.5% older women, who said that they have contributed something to their families/societies.

## Younger Generations perspective on Wisdom of Old Age

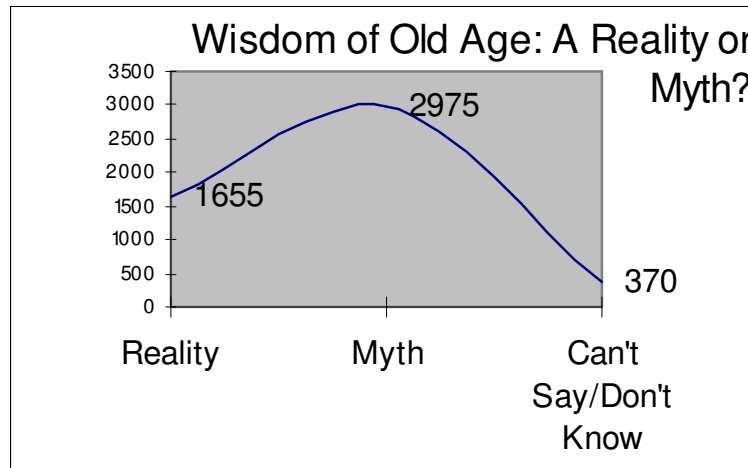
To assess the younger generations' point of view on Wisdom of old age, under the survey, survey teams were also directed to talk with younger people.

Representative sample of 5000 persons from age groups of 20-39 and 40-59 years was also interviewed. Respondents from younger generations were interviewed mainly from Delhi & NCR Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan & Gujarat.

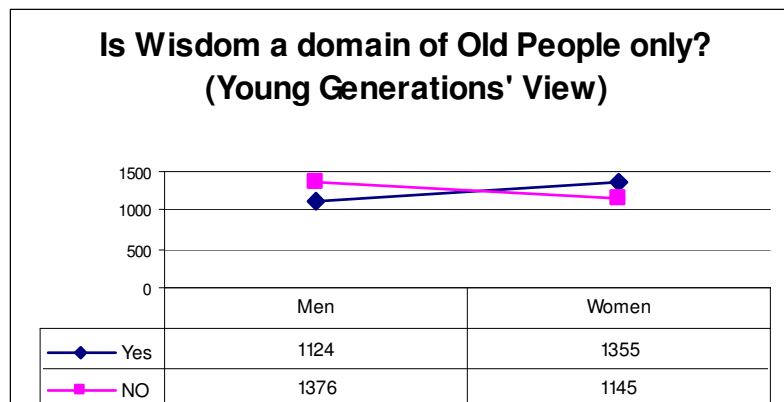
- According to 62.5% respondents from younger age groups, wisdom means a good combination of understanding gained by experience, accumulated knowledge or learning and insight and judgment.
- 13% respondents from younger age groups said that understanding gained by experience is wisdom in itself, whereas 15.7% respondents from younger age groups think accumulation of knowledge and learning is wisdom.



- To understand the fact that to what extent is wisdom is associated with Old Age, when survey team asked to respondents from younger age groups, 59.5% respondents from younger age groups said that Wisdom of Old Age is a myth. More than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> respondents think wisdom of old age is a reality.

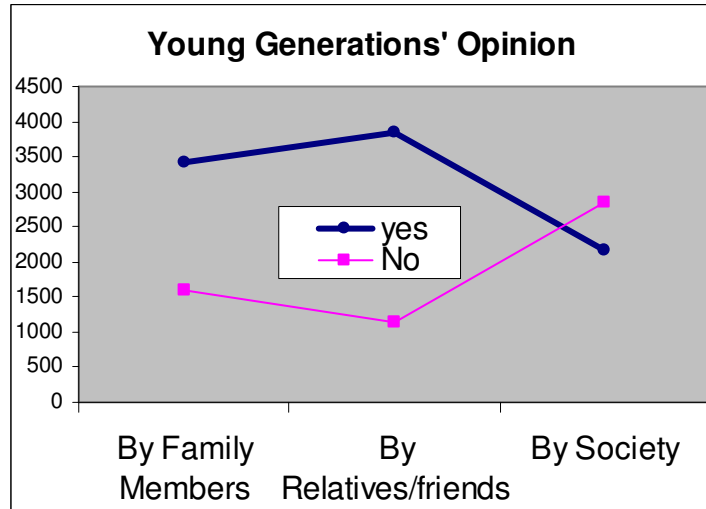
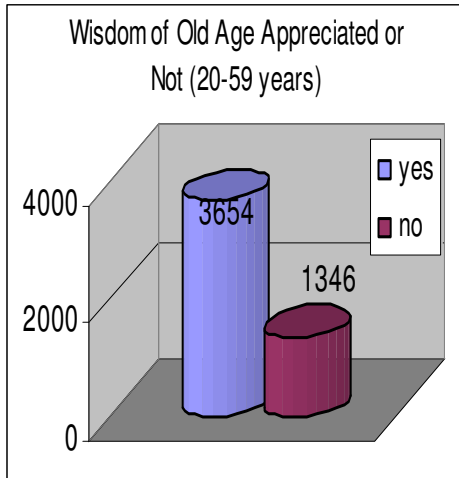


- According to survey, approx. 50% respondents from younger age groups said that wisdom is domain of old people only. They don't think old people as wiser as older people think themselves.



### Appreciation of Wisdom of Old Age by young generations

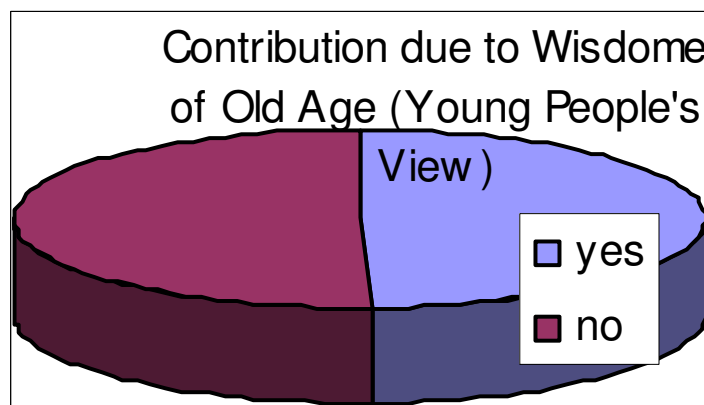
- Majority of respondents from younger age groups 66.3% respondents said that they appreciate wisdom of old age and respect their elders for this.
- 71.2% respondents from younger age groups agreed that they appreciate old members' wisdom and ask them for guidance/direction in family matters from time to time.



- 35.5% respondents from younger age groups give importance to their old relatives and friends due to their wise advice.
- 28.3 % respondents accept that their society accepts wisdom of old age.

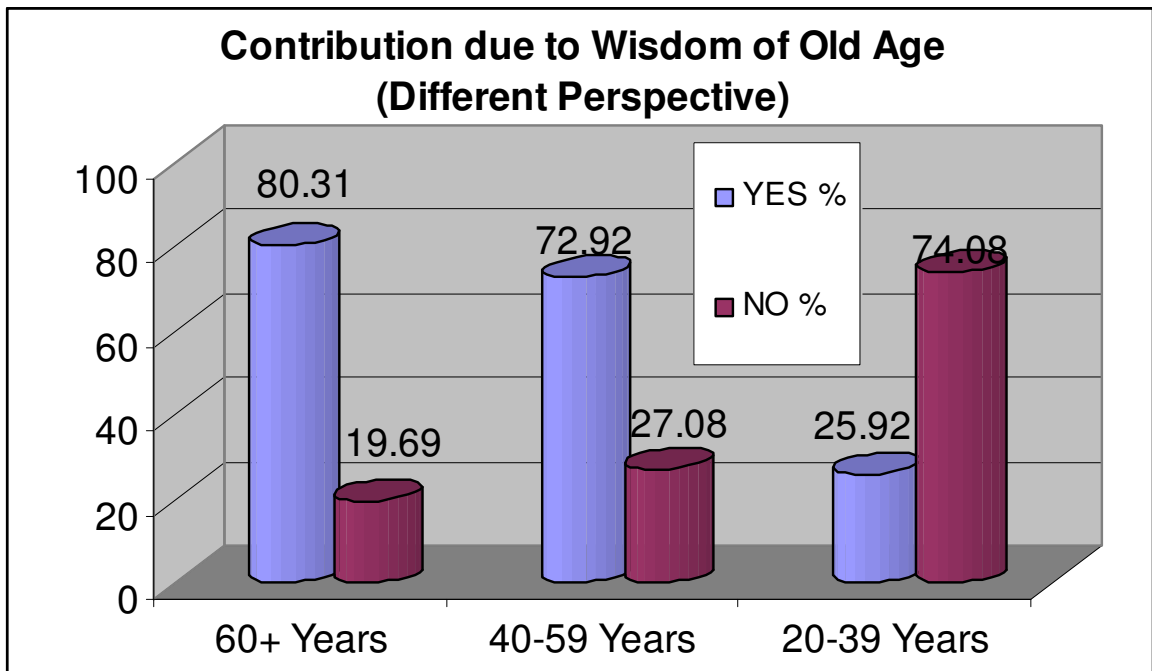
### Contribution of Wisdom of Old Age as per Younger Generations

- 15.6% young respondents said that their older family members felt themselves ignored /neglected in family /society.
- During the survey 49.42% respondents from younger age groups agreed that older persons are playing an important role in societies / families due to wisdom of old age.



- 18.5% respondents from younger age groups agreed that they took expert advice from older persons from time to time. In urban areas percentage of such respondents from younger age groups was found quite low (14.2%).

**Comparative Chart (given below) clearly shows the perceptual differences of different generations.**



### Observations

- Older persons still play a major role in social structure of our family system. They are regarded as custodian of age old wisdom, tradition, culture and heritage.
- Due to their wisdom gained through experience of long life, they still hold higher place in our family/society.
- With the advent of nuclear families and thus marginalization of older persons, their role in healthy development of a family or society has been constricted due to various reasons. Situation of Older persons living alone is pathetic. They seldom meet persons, seeking advice/guidance from them.

- Fresh retirees pass through very hard phase in their life. At the age, when they are at top and their wisdom is also at the peak, they retired suddenly and forced to live with a tag of spent force. Indeed it is direct attack on wisdom of old age.
- This section of older persons (<65 years) are really an untapped resources, which need to be explored in the interest of society as well as country.
- In the political world, the elderly have always been the corum of wise men leading their societies for balanced growth.
- In the armed forces, the high rankers are the experienced strategists commanding the forces through their wisdom of managing warfare to establish peace.
- In modern fast paced IT age, older persons are widely considered as spent force. This trend is emerging very fast in younger generation and older persons are no longer treated as traditional source of wisdom.
- Wisdom of older women has always been underestimated in the country, but it is a well known fact that Indian culture is still alive due to old mothers, who have inculcated moral values in their children.
- There is an urgent need for bringing about perceptual change in younger people's mindset towards the older persons.

**Few respondents and their quotes:-**

*When my son was opening his office for IT solutions he wanted me to tell him about all the Puja related work. He may be modern but traditional values can not be forgotten.*

-Jatashankar Tripathi, Retired Bank manager, 69, Kanpur, UP

*My daughter-in-law is a CA and used to read Dr. Spock's book on child care when her daughter was small, but she used to ask me all the time for home remedies and they always worked.*

-Shakuntala Devi, Retired School Teacher, 78, Raipur, Chhattisgarh

*“When we were in our forties, we always used to seek advice from our parents in family matters, especially in religious or spiritual matters. But today our children*

*are treating us as old stock as we are not well-versed in modern gadgets. They have hardly any time for us.”*

- Damyanti Verma, 67, Malviya Nagar, Delhi

*“Even after retirement from active service life, I am busy serving my visitors with my life-long medical experience. “*

- Dr. Pradeep Saxena, 71, Andheri (E), Mumbai

*I was very fond of star-gazing during my posting in North-East. Today I can tell you time at any point of time during any night by just looking at stars.*

-Ramanand Yadav, 64-year-old retired army personnel, Chennai

*You may depend upon weather forecast reports, based on scientific equipments, but I can also predict weather conditions by just observing changes in our atmosphere.*

Guruprasad Gayakwad, 81, Pune

## **Conclusion**

Older persons are not a spent force. They are treasure trove of life-long wisdom, tradition, culture, knowledge and insight. They may have less knowledge of worldly things, which keep changing every moment, but they have solid insight of real & knowledgeable values, which are permanent in nature and qualities of humanity.

Another aspect of wisdom in our future generations is the acknowledgement of wisdom and the understanding of the same for the betterment of society in the changing demographic communities. Wisdom is taken to be the capacity to realize what is of value in life, for oneself and others. It includes knowledge, understanding and technological know-how.

Societies always must be respectful towards wisdom of old age, and be wise enough to garner the essence of this wisdom to create a better future.

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