Respect in an Ageing Society

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Project team

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Background

- Ageing of the Australian population has occurred comparatively rapidly in recent years with the greatest increases among the very old (those aged 80 years or over).

- By 2031 22% of Australia’s population will be over 65 years of age. This compares to 1.9 million (11 per cent) in 1991.

Stereotypes of older people

- Across cultures (both collectivist and individualistic) the mainstream societal stereotype of older people is that they are warm but also incompetent.

- US study: The negative aspect of the elderly stereotype (incompetence) resists change, while the positive aspect of the elderly stereotype (warmth) is more malleable.

- Elderly people who behaved more incompetently gained in warmth, indicating that the highly incompetent target was rewarded on the group’s positive stereotype (warm) for behaving consistently with the group’s negative stereotype (incompetent).

- Regardless of gender, younger people were more likely to feel pity toward the older generation than admiration.

Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske (2005)
Ageism in Australia

- In Australia, qualitative research has shown that older people are deeply affected by ageist attitudes (particularly from health professionals)

Minichiello, Browne, & Kendig (2000).
Studies have shown that respect is a key factor that determines quality of life for older people.

Older people who are respected tend to have greater life satisfaction, which in turn enhances their sense of usefulness and involvement with their family, community and significant others.

(Noelker & Harel, 2000).
Respect in Japan

- Palmore and Maeda (1985) researchers identified 13 forms of respect for older people: care, victual, gift, linguistic, presentational, consulting, spatial, celebrative, acquiescent, salutary, precedential, ancestral and public.
Respect: other parts of Asia

- Ingersoll-Dayton and Saengtienchai (1999), studied Taiwanese, Singaporeans, Thais and Filipinos.
- Examined gestures and manners, customs, rituals and tokens associated with elder respect and distinguished 12 forms of elder respect.
Respect: Korea and the US

- Sung (2004) compared the specific behavioural forms of elder respect among young adults in the United States and Korea.
- Identified a comprehensive set of 14 forms of respect for older people, which were nearly identical to the ones identified in the previous two studies.
Respect

- Combined, the three studies distinguished 14 forms, which are all important dimensions of elder respect.

- However, these studies have been limited by restricted sampling of young adults attending colleges.
Respect across cultures

- Sung - expressions did not differ between American and Korean youth. However, the importance placed on these expressions, along with the frequency of use, differed between these two cultural groups.

- Sung proposed that differences in respect for older people demonstrated by different cultures is a matter of degree rather than direction for these two groups.

- No empirical studies have investigated expressions of respect for older people within Australian culture.
A total of 113 participants were recruited for focus groups for this study:

- two groups of older participants in residential care (n = 12),
- four groups of older people living out of care (n = 20),
- two groups of volunteers from a care facility (n = 13),
- four groups of people from the baby boomer generation (n = 20),
- four groups of people from generation X (n = 20), and
- four groups of people from generation Y (n = 20).

Individual interviews were conducted with participants being recruited to the following groups:

- generation X (n = 2)
- generation Y (n = 3), and
- baby boomers (n = 3)
Participants

- 63 women (55.7%) and 50 men (44.3%).
  - 70 (61.9%) participants were Anglo-Australians
  - 13 (11.5%) were Greek
  - 12 (10.6%) were Italians
  - 10 (8.8%) were Eastern European
  - 3 (2.6%) were South African
  - 3 (2.6%) were Asian
  - 2 (1.7%) were Sri Lankan.
Questions

Examples of the questions posed to participants included:

- What do you think respect for older people means?
- To what extent is respect for older people present within Australian society?
- How do you respect the older members of your family?
- What would a society that demonstrates respect for older persons look like?
- How is respect for older people different compared to respect for everyone else?
- What do you think are the most important aspects of respect to older citizens?
- What is the impact of respect on the lives of the older person?
- How do you think older individuals obtain respect in society?
- Do you think respect for the aged has changed over the years?
Emergent themes

Eleven first-order themes emerged from the data including:

- expressions of respect
- factors unique to Australia
- intergenerational differences
- changing of respect
- factors unique to the ageing society
- domains of respect
- the impact of respect
- older people gaining/creating respect
- sources of respect
- pathways of respect and
- ageism
Expressions of respect

- Care
- Consulting
- Public
- Precedential
- Linguistic
- Presentational
- Celebrative
- Spatial
- Ancestral
Care

- Having time and patience for older people, listening to older people, spending time with older people, offering practical help and inclusion.

- All six groups

  - She loves telling me these stories about when she was young. She can go on and on. She really appreciates when I listen. - Generation Y
Consulting

- Respecting the older person by seeking their counsel on issues.

- All six groups

  - In the same way my grandparents love to be asked about stuff. Like when I am doing things, like uni. What do you think about this?...those sorts of questions. - Generation X
Public

- Reflected societal efforts to promote the status of the older members of the community. Specifically, participants reported that public expressions of respect involved recognition of achievement.

- All six groups
Giving older people more space in public, allowing them to go through the doorway first, and get in and out of cars first. It also included allowing older people to have seats on public transport.

Only reported by older people

- *Like sometimes on the train, those kids they are big trouble, they won’t get off the seat.*
- Older group (care)
Linguistic

- Addressing older people with specific honorific expressions, as well as using respectful language.
- Only reported by the baby boomer groups.

  - I think they still like the traditional forms of respect like sirs and madams, it makes them feel important, but the young people don’t want to do this because it’s seen as not cool or something. It is still valued by the older ones - Baby boomers
Presentational

- Identified by generation X and the older groups
- The older groups reported that it is still very important for the younger generations to look presentable and behave responsibly when they are around older people.

- The way that my grandkids look is important. I mean I don’t like the tattoos or the piercings. I didn’t want him to get them. I was a bit aggrieved when he did. – Older group (care)
Celebrative

- Visiting their older relations throughout the year to celebrate birthdays and attend other family events
- Reported by generation Y, volunteers and the older groups.

- *I still have two grandparents alive, both on my mum’s side. We go out with them for all occasions like birthdays, all birthdays, theirs and ours. It is good to recognise that we are still all a family. They like feeling connected to us.* – Generation Y
Spatial

- This theme reflected the older family members being furnished with seats of honour at gatherings.
- Only mentioned by the baby boomers groups.

- In my family the elders command respect. They are definitely the head of the family. My wife’s mother is definitely the matriarch. She commands respect by her presence at functions and gatherings. She always sits at the head of the table. - Baby boomers
Ancestral

- Only mentioned by the baby boomers group.

  - We always celebrate the death of my father with my mum. It is important to go through that process each year. We go to the beach and have a drink for him. It’s nice and we all need it. We just remember him. - Baby boomers
Factors unique to Australia

- Dispersion of population
- Violence in society
Dispersion of population

- All groups

- I think families have changed so it’s hard for the older person to gain respect. I know that my family is spread over the country - Tasmania, Victoria, Queensland, Canberra. So it’s tough for everyone to show support for my grandma. – Generation Y
Violence in society

- Generation X, baby boomers and older (care) groups

- I know with all this violence and assault stuff happening they might be more reluctant to go out. We should encourage them to go out more, or set up some system that makes them feel better about going out in the community. Maybe then we can respect them more. – Generation X
Intergenerational differences

- Lack of understanding
- No shared values
- Anxiety/apprehension on the part of younger people
Lack of understanding

* All groups reported a lack of understanding between the younger and older generations in society that impacts on respect for older people.

  * I think teenagers and younger people find it difficult to understand anyone themselves. They are a bit narcissistic. But I think particularly when it comes to the older generation. They feel that they didn’t grow up in their generation so what would they know. They are dismissive of the validity of their knowledge. - Baby boomers
Lack of understanding

- You can’t judge the younger generations for being them. I guess it’s just a big change for us. We don’t know what it is like. So much is so different though. Having boyfriends at a very early age, drinking, drugs, all this tattoo stuff. I mean we struggle to ‘get’ them. Maybe that is why they don’t come to us. - Older group
No shared values

- Generation X, generation Y, baby boomers, older (independent living) groups
- The younger generation holds values of efficiency and individualism while the older generation holds values of patience and persistence.

  *I think some of the difficulties lie with our generations growing up in completely different times. We don’t have any shared values or beliefs. Or that is what it feels like anyway. Just no common ground.* - Older group
Anxiety/apprehension on the part of younger people

- Participants from generation X, generation Y, baby boomers and volunteers groups

  - The young people don’t know how to respect and how to interact, and there’s that awkwardness like we’ve been discussing.... I think they would respect the older people but have no understanding of how to relate. - Volunteer
Changing of respect

- Smaller families
- Divorce/separation
- Time pressure
- Individualism
- High earnings of young people
- Dual-career marriages
- Higher education
- Technology
Factors unique to the older generation

- Physical care (5 of 6 groups)
- Physical vulnerability (generation Y, baby boomers and older groups)
- Emotional vulnerability (generation X, generation Y and older groups)
Domains of respect

- Ethnicity (all groups)
- Religion (only volunteers)
- Sexuality (5 of six groups)
- Lifestyle (all groups)
- Relationships and change (4 of 6 groups)
- Living options (5 of 6 groups)
- Disability (all groups)
Impact of respect

- Self worth
- Quality of life
- Involvement in society
Self worth

- I think that it still makes them feel important and valued. They still have something to give. I guess it is hard when you see all these younger people coming through and you feel out of it. So respect from those younger ones is important because it makes you feel like you still have a use. - Older group
Well, I think the first thing that comes to mind is that it improves the quality of life. It may improve their wellbeing. Yeah, so I think it would increase the quality of life. - Generation Y
Involvement in Society

- It’s like a self-fulfilling thing. If they feel better about being more active and involved they are more likely to continue to do things. Maybe the perception of people would change this way. - Baby boomers
The older generation creating respect

- Not automatic
- Reciprocal respect
- Attitude
- Non-judgmental
- Activity/involvement
Participants from the generation X, generation Y, baby boomers and older person (care) groups identified that the older generation expect that respect should be automatically given.
Not Automatic

- I think that it is not good if they just sit back and expect respect from the rest of us. Maybe sometimes it’s hard for them because they consider themselves worthy of respect that they are not receiving. In their minds they consider that they have done everything to raise a family and make a living and that they should be respected. - Generation Y
Not Automatic

- I think that they just expect to be given respect because of their age. Sometimes I don’t agree with that because I don’t know them and I don’t know whether they have earned respect. - Generation Y
Reciprocal respect

- Participants from all the groups reported that it was important for older people to respect other people in order to gain respect.

- It’s reciprocal. The older generation need to make an effort to respect the younger generation. Don’t get pissed off with us if you don’t get something, ask questions and be patient with us. - Generation X
Attitude

- Generation Y, volunteers and older person (care) groups
- Older people need to have a positive attitude and demeanour.

- Yeah, I think frame of mind leads to more respect ... I guess there is that stereotype of older people. No one wants to offer help if they are just going to snap back at you. But if they seem nice, and they smile, that makes a difference. - Generation Y
Non-judgmental

- Generation X and older person (independent living) groups.
- The older generation are judgmental and concrete in their views
  
  - I guess the older generation have a reputation of being black and white and are not open to new ways of doing things and some of us are like that. Maybe we have to be more open and not so judgmental. – Older group (independent)
Activity/involvement

- All six groups identified being involved in life and its activities as an important way of gaining respect for the older members of society.
  - *I think that they can increase their visibility. The more visible old people are and the more they are out, the more they are seen to be doing things, whether it’s the pink ladies at the Royal Children’s Hospital or whatever.* - Baby boomers
Sources of respect

- Family
- Carers
- Community
- Government
Pathways to developing respect

- Families
- School/Universities
- Media
Ageism

- Unproductive
- Lacking ambition
- Fragile
- Exclusion
- Burden on Society
- Lack of Trust
Summary

- Respect for the older age group involves multiple expressions.

- Care expressions of respect were clearly the most important and most frequently used expression of respect.
Summary

- There was a noticeable difference between the six groups in the current study in relation to the expressions of respect for the older generation.
- Although all groups identified the importance of care, consulting and public forms of respect, there were differences in views relating to the other forms.
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Summary

- While the older two groups, baby boomers and volunteers groups reported that presentational respect (e.g. dress simply and neatly, and to maintain a polite, deferent posture) was a key expression, the generation X and generation Y groups did not identify this form of respect as important.
Summary

- Respect was acknowledged by different groups to improve quality of life, and increase feelings of self worth and social inclusion among older people.
Summary

- There may be factors that are causing the way respect is expressed to change.

- Smaller families, time pressure, individualism, dual-career marriages, and higher incomes of younger people, divorce and separation, along with changes in technology
Summary

- There may be factors that are unique to Australian society
Apprehension in younger people is evident when encountering older people. This apprehension could mean that some forms of respect for the older generation are neglected by younger generations.
Summary

- This seems to put the burden on the younger generations. However, opportunities for older people to create respect were also identified.

- Respect for the elderly is not automatically given. It requires elderly people to have a positive attitude and display respect for other people in society.

- For example, giving respect to younger people, adopting a positive attitude and participating in activities were suggested as important avenues.
Implications

- Positive ageing
- The place the elderly have in our society
- Social exclusion of the elderly
Promote positive ageing

- Older people have a constellation of skills, knowledge and experiences of value that they are willing to share
Policy implications

- An active media campaign to raise the profile of older people and their positive contributions.
- An annual media prize for most positive news story that promotes positive ageing.
- Continued development of *Active Ageing* for Home and Community Care program (HACC) services.
- Develop a range of intergenerational initiatives focused on sharing the skills, knowledge and experience of older people.
- Health promotion programs to encourage optimum health and independence of older Victorians.
- Programs and strategies which promote the rights of older people.
The Government’s Social Inclusion agenda states that social inclusion involves the opportunities for: employment, access to services, connecting with others, dealing with personal crisis and being heard.

Our study revealed that older people have difficulties with connecting with others and being consulted with.
Social Inclusion - Recommendations

- Evaluate current programs
- Promote involvement of older people in the planning and provision of services
- Further develop assistive technologies
- Intergenerational opportunities
- An accessible, affordable and safe transport system
- Community hubs, services and programs
Consumer choice and participation

- Identify ways in which older people can exercise greater choice and participation
- More training on person-centred care, interpersonal relationships, consumer empowerment and rights.
- A social marketing campaign to prepare older people for retirement
Quality of Life

- Respect is key for a good quality of life for all Australians – and in particular, our older generation. Remaining an active and respected member of local communities is critical for the health and wellbeing of older Australians.
- Healthy older people are likely to stay in the work force for longer.
- They will enjoy retirement with fewer health care needs.
- There will be less pressure on the health budget and carers.
Where to from here?

- ARC Linkage grant with Benetas to conduct further research into respect
  - 3-year study
  - Refine, implement and evaluate programs to promote positive attitudes and behaviours
  - 3 key groups - aged care workers, older people themselves, and adolescents.
Welcome to the debate

- 2010 Victorian Seniors Festival
- Respect Public Debate Event
- Friday 8th October at 10am

‘Seniors must earn respect.’
Affirmative: Young Victorians
Negative: Senior Victorians