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SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE DECLINE IN FAMILY SUPPORT FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN GHANA:
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF THE SHIFTS IN SUPPORT

Isabella Anike Gbemisola Aboderin

A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol
in accordance with the requirements of the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Social Sciences

School for Policy Studies
June 2000

80,415 words
Abstract

This thesis documents and investigates the causes of the decline in family support for older people that has taken place in recent decades in Ghana. In the literature, explanations of the causes of decline identify, on the one hand, the worsening economic situation and a growing incapacity on part of the young to provide support, and, on the other hand, weakening traditional values of familism and filial obligation as a result of modernisation.

This thesis offers a fuller understanding of the causes of decline than is provided by these explanations, by presenting an account that is grounded in the perspectives of individuals and that illuminates the complex interrelationships between material and cultural changes that have led to the decline in support. Based on a qualitative investigation of three generations' experiences, motives and views regarding provision and receipt of, and changes in old age family support, the thesis analyses why in the past family support for older people was, on the whole, adequate, and why it has declined in recent times. It shows that the decline in support is the result of a complex, mutually reinforcing interaction between the effects of modernisation and the worsening economic crisis. The two main shifts that underpin the decline are a) a growing focus on the nuclear family, and b) a weakening of the strict filial duties and sanctions that traditionally sustained support to aged parents, rendering such support increasingly dependent on parents' affective relationship with their children. Contrary to modernisation theory assumptions, these shifts are not caused by an embracing of modern values but are, primarily, results of the effects - some hitherto unexplored - of the worsening economic situation. The role of modernisation has mainly been to exacerbate these effects in ways that have mostly not been addressed in the literature.
To my mother

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not exist were it not for the help and support I received from a number of people and I take this opportunity to express my gratitude, hoping that wherever possible I will be able to reciprocate.

Above all, I thank my mother, Dr. Edith A. Boedefeld. To her support – moral, practical and financial, I owe the largest debt.

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I thank Demi Patsios for helping me out on so many occasions, no matter what my query or problem and Caroline Oyedepo for feeding me and keeping my spirits up, especially in the final year. I am grateful to Joy Madams, for providing logistical and administrative support whenever necessary. Finally, I thank Bristol University for a three year scholarship.
Candidate's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Isabella Anike Gbemisola Aboderin

June 2000
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INTRODUCTION

Background

In Ghana, the support and care of older people have traditionally been the exclusive responsibility of the family. Formal systems of social welfare provision for older people have been virtually absent. The material dependence of older people on their children and relatives, and especially the binding duty of children to support their parents in old age, are enshrined in the traditional moral code and customs (see Nukunya, 1992a; Apt, 1996; Gyekye, 1996).

However, in the last two decades (beginning with the Vienna World Health Assembly on Ageing in 1982), there has been concern among some observers of Ghanaian society, that the traditional system of old age family support has declined in the wake of urbanisation and industrialisation. As a result older people are no longer being offered the 'customary social protection' they used to enjoy (see for example Apt, 1996, 1997).

This decline in family support is occurring just when the number of older people in need of such support is rapidly growing, and this has led some commentators to fear an "imminent crisis of caring for the elderly" (Apt, 1996, p.1). Concrete symptoms of this decline are the increasing incidence of neglect, abandonment and unmet need among older people, especially in cities, and the emergence of community-based charitable services concerned with responding to these
problems. In the face of these symptoms, academics and voluntary bodies have been calling for some time for family-oriented policies and programmes to secure the welfare of older people in the future. (Apt, 1996, 1997). A first step towards this was made in 1998, when the government commissioned a group of experts to prepare the groundwork for the development of a national policy on ageing.

In their accounts of the causes of the apparent decline in old age family support, African and Ghanaian gerontologists (dominated by Professor Apt) have put forward two kinds of explanation. The first, drawing on modernisation theory notions, argues that traditional norms and values are weakening and suggests that there is an increasing unwillingness on the part of younger people to support their aged parents or relatives. The second explanation, drawing mainly on local observations, sees the decline as a consequence of Ghana’s worsening economic situation. The argument is that growing economic hardship has led to an incapacity of younger people to care adequately for their elders.

These explanations, however, provide only a limited understanding of why the decline in family support has occurred. This is due to two main reasons. At the conceptual level, they fail to consider the interrelationships between normative and economic changes in bringing about decline in family support. More fundamentally, the two kinds of explanation are not based on empirical evidence that takes into account the perspectives of individuals, despite the fact that such a grounding is vital. Any explanation of social phenomena – if it is to

1 The main such charitable service in Ghana is HelpAge Ghana, which was founded in 1986.
be meaningful, and illuminate the relative roles of material and normative factors - must arise from an understanding of individuals' views, motives and purposes, and their recursive relationship with the wider economic and social context.

Given this premise, it is clear that a solid explanation of the causes of decline in old age support in Ghana needs to be based on the following.

First, it requires an understanding of why and how people provided (more adequate) old age support in the past - i.e. an understanding of individuals' motives, purposes and experiences of providing support, and how these related to the prevailing material and social context - and an appreciation of how this basis of support has changed in the recent past. In other words, how does traditional support compare with the motives, attitudes, and wider context that underpin the increasingly inadequate old age family support today.

Second, it should rely on people's own explanations and interpretations of the causes of decline and its current manifestations.

Although there are, in the literature, some accounts of the 'traditional' basis of old age support in Ghana (see Nukunya, 1992; Apt, 1996, 1997), they cannot be used as a starting point for such an explanation because they, too, largely fail to consider individuals' perspectives. Instead they are couched in very general terms derived from personal observations and, in all likelihood, from classical anthropological interpretations of old age support in pre-industrial societies.

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This limited understanding of the decline in old age family support has so far not received much comment or led to more detailed research. One reason for this omission is the emphasis that has been placed on the need for quantitative research to provide baseline data on the status and needs of older people. This kind of information is seen as more relevant for policy development, and, in the context of severely constrained research resources, is seen as a priority. Despite the undoubted importance of quantitative data, it is the main assumption of this thesis that a more solid understanding of the causes and consequences of the decline in support is also needed – not only to obtain a deeper appreciation of the current problems, but also to develop a response to them.

Aims of the thesis

The main aim of this thesis is therefore to develop a fuller understanding of the factors that have led to the decline in family support in the past two or more decades, and of the implications of this decline – an understanding that is founded on a comprehension of the basis of family support in the past, and of how this has changed in the recent few decades.

In order to develop this understanding, a two-fold approach has been adopted, involving both a theoretical analysis and a qualitative empirical investigation. The theoretical analysis offers a conceptual framework for approaching the empirical investigation. The literature is scrutinised to pinpoint current

---

3 This view was expressed by Professor Apt in an informal conversation.
4 It is recognised that the notion of a 'static past' is a misconstruction, because social life is constantly in flux and changing. However inadequate, it is a device that helps to capture a sense of how things used to be.
understanding about the basis, and causes of decline in old age family support, and to identify key concepts, themes and limitations in the studies undertaken to date.

In order to make the framework as robust as possible, the analysis draws not only on the Ghanaian, but also on the Western and developing world research literature, the assumption being that drawing on such divergent bodies of knowledge is valuable and justified because intergenerational family support is a universal human experience.

Using the framework provided by the theoretical analysis, the qualitative investigation looks at the views of individuals from three generations – the oldest, the middle and the youngest generation. It explores each generation’s past or present personal experiences of, and attitudes to, providing and receiving old age support, as well as their interpretations of and explanations for the diminished level of support.

The accounts of the oldest generation (who have personally experienced the ‘past’ and the process of decline) provide the base for understanding the basis of old age support in the past, and the starting point for understanding the changes that have led to the decline in support. The experiences and views of the two younger generations complement or qualify the older people’s perspectives, and thus serve to fully develop the understanding of the causes and consequences of the decline in support.
Contribution of the thesis

This thesis adds to current understanding of family support for older people in Ghana on several levels. In conceptual terms, it develops a fuller, interpretively grounded understanding than has been undertaken hitherto of the basis of old age support in Ghana, and of the causes that have led to the decline in support. Whilst this understanding applies most immediately to the research debate in Ghana, it also informs the debate in other African or developing countries that have experienced similar declines in support. Given the universality of old age family support, it may even serve as a point of comparison for contemporary or historical debates in the West.

In policy terms, this fuller understanding of the reasons for and implications of the decline in support will help to make more meaningful the existing, quantitative research evidence on patterns of support for older people, and as such could be of use in the development of a national policy on ageing in Ghana.

In research strategy terms, by generating analytical accounts from indigenous empirical evidence, the thesis makes a modest contribution to the long overdue efforts of African social science to develop its own specifically African frame of reference for the interpretation of social life in Africa. By conducting a rigorous qualitative study in Africa where - unlike in the West - such an approach has yet to be established as a valuable and legitimate mode of inquiry in its own right, this inquiry may serve as an example and perhaps encourage others to consider adopting such an approach.
Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into three parts. Part One, comprising three chapters, offers a review of the relevant Western and developing world literature. The review has two aims. First, it locates the Ghanaian debate and this inquiry within the existing stream of research by tracing the development of the global research discourse on old age family support. Second, it analyses the existing understanding of the basis, and causes of decline in family support, in order to derive a framework for empirical investigation.

Chapter One underpins the review of the literature by examining the propositions of modernisation theory about the negative effects of industrialisation and urbanisation on old age family support. These propositions have constituted the main platform on which the research discourse on family support for older people – both in the west and the developing world – has been conducted. This chapter describes the emergence of these propositions and their intellectual origins, and critically examines their content and underlying assumptions.

Chapter Two sketches the trajectory of the Western research debate on old age family support as it has developed in the wake of these propositions, thus providing a point of comparison for the emergence and development of the debate in Ghana and the developing world. It examines in detail the historical debate on decline in material family support with industrialisation, and the contemporary research discourse on the nature of old age family support in Britain and the United States. The aim is to provide a critical assessment of the
existing conceptual understanding of the causes of decline in family support, and the basis of such support in modern times.

**Chapter Three** traces and discusses the origin, development and current status of the research debate on old age family support in Ghana as part of the wider developing world discourse. It describes how the research endeavour emerged in the 1980s as an essentially theory-driven, UN-led concern, sketches the developmental trajectory and reviews the empirical evidence about the decline in family support. It assesses in detail the understanding that currently exists in the Ghanaian and wider developing world literature, of the causes of decline in family support, and of the basis of such support both in the 'past' and 'present'. Finally it presents a more specific description of the situation in Ghana.

Part Two, comprising four chapters, presents the empirical analysis of the past basis of family support for older people and the causes of its decline.

**Chapter Four** introduces the empirical investigation by describing the main methods and approach that were used in the study. It clarifies the rationale for the approach adopted, describes the methods, framework for and processes of data collection and analysis, discusses specific problems that arose during the research, and, finally, considers questions of verification and ethics in the research.

**Chapters Five and Six** establish a picture of old age family support in the past, based on the personal views of the older generation. Whilst Chapter Five discusses the norms that underpinned the provision of such support in the past, Chapter Six outlines the actual patterns and costs of support, and people's reasons
and motivations for providing it. Drawing together the key themes it then analyses why old age support was adequately provided in the past.

Based on the oldest generation’s explanations and corroborated or qualified by the experiences and attitudes of the middle and youngest generations, Chapter Seven presents an analysis of the main causes and implications of the decline in family support.

Part Three presents the concluding discussion of this thesis. Thus, Chapter Eight draws together the main findings arising from the empirical analysis and relates them to the existing theoretical understanding and the global research discourse. It speculates on the trends for old age support in Ghana, discusses some implications for policy development, and highlights important areas for future research.
PART I

FAMILY SUPPORT FOR OLDER PEOPLE: THE WESTERN AND DEVELOPING WORLD LITERATURE
CHAPTER ONE

MODERNISATION THEORY: A DECLINE IN FAMILY SUPPORT FOR OLDER PEOPLE.

1.1 Introduction

The main proposition of modernisation and age theory is that urbanisation and industrialisation cause a decline in status and family support of older people. This proposition, put forward by Burgess in *Ageing in Western Societies* in 1960, and later by Cowgill in *Aging and Modernization* (Cowgill and Holmes, 1972; Cowgill, 1974)\(^5\), has been the main stimulus and platform for the research debate on old age support in the developing and the western world. In order, therefore, to provide a sound base for the subsequent discussion of this research debate, this chapter traces the emergence and intellectual origins of Burgess' and Cowgill's propositions, and critically examines their content and underlying assumptions.

1.2 Emergence of modernisation and ageing thesis: a crystallisation of popular concerns

The first thing to note about the emergence of the proposition of modernisation and age theory is that it was, in fact, a crystallisation of a prevailing, strong popular concern about the neglect or 'abandonment' of older people in urban, 'modernised' society. This concern was part of a more general worry about the demise of the family, which had arisen in the war and post-war period, in the face of apparently growing destitution and neglect of older people, rising divorce

---

\(^5\) As Quadagno (1982) notes, Cowgill's theory has been seen as a more extended and formalised version of Burgess'. A later, more elaborate defence of the theory (Cowgill 1986) has been paid relatively little attention (Fennell, Phillipson, and Evers, 1988).
rates, prostitution and illegitimacy (see Burgess and Locke, 1954; Tibbits, 1960).

Although it became particularly marked in this period, explicit public concern about the welfare of older people had existed in earlier years, especially at the end of the 19th century. In Britain, at that time, specifically in the rapidly growing cities, there was an increasing worry about widespread need among older people, who were getting no (or too little) financial support from their families. Fuelled by surveys such as Booth’s (1894, 1899), which clearly documented the extent of this need, this worry led to the introduction of the Non Contributory Pensions Act in 1906, the National Health Insurance Act in 1911, and the Widows, Orphans’, and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act in 1925. In other words, it led to the beginnings of the welfare state (see Shanas, Townsend, Wedderburn, Friis, Milhoj and Stehouwer, 1968).

In the United States, early public concern about the problems of older people also existed. However, the official response to it was much slower. Although several states had established state commissions on old age by the beginning of the century, and later introduced various ‘old age assistance’ or ‘old age relief’ schemes (beginning with Montana in 1923), it was not until the mid 1930s that widespread public services for the aged were introduced. (see Shanas et al. 1968)

What served to heighten the concern about the old in the war and post-war years (apart from the general worry about the demise of the family) was, as Tibbits (1960) describes, the rapidly rising numbers of older people:
"Older people did become visible very rapidly, doubling in number between 1900 and 1930 and again between 1930 and 1950. The sheer increase in numbers compelled attention to the rising problems of financial dependency, employment...housing and living arrangements and to the alarming increase in the prevalence of long-term illness and disability “ (p.5).

The growing concern about the plight of older people led not only to the establishment of various charitable welfare services for the old, but also to heightened political awareness, and to increasing calls for research into the problem. It was this that essentially fuelled the emergence of social gerontological research in the 1930s and 40s.

Most of this early research, not surprisingly, was problem-focused. It was geared towards the solution of practical problems, and took the form of “inventories, surveys, and observational research” (see Tibbitts, 1960; Shanas et al. 1968). The problem focus continued to dominate social gerontology until the 1960s. It fuelled the emergence of a dominant functionalist perspective, which produced several theories regarding the roles and ‘problems’ experienced by older individuals. (see Fennell, Phillipson, and Evers, 1988). One such theory was activity theory, which focused on the negative consequences of retirement and the need for new social roles and activities for older people (Parsons, 1942; Cavan, Burgess, Havighurst, and Goldhamer, 1949; Havighurst and Albrecht, 1953). Another was disengagement theory, which centred around the thesis that

---

6Important examples of such problem-oriented research in Britain include the survey on the health of older people conducted by Sheldon in 1948, or Amelia Harris’ research which led to the development of the ‘meals on wheels’ service for the aged (Harris, 1961). A notable exception to the general type of study was Peter Townsend’s investigation in 1957 into the Family Life of Older People
disengagement from interaction with others was an inevitable consequence of the ageing process. (see Cumming and Henry, 1961)\(^7\)

Against this background and in line with the functionalist perspective, Burgess (a sociologist at the University of Chicago) put forward his propositions about the decline of old age family support in western societies\(^8\). His propositions were, in a sense, an attempt to interpret and explain the current problems faced by older people, and the earlier decline in financial family support for older people that had led to the institution of state pensions.

Drawing on demographic and anecdotal data from the US, Germany, Italy, France and the Netherlands, he posited that due to industrialisation and urbanisation\(^9\)

"the older person...can no longer count as a matter of right and of moral and legal obligation on economic support by his children. He is less and less likely, if needed, to be offered a home by a son or a daughter. If ill, particularly with a chronic ailment his children are more and more likely to shift his care to a hospital rather than to provide a bed in their home. If lonely, he must more and more look elsewhere than to his descendants to provide companionship and sociability. In short he must seek elsewhere for the satisfaction of his needs – financial, health, and social. In Western cultures he turns to the government or other organisations." (p.17; emphasis added)

\(^7\) Although Cumming and Henry presented the 'formal' version of the theory, there existed, in fact, various conflicting theoretical and empirical perspectives on 'disengagement'. Most importantly, the perspective put forward by Neugarten and Havighurst distinguished between psychological and sociological disengagement arguing that the former preceded and prepared the latter (Havighurst, Neugarten, and Tobin 1968). Although important, there is no scope here to explore the different perspectives of disengagement theory further. For a more comprehensive discussion see, for example, Marshall (1994).

\(^8\) Burgess was motivated by a concern for the 'problems of older people' and a wish to contribute to the 'welfare movement for the ageing in the United States' (Burgess 1960, p. ix).

\(^9\) Although Burgess' propositions are typically seen as expounding the impact of modernisation on the situation of the aged, he himself did not use the term. Rather, he focused on the processes of the 'industrialisation of the economy' and the 'urbanisation of society' (1960, p. ix) which had been occurring in societies of western culture (Europe and America) in 'the last fifteen decades', at 'an ever increasing tempo'. It was Cowgill and Holmes who later explicitly used the term modernisation.
He argued that the decline in material family support for older people was essentially, a result of the demise of the traditional extended family. The loss of the family’s traditional structure and functions (especially its economic, educational, religious, and health protection functions) meant that older people had lost their former roles, status, and ‘favoured position’ in family and society. Now, so Burgess argued, they were trapped in a ‘role-less role’, and thus no longer received much attention or support from children or relatives (1960, p.20).

1.3 Sociological background of Burgess’ modernisation and ageing thesis

Burgess’ propositions about a loss of old people’s status and support, and about the demise of the traditional extended family, (which, in earlier writings he had described as a shift from an ‘institutional’ to a ‘companionship’ family (Burgess and Locke, 195410), were not new. In fact, they echoed a long history of sociological thought.

The notion of a decline in the support of the aged – although Burgess was the first to elaborate on it – had already been raised in earlier structural-functionalist analyses (e.g. Parsons, 1942). The idea of a decline in the status of older people meanwhile, as Quadagno (1982) points out, went back even further. In the

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10 Apart from structural changes from extended to nuclear family, Burgess also saw this shift as involving important changes in the relationships between family members. In the ‘institutional’ family, relationships were determined by traditional rules and regulations, specified duties and obligations, the emphasis being on following of traditional norms and compliance with duty. They were sustained and enforced by external community pressures and involvement. In contrast, the ‘companionship’ family was based on “mutual affection, and the sympathetic understanding and comradeship of its members”, and was characterised by equality between the spouses, egalitarian decision making and individuality of interests (Burgess and Locke, 1954, p.vii; see also Hutter, 1981).
eighteenth century it was a popular theme in the romantic movement, found for example in the writings of John Adam Smith (1776). Somewhat later, it was put forward by Durkheim in *The Division of Labour* (1893/1964) where he argued that,

"the worship of age is steadily weakening with civilization. Though formerly developed, it is today reduced to some few polite practices, inspired by a sort of pity" (1964, p.294)^11.

Burgess' more general proposition of a demise of the extended family, had already been raised in earlier structural-functionalist analyses, such as for example by Parsons in *The Social Structure of the Family* (1944), which posited a shift away from the extended towards the isolated nuclear family^12. It had also been put forward in earlier arguments by Ogburn, which were based on comparisons between rural and urban family patterns. (Ogburn and Tibbits, 1933; Ogburn and Nimkoff, 1955).

The roots of the idea, however, went much further. They go back to early social theory, for example to Toennies and Weber who had both stressed the disintegrating effects of industrialisation on families (see e.g. Toennies, 1887/1940; Weber, 1922/1947), and even further back to 19th century

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^11 In anthropological writings, a similar idea was put forward by Simmons in his early seminal work, *The Role of the Aged* (1945), which was based on a systematic, cross-cultural comparison of a random selection of historical and ethnographic studies of 71 small-scale societies. Simmons drew this data from the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) – a coded descriptive data base of comparative ethnographic findings from cultures of the world, located at Yale university and developed, most prominently, by U.S. anthropologist G.P. Murdoch. On the basis of his analysis Simmons argued that the prestige of older people in civilised society diminishes and that they "become functionless hangers on, who...are now relegated to the side-lines..." (1946,p.94).

^12 Later on the structural-functionalist perspective and analysis of social and family change was fully developed into a modernisation theory, most influentially by William Goode in his work *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (1963). A hallmark of this perspective was the assumption of a model of linear and uniform development which equated historical pre-industrial societies in the west, with contemporary pre-industrial developing societies.
sociological thinking. For example, the social Darwinist evolutionary theory of Maine (1861/1960) postulated a progressive development of family systems from primitive to civilised in which the kinship bond gradually weakened. Marx and Engels’ historical theory of the family (see Engels, 1884/1972), similarly, posited a progressive ‘privatisation of the family’. Le Play’s pioneering comparative analysis of more than 300 working class families (1855), proposed a decline of the extended family, as a result of the ‘atomising’ effects of technology, industrialisation and the division of labour.

1.4 Cowgill’s modernisation and ageing theory

In 1972, twelve years after Burgess, and after a decade in which functionalist and modernisation perspectives had come under increasing attack in both social gerontology and mainstream sociology, Cowgill, an anthropologist, published his propositions about the impact of ‘modernisation’ on the aged.

Initially these propositions took the form of 22 discrete statements of correlation between ‘modernisation’ (or particular processes involved in modernisation) and factors pertaining to the status and condition of the elderly. He refined these in 1974 to produce a more formulaic theory of ageing. The main tenet of this theory, just like Burgess’, was that modernisation (i.e. urbanisation, education,

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13 Cowgill made an explicit effort to provide a comprehensive definition of the term 'modernisation' which until then had been lacking, despite the fact that the word was widely used. Thus Cowgill defined 'modernisation' as follows: "Modernisation is the transformation of a total society from a relatively rural way of life based on animate power, limited technology, relatively undifferentiated institutions, parochial and traditional outlook and values, toward a predominantly urban way of life based on inanimate sources of power, highly developed scientific technology, highly differentiated institutions matched by segmented individual roles, and a cosmopolitan outlook which emphasises efficiency and progress" (1974, p.127).
the development of modern economic and health technology) leads to a decline in the *status* and roles of older people\(^{14}\).

In contrast to Burgess’ propositions, however, the theory made no explicit statement about the effect of modernisation on *family support* for older people. In fact, the only more or less direct reference to this was made in two of Cowgill’s initial statements of correlation:

“With modernisation the responsibility for the provision of *economic security* for dependent elderly tends to be shifted from the family to the state”, and

“The individualistic value system of Western society tends to reduce the *security* and status of older people” (Cowgill and Holmes 1972, p.323; emphasis added)

Despite this lack of direct reference to family support, Cowgill’s propositions have nevertheless been taken to imply, just like Burgess’, a decline in family support for older people as a consequence of their loss of status and roles. Though essentially the same in content, the methodological *basis* of Cowgill’s theory, however, differed fundamentally from that of Burgess’.

 Whereas Burgess’ proposition was based exclusively, on current rural and urban data from *western* societies, Cowgill’s theory was based on a systematic, *cross-cultural comparative* analysis of data from fifteen different societies at various stages of development\(^{15}\). It was predicated on the structural-functionalist model

\(^{14}\) However, as Quadagno (1982) points out, the theory gives no definition of the concept of *status*.

\(^{15}\) These societies included the preliterate Igbo, Sidamo, Bantu peoples of Africa, the ‘modern’ societies of Japan, Russia, Israel, Ireland, Austria, Norway, and the United States; and in between these extremes Samoa, Thailand, Mexico, and the Pima Indians of Arizona. Cowgill drew the evidence about these societies from ‘scattered, disparate sources’ (Cowgill, 1972, p.2)
of linear, uniform development, which equated contemporary pre-industrial developing societies with historical pre-industrial societies in the West.

Thus, as Quadagno (1982) points out, whereas Burgess' propositions merely corresponded with the structural-functionalist perspectives of family change, Cowgill's theory was 'placed squarely within the structural-functionalist paradigm'. (p.4)

This meant that whereas Burgess' thesis pertained exclusively to the situation of older people in the West, Cowgill's theory also pertained to the developing world. It was, in a sense, a prediction about the fate of older people in developing countries as they became more 'modernised'. (Underlying this prediction was, of course, the assumption - in hindsight clearly erroneous - that 'modernisation' in developing countries would take the same form as it had done in the West, i.e. that it would go hand in hand with economic progress.)

The fundamentally different scope of Burgess' and Cowgill's propositions meant, as we shall see, that each was of different import for the research discourse in the West and developing world. Whereas Burgess' were a stimulus mainly for research and debate in the West, Cowgill's propositions were a key reference point for the developing world research debate.

1.5 Modernisation theory's explanation of the decline in family support for older people

Having discussed the emergence of modernisation theory's propositions about declining family support for older people, the next task is to examine in more detail how modernisation theory explains this decline. That is, what kinds of
causal factors and mechanisms it implicates, and on what basis. The aim here is not to engage in a substantive critique of or attack on Burgess' and Cowgill's propositions, but to establish a clear and necessary reference point for the later theoretical and empirical analysis.

We have already noted that Burgess and Cowgill saw the decline in old age family support as a corollary of the demise of the traditional extended family, and the concomitant loss of older people's status and roles. However, neither Cowgill nor Burgess provide any systematic account of why, or by what mechanisms the decline in family support could have come about. The more recent literature also provides no further insight into modernisation theory's explanation of the decline in support. However it is possible to piece together a picture of the causal mechanisms inferred by Burgess and Cowgill by examining their various statements, and by referring to some of the key sources they drew on.

1.5.1 A weakening of filial obligation

The key factor that Burgess and Cowgill suggest as underpinning the decline in family support is a weakening of the traditional norm of *filial obligation*. Thus Cowgill argues:

"In all societies there is evidence of mutual obligations and responsibilities between aged parents and their adult children, but these obligations appear to be less clear and less binding in modern societies...there is considerable resistance to it, and state insurance and

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16 Given that Cowgill's 1974 theory contains no direct reference to family support for older people, this examination draws mainly on his two 1972 statements, as well as on his more elaborate 1986 defence of the theory, in which Cowgill presents a much more extensive discussion of the issue.
assistance programs have been instituted as partial substitutes for such filial responsibility" (Cowgill and Holmes 1972, p.307)

Burgess’, in the same vein, notes:

“In the past in all countries of Western culture there was a moral and legal obligation for adult children to support needy parents” and “the strong sentiment of kinship [made] for their willingness to support aging parents and other old relatives”\(^{17}\). However, he argues “the feeling of obligation on the part of the adult children to support and care for aging parents has declined…”, and “…particularly in cities there is evidence that familial attitudes and sentiments are weakening….” (1960, p.276)

1.5.2 Decreasing familism and rising individualism

As the last statement indicates, Burgess and Cowgill see the increased resistance to filial obligation – the increased ‘unwillingness’ of children to support aged parents or relatives – as a result of the erosion of the ethic of familism (of which they assume filial obligation was an integral part), and its replacement by values of individualism. These values emphasise self-reliance and independence and thus militate against support and dependence in old age. Thus Cowgill argues:

“…as some modern societies have opted for individualism, they have abandoned the protective shield of familism and have subjected their more vulnerable members including the elderly, to risks of isolation and insecurity not found in familistic societies” (Cowgill, 1986, p.47,50)\(^{18}\)

However, neither he nor Burgess give any further consideration to the origins of, or the causes behind the shift towards individualistic values.

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\(^{17}\) Although a few of Burgess’ statements, such as the above, refer to the support of older relatives, most refer only to the decline in support to older parents. It is therefore not entirely clear whether modernisation theory implies the same processes of decline for the support of older relatives as for older parents.

\(^{18}\) Although Burgess makes no explicit reference to the rise of values of individualism, it can be assumed that he, too, saw it as a factor, since he explicitly posited an emphasis on the development of individual interests as characteristic of the modern companionship family. (Burgess and Locke, 1954)
1.5.3 Secularisation

A further value shift that Cowgill, indirectly, advances as partly responsible for the weakening of filial obligation norms in modern societies, is the trend towards secular values. He argues that Ireland is an exception to the general modernisation trend, because there, due to “traditional religious principles which admonish the young to honour one’s father and mother”, the young, both urban and rural, continue to “feel a serious obligation to visit and look after the parents” (Cowgill and Holmes, 1972, p.307). He thus implies that the weakening importance of Christian (or religious) precepts\(^\text{19}\) in most modern societies has contributed to the increasing resistance to filial obligations\(^\text{20}\). However, again, he does not extend his discussion to consider the causes behind increasing secularisation.

1.5.4 Loss of older people’s roles and status

Apart from failing to discuss the causes behind the shift towards individualisation and secularisation, Cowgill and Burgess also do not actually explain how they link the loss in status and roles of the aged to the decline in family support. An indication of the link they imply, however, emerges clearly if

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\(^{19}\) The fifth Christian commandment to ‘*Honour* your mother and your father . . . (Exodus 20:12) requires two things of children. It requires them to ‘prize highly’ ‘glorify’ and ‘show respect’ (as in Proverbs 4:8) and to provide care and affection (as in Psalm 91:15) for their parents. (Rev. Dr. Angus Stuart, Bristol University Chaplain, personal communication)

\(^{20}\) Burgess makes no mention of secularisation in his propositions, but again it can be assumed that he also saw it as a factor, since he emphasises the role of, amongst others, religious sanctions in regulating behaviour in pre-industrial institutional families, but not in modern companionship families. (see Burgess and Locke, 1954)
one considers their underlying assumptions about why children supposedly complied with their filial obligation in pre-industrial, 'traditional' society. Although neither Burgess nor Cowgill make these assumptions explicit, they are apparent in some of the key sources or perspectives they drew on, most importantly, Burgess and Locke's (1954) historical interpretations of the western pre-industrial family, and Simmons' ethnographic interpretations of old age support in non-western, ‘primitive’ societies (1945, 1946). These interpretations of old age support in pre-industrial society, upon which Burgess and Cowgill predicated their propositions, were classical structural-functionalist interpretations. These held that children21 'traditionally' fulfilled their filial obligation to support aged parents a) because they feared the consequences of not doing so, and b) because they received other services in exchange (see Figure 1).

First and foremost children were assumed to conform with their obligations because they feared the sanctions that would otherwise befall them. Thus, the assumption was, as Simmons put it, that support to aged parents was enforced by 'the force of custom' and 'the fear of consequences', rather than in any 'deep-seated instinct to guarantee elders either homage or pity from their offspring' (1945, p.50). The notion of 'enforcement' was also raised in Burgess and Locke's (1954), portrayal of the pre-industrial family. There, so they argued, behaviour was generally characterised by 'compliance with duty and the following of tradition...', and was regulated by a

"combination of powerful sanctions of the mores, religion, and law....", (195, p.23; emphasis added)

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21 Again virtually all statements make reference to care provided to aged parents, and it is not clear whether the same mechanisms are inferred for support given to aged relatives.
Figure 1: Structural-functionalist model of the motivational basis of family support for older people in 'traditional' society

- **Familial and social status and authority of the old**
- **Religious, familial & economic sanctions attached to non-conformity with normative obligation, wielded by the old**
- **Fear of consequences**
- **Support to older parents** (independent of affective relationship between them and children)
- **Old provide services in exchange for support**
- **Interdependency of old and young within extended family.**
- **Familial roles & functions of the old.**
- **Binding, normative filial obligation to honour and support older parents.**
The sanctions that were assumed to enforce support to parents were either religious punishments such as a curse from God or the old person, or – as, for example, threats of expulsion – penalties imposed by community and family. In addition, as Simmons’ descriptions in particular, children were assumed to fear economic penalties, such as barring of access to land or threats of dis-inheritance. The potency of these sanctions lay in the fact that it was the old people themselves who - by virtue of their property rights and positions of authority in family and society – had the power to wield and apply them.

In addition to the fear of consequences children were also assumed to have fulfilled their filial obligations in pre-industrial society because they received, from their aged parents, useful and needed services in exchange. These services, which in a sense provided an additional incentive for children to support parents, usually took the form of domestic help, child-minding or education, medicinal or religious advice. (see Simmons, 1945, 1946)

The assumption that thus underpinned Burgess’ and Cowgill’s propositions was that in pre-industrial society, status and roles of the aged were crucial for ensuring that children conformed with their filial obligation to support aged parents. As Simmons put it:

...security and survival in senescence are not a boon of nature nor a gift of the gods; they depend upon the contributions which old people can make or the rights which they can command in the particular groups of which they are members" (1946, p.74)

On the one hand, the familial, economic, and religious authority of older people gave them the power to enforce (through the threat of sanctions) conformity with filial obligations. At the same time, their roles and functions especially in the
extended family provided them with resources to give in exchange and as an incentive for conformity.

Together, the aged’s power and resources thus ensured that children fulfilled their obligation to support parents regardless of the amount, or even in spite of the lack of affection, sympathy, or as Simmons put it ‘homage or pity’ they felt for them. In other words, provision of support, fulfilment of filial obligations was assumed to be independent of the affective relationship between parents and children.

The link that modernisation theory thus implies between the loss of older people’s status and roles and the decline in family support for them is clear. The loss of the aged’s status and roles, due to education, urbanisation, and the development of new technologies meant an erosion of their exchange resources and enforcement powers, and thus a reduced conformity by children to their filial obligations.

Overall, modernisation theory thus proposes a two-fold mechanism by which ‘modernisation’ leads to a decline in family support for older people (see Figure 2). On the one hand, through shifts towards individualism and secularism, it weakens the traditional or religious norm of filial obligation itself. On the other hand, and at the same time, it reduces conformity with filial obligation norms, by removing incentives for it and weakening its enforcement.

The result, as modernisation theory implies, is that children increasingly focus on their nuclear families, and that support to older parents becomes more and more dependent on the affective relationship between parents and children. In other words, it becomes dependent on the love or sympathy that children feel for their
Figure 2: Modernisation theory's explanation of the causes of decline in family support for older people

- **Modernisation**
  - **Secularisation**
    - **Value change**: Value of familism down, value of individualism up
  - **Value change**: Decline in family support for older people

- **Formal education**: Young more educated than the old
  - Older people lose power to wield sanctions, and resources to provide in exchange for support

- **Urbanisation**: Nuclear family households, geographical separation
  - Children focus on their nuclear families and support becomes dependent on children's affection or sympathy

- **Industrialisation, new technology**: Decline of extended family as economic production unit, jobs of older people obsolete
  - Older people lose their former status and roles in family and society
  - Weakened value/norm of filial obligation, and resistance to conformity with filial obligation
  - Reduced enforcement and incentives for fulfilling filial obligation

- **Support to older parents (relatives)**
parents, and the degree to which they wish to help them. And this means that many older people no longer receive support. Dinkel (1944) puts this as follows:

"In the past, elders were fairly certain that come what might in the history of their personal relations with their offspring the latter would be willing to give assistance if necessary. Now, the children often take into consideration the nature of their personal relations with parents in order to come to a decision as to whether or not to help them. Parents, therefore, cannot be sure of obtaining support." (p.378/9)

By proposing, as the main cause of the decline, a weakening of traditional values or norms as the main cause of the decline in support, modernisation theory puts forward primarily an idealist explanation of the decline in family support. I.e., it offers an explanation that falls into the tradition of interpretations, typically associated with Durkheim's The Division of Labour, which sees socio-historical change as driven, essentially, by human ideas rather than, as Marxist accounts would hold, by material or economic forces.

1.6 A limited explanation

One key aspect of modernisation theory's idealist explanation is, indeed, its failure to consider the role of material constraints – for example the widespread poverty amongst labouring classes during the period of industrialisation in the West – in bringing about decline in family support for older people.

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22 The notion that old parents cannot count on the affection and love of their children to secure their well-being in old age has, in fact, been a popular one, being for example, a recurring theme in the literature, such as in Shakespeare's King Lear.

23 Dinkel drew on the same earlier sociological perspectives as Burgess had done, though he did not serve as a direct reference for Burgess.

24 Of course, as Craib (1997) points out, Durkheim's explanation is not purely idealist, but is in part almost materialist in character, thus rendering his exact position ambiguous. Similarly, some of the factors implied by modernisation theory as initially causing the loss of older people's status and roles are clearly material.
Although Burgess does note the role of economic constraints and the *incapacity* of children in bringing about the historical decline in financial family support to older people in the West,

"older persons were more and more left stranded in this period of economic transition. In the cities the children were less and less able to accommodate aging parents...or give them other financial assistance" (1960, p.x; emphasis added),

he never incorporates this important material dimension into the mainstream of his account. Cowgill’s theory makes no reference to material constraints at all. This omission clearly suggests that modernisation theory’s explanation of decline in family support for older people - specifically as an explanation of the historical decline in financial support by the family in the West – is limited. A further limitation, already indicated, is that, although the concern is with a decline of ‘extended family’ support, the explanation explains only the causes of decline in support from adult children. It makes no explicit mention of the causes of decline in support from other, more extended relatives, and thus leaves unclear whether it infers the same or different mechanisms for them as for adult children.

These conceptual limitations are symptomatic of a more fundamental, epistemological limitation in the explanation offered by modernisation theory. As argued earlier, a sound explanation of decline in family support would need to be based on an understanding of why and how adult children and relatives provided (more adequate) support in pre-industrial society, and of how and why (if at all) the basis of support differed in modernising society. However, modernisation theory was clearly not based on such an understanding. In terms
of the basis of support in modernising society, there had not yet been. at the
time, any significant empirical research, which could have provided such an
understanding.

Meanwhile, the existing structural-functionalist interpretations of support in pre­
industrial society upon which modernisation theory was based, also failed to
provide a full understanding a) because they referred only to support from adult
children, and failed to explain support from extended relatives, and b), most
importantly, because they were not grounded in evidence about the perspectives,
meanings and motives of individuals in providing support.

Rather, they were etic interpretations, generated not from interpretive empirical
evidence, but, in keeping with the positivistic research tradition (O'Brien, 1993),
based on a priori theoretical conceptions about social life in pre-industrial
societies. The use of such a priori theories, especially in the early structural­
functionalist ethnographies which, amongst others, provided the material for
Simmons' analysis, has been explicitly exposed and critiqued in the literature.

Owusu (1978) for example noted how these early ethnographies, associated
particularly with British anthropologists such as Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown,
Evans-Pritchard, or Fortes between the 1920s and 1950s\textsuperscript{25}, were characterised by
the use of "theories to assist the ethnographer in organizing his field data and
..presenting the conclusions derived from it"(p.710). These conclusions,
however, Owusu (1978) argues, corresponded little with the local realities of
those studied.

\textsuperscript{25} Important French structural-functionalist anthropologists included Mauss and Lévi-Strauss.
This etic approach, which merely inferred individuals' motivations and perspectives, was for example, explicitly described by Fortes (1945) himself:

"...writing an anthropological report...involves breaking up the vivid kaleidoscopic reality of human action, thought, and emotion which lives in the anthropologists notebooks and memory, and creating out of the pieces a coherent representation of a society, in terms of the general principles of organization and motivation that regulate it. It is a task that cannot be done without the help of theory" (p. vii; emphasis added).

The 'theories' that the ethnographers used to guide their interpretations were generally, as Owusu (1978) points out,

"...well established...Western views of society and culture, their origins and development, based on European academic and popular philosophical thought and experience...." (p.712)  

The specific theoretical conceptions that evidently underpinned the (ethnographic and historical) interpretations of pre-industrial family support upon which modernisation theory was based, were early Durkheimian, structuralist views of social action in kinship-based societies 27. These emphasised the power and authority of the aged in such societies, and saw behaviour and relationships as regulated by 'mechanical solidarity', that is, by normative rules with repressive sanctions and punishment. (see Durkheim, 1893/1964; Lukes, 1973; Jary and

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26 In addition to this fundamental epistemological flaw, the literature has exposed serious methodological faults in early ethnographies which additionally question the validity of their interpretations. These methodological flaws call into question the credibility of the collected data (at least in African ethnographies) and include amongst others a) the reliance on a few, often misguided, native interpreter-informers, which, if they were literate, often simply fed back earlier ethnographic interpretations of their culture that they read, believing that anything written in a European language was sacrosanct and beyond question (Owusu 1978) terms this the 'paraliterate' feedback problem); and b) the European ethnographers' typical ignorance or at least not full command of native languages (see Jones, 1974; Robertson, 1975; Owusu, 1978; Nukunya, 1983).

27 These conceptions themselves were again part of the positivistic tradition and thus again not derived from interpretive evidence.
Jary, 1995; Craib, 1997.) That these conceptions shaped the ethnographic and historical assumptions underpinning modernisation theory is not surprising, given that Durkheim was a crucial influence on both the early structural-functionalist anthropologists, and the structural-functionalist perspective in western sociology.

1.7 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to establish a clear base for the subsequent theoretical and empirical analysis by examining the nature and content of modernisation and ageing theory. This scrutiny has identified four key features of the theory’s proposition of a decline in family support for older people, and its explanation of the decline:

1. Modernisation theory’s proposition of a decline in family support in modernising societies, initially emerged in the West, as an interpretation of current and seemingly increasing problems among older people, and as an explanation of the earlier historical decline in financial support by the family that had led to the emergence of state pensions at the beginning of the 20th century. The proposition, which drew on structural-functionalist and earlier perspectives on family change, in effect crystallised and formalised already existing popular perceptions of an ‘abandonment’ of older people.

28 Durkheim contrasted this with ‘organic solidarity’, marked by an emphasis on individual initiative and dignity, voluntary solidarity and interdependence, characteristic of modern advanced society. (Lukes, 1973; Jary and Jary, 1995)
Whilst the initial proposition, put forward by Burgess, referred exclusively to the situation of older people in western societies, Cowgill's later theory, because it was based on the assumption of uniform, linear development, entailed an important prediction about the fate of older people in developing societies.

2. Modernisation theory advances primarily an *idealist* explanation of declining family support. It posits, as the main cause of the decline the weakening of traditional norms of familism and filial obligation, both in terms of an erosion of the norms themselves, due to shifts towards individualism and secularism, and in terms of a diminished conformity with the norms, due to weakened enforcement and reduced incentives. The result of this weakening of norms is that provision of support becomes dependent on the existence of a good affective relationship between parents and children.

3. Modernisation theory's explanation of the decline in family support is predicated upon classical structural-functionalist interpretations of the traditional basis of family support. These hold that in pre-industrial societies support to older parents in pre-industrial societies was adequate because it was enforced by binding filial obligations and sanctions, and additionally underpinned by the receipt of services in exchange. In other words, support was adequately provided because it was *not dependent* on the presence of any sentiments of love and affection on part of the children.
4. Modernisation theory's explanation of declining family support, especially of the historical decline in financial support by the family in the West, is conceptually limited for two reasons. First, it fails to account for the evidently important role of material constraints in bringing the decline about. Second, though broadly referring to decline in extended family support, it actually explains only the causes of decline in filial support. Thus it fails to make clear what mechanisms (whether the same or other than for adult children) underpin the decline in support from relatives other than children.

These conceptual gaps betray a more fundamental, epistemological limitation in the explanatory power of modernisation theory, i.e. the fact that it was not based on an understanding of the basis of family support in pre-industrial, nor in modernising societies. Whilst there was no empirical evidence to provide such an understanding for modernising societies, the structural-functionalist interpretations about support in pre-industrial societies failed to provide a full understanding. This was a) because of their failure to make clear how support from relatives other than adult children was underpinned, and b), more importantly, because they were not based on evidence about individuals' perspectives and interpretations.

Having established these key features of modernisation and ageing theory, it is now possible, in the following chapters, to examine how the western and
developing world research discourse on old age family support developed in the
wake of the modernisation argument.
CHAPTER TWO

FAMILY SUPPORT FOR OLDER PEOPLE – THE WESTERN RESEARCH DEBATE

This chapter examines the western research debate on family and old age support as it developed in response to the propositions of modernisation and ageing theory. It assesses in particular the conceptual understanding about the basis of family support, and the causes of decline or inadequacies in such support that have emerged from this debate. The aim is to provide a point of comparison for the research debate in the developing world, and to identify key concepts and foci for the development of the empirical analysis framework.

2.1 Introduction

The propositions of modernisation and ageing theory provided a challenging stimulus for the western research debate on family and old age support. This debate, as Marshall, Matthews, and Rosenthal (1993) have pointed out, can be seen as falling into two successive periods, each with a different focus of concern and interest. The first period, the ‘Shanas’ period, was largely concerned with critiquing and refuting modernisation and ageing theory, whereas the focus for the second period, the ‘Bengtson’ period, shifted to an exploration of the basis of family ties and support for older people.29

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29 Marshall et al. actually characterise the research debate on family support as falling into three periods, the first being the ‘Burgess period’, followed second by the ‘Shanas’, and third the ‘Bengtson’ period.
2.2 The 'Shanas' period – critique of modernisation and ageing theory

The first period of the debate began in the 1960’s and was dominated by the work of Shanas and her colleagues. The focus in this period was on a critique of modernisation and ageing theory on the basis of both contemporary and historical evidence. The critique involved, on the one hand, a rejection of its proposition of a breakdown in family support and abandonment of older people in modern societies, and on the other hand a refutation of its explanation of decline or inadequacies in family support in such societies.

2.2.1 Critique of modernisation theory in light of contemporary evidence

This critique of modernisation and ageing theory came from a growing number of studies, in particular the groundbreaking study by Shanas and her colleagues, which, unlike most social gerontological research, was not practical and problem oriented, but investigated the general family situation and relationships of older people in contemporary society (Shanas, 1962; Shanas, Townsend, Wedderburn, Friis, Milhoj and Stehouwer, 1968).

The specific aim of Shanas et al. (1968) was to revise the theoretical proposition and popular assumption of a widespread abandonment of older people, which, as they noted, was not based on any solid empirical evidence. Their objective was

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They termed this theoretical proposition "segregation theory", which they saw as comprising three parts. Two addressed the issues of abandonment and isolation, and the third focused on individual ageing and disengagement, i.e. disengagement theory. It is somewhat curious to note that Shanas et al., despite their reaction to these theoretical propositions, made no explicit reference to Burgess, instead referring only to Parsons. This echoes the curious absence of any reference to Burgess' work in the discussion of modernisation theory in the Encyclopaedia of Social Gerontology, and stands in contrast to the explicit reference to Burgess' work as a precursor to modernisation theory in Quadagno (1982) and Fennell, Phillipson, and Evers. (1988).

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thus to produce a balanced and empirically grounded picture of the situation of older people, which could serve as a solid knowledge base for policy development. The findings of the study in the US, the UK, and Denmark, showed the majority of older people to be firmly integrated and involved in exchanges of mutual support with their children and grandchildren. Thus, the authors strongly rejected the notion of an ‘abandonment’ of older people, and stressed that their findings were evidence of children’s ‘lasting devotion’ toward their parents. Although Shanas et al. noted that significant numbers of older people did not receive adequate family support, they emphasised, again, that this was not due to an ‘abandonment’ by their families. Rather, it was due, in most cases, to the fact that the old person had no family at all or none nearby. Their rejection of the notion that the absence of family support or contact reflected a lack of obligation or willingness on the part of children was supported by evidence from other studies. These showed that a) generally, filial obligation norms continued to be endorsed amongst all age-groups (Streib, 1965; Leichter and Mitchell, 1967; Wake and Sporakowski, 1972), and b) that older people who

31 It was clear, however, that financial support was not a key feature. Shanas et al. found that most older people no longer received significant financial support from their families. Instead, most derived income from state benefits. Fewer derived additional income from wages or salaries, or from rent, interest, and annuities. A minority had occupational pensions of some kind (1968, p.438).

32 Shanas et al. also used their empirical findings to critique disengagement theory arguing that “even very old women retain important roles as housewives, mothers and grandmothers” (1968, p.6) and that retirement did not necessarily mean a decrease in social activity or engagement. (see Shanas 1971). More generally, Shanas et al. critiqued the dominant functionalist view of ageing as a problem of individual adjustment, arguing that older peoples’ problems were rather the result of “formal actions on the part of mass society…” (1968, p.425).

33 In stressing the existence of “substantial numbers of old people who were not receiving adequate care”, and who had, instead to rely on often inadequate statutory services, Shanas et al. argued strongly for an expansion of existing and introduction of new public services for the aged.
lived alone were typically *not* abandoned by their children, but actually preferred to live alone. As Rosenmayr and Kockeis (1963) put it, they preferred an 'intimacy at a distance' with their children.

Apart from rejecting the notion of an abandonment of older people, Shanas *et al.* also used their findings to reject the more general proposition of a break-up of the extended family. They argued instead, in line with earlier empirically based sociological critiques of the modernisation model (e.g. Sussman, 1959; Litwak, 1960; Sussman and Burchinal, 1964), that the extended family was not giving way to an isolated nuclear family, but merely 'adapted' and 'modified' in the wake of rapid social change. This empirically based critique of the model was complemented by more theoretical sociological challenges to modernisation theory. These exposed serious flaws in the theory's logical, conceptual and methodological basis, most importantly its fallacious structural-functionalist assumption of a universal, uniform mode of societal development from 'traditional' to 'modern' (e.g. Applebaum, 1970; Scott, 1970) and its concomitant assumption of a 'static' traditional, and a static 'modern' state. (e.g. Moore, 1964; Gusfield, 1967)\(^{34}\).

### 2.2.2 Critique of modernisation theory in light of historical evidence

In addition to the challenge from contemporary evidence, the proposition of a decline in family support for older people in modern societies was also refuted by emerging historical evidence. This evidence, most of which was generated by

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\(^{34}\) Although these mainstream sociological critiques of the modernisation model are very important it is not possible here to pursue them further. For a more comprehensive discussion see, for example, Hutter (1981).
emerging research in historical sociology, challenged the core assumption of modernisation theory, i.e. that in pre-industrial society older people had lived and enjoyed full status and support within the 'bosom' of the extended family. It exposed this assumption as part of the 'world we have lost' syndrome, and as a romantic 'golden past' myth (Laslett, 1965; Quadagno, 1982), which did not fit with the reality of the situation of older people in pre-industrial society.

First, the evidence showed that, contrary to assumptions, the extended, patriarchal household was not the norm. Most older people (at least in colonial and 19th century America and 19th century England) did not and preferred not to live with their married children in an extended family household (Anderson, 1971; Laslett and Wall, 1972; Thomas, 1976; Laslett, 1977; Stearns, 1977; Demos, 1978; Seward, 1978; Wall, 1984). Where they did do so, it was typically out of economic necessity (Chudacoff and Hareven, 1978; Fischer, 1978; Dahlin, 1980).

Second, the evidence proved that material support for older people in pre-industrial society was not guaranteed. It revealed that, at least since the sixteenth century, there had always been sizeable proportions of older people (in particular women, and among the poor working classes) who did not receive any material support from their families, and had, instead, to rely on state or charitable

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35 The discipline of historical sociology of ageing emerged in the mid 1960's and was associated with the historical demographic work of Peter Laslett (e.g. Laslett, 1965; Laslett and Wall, 1972). His research employed a particular research technique called 'family reconstitution', which used census and parish registers to establish past household size and composition.

36 Apart from refuting the assumption of older people being supported within the extended family, the evidence also served to refute the more general structural-functionalist assumption of the historical existence of the extended family, and the thesis of a trend towards the isolated nuclear family. (see Hutter, 1981 for a review)
support\(^{37}\) (e.g. Anderson, 1977; Thomson, 1984; Walker, 1987a; Quadagno, 1982, 1999). The evidence indicated, in other words, that the provision of material support to older people has always "...been conditional on a plentiful supply of food, adequate housing or secure work" and that where one or more of these was absent support to older people always became a 'low priority' (Fennell, Phillipson, and Evers, 1988, p.33; emphasis added).

The evidence moreover showed that most older people did not receive much support from the extended family. It was usually only adult children (in particular the youngest daughters and wives of first born sons) who provided such support (Laslett, 1976; Robin, 1984).

Third, and relating specifically to the status of older people in pre-industrial society, the evidence revealed that high status in old age was not guaranteed but depended on the old person having wealth. Thus, although respect for older people existed as a cultural ideal, in practice it was reserved for a few elites (Kastenbaum and Ross, 1975; Thomas, 1976; Stearns, 1977; Hendricks and Hendricks, 1977-1978; Quadagno1982, 1999).

In addition to the evidence that refuted modernisation theory's assumptions of extended family support for older people in pre-industrial society, there was a second strand of historical evidence which challenged modernisation and ageing theory. This evidence, most notably that of Anderson (1977), specifically disputed the theory's idealist explanation of the historical decline in financial

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\(^{37}\) This support took the form of Poor Law pensions or poor-relief, and/or living in almshouses, the homes of neighbours or in specialised homes for the elderly. Thomson (1984) for example argues that in Britain in the 1840s and 50s two-thirds of women over 70 were in regular receipt of a Poor Law pension. Walker (1987) notes that in Edwardian Britain, about one tenth of older women could expect to end their days in the workhouse.
support by the family and the consequent rise of state support for older people at the beginning of the 20th century in Britain. The evidence clearly showed that the refusal of children to support their old parents in this period (and thus the heightened demand for state support) was not primarily due to an unwillingness or weakened sense of filial obligation on their part. Rather, it was the result of their own abject poverty and lack of resources, caused by unemployment and low wages (Anderson, 1977; Quadagno, 1982). By stressing the key role of economic constraints and the incapacity of children to support older parents, Anderson proposed an essentially materialist explanation as an alternative to modernisation theory's idealist account of the decline in support. The crucial assumption in this explanation was, of course, that adult children were being forced to make decisions on how to allocate their meagre resources, and in doing so, gave priority to themselves and their children, not their old parents. However, there was no further discussion of the values, reasons and interests that lay behind these decisions and priorities, and how they may have been shaped or influenced by prevailing norms.

Thus, as an explanation of the decline in support, Anderson's materialist account was also limited. Just as modernisation theory's explanation had failed to consider the role of material constraints, the materialist explanation failed to take account of the idealist dimension, i.e. the role of values and norms in underpinning the decline in financial family support for older people. The result, as Quadagno (1999) has noted, is that the reasons and processes behind the shift from family to state provision of financial support to older people still remain poorly understood.
The conceptual limitation in the materialist explanation, just as was the case for modernisation theory, is again symptomatic of the fact that it was not based on a full understanding of the basis of family support in pre-industrial and in modernising societies.

In the case of modernising societies the research that could have provided such an understanding had not been done. A full understanding of the pre-industrial basis of support, meanwhile, was lacking, because no research had attempted to re-examine the existing structural-functionalist interpretations, by generating empirical evidence about the motives and perspectives of individuals in providing support. Although there were a few studies that did explore aspects of the pre-industrial basis of support in Europe and America, they did not provide any interpretive insights of this kind. Their findings, that support to older people was often provided only in return for the contractually agreed transmission of their property to their children (e.g. Braun, 1966; Greven, 1970; Berkner, 1972; Howell, 1976; Sabean, 1976; Stearns 1977, Hanawalt 1986), merely served to confirm the existing view of pre-industrial support as based not on affective sentiments, but on exchange of services.38

38 The fact that this evidence about the basis of old age family support was pitched as a challenge to modernisation theory suggests that not much detailed attention was given to identifying the assumptions underpinning modernisation theory in relation to support in pre-industrial societies. It appears as if modernisation theory was presumed to stipulate only that binding filial obligation norms compelled support in pre-industrial society.
2.3 The 'Bengtson' period – focus on the contemporary basis of old age family support

After contemporary and historical evidence had shown, as O’Rand (1990) put it, that modernisation theory did “not fit with history nor with contemporary...arrangements” (p.131), the ‘Bengtson’ period in the research debate on old age and family support began. The focus in this period, much of which was dominated by the work of Bengtson and his colleagues, moved away from an explicit concern with critiquing the notion of an abandonment of older people in modern society – even though the notion continued (and continues) to persist especially in popular perception. (see Shanas, 1979; Brody, 1985; Fennell, et al., 1988; Bengtson, Rosenthal, and Burton, 1996). Instead, most research – apart from a few studies which essentially replicated Shanas’ findings – focused on two areas. The first was policy and ‘needs-oriented’ research. This involved studies which examined the support situation and especially the needs of older people and their carers. The second, more ‘academic’ strand of research, involved studies which focused on exploring the underpinnings of family ties and support for older people. Both research strands were fuelled by an emerging and ongoing policy debate about the extent of public provision for the care of older people, and together led to an intense research discourse about the motivational basis

39 The dogged persistence of the popular notion of an ‘abandonment’ of older people, in spite of ample evidence to the contrary led Shanas in 1979 to call it a ‘hydra-headed monster’ – as soon as one head is cut off another one grows. In an attempt to explain this dogged persistence, Brody (1985) hypothesized that the myth persists because at its heart is the fundamental truth that ‘adult children cannot and do not provide the same total care to their elderly parents that those parents gave to them in the good old days of their infancy and childhood’ (p.26).

40 Marshall et al. (1993) have in fact questioned why such studies, e.g. Cantor (1975), Cicirelli, (1981) “…felt compelled to spend so much time replicating their findings” (p.44).
especially of filial support for older people. The following sections describe first the nature and development of the two research strands, and then examine in detail the debate, and the emerging conceptual understanding, about the contemporary basis of filial support.

2.3.1 Research on the situation and needs of older people and their carers

The strand of needs-oriented research emerged, in effect, as a response to the apparent problems and unmet need among older people that research (such as Shanas' *et al.*'s, 1968), had documented. Most early studies — typically surveys of varying scope — were therefore concerned (just as very early social gerontological research had been), with assessing the care situation of older people, identifying areas of need and possible ways of meeting or responding to them. (e.g. Harris, 1971; Abrams, 1978, 1980; Hunt, 1978; Bebbington, 1980; Townsend, 1981; OPCS, 1982; Chappell, 1983; Wenger, 1984). Some surveys focused on specific aspects, for example housing of the old (e.g. Butler, Oldman, and Greve, 1983; Tinker, 1984; Fennell 1986, 1987).

The evidence emerging from these studies clearly documented that although family members (in particular wives and adult children) were extensively involved in providing support, many older people's needs were not being met. The evidence thus suggested a need for an expanded public provision for older people. The prevailing political climate, however, militated against such an expansion. In both the UK and the US, conservative governments, facing a fiscal crisis that had loomed since the late 1970's, were intent on cutting back welfare expenditures for the elderly. The argument used to justify this policy was that
the responsibility for the care of older people lay, ultimately, with the family where it ‘rightly’ belonged. Playing on popular perceptions of an abandonment of older people, the rising demand for social services and institutional care was thus portrayed as evidence for the ‘fact’ that families were shirking their ‘natural’ responsibilities. Increased state support, so the argument continued, would therefore only serve to further encourage such irresponsibility and lead to an untenable dependency on the state (see Moroney, 1976; Finch, 1989)41.

In reaction to these conservative politics, much of the writing in social gerontology became increasingly political, criticising government policy and rhetoric (which was seen as echoing the ‘family values’ ethic in Victorian social policy), and strongly advocating an expansion of public service provision for older people (see Walker 1982, 1985; Qureshi and Walker, 1989).

The critiques, which drew on feminist and political economy42 perspectives in social gerontology, focused on three issues:

First, they exposed the lack of any evidence to support the government’s claim that present day families lacked a sense of responsibility and were ‘unwilling’ to care for their older dependants. (see Qureshi and Walker, 1989). They pointed

41 The political weight of this notion was increased by popular perceptions of the dire conditions in institutions which had been raised by earlier research, such as for example Townsend’s The Last Refuge (1962).

42 The political economy perspective in social gerontology is chiefly associated with scholars such as Estes (1979, 1986), Estes, Swan and Gerard (1982), Minkler (1984), and Myles (1984) in the US; Townsend (1981, 1986); Phillipson (1982, 1991. 1994), and Walker (1981, 1986, 1990) in the UK; and Guillemard (1986) in France. The perspective applies Marxist and neo-Marxist critiques and has aimed to promote a structural rather than an individual view of the problems of older people. That is, it has aimed to call attention to the ‘social construction of old age’ and its problems (see Minkler, 1996). The central challenge of the political economy of ageing has been, as Estes (1999b) put it “to understand the character and the significance of variations in the treatment of the aged and to relate them to broad societal and global forces and conditions” (p.17).
not only to the clear evidence that family members, in particular wives and adult children, were the predominant care-givers\textsuperscript{43}, but also that the amount of old age care provided by families was now higher than ever before. In the past, so they argued, the much shorter life spans had meant that people rarely had to care for frail, older family members, and if so, for much shorter periods (see Moroney, 1980; Haber, 1983; Dwyer and Coward, 1992).

Second, the critiques stressed the fact that many carers often provided care at great social and financial costs to themselves. Many women carers, for example were denied the right to be economically independent because they had to give-up work full-time, or altogether. At the same time they did not receive any support from the state, making their caring, in effect, equivalent to ‘unpaid labour’(Finch and Groves, 1983).

Finally, the urgency of the need for expanded public care provision was emphasised by pointing to the rising trends in life expectancy, divorce and women’s labour force participation, which meant increasing demand for old age care, and, at the same time, increasing difficulties for families to provide such care. In short, they meant that the pressures on family carers were going to get heavier, if not intolerable (see Moroney, 1980; Finch and Groves, 1983; Walker, 1983; Goldscheider, 1990).

\textsuperscript{43} The predominance of wives amongst spousal caregivers reflects in part the higher life-expectancy of women. Among adult children carers the gender difference is smaller, with daughters and daughters-in-law constituting about 55-60\% (see e.g. Parker, 1992)
Research on carers

The political and feminist concern about the ‘plight’ of carers soon led to an increasing number of studies which focused on exploring the situation and, in particular, the problems of those caring for an older person. Their findings, confirming the often high ‘costs of caring’ that many (mainly female) carers endured, in turn fed into the policy debate (e.g. EOC, 1980, 1982; Brody, 1981, 1985, 1989; Finch and Groves 1982; Nissel and Bonnerjea, 1982; Graham 1983; Jones, Victor, and Vetter, 1983; Charlesworth, Wilkin and Durie, 1984; Joshi, 1987; Stone, Cafferata and Sangl, 1987; Green 1988).

In the mid to late 1980s, as Marshall et al. (1993) and Jerrome (1996) point out, caregiving became the dominant concern, almost a small industry, in ageing and family research.

Most studies focused either on documenting and measuring ‘caregiver burden’ or ‘caregiver stress’; on exploring carers’ coping mechanisms; or on evaluating the effectiveness of support programmes for carers (e.g. Montgomery, Gonyea and Hooymann, 1985; George and Gwyther, 1986; Zarit, Todd and Zarit, 1986; Stone, Cafferata and Sangl, 1987). Evidence from these studies led to the development of ‘self-help’ manuals and guides for carers. Although in the 1990s caregiver research has continued to flourish, it has, as Jerrome, (1996) notes, begun to come under increasing attack for its repetitiveness and lack of progress, even in the UK the increased concern about carers was reflected in the founding of the Carers National Association in 1982.
2.3.2 Research on the basis of family relationships and support of older people.

The second, more 'academic' strand of research that emerged in the Bengtson period was, in a sense, fuelled by the evidence that was being generated by the needs-oriented surveys on older people and carers. With ample proof of persisting family ties and support for older people, but also a heightened awareness of the concerns about the increasing demand for and strain of providing family support, the research interest turned to the question of what underpinned or drove family support for older people. This question was addressed by three different types of studies: (i) studies which explored the motivations of carers caring for dependent elderly parents (or relatives); (ii) studies which explored the determinants of correlates of filial support for older people; and (iii) studies which examined the role and nature of filial obligation norms.

The aim here is to first of all sketch the nature, design and foci of these different types of studies. Their findings will be discussed in detail later when examining the emerging debate on the contemporary basis of filial support.

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45 Jerrome speculates that this lack of progress is due, partly, to the 'proliferation of age-related journals which publish identical and unoriginal material for different audiences', and a 'funding situation which permits the re-invention of the wheel' (1996, p.94,95).
Research on carers’ motives

The studies which explored the motives of those people who cared for dependent older relatives (especially older parents), did so either as their sole focus (e.g. Horowitz and Shindelman, 1983; Walker, Pratt, Shin and Jones, 1989,1990), or as part of a broader investigation of carers’ experiences, attitudes, and caregiving patterns. (e.g. Cicirelli, 1981; Ungerson, 1987; Lewis and Meredith, 1988; Qureshi and Walker, 1989; Aronson, 1990). Typically, the studies focused on exploring the role of affection, obligation and/or reciprocity as motives compelling support. Whilst some did so using entirely quantitative methods such as pre-coded questionnaires (e.g. Walker et al. 1989,1990), most were at least in part qualitative (e.g. Horowitz and Shindelman, 1983; Ungerson, 1987; Lewis and Meredith, 1988; Qureshi and Walker, 1989; Aronson, 1990).

Research on ‘correlates’ of filial support

In contrast to the studies exploring carers’ expressed motivations, the more recent studies into the correlates of care - typically all large-scale surveys - have sought to quantitatively establish the factors that correlate with support provision. In other words, they have inferred individuals’ motivations (e.g. Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Hogan, Eggebeen and Clogg, 1993; Silverstein and Litwak, 1993; Lawton, Silverstein and Bengtson 1994; Lee, Netzer and Coward, 1994; Silverstein, Parrott and Bengtson, 1995).

Most of these investigations have either been part of more general surveys into intergenerational ties (e.g. Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Lawton et al. 1994; Lee et al. 1994) or have used data from such surveys, particularly from Bengtson’s
longitudinal study of generations (LSG) (Bengtson, 1975)\textsuperscript{46}. As a conceptual framework for exploring the determinants of family support, many studies have used the 'intergenerational solidarity' framework, which was developed on the basis of LSG data\textsuperscript{47}. The framework conceptualises intergenerational solidarity as a multidimensional construct involving six components. These are 'functional solidarity' which refers to help and the exchange of resources, as well as 'normative solidarity', 'affectual solidarity', 'consensual solidarity', 'structural solidarity' and 'associational solidarity' (see Bengtson and Schrader, 1982; Bengtson and Roberts, 1991)\textsuperscript{48}

Thus, these studies have conceptualised family support to older people as 'functional solidarity' and have investigated its correlation with one or more of the other solidarity dimensions and/or with other socio-demographic factors such as gender and race. One study has additionally explored its correlation with

\textsuperscript{46} The LSG, which began in 1971, is a large-scale, cross-sectional, longitudinal quantitative survey of 3 generations - grandparents, their children, and their grandchildren aged 16-26 who are asked about their perceptions of, attitudes towards, and engagements in intergenerational relationships, as well as about other opinions, values, attitudes, values and their well-being (Bengtson, 1975). This study has continued to the present day, involving since 1985 regular three-year surveys. To date it has reached the sixth such survey and is expected to continue in the future.

\textsuperscript{47} The intergenerational solidarity framework was developed using LSG data and drawing on classical social theory, social psychology, and the sociology of the family.

\textsuperscript{48} 'Normative solidarity' refers to commitment to familial roles and obligations and includes filial obligations, i.e. the expectation on adult children to provide assistance to, and meet the needs of their ageing parents (see Seelbach, 1977).

'Affectual solidarity' refers to 'positive sentiments held about family members, and the degree of reciprocity of these sentiments'.

'Consensual solidarity' refers to the 'degree of agreement on values, attitudes, and beliefs among family members'.

'Structural solidarity' refers to the opportunities for intergenerational relationships as given by the 'number, type and geographic proximity of family members'.

'Associational solidarity' refers to the 'frequency and patterns of interaction in various types of activities in which family members engage'. (see Bengtson and Roberts, 1991, p.857)
normative expectations of inheritance (Silverstein, Parrott and Bengtson. 1995). In contrast to the above, many correlates studies have not used the intergenerational solidarity framework, mainly because they have investigated factors that the framework does not capture (e.g. Hogan, Eggebeen and Clogg, 1993; Silverstein and Litwak, 1993; Whitbeck, Hoyt and Huck, 1994). Whitbeck et al. (1994), for example, drawing on interactionist perspectives, have investigated the correlation of early parental rejection with the provision of filial support to aged parents. Hogan, Eggebeen and Clogg (1993), drawing on social exchange theory, and on earlier findings of mutual exchange of services between parents and children (e.g. Shanas et al. 1968), have investigated to what extent provision of support to older parents is matched by current or recent receipt of support from parents. Finally, Silverstein and Litwak (1993) have analysed the determinants of different types of support, distinguishing, for example, between household support and social-emotional support.

49 In doing so, it took the cue from previous empirical evidence showing a positive relationship between the amount of contact between parents and children and the amount of parents’ ‘bequeathable wealth’ (Bernheim, Shleifer and Summers 1985) as well as a relationship between caring for older parents and receiving the largest share of their property (Sussman, Cates and Smith, 1970). Theoretically, it drew on economic perspectives, which see inheritance as inducing children to provide support and part of an exchange between parents and children. (e.g. Cox and Rank, 1992)

50 The authors critique the intergenerational solidarity model’s failure to consider relationship histories and their effect on current expressions of family solidarity, thus treating family solidarity ahistorically.

51 In this study, ‘recent’ meant financial support up to 5 years prior. For help with child care or advice, it meant up to 1 month prior. Hogan, Eggebeen and Clogg, also critique the intergenerational solidarity framework, this time for its failure to see old age support as ‘part of a larger exchange process involving receiving as well as giving’ (1993, p.1429).

52 Again, the authors highlight the limited scope of the intergenerational solidarity framework. They note the framework’s failure to allow analysis of the differences between these types of support.
Research on filial obligation norms

The third type of studies exploring the basis of family support to older people—studies into filial obligation norms—aimed to establish to what extent these norms were (still) endorsed in the general population, despite the ever increasing demands and strains of caring for elderly parents. Almost all these studies investigated the endorsement of normative statements applying to third parties such as "what should children do for parents" rather than statements of personal obligations such as "what should I do for my parents" or "what should my children do for me". Some studies examined norm endorsement only among adult children (e.g. Finley, Roberts and Banahan, 1988; Wolfson, Handfield-Jones, Cranley Glass, McClaran and Keyserlingk, 1993; Wallhagen and Strawbridge, 1995) or amongst older people (e.g. Seelbach, 1978; Marshall, Rosenthal and Daciuk 1987; Lee and Shehan 1989). Others used two or three-generational samples (e.g. Brody, Johnsen, Fulcomer, and Lang 1983; Brody, Johnsen and Fulcomer 1984; Storm, Storm, and Strike-Schurman, 1985; Hamon and Blieszner, 1990) or general representative population samples (e.g. Hanson, Sauer and Seelbach, 1983; Roff and Klemmack, 1986; Treas and Spence, 1989; Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Finch and Mason, 1990, 1992). There were also variations in the methodological approach used. The early studies in particular investigated the endorsement of very general normative obligations such as "children should take care of their parents, in whatever way necessary when they are sick", or "children should give their parents financial help" (Seelbach, 1978, p.343). In contrast, many of the later studies, often using the vignette technique, explored the endorsement of filial obligation norms in relation to other
commitments to work or children, or in specific circumstances or contexts (e.g. Brody et al., 1984; Storm et al., 1985; Roff and Klemmack, 1986; Marshall et al., 1987; Treas and Spence, 1989; Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Wolfson et al. 1993). They did so, as Marshall et al. (1987) point out, in recognition of the fact that a real understanding of the norms requires insights into how general rules are interpreted in specific settings, with specific kin persons (see Rossi, 1993).

Some studies additionally examined the normative responsibility of adult children compared to those of other relatives (e.g. Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Finch and Mason, 1990, 1992). Finally, several more exploratory studies also investigated the operation of filial obligation norms in practice (e.g. Finch and Mason, 1992), and people's personal attitudes and expectations about filial obligation and old age support (e.g. Brody et al., 1984; Storm et al., 1985; Wallhagen and Strawbridge, 1995).

**Continuing policy debate**

The policy debate which initially fuelled research in the Bengtson period continued, throughout the 1990s, to run in parallel, fuel and feed on the research. In part, this debate has continued to focus on the specific question of public versus family provision of long-term care for older people. In the UK this specific debate has been further fuelled by concern over new socio-demographic

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53 In the UK this debate takes as one reference point the 1990 Community Care Act 1990, which established a new framework for the provision of welfare services from formal, quasi-formal, informal, public and private sources. It intended to shift provision from public to both for-profit and non-profit providers, in order to enhance cost efficiency and reduce public expenditure.
trends, which question the future feasibility of family support\(^{54}\), as well as by the apparently rising demand for formal care services (see Clarke, 1995; Grundy, 1995). Again, critical perspectives from social gerontology have argued against government rhetoric, and stressed that the rising demand does not reflect a weakening of family or filial obligations. Rather, as they have argued, it is an expression either of old people's own preferences or of constraints which render families \textit{unable} to provide the necessary care. Thus, expanding public services would not, as policy makers fear, open the floodgates of demand, but would rather help families to care (Walker, 1995; Clarke, 1995; Grundy, 1995). In addition to this specific debate, however, there has arisen, in the 1990's, a much more fundamental debate about priorities in the allocation of society's resources between the young and old. This debate, particularly prominent in the US and the UK, as well as in Canada and Germany, has centred specifically on the issue of how to finance the growing need for social security and long-term care of the growing proportion of older people (see Walker, 1990)\(^{55}\). In some countries like Britain and America, this concern has led to the development of models to restructure traditional state dominated systems of social security and welfare for

\(^{54}\) The main trends in fertility and marriage patterns which are giving rise to concern are: a) the continuing rise in the rates of divorce and remarriage, which means that divorced older people have no spouse to care for them, and that adult children who are divorced or lone parents, will not have sufficient resources to provide care. 
b) the increasing numbers of single parent families, which means that single parents as adult children may not have enough resources to care for their old parents. 
c) the rise in the rate of childlessness, and the falling average number of children, which mean increasing numbers of older people who have no or only very few children to care for them. 
d) the rise in the age of first pregnancy, which means that more women will be faced with competing obligations to their young dependent children as well as their aged parents (see Clarke, 1995; Grundy, 1995). 

\(^{55}\) A further concern, particularly in the US, where this debate is often referred to as the 'generational equity debate', has been the worry about possible future conflicts over equity issues between old and young generations.
the aged (see Johnson, 1995). Apart from practical considerations, the debate has also included a more theoretical discourse about the basic obligations and rights of one generation vis-à-vis another. Central to this discourse has been the notion of 'justice across generations', or of the 'intergenerational contract' (or compact), which is commonly taken as mirroring the implicit contract that exists between generations at the family level (Johnson, Conrad and Thomson, 1989; Bengtson, 199356; Johnson 1995). The contributions to this discourse have varied widely, ranging, amongst others, from political and moral economy arguments57, which question the legitimacy of the whole debate, and see it as a socio-political construct geared toward legitimating cutbacks in state expenditure for the aged. (e.g. Walker, 1993; Estes, 1999b), to contributions which, accepting the reality of the concern, have examined possible trends in and public perceptions of the 'contract between generations' in family and society (e.g. Bengtson, 1993; Quadagno, Achenbaum and Bengtson 1993; Bengtson and

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56 Bengtson (1993) defines the ‘contract across generations’ in Western societies as comprising three levels or sets of expectations and obligations. The first, biosocial generation and socialization holds that “the first generation will succour and bring up the second, who will then bring up a third generation”. The second, gerosocial succession holds that “the second generation will have sufficient resources to bring up the third”. The third set, geriatric dependencies holds that “the first generation will be honoured and helped during their decline - and death - by their descendants, the second or third generation” (p.5).

57 The moral economy perspective can be seen as complementary to the political economy of ageing in that it focuses not on the material but on the cultural and moral dimension of social processes affecting the aged (Clark 1999, Robertson, 1999). It is concerned with the “ideas, beliefs, ideologies, and meanings that are part of the construction and definition of aging as a problem that societies produce” (Estes 1999b, p.27). More specifically, moral economy focuses on the “collectively shared assumptions underlying norms of reciprocity” (Minkler and Cole 1999, p.42).
The sense emerging from these discussions, is that the fundamental terms of the contract are in the process of being renegotiated:

"in both public and private domains...the future of the social contract has become a contested issue. As we look toward the projected population dynamics of the twenty-first century, it is clear that the social agreement between successive generations to help and be helped requires a critical reappraisal. More than just a prediction of material costs and benefits, this reappraisal must examine the fundamental cultural assumptions and social assignments that define the meaning of giving and deserving in the social contract" (Hashimoto, 1996, p.13).

Thus, the debate has spawned several more abstract or philosophical contributions, which have discussed the ethical underpinnings of the 'intergenerational contract', and have put forward a diversity of views about 'justice between generations' and the limits of obligations towards the old. (e.g. Callahan, 1987; Daniels, 1988; Laslett, 1992; Laslett and Fishkin 1992; Johnson 1995, 1999).

2.4 Discourse and developing understanding of the contemporary motivational basis of filial support

One particularly important offshoot of the wider policy debate that fuelled research in the Bengtson period was, as indicated earlier, a politically charged

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58 On the one hand, these investigations have generally found that the parameters of the contract are indeed changing a) because demographic factors have changed the "the normative life course concerns" for the average individual and have made caregiving (often for substantial periods) for a dependent older family member a "normative life event of middle age"; and b) because political factors have altered the "public policy priorities regarding responsibilities towards aging citizens" (Bengtson 1993, p.23). On the other hand, the investigations have found broad persistence of normative values and expectations of solidarity between old and young in families and society (Bengtson, 1993; Bengtson and Harootyan, 1994).

59 It is beyond the scope of this review to provide a detailed discussion of the various contributions to the intergenerational contract debate. For such a discussion, see, for example, Bengtson (1993).
research discourse specifically about the motivational basis of filial support, i.e. about what makes children care for their elderly parents in contemporary society.

2.4.1 The affection model

The first model of the motivational basis of support that was put forward (following on from the notion of 'intimacy' and 'devotion' that Shanas et al. (1968) and Rosenmayr and Kockeis (1963) had raised in the 1960s), portrayed support to aged parents as being provided out of a natural sense of love and affection on part of the children. An important offshoot of this argument was that women, by nature, were more caring and affectionate than men – or even that caring was central to women's identity – and that this was the reason why they predominated as caregivers. (Chodorow, 1978; Hess and Waring, 1978).

This prime role of affection in motivating support, was, as Jarrett (1985) points out, generally seen as a clear departure from the strict duty and compulsion that were thought to have compelled filial support in pre-industrial, traditional societies. Hess and Waring (1978), for example, argued that there had been a 'historical erosion' in filial duty, and that instead intergenerational aid was now motivated by discretionary motives - independent choice and affection60.

This view of the contemporary basis of old age support was consistent with prevailing popular perceptions, which saw the modern American family as bound together by closeness, love, independent choice and emotional solidarity (see

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60 This view, and specifically Hess and Waring’s argument, clearly echoes the modernisation model, and takes as given the classical structural-functionalist interpretations of family support in traditional society. It is somewhat surprising that in this context the modernisation notion should have been taken on so uncritically, despite the refutation it had received not just in social gerontology, but also in mainstream sociology.
Nydegger, 1983; Jarrett, 1985; Finley et al. 1988). As Nydegger put it, it reflected Americans’ "culturally unique view of [modern] kinship as a set of personal relationships rather than formal relations...." (1983, p.30; text in parenthesis added). This view, as Jarrett (1985) points out, was also dominant in family sociology at the time. The focus, especially of the re-emerging interactionist perspective, was on the marriage bond and the socialisation of children, both of which were seen as being based on affection, and the creation of expectations rather than the transmission of them. The view was that prescriptive norms had been, or were being eroded, and that there was a trend towards minimal cultural guidance about the nature of generational ties and obligations (e.g. Hagestad 1981, p.25).

Politically, the affection model was consonant with prevailing government rhetoric, which portrayed family caregiving as a ‘natural responsibility’. It therefore “…neatly merge(d) with popular demands for cost-reduction in social programs”(Jarrett, 1985, p.6).

**Empirical support for the ‘affection’ model**

Empirical support for the affectionate caregiving model came most prominently from studies on caregiving motivations and correlates, which showed that adult children expressed their motives for supporting older parents first and foremost in terms of affection, and that their level of affection correlated with the level of

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61 Thompson (1989) has argued that the reluctance of ‘sensitive’ western social scientists to think of family relationships in terms of formal obligations, was motivated by prevailing conceptions of ‘morality’, which saw moral obligations as implying rule-following and impersonal behaviour. Applying these to family relationships (including family support for older people) would have thus meant ‘denying the personal and emotional nature of family bonds’.
care they provided (e.g. Cicirelli, 1981). On the basis of these findings, Cicirelli argued that ‘affection’, a voluntary motivation arising from the individual parent-child relationship, was the main motivation driving support. Drawing on the social-psychological theory of ‘attachment’ (e.g. Bowlby, 1979), he argued further that this affection was the result of an internal sense of attachment that originated in early child-parent interaction, and created a desire to be close to and protect parents (Cicirelli, 1983).

Additional empirical support for the notion that care was driven by voluntary motives arising from the individual parent-child relationship came from evidence which showed that caregiving was often compelled by a sense of ‘reciprocity’, a feeling of appreciation, indebtedness and gratitude for what parents had done in the past, and a concomitant wish to repay and help in return. Horowitz and Shindelman (1983), for example, showed not only that having received past help from parents after leaving the parental home was correlated with caregiving, but also that ‘reciprocation’ was an important motivation expressed by many carers, typically in phrases such as ‘...[because] all my life she was good to me’ or ‘...[because] if I needed anything he gave it to me’ (Horowitz and Shindelman, 1983, p.16) 

\[62\] Finch (1989), in her theoretical discussion, links the idea of reciprocity over the life-course to two sociological conceptions, first, Bulmer’s (1987) idea of a ‘lifetime balance sheet’ as representing social care within families, and second Gouldner’s (1973) argument that in making calculations about long-term reciprocity people take into account the past conduct of the person in question, what they have done and how they have behaved in the past. She moreover links the idea to the anthropological concept of ‘cycles of reciprocity’ (Levi-Strauss, 1969), which emphasises the long periods over which exchanges take place and the unequal nature of the exchange.
The notion of 'reciprocity' as underpinning support, was later expressed in the concept of a 'support bank', in which deposits are made earlier in one's life in anticipation of future needs or withdrawals (Antonucci, 1990).

2.4.2 Critique of affection model

The affection model of caregiving soon received criticism on theoretical, empirical, and political grounds. All disputed the prime importance of individual relationship factors, and argued instead for the key role of structural obligations in compelling filial support. Implicit in these critiques, was thus the view that 'affection' and 'obligation' were at opposite ends of a spectrum.

Theoretical critique

The theoretical critique of the affection model came particularly from Nydegger, (1983) whose challenge was based on an anthropological perspective and focused on two aspects. First, Nydegger critiqued the model for painting too rosy a picture of parent child relationships – what she called a 'Norman Rockwell idealisation' – and for failing to consider the role of conflict and antagonism63. This, as Nydegger pointed out, contrasted with the prominent role that was given to strife and discord in anthropological interpretations of kin relationships in non-western, non-industrialised societies. Second, and more fundamentally, Nydegger challenged the model’s exclusive focus on individual relationship factors, and its failure to consider the role of structural rights and obligations in compelling family support. She again

63 This criticism was later echoed by Marshall et al. (1993).
contrasted this with anthropological interpretations, which, she argued, typically overemphasised the role of structural factors, and neglected the role of individual relationships in shaping ties between kin. Interestingly, Nydegger did not extend her analysis to critique also the fundamental epistemological limitation, i.e. the lack of interpretive grounding, in anthropological interpretations of ‘traditional’ support. She also did not extend her critique to the historical interpretations of support in pre-industrial western society, which, as we have seen, were equally ‘structural’. These, too, remained unchallenged.

Empirical critique

The theoretical critique of the affection model was complemented by challenges which were based on empirical evidence. This evidence came, on the one hand, from earlier studies on parent-child relationships, which, as Qureshi and Walker (1989) point out, questioned the degree to which affection and a desire for closeness with old parents really existed on part of adult children. Teeland (1978) in Sweden, for example, found that affection was not a given in the structure of the relationship between parents and their adult children, but had to be achieved.\(^4\) Blau (1973) argued further that children typically felt a desire for distance from their old parents, and that the notion of ‘intimacy at a distance’ was a myth. Even Rosenmayr and Kockeis, who had put forward this notion, acknowledged that older parents seemed more attached to their children than vice versa.

\(^4\) It should be noted, however, that Teeland’s findings were based on rather limited indicators for measuring emotional closeness and affection (see, Qureshi and Walker, 1989).
In addition to this early empirical evidence, the affection model was also challenged by findings emerging from the increasing number of studies into carers' motivations and correlates of care. These showed that neither affection nor reciprocity were necessary preconditions for the provision of support to aged parents. Many children provided such support in the absence of any particular feelings of affection or gratitude towards their parents, and without having received any past help from parents. What was a necessary precondition for support however, was a sense of a general, normative obligation or duty on children to assist their parents in old age (e.g. Horowitz and Shindelman, 1983; Qureshi and Walker, 1989; Walker et al., 1989, 1990; Wallhagen and Strawbridge, 1995). Carers expressed this obligation either in terms of a formal relationship obligation "because she is my mother", "you do for your parents because they are your parents" or in terms of a moral duty "you honour your parents. I feel it is my duty" (see Walker et al. 1989).

The roots of this filial obligation were typically seen as lying in the Judaeo-Christian commandment to honour ones parents in return for nurturing received in childhood and for the gift of life itself (see Berman, 1987; Daniels, 1988).

Thus, filial obligation, just like reciprocity, also involved an element of reciprocation or repayment. This time, however, it was not based on gratitude and appreciation for what parents had done for one throughout life, but rather was an obligatory reciprocation for life and care received as a dependent child65.

65Callahan (1985) argued for a different origin of filial obligation. Drawing on evidence that many carers express their sense of obligation in terms of a situational obligation – i.e. the old parent was in need and there was no one else to do it (e.g. Brody 1985, Walker et al. 1989), Callahan argued that filial responsibility arises not from indebtedness or compulsory repayment but rather from the sheer need and dependency of the aged parents. I.e. it is based on an ethic of
The evident importance of filial obligation as a motivation for support – which was underscored by evidence of a widespread general endorsement of filial obligation norms (e.g. Brody et al. 1983; Rossi and Rossi, 1990) – led authors to argue that care for older parents was not, as the affection model had implied, primarily driven by discretionary motives arising from the personal relationship, but rather by structural normative obligations. It was further suggested that the key role of such obligatory motives was perhaps even under-represented in the empirical data, because prevailing social norms, which held that children ‘should want to help their parents’ made people reluctant to admit to them (see Walker et al. 1989, 1990).

**Political critique**

The apparent chief importance of normative obligation in compelling support was drawn on by feminist and political economy analysts, who used it as a key argument in their critique of the affection model. They asserted that the model wrongly portrayed family caregiving (especially by women) as a natural responsibility, and thus legitimated the insufficient public provision for old age care (e.g. Ungerson, 1983; Walker, 1983; Aronson, 1985). Far from being a natural responsibility, they argued, filial or family support was, in fact, driven by an externally constructed public *ideology* of caregiving. This ideology, which they saw as part of the ‘ideology of familism’, was widely internalised and was thus highly effective in compelling family members (especially women) to

*interdependence* rather than on ‘contractual’ reciprocity. Although important, Callahan’s argument did not receive much attention in the debate.
provide care\textsuperscript{66}. Where people for some reason or other did not conform, the ideology elicited social disapproval, and feelings of guilt\textsuperscript{67} (see Graham, 1983; Ungerson, 1983; Walker, 1993).

\subsection*{2.4.3 Recognition of the importance of both obligation and affection}

The politically motivated affection-obligation debate or ‘imbroglio’ as Thompson (1989) called it, gave way, with time, to a recognition that filial support needs to be understood as the result of \textit{both} personal motives and structural norms, and that the role of each is variable and complex. This recognition has developed in light of emerging evidence from correlates, filial obligation, and motivation studies.

The key importance of affection and obligation in compelling support has been confirmed by several ‘correlates’ studies, which have shown that both factors are important pre-disposing determinants of support (e.g. Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Silverstein and Litwak, 1993; Bengtson and Harootyan, 1994). At the same time, however, these and other correlation studies have indicated that the importance of each factor is not uniform, but varies according to gender, as well as to the type of support provided.

\textsuperscript{66} Some authors argued further that the effectiveness of the ideology in compelling women in particular to provide care was reinforced by the existing gender inequalities in the labour market, which meant that women, being much lower paid and more likely to be in part-time employment, were the most ‘appropriate’ to give up their jobs to care (see Ungerson, 1983; Qureshi and Walker, 1989).

\textsuperscript{67} It is interesting to note that the critical writings from the political economy perspective did not make any reference to the religious roots and dimension of the filial obligation, seeing it instead purely as an externally constructed and socially reproduced ideology.
One study, for example, found filial obligation to be the key determinant of support from men, but affection to be the principal motivating factor for women (Silverstein et al., 1995). Another study found filial obligation norms to be important in compelling provision of 'tangible' (domestic) support, but to be of little significance in driving the provision of social-emotional support (Silverstein and Litwak, 1993). In addition to demonstrating the variable importance of each factor, evidence has also begun to show that the role of affection and obligation in compelling support is much less straightforward than previously assumed.

For the affective relationship, evidence, especially from the LSG, has demonstrated a very real asymmetry in the sentiments of adult children and their parents. Echoing the earlier findings by Rosenmayr and Kockeis (1963), it was shown that the level of affection felt by the young is consistently less than that felt by the old, a trend which the authors postulate is universal and have termed the 'intergenerational stake hypothesis' (Giarrusso, Stallings and Bengtson, 1995). These findings have served to highlight the need for more consideration of the influence of conflict or negative sentiments in shaping intergenerational relationships and support (see Bengtson et al. 1996).

In the case of filial obligation norms, the emerging evidence especially from the increasing number of endorsement studies, has shown – contrary to what had been assumed – that the normative obligation is not fixed and universal, but variable and conditional. First, evidence has shown that filial obligation is not generally seen as including a duty to provide financial support for aged parents. State support is seen as much more appropriate, and value is placed on ensuring
financial independence in old age (e.g. Brody et al., 1984; Storm et al., 1985; Treas and Spence, 1989; Qureshi and Walker, 1989; Hamon and Blieszner, 1990; Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Finch and Mason, 1992). Moreover, although there is a broad cultural agreement that children, before all other relatives, should do something to help their old parents, there is little public normative agreement about what they should do (see Finch and Mason, 1992; Finch, 1995).

In addition to the uncertainty over content, evidence has also shown that the application of filial obligation norms in practice is hedged by limits and conditions.

**Limits of filial obligation**

The limits of children’s obligation to support older parents have been found to lie, most importantly, where caring conflicts with children’s prior obligations to their own children or spouse. In other words, people commonly perceive the needs of the nuclear family as having clear priority over those of old parents (e.g. Storm et al., 1985; Finch and Mason, 1992).69

Limits in filial obligation have moreover been found where caring interferes with work schedules; where children’s resources (especially financial resources) are very limited; and where children face serious obstacles – such as great

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68 A more general cultural emphasis on self-sufficiency and independence in old age, (not just in respect of financial support), was also noted in studies by Aronson (1990) and Hashimoto (1996).

69 Finch and Mason, for example, exploring the perceived degree of obligation on children to move away to care for the husband’s parents, as opposed to staying put to enable their children to continue their education, found that the vast majority of respondents perceived no obligation on the children to move. Similarly, Storm et al. (1985) found that the majority of their respondents perceived a reduced filial obligation on children who had ‘their own’ families, i.e. their offspring or spouse, to care or provide for.
geographical distances – in providing care (see Brody et al. 1984; Storm et al. 1985; Hamon and Blieszner, 1990).

In other words, limits in the obligation on children are commonly perceived where providing care to older parents becomes too ‘costly’, or overstretches children’s and their families’ capacity.

The significance of such normative limits has been indicated (although not explicitly recognised) in several studies which showed that children who did not care for their old parent(s), gave as a reason either prior obligations to spouse and children, or a personal incapacity to provide care (see Isaacs, Neville, and Livingstone 1972; Qureshi and Walker, 1989; Aronson, 1990; Finch and Mason 1992). It is possible - although this has not yet been explored - that such normative limits in filial obligation may help to understand some current patterns of filial support. For example, they may help to explain a recent finding in the US that African-Americans, who typically face disproportionately high social and economic constraints, are much less involved in filial support than their white counterparts – even though their endorsement of filial obligation norms is equally strong (see Hogan et al., 1993; Lawton et al., 1994). Similarly, limits in obligation may help to explain the finding that geographical distance

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70 The idea of limits in filial obligation appears to resonate with the notion of the ‘limits of morality’ which has been put forward by Callahan in the debate on whether or not families should or can be expected to provide long-term care of chronically ill older people (see e.g. Callahan, 1991).

71 The constraints among African-Americans have been attributed in particular to their ‘worsening employment prospects’ and the decline in inflation-adjusted transfers to poor families during the 1980’s (Lichter, 1988; Wilson, 1987; Bane and Ellwood, 1989; Hogan et al., 1993). It has thus been suggested that due to these trends the ability of black families to support kin may have deteriorated, meaning that “those very families most needing support will be least able to provide it” (Hogan et al., 1993. p.1430).
significantly reduces the incidence of support to older parents⁷² (Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Hogan et al., 1993; Silverstein and Litwak, 1993).

**Conditions of filial obligation**

The conditional nature, or ‘conditionality’ of normative filial obligation indicated by the evidence, is linked to the nature of the past ‘conduct’ of the old parent. Storm et al. (1985), for example, found that respondents felt there was no obligation on children to support parents, if the parents had neglected their parental duties in the past. By the same token, children who did not provide care to their parents have been found to sometimes justify this by the fact that the old parent had never supported or cared for them, not even in their childhood. In other words, they imply that they have no obligation to the old parent, because he or she had neglected them⁷³ (e.g. Isaacs et al., 1972; Qureshi and Walker 1989).

Again it is possible that the conditionality of filial obligation may help to understand some patterns in support. For example, it may help to explain the finding that perceived early parental rejection reduces the propensity of children to provide instrumental support to their parents, by reducing feelings of filial responsibility (Whitbeck, Hoyt and Huck, 1994).

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⁷² This finding, incidentally, echoes earlier evidence which showed geographical distance to be a key impediment to the provision of care and support to older parents (e.g. Sheldon, 1948; Townsend, 1957; Shanas et al.1968)⁷³ This ‘conditionality’ is consonant with the notion put forward by Douglas (1971) that when making decisions about long-term reciprocity, people take into account the old person’s past conduct, i.e. the extent to which he or she ‘deserves’ support. This notion of ‘desert’ is, of course, not without interest as it has been an important influence in policy, for example Victorian welfare policy for older people (see e.g. Anderson, 1977; Finch, 1989).
Exchange

The final strand of evidence which has added to the broader understanding of the contemporary basis of support, (though perhaps less significant than the others), is evidence indicating the involvement of a fourth motivational factor (apart from affection, obligation, and reciprocity) in compelling support. Findings from several correlation studies have suggested (a) that support to older parents is often correlated with currently receiving help or assistance from them; and (b) that there is some degree of correlation between normative expectations of inheritance and the provision of care, in particular by sons (see Cox and Rank, 1992; Hogan et al., 1993; Silverstein et al., 1995). In the light of these findings, and drawing on exchange theory\(^{74}\), the authors have proposed that exchange is a further, important factor compelling support. Although exchange is also based on reciprocity, it differs from the motivational factor of reciprocity in that it is not rooted in gratitude for the past help of parents, but rather in more utilitarian motives, i.e. in self-interest.

\(^{74}\) Exchange theory is associated primarily with economic rationalism and the classic formulations by Homans (1961) and Blau (1964). Its origins, however, lie in behavioural psychology and the anthropological notion of 'exchange' in simple societies, associated with Malinowski, Mauss, and Levi-Strauss. Apart from assuming a rational decision making model and utilitarian motivations, exchange theory assumes that exchange is governed by norms of reciprocity, and that actors will only continue an exchange as long as the benefits are greater than the costs, and while there are no better alternatives (Hendricks, 1995). It further assumes that reciprocal exchange, either concurrently or over the life-course, is the foundation of all interactions (Bengtson, Burgess and Parrott, 1997).
2.5 Current conceptual understanding of the motivational basis of filial support

The current conceptual understanding of the motivational basis of filial support, developed from the research discourse over the last two decades, is characterised by a recognition, as Walker et al. (1990) put it, that this basis is 'neither simple nor unchanging', and that it is driven by the interaction of both personal bonds and structural norms. It seems clear that support is underpinned by a delicate balance of affection, reciprocity, obligation and possibly exchange, and that this balance is influenced by factors such as gender, the type of support, and the personal relationship history. It is moreover clear that filial obligation norms, though of key importance, are not fixed, but are qualified and hedged by limits and conditions.

In recognition of the key importance of both personal relationship history and variable structural norms in compelling support, a few authors have attempted to conceptualise the link between the two. Thompson (1989), for example, proposed the notion of 'contextual' and 'relational' morality, which linked obligation to both the individual private sphere, and the broader socio-historical context, thus transcending the dichotomy between structural constraints and personal bonds.

More recently, Finch and Mason (1990,1992), drawing on interactionist perspectives, have proposed that filial obligation norms are to be seen, not as rules, but as 'normative guidelines', which are recognised and help people to negotiate responsibilities and commitments to aged parents. These negotiations also take into account the history of the past relationship, as well the familial and
social situation of both child and parent (see Finch and Mason, 1990, 1992; Finch, 1995).

2.5.1 Limits in the current understanding

Despite these analyses and the insights gained, it is clear, as several scholars in the field have pointed out, that there is still no full understanding of the basis of filial support, i.e. of why children give the support they do. Silverstein and Litwak (1993) comment “the debate about how best to describe family support in later life has come to a less than satisfying solution” (p.258). In the same vein, Hogan et al.(1993) remark that despite extensive research efforts “the nature of kin support and its determinants remain elusive” (p.1428) and Abel (1990), notes that we ‘are a long way’ from understanding family care-giving.

The key limitation to current understanding is that we do not yet fully understand what the interrelationship is between affection, obligation, reciprocity and exchange (i.e. between personal and structural factors) in compelling adult children to provide support, and how this may be shaped by their social and familial context. We also do not know how the motivational basis for support relates to the wider structural and material context in shaping the patterns of support provision.

A further limitation in the current understanding of the contemporary basis of support is its lack of historical perspective. We do not know – and there appear to have been few attempts to explore – how and why the contemporary basis of support has developed, and how it differs from that in pre-industrial and modernising societies. The necessary starting point for such a developmental
understanding – a sound knowledge of the basis of support in pre-industrial and modernising societies – is also lacking. The interpretations that exist, i.e. the classical structural-functionalist interpretations, which portray support as the enforced and/or enticed fulfilment of filial obligation norms, fail to give a full understanding because they are not grounded in and do not give any insights into the motives, interests and perspectives of individuals. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, the interpretations appear to be taken for granted, and there have been no attempts to re-examine or develop them by generating more interpretive evidence.

That the current understanding of the basis of support remains limited is, at least in part, a reflection of the fact that there has been little cross-fertilisation between the different strands of research, i.e. between filial obligation, motivation, and ‘correlates’ studies. There has also been no formal attempt to pool and integrate their findings so as to identify key strands or issues to be explored further.

Another contributory factor is, presumably, the relatively modest attention that has been paid in social gerontology to the development of theoretical explanations, in particular explanations that illuminate the links between individual agency and structure. Most research, as several scholars have commented, has produced only empirical generalisations of findings (e.g. George, 1995; Bengtson et al., 1997; Bengtson, Rice and Johnson, 1999).  

As Marshall (1996), however, points out, there are many important theoretical developments in social gerontology. These include, for example, the area of work and the life-course, and the moral economy of ageing, both of which focus in particular on theorising the links between micro and macro levels (see e.g. Ryff, Marshall and Clarke, 1999; Estes, 1999a).
It is, of course, possible, as Abrams (1978) has speculated, that even more theoretical efforts or more cross-fertilisation would not succeed in generating a full understanding or picture of the basis of support because

“.....we are [maybe] dealing with relationships so entangled, ramified and minutely varied that they cannot be ordered at all or...only by an effort quite out of proportion to any conceivable results” (see Qureshi and Walker, 1989, p.113).

This notwithstanding, it is clear that a more focused empirical effort could definitely provide a better understanding of the basis of support, in particular if certain conceptual issues and epistemological approaches are brought into play.

Conceptual issues

- The notion of limits in filial obligation – related to the capacity and needs of adult children and their nuclear families – could provide a potentially useful mechanism for exploring the influence of the material and social context (and changes in that context) in shaping the amount and patterns of support provided. This is because it is the social and material context, which, to a large degree, determines the resources available to adult children and the extent of their competing obligations to offspring, spouse and work. In other words, it is the material and social context, which, at least in part, shapes the ‘capacity’ of children to support their parents.

Thus, apart from exploring present patterns of support, the notion of limits could also help to understand changes in the amount of family support over time, for example, the decline in financial support during the period of economic transition in the 19th century in Britain.
• The notion of a *conditionality* in filial obligation, which relates to the past 'conduct' of the old parent, could serve as a mechanism for exploring at least one link between structural filial obligation and the personal parent-child relationship history in motivating and shaping support.

• The relative role and interrelationships between the motivational factors of affection, reciprocity, and obligation could be better understood if, in exploring carers' motives, several conceptual issues were clarified:
  a) the connection between affection and reciprocity. There are indications that feelings of affection for the old parent are, to a large degree, *dependent* on there being an element of reciprocity. In other words they are dependent on the parent having 'been good' to the adult child in the past (e.g Qureshi and Walker, 1989, p.155,162,164). Investigations of children's motives for supporting their older parents should thus focus on exploring where their feelings of affection (if any) come from, and on what they are based.
  b) the potentially blurred distinction between 'reciprocity' and 'obligation'. This arises from the fact that *both* are based on an element of reciprocation and repayment. Both involve a *sense* of indebtedness and an urge to support parents in *return* for what they have done in the past. The difference between them, however, lies in the 'quality' of the repayment and what is being repaid:

In the case of 'obligation', the past help which the children are obliged to repay is the care and nurturing they received as an infant or as a dependent
child (as well as the gift of life itself) and it has the quality of a compulsory reciprocation.

In the case of 'reciprocity' it is mainly help and support received after childhood, as an independent adult, that children feel compelled to reciprocate. This time the reciprocation has a voluntary quality.

Studies of children's motives should thus explore exactly what children's sense of reciprocation or repayment refers to, and why.

**Epistemological approaches**

- Most important, the generation of a better understanding of the contemporary motivational basis of support including the conceptual issues above, requires an interpretive investigation to gain an insight into individuals' **interests** and **purposes** in providing support and how these relate to their wider familial, social and normative context.

  So far, such an exploration, especially of the interests and intentions of carers, has not been undertaken.

- The development of a better understanding of the basis of support could also be enhanced a) by more exploration of the context, reasons and motives that underpin cases where children do not provide support to older parents; and b)

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76 This specific challenge, of course, echoes a key challenge in sociological theorising. The challenge, that is, of finding the balance, of putting together the inner experiences and intentional activities of the individual with the options and limits of the surrounding world. It is a task of joining the inside realm and the outside realm." (Ryff, 1986, p.62)

77 It could be speculated that the lack of consideration of people's **interests** in providing care reflects the existence of a cultural value or 'norm' which holds that motivations for caring are not to be self-interested.
by making clear distinctions between different types of assistance when exploring motivations or correlates of support.

- Finally, a fuller developmental understanding of the contemporary basis of support requires, as a starting point, a re-examination of the basis of support in pre-industrial, and modernising societies. This exploration, again, needs to be grounded in evidence about the perspectives and motives of individuals. Despite the obvious difficulties such a historical exploration presents, recent developments in reminiscence and oral history can perhaps provide effective tools for such a task (see e.g. Plummer, 1983).

2.6 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has examined the Western research debate on old age family support. It has described the trajectory of this debate as it developed in response to modernisation and ageing theory's propositions; and it has critically assessed the current understanding of the causes of decline and the basis of family support for older people. It has identified key concepts and gaps in this understanding and potential ways of addressing these gaps.

The chapter has thus provided foci for the framework to guide the empirical analysis, and a point of comparison for discussion of the developing world debate on old age support.

The trajectory of the western debate, as this chapter has described, has involved two main periods of research. The first period, beginning in the mid 1960s, was dominated by contemporary and historical research which refuted modernisation
and ageing theory’s notion of an ‘abandonment’ of older people, and its idealist explanation of decline and inadequacies in such support (specifically the historical decline in financial support from the family during the 19th century).

The research showed a) that the theory’s assumption of universal extended family support in pre-industrial societies was fallacious; b) that most older people in ‘modern’ societies were still involved with and in mutual support with their families; and c) and that decline or inadequacies in support were not a result of weakening filial obligation norms, but were primarily due to material constraints and the incapacity of adult children to provide more.

In the second period, beginning in the mid to late 1970s, the research focus shifted. Influenced by an ongoing policy debate about the extent of public care provision for older people, most research fell into one of two strands. One was concerned with investigating the situation and needs of older people and their carers; the other focused on exploring the contemporary basis of family ties and support for older people. Both strands of research, fuelled by the policy discourse, led to an intense debate – and a developing understanding – about what constituted the motivational basis of particularly filial support. This debate established that support from adult children in contemporary society is based on the interaction of a multiplicity of factors arising from personal bonds and structural norms, i.e. normative filial obligation, reciprocity, affection, and exchange. Research also showed that this can vary according to gender and type of support, and that the application of filial obligation norms is itself hedged by limits and obligations.
Despite the extensive insights gained, understanding of both the basis of filial support and of the causes of decline in family support for older people, remains limited:

In terms of the causes of decline, (specifically the historical decline in financial support from the family), understanding remains limited because the ‘materialist’ explanation that has been put forward fails to account for the values, norms and interests that underpinned adult children’s decisions and priorities in allocating their constrained resources. This conceptual gap is symptomatic of a more fundamental, epistemological weakness: The explanation is not based on an interpretively grounded understanding of why people provided support in pre-industrial societies, and of how this basis of support had changed in modernising societies. The existing interpretations of the basis of support in the past, i.e. the structural-functional accounts of pre-industrial support, do not take any account of the perspectives of individuals.

Understanding of the contemporary basis of filial support, though much more extensive than that of the past, also remains limited, mainly because we do not yet know what the interrelationships are between the different motivational factors, and how this motivational basis relates to the wider social and economic context in shaping patterns of support provision. This limited understanding reflects, primarily, the lack of evidence about the motives, interests and purposes of children in providing the support they do, and of how these relate to their familial, material, and social situation. What is therefore needed to generate a fuller understanding of the present basis of filial support is, first and foremost, an interpretive investigation to provide such individual level evidence. Several
conceptual mechanisms were identified in this chapter which could facilitate such an investigation. The same interpretive investigation is, of course, also necessary (to the extent that current methods allow) to gain a deeper insight into the basis of support in the past in both pre-industrial and modernising societies. Apart from providing a better understanding of the present, this would also provide a starting point for generating a more solid explanation of the causes of the historical decline in financial support by the family.
CHAPTER THREE

FAMILY SUPPORT FOR OLDER PEOPLE – THE DEVELOPING WORLD AND GHANAIAN RESEARCH DEBATE

This chapter discusses the Ghanaian research debate on family support for older people, as part of the wider developing world discourse. It first examines the origin and development of the research debate on old age support in the developing world as a whole, and then focuses specifically on the policy discourse and context of old age support in Ghana. For both the Ghanaian and wider developing world literature, it assesses in detail the understanding that currently exists about the causes of decline in, and the basis of family support for older people.

The aim is to describe the background to the empirical study and, as in Chapter Two, to identify key concepts for the empirical analysis framework.

3.1 Introduction

The developing world research debate on old age support was, just like the western debate, strongly influenced by modernisation theory's proposition of a decline in family support for older people. In contrast to the West, however, the proposition was, this time not seen as controversial. Rather, it was seen as a prediction of the fate of older people in developing 'modernising' countries.

The research debate thus emerged, in a sense, as a response to the concern about anticipated problems of old age support in the developing world.
3.2 Origin and course of the developing world research debate

The debate effectively began with the UN 1982 World Health Assembly on Ageing (WHAA) in Vienna\textsuperscript{78}, and in particular with the International Plan of Action on Ageing that emerged from it. As Sen (1994) notes, it was this assembly, and this plan that ‘placed ageing on the agenda of developing countries’, and spurred gerontological research in the developing world (p.22).

The concern that led the UN to set up the Vienna Assembly was based on two factors.

First, the concern arose in the light of demographic projections, which predicted for all developing world regions drastic increases in the number and proportion of older people in the population, i.e. a gradual shift from a youthful to a more mature population (see Tables 1 and 2). This ‘demographic transition’\textsuperscript{79}, which was projected to occur at a much faster rate than it had done in the West\textsuperscript{80}, meant on the one hand a drastic rise in the need and demand for old age support and care, and on the other, a diminishing pool of young to provide care or support to the old. At the level of the family this specifically meant a decline in the number of adult children per older person (Siegel and Hoover, 1984).

\textsuperscript{78} The Vienna Assembly was led by the United Nations Centre for Social and Humanitarian Affairs, and was preceded by two years of preparatory regional and national consultations, which involved the compilation of national profiles on the elderly population.

\textsuperscript{79} The theory of ‘demographic transition’ was developed in the early twentieth century to describe the gradual ageing of the population which occurred in Western European societies after the industrial revolution, as a result of declining death rates (due on the whole to gradual improvements in living standards rather than improved medical technology) and then declining birth rates. Population ageing in these countries can therefore be seen as a long-term consequence of socio-economic development (see Sen, 1994).

\textsuperscript{80} In France, for example, the transition had taken 115 years, from 1865 to 1980. In Tunisia it is anticipated to take 15 years, from 2020 to 2035 (see United Nations / Division for Social Policy and Development, 1999a).
Table 1: Demographic Trends – projected population ageing in the developing world

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/Country</th>
<th>Population 60 years or older (numbers in thousands)</th>
<th>Population 60 years or older Percentage of total population</th>
<th>Life expectancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less developed Countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>205,285</td>
<td>364,133</td>
<td>1,594,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More developed countries</td>
<td>170,489</td>
<td>228,977</td>
<td>375,516</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Projected population ageing in individual developing countries, comparison with UK, and US, selected examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/Country</th>
<th>Population 60 years or older (numbers in thousands)</th>
<th>Population 60 years or older Percentage of total population</th>
<th>Life expectancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>6,606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>1,297</td>
<td>7,578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>984</td>
<td>1,862</td>
<td>10,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>3,117</td>
<td>5,286</td>
<td>28,357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>894</td>
<td>1,347</td>
<td>8,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>2,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>3,793</td>
<td>6,418</td>
<td>42,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>33,936</td>
<td>75,190</td>
<td>323,855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep. of Korea</td>
<td>2,408</td>
<td>4,764</td>
<td>15,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>2,203</td>
<td>4,187</td>
<td>26,041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>2,330</td>
<td>5,166</td>
<td>21,981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>3,437</td>
<td>4,864</td>
<td>12,733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>7,464</td>
<td>12,839</td>
<td>56,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>899</td>
<td>1,508</td>
<td>5,229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>3590</td>
<td>6,611</td>
<td>35,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrialised countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>11,138</td>
<td>12,276</td>
<td>17,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>33,918</td>
<td>45,180</td>
<td>97,009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Life expectancy figures for 2050 could not be obtained
The ageing of the developing world population was seen mainly as a result of the rise in life expectancy, due to the increased availability of effective treatment or prevention of infectious diseases and improved perinatal and infant mortality (see Kalache, 1994; Sen, 1994). In most regions (except Africa) the ageing of the population was additionally compounded by falling rates in fertility, which reflected the increased availability and use of effective contraceptives.

Second, in addition to these demographic trends, the UN concern arose because it was assumed that just as need for old age support was rising, traditional systems of extended family support were going to erode in the wake of modernisation and urbanisation. It is not hard to see that this assumption was shaped by the propositions of modernisation and ageing theory. The key influence that modernisation theory indeed had on UN thinking was initially exposed by Neysmith and Edwardh (1983). These authors showed that the two crucial working papers upon which the initial consultations for the Vienna Assembly were based, one on development issues and the other on humanitarian issues, used modernisation and ageing theory as their central theoretical framework.

Marshall (1990), exposed the same ideological underpinnings in later UN documents on research and policy development. These documents centred around the concern that the "...significant decline in some developed countries in the availability of family care in the past decades...[and the] well known symptoms of modernisation...[i.e.] alienation and cultural disorientation" were being repeated in developing countries (WHO, 1989, p.63: text in parentheses added). It is somewhat puzzling that these crude modernisation theory assumptions which, as Marshall points out, were stated with absolutely no
supporting data, should have been taken on so uncritically, given the solid and repeated critique of the modernisation model that had been put forward in sociology and social gerontology in the West. The reasons for this – if nothing else, it testifies to the lack of cross-consultation between academic and UN policy-oriented expertise on ageing – would clearly be of interest for future investigations.

**An imminent crisis in old age support**

The picture of rising need for and declining family provision of old age support was seen as heralding an imminent crisis in old age support. If no action was taken, so it was argued, developing countries would soon require huge resources and infrastructure to respond to the growing needs of older people, infrastructure and resources that they, however, could not provide. There was thus, in developing countries, an urgent need for policy action to secure the well-being of older people in the future (see Kalache, 1994).

It was with this in mind that the Vienna Assembly developed, and the UN General Assembly later ratified, the International Plan of Action on Ageing (the ‘Vienna Plan’). The objective of this plan, which was to be assessed in four yearly reviews, was to “guide thinking and the formulation of policies and programmes on ageing”. Its 62 recommendations for action specifically aimed “to strengthen the capacities of Governments and civil society to deal effectively with the ageing of populations and to address...the dependency needs of older

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81 These recommendations centred around the seven areas of health and nutrition; protection of elderly consumers; housing and environment; family; social welfare; income security and employment; and education (see United Nations. 1999c).
people” (see United Nations, 1999b,p.1). The emphasis was to be on policies that strengthened and complemented existing family support systems, the general view being that improvements in the well-being of older people had to begin within the family (see Hashimoto and Kendig, 1992). One exception to this general view was the case of financial support. Here the plan specifically recommended, where possible, the introduction of ‘social security schemes based on the principle of universal coverage’ so as to ‘ensure to all older persons an appropriate minimum income.’ (see United Nations, 1999c).

Apart from recommending specific policy responses, the plan also called for research to aid in the development of such responses. In the light of the lack even of basic information on older people – a lack, as Sen (1994) notes, that had become glaringly obvious during the preparation of the national profiles – the plan called specifically for the collection of socio-demographic baseline data on older people, as well as for research on the social, economic and health aspects of ageing (see United Nations,1999b).

In order to foster this research endeavour a WHO/NGO collaborative group, and a ‘Special Programme for Research on Aging’ were established. Individual countries (including Ghana), moreover, received UN grants to study the social impact of ageing.

3.2.1 Policy-oriented research

The research that initially emerged following the Vienna Assembly focused primarily on gathering baseline information on the social, economic and health situation of older people, the sources and adequacy of their support, and, in some
cases, their roles in the family and community. Whilst some studies were large-scale cross-national surveys, most were smaller national studies of varying scope (see Table 3).

In addition to collecting baseline information, some studies also focused on exploring the extent to which traditional norms of filial obligation still persisted or were already eroded in the developing 'modernising' societies. Most of these investigated the level of endorsement of such norms among younger people and/or the extent to which their expectations of old age support still reflected these 'traditional' norms (e.g. Dorjahn, 1989; Togonu-Bickersteth and Akinnawo, 1990; Ohuche and Littrell, 1989). Like the early 'endorsement' studies in the West, these studies typically investigated only the endorsement of general normative statements, such as "it is the duty of a working child to provide for the financial comfort of his/her elderly parents" (see Togonu-Bickersteth and Akinnawo 1990, p.325). They did not explore norm endorsement in specific contexts and situations.

In addition to endorsement studies, some investigations focused on exploring young people's conceptions or interpretations of filial piety (e.g. Sung, 1990, 1992). Finally, several studies investigated the extent to which older people still believed in or counted on filial obligation norms (e.g. Ahn, 1982; Goldstein et al., 1983; Treas and Wang, 1993).

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82 Most of these studies used samples of secondary school or university students, reflecting the assumption – typically associated with the modernisation model, which sees modernisation in non-western countries primarily as a product of acculturation, i.e. induced through the introduction of western values and norms primarily through education – that the educated, the 'elite' are the vanguard of change and the indicator of things to come, the more societies develop and modernise (see Chodak, 1973)
Table 3: Examples of surveys of the socio-demographic, economic, health and support profile of older people in developing countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cross-national studies</th>
<th>WHO supported study of the aged in the Western Pacific region (Fiji, Rep. of Korea, Malaysia, and Phillipines), (Andrews, Esterman, Braunack-Mayer and Ryagie, 1986)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASEAN(^a) study in South East Asian countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand) (Chen and Jones 1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESCAP study of aged in Asian countries (China, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines)(Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PAHO survey of the elderly in the Caribbean and Latin America (Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago) (Pan American Health Organisation, 1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNU study in South East Asia, Africa and Latin America (Egypt, Singapore, South Korea, India, Brazil, Thailand and Zimbabwe) (United Nations University, 1986; Hashimoto, 1991)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National studies</th>
<th>Latin America:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brazil (e.g. Ramos, 1987; Ramos, Rosa, Oliveira, Medina and Santos, 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mexico (e.g. Alvarez Gutierrez and Brown, 1983; Bialik, 1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean:</td>
<td>Barbados (e.g. Braithwaite, 1986)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jamaica (e.g. Mesfin, Sinha, Jutsum, Simmons and Eldemire, 1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia:</td>
<td>Bangladesh (e.g. Chaudhury, 1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>China (e.g. Hu, 1986; Wu and Wang, 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>India (e.g. Biswas, 1985; Reddy, 1985; Cain, 1986; Desai and Naik, 1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Korea (e.g. Sung, 1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nepal (e.g. Goldstein, Schuler and Ross, 1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thailand (e.g. Caffrey, 1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa:</td>
<td>Egypt (e.g. Fadel-Girgis, 1983; Azer and Afifi, 1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ghana (e.g. Okraku, 1985; Brown, 1985; Apt, 1987; UNOV(^b)/CSDH, 1993(^c))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nigeria (e.g. Ekpenyong and Peil, 1985; Ekpenyong, Oyeneve and Peil, 1987; Peil, Bamisaie and Ekpenyong, 1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sierra Leone (e.g. Peil, 1990; Dorjahn, 1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Africa (e.g. Ferreira, Möller, Prinsloo and Gillis, 1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zaire (e.g. Masamba, 1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zimbabwe (e.g. Nyanguru, 1991; Nyanguru, Hampson, Adamchak and Wilson, 1994)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) ASEAN = Association of South East Asian Nations  
\(^b\) United Nations Office Vienna  
\(^c\) see Apt (1995a)
3.2.2 Ethnographic research

Although policy-oriented research dominated the field, the heightened interest or concern about the situation of older people in developing countries also stimulated an increasing amount of ethnographic research. This research typically focused on exploring the patterns and cultural context of intergenerational support in developing societies, often with a view to identifying continuity and change (e.g. Shahrani, 1981; Hampson, 1982; Reid, 1985; Zimmer, 1987; Cattell, 1990; Guilette, 1990; Rosenberg, 1990; Sangree, 1992; Draper and Keith, 1992; Keith, Fry, Glascock, Ikels, Dickerson-Putman, Harpending and Draper, 1994; see Foner, 1993 for a review)83.

The growing ethnographic interest in old age, as Sokolovsky (1990) notes, signified the emergence of a new specialism in anthropology, referred to at times as ‘ethnogerontology’, or the anthropology of ageing 84. Outlets for this new research, which often overlapped with the policy-oriented research debate, included several new journals such as the Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology (founded in 1986), or the Southern African Journal of Gerontology (founded in 1991).

83One particularly prominent, though much broader and more theoretically oriented ethnographic study, was project AGE, (Age, Generation, and Experience). Started in 1982, this study aimed, on the basis of cross-cultural comparison of data from seven societies, to develop an explanatory framework about “... the mechanisms through which culture interacts with social and physiological factors to define the aging experience” (Keith et al., 1994, p.xvii)

84Markers for the establishment of this new discipline were for example the publication of two works - Age and Anthropological Theory (Kertzer and Keith 1984), and New Methods for Old Age Research (Fry and Keith, 1986). The latter arose out of the methodologies developed for the AGE project. (Keith et al.1994)
**Earlier ethnographic research**

Prior to this, a gerontological focus in anthropology had also existed. However, as Keith *et al.* point out, this focus was limited to a few 'holocultural' studies, which compared existing ethnographic data on older people from different cultures (e.g. Palmore and Manton, 1974; Amoss and Harrell, 1981; Glascock and Feinman, 1981; Glascock, 1982; Maxwell, Silverman and Maxwell, 1982; for a review see Silverman, 1987).

These studies, which effectively used the same technique as Cowgill had done, served, in a sense, to 'test' modernisation theory. Palmore and Manton's early analysis, which also included data from modernising and modern societies, rejected modernisation theory's proposition of a linear decline, arguing instead that in very modern societies the status of older people rose again. In other words, they argued for a U-shaped relationship between modernisation and older people's status.

The later analyses and other studies specifically refuted modernisation theory's assumption of a universally high status and support for older people in traditional cultures.

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85 The data, as Draper and Keith (1992) point out, was drawn from sources such as the earlier mentioned Human Relations Area Files, or the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample.

86 Prior to these studies, as Sokolovsky (1990) has pointed out, an explicit gerontological focus in anthropological research was absent, despite the fact that most ethnographers made extensive use of older informants. Exceptions were Simmons' seminal work in 1945, a few articles by other American scholars such as Mead (1951, 1967), and several other isolated studies (e.g. Arth, 1972; Shelton, 1972; Nahemov and Adams, 1974).

The modest amount of interest in old age that did exist in early American anthropology, as Keith *et al.* (1994) point out, was mainly concerned with collecting life-histories of older individuals in native American cultures. The aim was to acquire and preserve as much cultural knowledge about these societies as possible before they were obliterated by colonisation and modernisation. In early British anthropology, i.e. in ethnographies conducted by structural-functionalist ethnographers such as Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard, old age was considered merely as a structural feature. The focus was on formal age systems and the social functions of age-groups.
societies. Just as historical research evidence in the West had exposed this assumption as a ‘golden past’ myth, their evidence exposed this assumption as a ‘golden isles’ myth (see Nydegger, 1983 for a review). The evidence showed that in pre-industrial societies high status and prestige in old age was not universal but was conditional a) on older people’s economic power and control (which in turn depended mainly on their class and gender) (Silverman and Maxwell, 1983; Silverman, 1987) and b) on their ability to make valuable contributions to the kin network. Decrepit older people where nowhere valued (Simmons, 1945; Dowd, 1983; see Logue, 1990 for a review).

Older people were also not necessarily vested with political authority. Evidence indicated that true gerontocracies were the exception, and that the ‘elders’ holding political power were often vigorous middle aged men, the term ‘elder’ referring more to a sense of seniority than chronological age (see Douglas, 1963; Nahemov and Adams, 1974; Foner and Kertzer, 1978; Nydegger, 1983).

Often there was also a disjunction between what Lipman (1970) termed ‘ritual deference’ and ‘realistic appraisal’ of the old; i.e. between professed respect for older people and the way they were actually treated. Arth (1972), for example, studying the Igbo in Nigeria observed highly ambivalent behaviour and attitudes towards older people, despite an official cultural ‘ideal’ of respect towards them (see also Shelton, 1972; Nydegger, 1983).

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87 It is important to note, as Nydegger (1983) has pointed out, that Simmons himself had recognised that many older people, especially those who had nothing to ‘offer’ the young, in small-scale societies were not adequately supported (1945, 1946). However, his insights were not fully taken on board in the formulation of the modernisation thesis.
Finally, and most importantly, the evidence showed that in many traditional societies, older people – especially those who were physically unable to contribute - did not receive much care and support. Where there were societies in which people were living at subsistence level, older people were often neglected, abandoned or even killed, a process which Glascock has termed 'death-hastening' (see Simmons, 1945; De Beauvoir, 1972; Glascock and Feinman, 1980; Glascock, 1982, 1990). A particularly vivid example of such death-hastening, is to be found in Turnbull’s description of the Ik of northern Uganda, in 'The Mountain People' (1973).

The rebuttal of modernisation theory by these early ethnographers, again raises the question why the theory was so readily accepted as a framework for the UN led endeavour on ageing in the developing world.

3.2.3 Contemporary research findings

The findings that emerged from the surveys and ethnographic studies conducted in the wake of the Vienna Assembly, revealed two important issues. On the one hand, they showed that the majority of older people in developing countries continued to live with, and receive some support from their children and families. In other words, they found a broad continuity of traditional cultural patterns of intergenerational co-residency support networks (e.g. Alvarez Gutierrez and Brown, 1983; Goldstein et al., 1983; Masamba, 1984; Brown, 1985; Okraku, 1985; Andrews et al., 1986; Peil et al., 1989; Cattell, 1990; Rosenberg, 1990; Cain, 1991; Peil, 1991; Hashimoto, 1991; Sangree, 1992; Sung, 1991; Ramos et al., 1993; see Hashimoto, 1993 for a review).
The findings moreover showed a general persistence of traditional norms and ideas about filial obligation, both in terms of normative beliefs and expectations (e.g. Dorjahn, 1989; Cattell, 1990, Togonu-Bickersteth and Akinnawo 1990; Sung, 1992).

On the other hand the studies clearly documented the existence of serious inadequacies in the support – in particular financial support - for older people. Most surveys found significant proportions (sometimes the majority) of older people received no or only insufficient assistance from children or other relatives (e.g. Robertson, 1981; Brown, 1985; Okraku, 1985; Togonu-Bickersteth, 1987; Zimmer, 1987; Burman, 1988; Cattell, 1990; Nyanguru and Peil, 1993; and see Table 4)\textsuperscript{88}. Several reports moreover cited anecdotal evidence of neglect and abandonment of older people (e.g. Martin, 1988; Cattell, 1990; Apt, 1992), and – despite the general persistence of filial obligation norms – a few studies found some indications of subtle shifts away from these norms. Togonu-Bickersteth (1989), for example, found that adult children who experienced financial difficulties in supporting their parents did not expect financial support from their children in old age. Togonu-Bickersteth and Akinnawo (1990), moreover, found only a minority of young people rejected the idea of sending older relatives into an old people’s home. Similarly, only a minority endorsed the view that the care of the elderly should be the responsibility of the family, not the government.

Among older people, Treas and Wang (1993) found that many (especially the better-off and more educated) believed that old people should rely on themselves.

\textsuperscript{88} None of the studies, however, made an attempt to determine the actual degree of inadequacy by exploring the relationship between the old people's needs and the support received by them.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Study Details</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Brown (1985) 176 rural and urban older people, Greater Accra Region</td>
<td>68.2% received no financial support from extended relatives. For 79.5% income was insufficient to meet even their minimum requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apt (1987)</td>
<td>1057 urban and rural older people, Central Region</td>
<td>21% received no financial contributions from children at all; 45.9% do not receive such contributions regularly. 74% of urban and 21.5% of rural older people received no support from extended relatives. 33.5% had insufficient income to meet their basic needs. Of these, 12.8% resorted to begging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNOV/CSDH survey</td>
<td>600 rural and urban older people, countrywide</td>
<td>28.1% of urban women and 50.5% of urban men received no financial assistance from children. The percentages for rural women and men were 20.9% and 38.9%, respectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Ferreira et al. (1992) 997 urban and 400 rural older people</td>
<td>32% of urban and 34% of rural older people received no financial support from children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Nyanguru et al. (1994) 150 urban older people</td>
<td>24% receive no financial support from their children, and have no other adequate means of income. For 53%, amount received from children was insufficient for even a month's supply of groceries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Goldstein, Schuler and Ross (1983) 46 urban older people</td>
<td>61% received no or only minimal financial support from children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rep. of Korea</td>
<td>Andrews et al. (1986) 997 older people, representative sample</td>
<td>30.7% received insufficient financial support from family.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Andrews et al. (1986) 830 older people, representative sample</td>
<td>43.7% received insufficient financial support from family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Ramos et al. (1993) 1602 older people in Sao Paulo</td>
<td>Older people's situation characterised by low income and poverty. 70% have monthly income of less than US $100 per month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>Braithwaite, (1986) rural and urban older people</td>
<td>24.8% received no material support from children.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*See Apt (1995a)
3.3 Explanations for the decline in family support for older people

The inadequacies in family support for older people were generally seen (though there was no formal supporting evidence) as signifying a *decline* in the adequacy of family support, in that in the past, the present scale of problems had not existed. This reinforced the concern about the ‘problem’ of old age support and the need for urgent policy responses (e.g. United Nations, 1984, 1991; Tout, 1989; Okojie, 1988; Apt 1993a; Tracy, 1991).

The ‘sobering’ lack of such responses was strongly critiqued in the second and third review of the Vienna Plan in 1989 and 1992 (see e.g. United Nations, Economic and Social Council, 1989; Hashimoto, Kendig and Coppard, 1992). As a result, several initiatives emerged. In Africa, for example, the African Gerontological Society (AGES) was founded. Its aim was to “sensitise African governments, NGOs and civil society as a whole on issues of ageing, and to enable them through research and other means to plan and implement policy initiatives, programmes and services to enhance the well-being of older persons” (see Apt, 1999). At the international level, the launch of specific journals, such as, for example, BOLD in 1989, further facilitated the policy-oriented discourse.

Despite general agreement that the current scale of inadequacies did represent a decline in family support, there were, however, different interpretations of what had brought about this decline.
An increasing ‘unwillingness’

On the one hand, and in the line with modernisation theory, some viewed the decline in support as reflecting the erosion of the extended family due to the forces of modernisation. The notion was that traditional commitments to the extended family were being replaced with the individualism of ‘modern’ nuclear families, and that the needs of older people were being overlooked in the segmentation of urban life and the move away from traditional community pressures. In other words, the relatives and children were, in a sense, seen as becoming less willing to support their older members (e.g. United Nations, 1984; Martin, 1988; Okojie, 1988; Nair and Ramana, 1989; Tout, 1989). Martin, for example, described how in some Asian countries, such as Singapore, concern about changing attitudes and the reduced willingness of families to provide old age support had led to steps — following the example of China and Japan — to enshrine filial duty in the law and to offer tax incentives for children supporting older parents.

A second interpretation of the decline that also suggested an increased unwillingness of children to provide support, was put forward by Caffrey (1992) on the basis of her findings in Thailand. Caffrey did not emphasise changing attitudes but, drawing on exchange theory, argued that the decline in support was primarily due to the fact that older people had lost their traditional ‘exchange’ resources (such as land and house ownership, as well as advisory and religious

89 In China the 1980 marriage law stipulates that parents who cannot care for themselves have a right to support from their children (see Goldstein and Goldstein, 1986). The 1980 penal code moreover holds that refusal to support ones parents can, in extreme cases, be sentenced to imprisonment of up to five years or to penal servitude (see Fang, Chuanbin and Yuhua, 1992). In Japan, lineal relatives by blood are obliged by law to support each other (Kii, 1981).
roles) through which they formerly prevailed upon children to stay nearby and provide support. Now, after the transition from a kin to a cash based economy, with no such resources left, old people could no longer secure support from their children.

An increasing incapacity

In explicit contrast to the explanations based on unwillingness, several authors argued that inadequate support was not the result of weakened extended family ties and obligations, but were rather caused by financial constraints and an inability on the part of families or children to do more. De Lehr, writing on Mexico, for example noted:

“The issue is not whether the family will abandon its role as the care-provider for the elderly. Instead, it concerns the difficulties and hardships that families encounter in trying to care for them....impoverished families do not even have a minimum income with which to meet their basic needs” (1992, p.221)

A few authors, most notably Goldstein, Schuler and Ross (1983) and Hashimoto (1993), presented their argument as a more extended and explicit critique of modernisation theory assumptions. Hashimoto, referring to the evidence that most older people continued to live in multi-generational extended households, specifically rejected the notion of a breakdown of the extended family. She argued, as did the earlier western sociological critics of the modernisation model, that extended families were not breaking down, but were adapting to new socio-

90 Although Caffrey puts forward this explanation as an alternative to modernisation theory (in particular its emphasis on weakening norms as the cause of decline), it is, in fact, in line with the modernisation model, which, as has been shown earlier, also links the loss of older people’s ‘exchange’ resources with a concomitant decline in conformity with filial obligation norms.
Goldstein et al. specifically critiqued modernisation theory’s idealist explanation that decline in support was primarily caused by weakening traditional values. Based on their findings in Nepal, which showed that inadequacies in support occurred first and foremost among the poor – despite the fact that they continued to live in traditional extended family households and despite the fact that the young still espoused their obligation to support the old – the authors argued that the decline in family support was not due to ‘modernisation’ but primarily due to economic constraints. Although acknowledging that there had been some changes in basic attitudes toward more individualism, conjugalism and secularism, they emphasised that these socio-cultural changes were not the primary cause of the decline in support. The main cause, rather was the worsening economic situation in Nepal, as in other developing countries. This ongoing economic crisis, marked by unemployment, inflation, falling real incomes, reduced public welfare provision etc., meant that children no longer had the capacity to support their older parents:

“Unemployment, underemployment, and inflation are widespread in Nepal. It has become increasingly hard for sons to support even their own nuclear families. Because son’s salaries are insufficient they are forced to make difficult decisions regarding the costs of different uses of this income. Should the money be spent on one’s own children and/or style of life, or should it be used to provide one’s parents good food and expensive medical care? In this weighing of alternatives the Kathmandu elderly parents are the losers, and they understand this”(1983, p.721)

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91 They argued that these changes had taken place due to education and increasing economic independence of the young, resulting in decreasing economic control and power held by the old.
This essentially materialist interpretation of the decline in old age support echoed the earlier western critique of the modernisation model put forward by Anderson (1977). The crucial assumption in Goldstein et al.'s interpretation, just as it had been in Anderson's, was, again, that adult children, in making decisions on resource allocation, principally gave priority to themselves and their nuclear family.

By arguing for the key role of the wider economic crisis, Goldstein et al. also echoed the more general, political-economy critique of modernisation theory's relevance for ageing in the developing world. This critique, put forward by Neysmith and Edwardh (1984), argued that adherence to the modernisation model meant that deteriorating conditions in the lives of older people were simply attributed to and accepted as the consequences of modernisation. The important causal role that broad economic and political factors played was ignored.

**Incapacity and unwillingness**

In contrast to the interpretations which emphasised *either* the key role of economic constraints *or* of weakening traditional values in causing the decline in support, most accounts in the literature – especially the official policy-oriented reviews – implicated *both* factors. A foremost example of this is Hashimoto and Kendig (1992), whose review headed an edited volume on *Family Support for the Elderly* published by the WHO Global Programme for Health of the Elderly to mark the third revision of the Vienna Plan (Kendig, Hashimoto and Coppard, 1992). The aim of this volume was to focus the research and policy debate and
to “inform policymakers and professionals developing national responses to population aging” (Hashimoto and Kendig, 1992, p.4). In their discussion of the current inadequacies in support Hashimoto and Kendig note that these were mainly caused by ‘lack of resources (poverty)’, ‘lack of motivation (normative breakdown)’ as well as by ‘geographical distance (migration)’, or ‘family structure (childlessness)’ (ibid., p.9). In other words, they implicated both an unwillingness of families or children, due to ‘modernisation’, and an incapacity on their part due to material constraints. These constraints, as they put it, had forced families to “face critical questions of resource allocation between generations as each seeks economic progress and adequate living standards under adverse circumstances” (ibid., p.6)\(^2\). Again, the assumption was that in such a situation the young are given priority. Finally, Hashimoto and Kendig also expressed their ‘dual’ position regarding the causes of the decline in support – implicating both weakening norms and economic constraints – in their stance on modernisation theory:

“compelling arguments can be marshalled for both the ‘abandonment’ thesis and for the counterargument of continuity and strength of older people’s family and community ties” (ibid., p.1)

This dual position was also put forward in anthropological accounts. Foner (1993), for example, in her summary of ethnographic findings, referred to both an unwillingness and an incapacity on part of the family as causes of decline in

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\(^2\) Though noting the role of economic constraints, Hashimoto and Kendig, however, never refer to the wider economic crisis in the third world as an underlying cause of the decline in support. The only time they mention the broad economic situation is in relation to the limited ability of developing countries to fund welfare services and programmes for older people. They note, in effect drawing on a political economy perspective, that the level of funds available to governments for such services “is heavily influenced by international economic relations which are beyond the control of developing countries” (1992, p.5)
support. On the one hand, and in line with modernisation theory, she proposed that declining support was due to "new ideas, values, and conceptions [and a] reduction in old people's control over productive resources". These, she argued, have reduced the "willingness of the young to look after old parents" by reducing the "effectiveness of...sanctions at old people's command" and by "giv[ing] legitimacy to young peoples' neglect" (p.112)

On the other hand Foner also proposed that inadequacies in support may be caused by the fact that, due to "growing consumer needs, and scarcer land". many children "have less to spare for elderly parents" (ibid.).

3.4 Limitations in the existing explanations

Although these explanations of the decline in family support have undoubtedly raised the key factors, they still do not provide a real understanding of why and how this decline has come about. The idealist explanations, which, in line with modernisation theory, interpret the decline as a result of an increasing unwillingness of the young to fulfil traditional filial and family obligations, fail, just like modernisation theory itself, to consider the role of economic constraints in causing the decline.

The materialist explanations, which put forward the 'incapacity' of adult children as the main cause of the decline, fail, just like the historical materialist accounts in the West, to consider the values that underpinned children's decision to give priority to themselves and their own offspring in allocating their meagre resources, and how these values may have been influenced (if at all) by changing attitudes. Unfortunately, the same failures can be found in the all other
descriptions in the literature of old people's low priority in resource allocation (e.g. Samarasinghe, 1982; Fernandes, 1982). Even Treas and Logue (1986) who explicitly discuss this issue, fail to provide any further insights. They note:

"Family decisions may relegate the elderly to a low priority in the allocation of limited family resources, because to do otherwise might constrain investments in children's schooling, impair the health and nutrition of younger generations, impede mobility and impose greater opportunity costs and stress on those who care for the aged" (1986, p.651)

However, they, too, do not discuss what the value basis of these priorities may be.

Finally, the explanations that propose both weakening norms and material constraints as causes of the decline in support, fail to provide a real understanding of the decline, because they do not consider the crucial question of the interrelationships between the cultural and material factors and their respective role and impact in causing the decline in support.

A last specific limitation to all of these explanations is that they do not make clear whether there are different mechanisms in relation to the decline in support from adult children, as opposed to the decline in support from other relatives. Although most accounts generally talk of the diminishing support from 'families', they explicitly refer only to reduced support from adult children. It is not clear whether the same or different causes are implied for reduced support from relatives.

The limitations in these explanations of the decline in support can be seen, most immediately, to result from the fact that, apart from Goldstein et al. and Caffrey, there has been no real attempt to critically analyse the causes of decline. Most accounts are brief and written in very general, descriptive terms.
More fundamentally, however, the conceptual limitations reflect, again, a more basic epistemological weakness in the existing accounts. A solid explanation, as argued earlier, would have to be grounded in an understanding – based on individuals' perspectives, motives, interests and their relationship with the wider context – of why and how relatives and children apparently provided more adequate, old age family support in the past, and of how, if at all, this basis of support has changed with development. The existing explanations, however, just like modernisation theory and the historical explanations of decline in the West, lack such a grounding.

In terms of the motivational basis of support in the past, the accounts in both the policy-oriented and anthropological literatures take as a basis the classical anthropological interpretations of support in traditional society, which as earlier described, portray support as compelled by binding filial obligation norms, enforced by sanctions and exchange. However, as we have seen, these interpretations clearly lack grounding in interpretive evidence, and thus do not provide a real understanding of the basis of support. Moreover, they focus only on adult children and fail to make clear what motivated other relatives to provide old age support.

In terms of the basis of support in contemporary developing societies, the policy-oriented literature includes little discussion of the issue, except to note the continued endorsement of filial obligation norms and, in some cases, apparent subtle shifts in traditional expectations. The assumption seems to be, though this is never discussed nor investigated, that support, where it is given, is compelled by the same factors as in the past.
The ethnographic literature, in contrast, has described the contemporary basis of support in developing societies. However, these descriptions, which are summarised by Foner (1993), also do not offer a real understanding of why people provide support: First, being structural-functionalist interpretations, they do not consider individuals’ perspectives, motives and interests in providing support (e.g. Goody, 1976; Sharani, 1981; Reid, 1985; Cattell, 1990; Rosenberg, 1990). Second, they fail to make clear what motivations compel relatives other than children to provide support, referring instead only to support provided by adult children.

Echoing the classical anthropological accounts, the descriptions variously portray such filial support as compelled by cultural norms of filial obligation which require children to repay their parents for care received in childhood, enforced by community, economic or supernatural sanctions, as well as by the exchange of services or resources from older parents. Foner, in contrast to the classical interpretations, additionally raises the important role of love and affection in compelling filial support, although she does not explain how this relates to or interacts with the other motivational factors.

93 The persistence of structural-functionalist interpretations in ethnographic research (at least in Africa) has been noted and critiqued in the literature (e.g. Nukunya, 1983; personal communication 1998). A particular indication of the persisting structural-functionalist perspectives in this case, is the fact that Foner (1993) lumps together evidence from societies as diverse as for example, the !Kung in Botswana and the Kirghiz in Afghanistan as representing the basis of support in non-industrialised society. She thus reveals a lingering structural-functionalist view of non-industrialised, primitive societies as being the same, at least as far as the basis of family support to the aged is concerned.

94 It should be noted that Foner raises the role of love and affection as underpinning support from children without, however, referring to any supporting evidence. Instead, it seems, she bases this simply on extrapolation from the West:

“As in our own society [support]...is...often a matter of emotional and practical considerations. Many children feel deep affection for aged parents and look after them with loving concern” (Foner, 1993, p.102, text in parenthesis added)
A final epistemological issue, which has prevented the development of a solid understanding of the decline in support, is that no systematic distinction has been made (neither in accounts of the basis of support, nor of the causes of decline) between the different types of support, i.e. between social, financial, and domestic assistance. Such a distinction is necessary because it cannot be assumed that the mechanisms of decline are the same for all.

3.5 Recent developments

This limited understanding of the causes of decline and the basis of family support for older people has, so far, received virtually no comment in the literature, perhaps reflecting the fact that other research questions are seen as more important for policy development purposes. Thus, with the exception of Keith (1992), who explicitly noted the need for a better understanding of the ‘motivations and preconditions for support’ in order to identify the most effective points for policy intervention, no authors have called for more research to establish the basis of support and the causes of decline.

This is despite the fact that there have been, in the last few years, many calls for more research on ageing and old age support in the developing world (e.g. Sen, 1994; Mamo, 1996\(^95\)). Most recently the fourth review of the Vienna Plan in 1999 again noted the minimal progress that developing countries had made in responding to population ageing (see United Nations, 1999d).

\(^{95}\) Mamo for example has criticised the lack of a culture of research in developing countries and has specifically called for more quantitative and qualitative research into attitudes to ageing, family structures, individual roles, life quality and the subjective well-being of older people.
In response to these calls, and particularly in view of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999, there have been several recent initiatives, which have aimed to foster research and policy development in developing countries. In Africa, for example the African Foundation for Research and Interdisciplinary Training in Ageing (AFRITA), a non-profit making trust, was set up in 1998, in order to support research and to link training and research to policy development on ageing in Africa (see Wilson, 1999a).

At a global level, HelpAge International launched the Ageing and Development journal in 1998, and the Ageing and Development Report in 1999. Both have aimed to inform and thus to facilitate the research and policy debate.

Fostered by these developments and spurred by the calls for more research in the literature, the empirical research on ageing that has emerged in recent years has expanded in amount and range. However, none of this research has focused on exploring the causes of decline, nor (with very few exceptions) the motivational basis of family support for older people. Instead most studies have investigated other issues. For instance there have been many more large scale surveys exploring the situation of older people, especially their economic and health needs. In Africa, for example, Wilson, (1999b), has investigated specifically the

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96 The report provides an overview of the condition and situation of older people, of the effects of social and economic development policies on them, and on the existing national policies for older people in the developing world. It emphasises the impact of poverty on older people and strongly advocates making global ageing a priority issue in future development policies. The report specifically argues for a fundamental shift in ageing policy and opinion so as to reflect the economic and social contributions that older people make and to enable them to retain their independence (see HelpAge International, 1999).

97 There is no scope here to describe or discuss in detail the findings of the various individual studies, the aim, rather, is to sketch the range of research on ageing that is currently being undertaken in developing countries.
health and nutritional status of older people in Zimbabwe. In South Africa, Møller and Devey (1995) have used data from the South African Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development (PSLSD) to establish conditions of households with elderly members. There has also been increasing research, for example, by the South African Pensions Study, on the impact of old age pensions (see Ferreira, 1999). In Africa as a whole, there is a beginning to be a focus, though not yet systematic research, on the impact of HIV/AIDS on older people (e.g. Okatcha, 1999; Wahome, 1999).

In Asia, HelpAge India has begun a large-scale study among older people in Dehli and its surrounding, with the aim of identifying the types of support needed from family, government and society. In Cambodia, HelpAge has initiated a baseline survey on demographic characteristics, health status, survival strategies, social roles and family structure of 600 urban and rural older people. Institutes in four Asian countries (Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines) have together with the University of Michigan, planned a programme to systematically collect and analyse data on patterns of income, residence and working patterns and health status of older people, as well as their receipt or use of kin support and government or other services. Globally, the UN Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) has commissioned extensive research into the living conditions of older people in a range of urban communities.\textsuperscript{98}

In addition to such needs-oriented quantitative surveys, there have been a host of studies which have focused on exploring the social and cultural aspects of older peoples' roles and intergenerational relationships.

In Africa, for example, Møller (1994), Campbell (1994) and Everatt and Orkin (1994) in South Africa have explored younger people’s attitudes toward older people and intergenerational relationships. In Ghana, Apt, Koomson, Williams and Grieco, (1995) have examined the extent to which older people still perform traditional roles and functions in family and community.

In Asia, there have been a series of pioneering qualitative studies (in Malaysia, Taiwan, the Philippines and Thailand) which have explored older people’s and younger adults’ attitudes to, and experiences of co-residency between parents and adult children (Domingo and Milagros, 1995; Knodel, Saengtienchai and Sittirai, 1995; Lee, Lin and Chang, 1995; Mehta, Osman and Lee, 1995; Milagros, Domingo, Knodel and Mehta, 1995). The aim of these studies was specifically to provide (to date almost non-existent) qualitative insights, to complement and illuminate the accumulating quantitative research findings (see Knodel, 1995).

Finally, there have been a host of ethnographic studies exploring various areas and in a sense complementing the more policy-oriented research. The nature and cultural basis of family support for older people, has, for example, been explored by Cattell (1997a,b;1999) in Kenya; van der Geest (1995, 1997) in Ghana; and Rubinstein, (1994) in Vanuatu. In South Africa, Møller and Sotshongaye (1996) and Sagner and Mtati (1999) have explored the meanings and uses of the old age pension.
3.6 The Ghanaian context and policy debate

The Ghanaian research debate on old age support, which is dominated by the writings of Professor Apt (who is president of the African Gerontological Society and also the leading authority on ageing in Africa), emerged, as we have seen, as part of the wider developing world debate sparked by the Vienna Assembly. It was thus underpinned by the same concern about the imminent crisis in old age support, due to rapid population ageing and the erosion of traditional extended family support systems in the wake of modernisation (see Apt, 1996; United Nations, 1985).

This concern, as in the rest of the developing world, has in Ghana been reinforced a) by survey findings (as described above) which – despite showing a broad persistence of family support networks – have documented serious inadequacies especially in material support for older people, (see again Table 3, and e.g. Robertson, 1981; Okraku, 1985); and b) by reports of the growing incidence of visible neglect and destitution among older people especially in cities.99

The 1970 census found in urban areas large numbers of destitute older men and women sleeping under market stalls or in lorry parks for want of another place to go (Ghana Census Office, 1970)100. Since then annual Department of Social Welfare reports have regularly called attention to the growing destitution of older

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99 It is interesting to note that this growing incidence of destitution in cities resembles the earlier discussed deprivation of older people described, for example, in Booth’s surveys, during the period of economic transition in late 19th century Britain (see e.g. Anderson, 1971, 1977).

100 Although some destitution among older people had been documented earlier, for example in national surveys conducted in the years between 1948 and 1954, it seems very clear (though there exist no hard data on this) that the incidence of the problem has markedly increased over the last 50 years. (Apt, 1993; C. Addo, Social Welfare Department, Accra, personal communication; J.D. Mensah, HelpAge Ghana, personal communication).
men and women in cities, many of whom take to begging in the streets (Apt, 1993b; C. Addo, Social Welfare Department, Accra, personal communication).

In Accra, the hospital welfare service has, for over a decade now, repeatedly expressed concern about the increasing numbers of older people who are ‘dumped’ at the hospital by their families (Apt, 1992; C.Addo, Social Welfare Department, personal communication). A similar concern over ‘dumping’, especially of older women, in Accra’s psychiatric hospital, has been raised by staff in the hospital’s geriatric ward (Nursing Staff, Accra Mental Hospital, personal communication).

The evident unmet need among older people in Ghana is unanimously seen as signifying a decline in family support. As Apt notes, it is seen as a sign that “the traditional [extended family] social welfare system no longer offers the elderly the customary protection they...previously enjoyed” (1996, p.1; text in parenthesis added).

In this context Apt and others imply that the situation and support of older people in traditional Ghanaian society, was almost ideal. Apt, for example notes:

“In ...traditional society...the authority...accorded to the aged was never challenged...The elderly were looked upon with respect and honour” (1996, p.32).

Similarly, Gyekye (1996) argues:

“... old people live with their children or grandchildren and are cared for by them. Old people are not only wanted but they are also respected and venerated. They are never considered an impediment to the enjoyment of life of younger people; on the contrary, they are, like other human beings. enjoyed” (1996, p.89/90)
These accounts clearly have the ring of 'golden past' type idealisations, and, indeed, the authors present them without reference to supporting evidence, and without acknowledging the criticism of such idealisations that has been put forward in the ethnographic and historical literature. One author, however, has argued that these ideal portrayals are nevertheless valid, at least as far as care and support of older people is concerned: Nukunya (1992a) notes that although generally data on traditional societies are cast in too idealistic terms, "there is little doubt" that in the case of care for older parents the cultural ideals and principles were adhered to (p.21). However, he cites no supporting evidence. The accuracy of the ideal descriptions of the past notwithstanding, what is clear is that some non-support of older people has existed at least since the early 1960s\textsuperscript{101}, but also that the present scale of problems among older people represents a clear decline in the adequacy of family support\textsuperscript{102}.

\textit{Responses to the decline in support}

In response to the declining adequacy of family support, several charitable church and community initiatives for older people have emerged in the last fifteen years. Most prominent is HelpAge Ghana, founded in 1986, which operates several day centres, runs a few income generating schemes for older people, provides an adopt-a-granny scheme, and tries, at least sporadically, to

\textsuperscript{101} Caldwell, for example, in his 1963-1964 survey of rural and urban older people, found 4.5\% to receive no financial assistance from their children (Caldwell, 1966). Similarly, the Social Welfare Department noted already in 1961 that there were visible numbers of destitute older people in cities (Ghana Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1961).

\textsuperscript{102} Apart from being asserted in the literature, this view was expressed by the director and other staff at HelpAge Ghana, by Social Welfare Department staff, as well as staff at the general and psychiatric hospitals.
provide for the neediest older people basic medicines, food and basic household items.\textsuperscript{103}

Apart from these charitable responses, there have been regular calls – just as in the rest of the developing world – for systematic policies and programmes to meet the increasing need among older people. The emphasis in Ghana and Africa as a whole, has generally been on measures that utilise and strengthen the existing traditional family support systems, rather than on the introduction of western models of formal state support. Apart from being perceived as less appropriate to the African context, such formal programmes, as Apt (1997) has argued, are simply unaffordable. The fiscal situation of African states

"precludes the possibility of government operating as the primary or even a substantial funding agency for the social welfare of older people in the near future" (p.13).

Apt thus concludes that the responsibility for older people in Africa needs to be located "with kin or with older persons themselves or some mix of the two" (ibid.)\textsuperscript{104}.

Following in this line of argument, the African Gerontological Society, in its most recent discussions on policy options for Africa, not only advocated strategies to strengthen family support, but also issued a clear call for the extension of voluntary, contributory social insurance and pension schemes (see Kimoi, Mendy and Mugambi, 1999).

\textsuperscript{103} HelpAge Ghana operates mainly in Accra. Its work covers most of the poor and less well off areas, which are divided into 'zones'. Each zone has a zonal leader who works with a team of volunteers and is responsible for the older people in his or her zone. Apart from practical help for the elderly, HelpAge is actively engaged in awareness raising and lobbying the government.

\textsuperscript{104} In this context, Apt questions the "current orthodoxy that family size should be reduced in developing countries" and notes that this would clearly undermine the ability of families to perform their role (Apt. 1995b, p.1)
In Ghana, to date, public social security programmes exist in only a very limited form. There is no comprehensive health or social insurance scheme. The existing pension schemes (SSNIT Social Security and National Insurance, and CAP 30), until recently, covered only government employees and provided for their members only lump sum benefits in the event of retirement, i.e. they were provident fund schemes. In 1991, in response to continued pressure from HelpAge, pensioners and the informal sector, the government overhauled the pension laws. The aim was to make the existing schemes universal, covering both the formal wage paying and the informal sector\(^{105}\), and to transform the provident fund into a pension scheme (see Dei, 1997). Under the new provision employers must contribute 12.5% and employees 5% of their monthly salary. The self employed have to contribute 17.5%\(^{106}\). Despite this formal expansion, however, the programme’s actual coverage remains minimal. This is due to several difficulties:

a) the majority of employers (in particular small-scale businesses) fail to register, in order to avoid paying contributions.

b) many employers defraud their employees, deducting their 5% contribution, but failing to pay this into the pension scheme. Though SSNIT is theoretically empowered to trace and prosecute non-registering institutions, they rarely do so due to lack of resources. Equally, employees typically do not report employers for fear of consequences.

c) the vast majority of employees in the informal sector, traders, fishermen, and the self-employed, do not register, either, because they cannot afford to pay the 17.5% monthly contribution, or because they simply do not know of the scheme.

\(^{105}\) Currently the vast majority of the labour force, some 69% of men and 92% of women in Ghana are in the informal sector. Most of them are employed in small-holder agriculture, fishing, trading or other small-scale enterprises (Government of Ghana, Technical Committee on Poverty. 1996)

\(^{106}\) As part of this change the old CAP 30 scheme was discontinued. SSNIT is now the only scheme.
In recognition of these problems, SSNIT has initiated a series of consultations – including the development of a framework in collaboration with the World Bank – in order to expand the programme’s coverage (J.D. Mensah, Director, HelpAge Ghana, personal communication).

The Ghanaian government, too, has begun to respond to the sustained calls for the development of policies to meet the needs of older people. In 1995 it introduced an annual ‘day of the older person’. On the day, which coincides with HelpAge week, the issue of ageing and older people receives wide media coverage. The aim is to inculcate positive views of older people, and to encourage the young to honour their traditional obligations toward the old.

In 1997, the government introduced a programme of free health care for the aged. Though full of promise, this programme turned out on closer inspection to be rather modest. It applies only to those aged over 70 and covers only consultations, basic laboratory tests and basic drugs for acute illnesses (Government of Ghana, Ministry of Health, 1997). This means, it does not cover hospitalisation or transport fees, nor drugs for chronic illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, stroke, cataract and other eye problems, which, after all, are the most frequent health problems of older people (see Apt, 1995a).

Most recently, in 1998, the government, under the auspices of the Minister of Employment and Social Welfare, set up a national intersectoral committee (including, amongst others members of HelpAge), in order to develop a proposal for a national policy on ageing framework. A subcommittee chaired by Professor Apt is tasked with refining and developing the framework in detail. This will then be debated in parliament. Specific measures to be included in the
framework are the creation of a national budget for ageing, and a national commission and ‘desk’ for ageing\textsuperscript{107} (J.D. Mensah, Director, HelpAge Ghana, personal communication).

### 3.7 Explanations of decline in support for older people in Ghana

The explanations for the decline in support that are put forward in the Ghanaian literature (e.g. Apt 1992, 1996, 1997) in effect echo those in the official policy-oriented and anthropological literature. They too cite both weakening traditional norms, i.e. a growing unwillingness of the young, and economic constraints, a growing incapacity of the young, as causes of the decline. Thus, drawing on modernisation theory, Apt argues on the one hand, that education, city living, and access to world media have led to increasing individualism and focus on the nuclear family and have “weaken[ed] the cultural ideas that pull the family together...”. Thus, they have “transform[ed] the aged into an unwanted stranger while the extended family fares poorly” (1996, p.5,40). She further notes that although traditional “cultural ideas continue to receive lip service...they begin to lose their compelling power to influence behaviour in favour of the aged” (1996, p.6). One result of this is that the ‘burden’ of supporting older people now rests solely with the nuclear family, i.e. their spouse and children (see Apt, 1993b).

Further, in line with modernisation theory and echoing Caffrey’s (1990) earlier argument, Apt states that the decline in old age support has also been caused by

\textsuperscript{107} Ghana already has specific national budgets, commissions and ‘desks’ for children, youth, and women’s development.
the erosion of older people's resources and power. In traditional Ghanaian society, "the old were...central to the performance of religious and social rituals,...had control over ancestral property...and...the labour and marriage of children". It was this that "enabled the elderly to protect their welfare" (Apt. 1997, p.8). Modern developments, however, particularly education and the emergence of salaried or wage employment in towns, have brought economic independence for the young and have diminished the social and economic power and functions of older people (Apt, 1996, p.7). In particular, they have weakened their "ability...to make the same strategic use of inheritance options in making sure that their daily welfare is taken care of"(Apt, 1997, p.8/9).

In contrast to this modernisation perspective, and on the other hand, Apt argues that the decline in family support has been caused by Ghana's deepening economic crisis.

This crisis has meant that young people, especially in cities, no longer have the capacity to provide for "themselves, their own children and their elderly relations" (1997, p.7; 1992). The implication is again that the old come last in resource allocation decisions. The economic crisis in Ghana, which emerged in the early 1980's due to poor fiscal management and deteriorating terms of trade\textsuperscript{108}, has been marked by mounting debt burdens\textsuperscript{109}, widespread un- and underemployment\textsuperscript{110}, falling real incomes and sharply rising costs of living (Apt,

\textsuperscript{108} Specific factors were the rise in petroleum prices, and the falling price of Ghana's main export commodity, cocoa.
\textsuperscript{109} External debt in 1997 stood at 5982 million dollars (see Von Baratta, 2000).
\textsuperscript{110} Formal employment opportunities have declined sharply since 1985, and un- and underemployment have risen since 1993 (Ghana Statistical Service, 1995; UNDP, 1997). The current unemployment rate in urban areas stands at almost 20\% and is particularly high (over 40\%) among male youths aged 15 – 24 in Accra. Rural unemployment, in contrast, is much lower (1.7\%) (see Ghana Statistical Service, 1995a; Institute of Economic Affairs, Ghana, 1997).
Despite some stabilisation at the macro level following the adoption of a World Bank/IMF structural adjustment programme, the situation at the social level has continued to worsen. The rising costs of living i.e. of food and in particular of health care and education (the latter a result of the cost recovery policies in these sectors ordered by the adjustment programme) have led to a continuous fall in living standards, levels of education and health service utilisation (see Apt, 1992; Government of Ghana, Technical Committee on Poverty, 1996; UNDP, 1997). This was despite the introduction of the 'Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Cost of Adjustment' (PAMSCAD) in 1988. Particularly alarming has been the recent sharp increase in urban poverty. In Accra, for example, poverty has more than doubled from 9 to 23% between 1988 and 1992, whilst the depth of poverty increased from 2 to 6%. Since the early 1990s trends indicate that the overall incidence of poverty, especially in urban areas, has increased further (see Ghana Statistical Service, 1995b; Ghana Government, Technical Committee on Poverty, 1996; UNDP, 1997).

3.8 Limitations in the explanations of decline in support for older people in Ghana

Although the existing accounts of the decline in support in Ghana clearly raise the important factors that have been involved in causing the decline in support, they still – just like the accounts in the policy-oriented or anthropological

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111 From 1990 to 1997 the rate of inflation was 29.2% (see Von Baratta, 2000).

112 The depth of poverty is measured as the average proportionate shortfall of expenditures for the poor group below the selected poverty line (see Government of Ghana, Technical Committee on Poverty, 1996).
literature – do not provide a full understanding of why and how the decline has come about. This is because, again, they fail to explain the crucial question of what the interrelationships have been between cultural and material factors in bringing about the decline. They moreover fail to make clear which mechanisms of decline apply to support from adult children and which to support from other relatives, and to make systematic distinctions between the different types of support.

Crucially, this failure to provide a full understanding reflects the fact that the question of the causes of decline *per se*, just as in the rest of the developing world, has received little, if any, analytical or empirical attention. Most accounts are, again, offered in very general, descriptive terms. This, as Professor Apt has suggested, is due, at least in part, to the fact that other issues, such as for example needs assessment research, are seen as much more necessary for policy development, and are thus, especially in the context of severely constrained research resources, given priority\(^\text{113}\).

More fundamentally however, the limitations in the current accounts reflect a basic epistemological weakness.

This is the fact that they are not grounded in an understanding (based on individuals' experiences, motives and interests) of why and how people provided (more) adequate old age family support in past traditional society; and of how this basis of support has changed in the present modernising society.

Although several accounts in the Ghanaian literature do describe the basis of support (e.g. Nukunya, 1992a; Apt, 1996, 1997; Gyekye, 1996), they do not

\(^{113}\) This view was expressed by Professor Apt in an informal conversation.
provide a real understanding either of the past traditional, or the present basis of support. The latter is hardly discussed at all. Almost all the writing in the literature describes only the traditional basis of support, and makes no explicit reference to the present situation. The assumption seems to be, though it is never discussed or explored, that where support is given at present, it is compelled by the same factors as in former times. Meanwhile, the understanding of the traditional basis that these descriptions provide is also limited, because they provide no evidence about the perspectives of individuals, their experiences, and motives in providing support and how these relate to their material and social context. Instead, the accounts merely describe three structural factors, obligation, exchange, and economic coercion, that have traditionally compelled the young to provide for older family members. They do not, however, explain how the three interact, nor what the relative role of each is in compelling support from adult children and other relatives.

*Filial Obligation*

As the central factor traditionally motivating support, the accounts describe the binding normative obligation on the young to support and honour their elders in return for care received when growing up. This traditional obligation, as Apt, Nukunya and Gyekye point out, is enshrined in the following proverb:

“If your elders take care of you while cutting your teeth you must in turn take care of them when they are losing theirs” (see e.g. Apt 1996, p.22).114

114 Interestingly, very similar proverbs exist also in other African cultures. In Nigeria, among the Yoruba, for example, a proverb holds:

“When the bushrat is old, it feeds on its children’s breasts” (see Togonu-Bickersteth, 1989, p.46). In Rwanda, it is “an old hare suckles from the young” (see Marzi, 1994, p.4)
Non-fulfilment of this proverbial obligation, as Apt describes, was traditionally met with strong disapproval from kin, as well as from the ancestors, the latter often requiring 'elaborate and costly expiation'. Fulfilling ones obligations to older kin was thus necessary for 'social acceptance', and the 'avoidance of shame' (ibid.). The obligation, as Gyekye (1996) describes, applied particularly to adult children:

"The most outstanding responsibility that a child has to his or her parents is to take care of them in their old age... In Ghanaian communities, for instance, the adult sons and daughters of aged people are always reminded:... The old man [or woman] is dependent on his [or her] children" (p.88/89; emphasis added).

Nukunya (1992), in the same vein notes:

"Almost invariably in African societies, the care of one's parents in old age is an enshrined responsibility" (p.21).

**Exchange**

A second factor which (only) Apt puts forward as traditionally driving family support for older people, is exchange. She suggests that traditionally, care for the aged was rooted "in a substantial exchange of economic and domestic services between the generations", and that "the young honoured their responsibilities to the old, believing that they had meaningful roles to play [and] because they never ceased to be productive" (1996, p.32). Apt stresses in particular child care as a key service provided by the old.

**Economic Coercion**

The final factor, which Apt proposes as underpinning support, is an element of economic coercion. She notes (as described above) that it was especially older
people's control over ancestral resources and property and their power to strategically use 'inheritance options' that enabled them to 'protect their welfare', and ensure that their daily needs were taken care of by the young.

By proposing exchange, coercion, and binding filial duty as the main compelling factors, and not mentioning any role for sentiments of affection or love, these existing accounts of the traditional basis of support in Ghana clearly echo the classical structural-functionalist interpretations of support in non-western, kin-based societies. Although the Ghanaian accounts probably derive, most immediately, from the authors' personal experiences and perceptions\(^{115}\), it is very likely that they have to some extent also drawn on, or been influenced by, the established anthropological interpretations.

The acceptance and influence of these interpretation in shaping indigenous scholars' perceptions in Africa (despite their serious epistemological and methodological limitations) has been strongly and repeatedly critiqued in the literature, coupled with a call for new, more realistic and more reliable, indigenous models and interpretations of African social life (see Owusu, 1978; CODESRIA, 1988; Stansfield, 1994; Prah, 1998).

The limited understanding that currently exists of the causes of decline in and the basis of support for older people in Ghana has – just as in the rest of the developing world – received little, if any, comment.

\(^{115}\) Professor Apt, for example, in a personal conversation remarked that her accounts of the basis of support were not based on any empirical evidence, but on her personal knowledge of the traditional Ghanaian system.
There have been no calls urging the need for more research in these areas, and, with the exception of a recent ethnographic study on the cultural context of old age care in rural Ghana (Van der Geest, 1997), there have been no further empirical investigations. Van der Geest’s study, based on interviews with older people and on focus groups with young and middle-aged people, has indicated that care to older parents in rural Ghana is based first and foremost on reciprocity. It is given in return for the care they gave their children when young. It is not given just out of respect for age alone. Although providing these interesting insights, Van der Geest offers no further advances in understanding how and why support is given, because it too does not explore the experiences, motives and interests of individuals in providing support.

3.9 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has described the course of the research debate on old age family support in Ghana and the developing world as a whole. It has shown how this debate arose in light of concern about an imminent crisis in support for older people in the wake of demographic population ageing, and modernisation, and how the empirical research emerging from it – despite documenting broad persistence of intergenerational living and support networks – has demonstrated serious inadequacies, especially in the financial support received by older people. These inadequacies, especially at the present scale, are clearly perceived as signifying a decline in support.

Interestingly, Van der Geest makes no mention of the traditional (and proverbial) reciprocal duty on children to provide support to older parents in return for care received in childhood.
Whilst the decline in support has reinforced the concern about the future of old age care and has heightened the perceived need for policy responses in Ghana and the developing world, there is as yet no clear understanding of the causes that have brought about this decline. The existing accounts in the Ghanaian, as in the wider developing world literature, put forward two strands of explanation. On the one hand, in line with modernisation theory, they suggest weakening traditional values of familial and filial obligation and thus an increasing unwillingness of younger family members to provide support. On the other hand, and in line with the political economy perspective, they refer to the worsening economic situation in developing countries and the resultant increasing incapacity of family members to provide support to older kin. However, the crucial question — what the interrelationships have been between socio-cultural and material changes in underpinning the decline — still remains to be addressed. This is due, on the one hand, to the limited analytical, let alone empirical, attention that has been given to exploring the question of the causes of decline in support in Ghana or other developing countries. On the other hand, and more importantly, it is due to the fact that none of the existing accounts are based on an interpretively grounded understanding of the basis of support in the past, i.e. how and why people provided more adequate support and how this has changed in recent times. Although the lack of understanding of the causes of decline in Ghana (as in other developing countries) has received virtually no comment or call for redress in the literature — reflecting the greater priority that is given to quantitative and needs-oriented research — a greater understanding of this question is, in fact, crucial for the development of appropriate and effective
policies. Understanding more fully why and how the problems have arisen, and what people’s motives are in providing the support they do, is vital, especially for policies that aim to strengthen or complement the existing family support systems. What is needed to generate such a fuller understanding is an interpretive investigation which establishes the basis and patterns of support in the past, by exploring individuals’ former experiences, motives and interests in providing support, and how these related to their wider social and material context. This should then be compared to the basis of support in the present. Together with people's own interpretations of the changes and decline in support, it is then possible to identify how and why family support has declined, and what the implications of this decline are. In this context, it is important to establish to what extent support in the past really was ‘ideal’, as the accounts in the literature imply, or whether inadequacies in support did also exist in former times.

In order to generate a comprehensive and accurate understanding it is also necessary to make clear distinctions between old age support provided by adult children and by other relatives, and between different types of support.

The framework for such an investigation, to make the analysis as solid as possible and enable it to build on insights already gained, should draw on the key concepts as well as the ‘gaps’ found in the current understanding of both the causes of decline, and the basis of support in the Ghanaian, the wider developing world and the western literature. It is to such an interpretive investigation, especially of the decline in material family support to older people, that the remainder of this thesis now turns.
PART II

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS:
THE PAST BASIS OF SUPPORT FOR OLDER PEOPLE AND THE CAUSES OF ITS DECLINE
CHAPTER FOUR
METHODS AND APPROACH

This chapter introduces the empirical investigation by describing the methods and approach that were used to explore and generate a fuller understanding of the past basis of and the causes of decline in family support for older people in Ghana. The chapter outlines the rationale for the approach adopted, describes in detail the methods, framework for and processes of data collection and analysis, discusses specific problems that arose during this process, and finally considers questions of verification and ethics in the study.

4.1 Overall approach

This empirical study, as indicated earlier, investigated the past basis of and causes of decline in old age support principally by exploring and comparing the experiences and/or attitudes of three generations regarding the provision and receipt of old age family support; as well as their own explanations and interpretations of the diminished adequacy of support. The accounts of the oldest generation (who have personally experienced the past and the process of decline) provided the base for understanding old age support in the past, and the starting point for understanding the changes that have led to the decline in support. The experiences and views of the middle and youngest generation (who are currently involved in and/or have expectations of providing and receiving old age support), complemented or qualified the older people's perspectives, and thus served to

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fully develop the understanding of the causes and implications of the decline in support.

The study additionally investigated the background of several cases of older people ‘dumped’ by their families in hospital, and gathered insights from consultations with several scholars at the University of Ghana, as well as with HelpAge and other welfare professionals e.g. hospital welfare staff, and nursing staff on the psychiatric hospital’s geriatric ward. Finally, it obtained concrete information and data from examining the literature on the wider social, economic, and cultural context and trends in Ghana.

The main approach that the investigation used to generate and analyse the empirical evidence was qualitative. Although there exists no one formal definition of qualitative research, given the multiplicity of perspectives and methods that exist within the qualitative paradigm, there are, as Creswell (1998) points out, three key features that are central to all qualitative research. These features are a naturalistic and an interpretive approach and a process of inductive analysis.

The naturalistic approach holds that researchers are committed to studying things and people in their natural settings. This contrasts with the experimental research approach typically employed in the natural sciences. The interpretive approach means that phenomena are interpreted or made sense of ‘in terms of the meanings people bring to them’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). In other words, the approach aims,

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117 These three aspects, as Creswell notes, are included in most of the current definitions of qualitative research (e.g. Merriam, 1988; Eisner, 1991; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg, 1992; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).
"...to describe and analyse the culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied" (Bryman, 1988, p.46)

An inductive approach to analysis means that theoretical accounts or concepts are not, as in conventional positivist research, imposed prior to data collection, but are rather generated from patterns, themes and categories which emerge from the empirical data (see e.g. Patton, 1990; Huberman and Miles, 1994; Janesick, 1994).

These three key features, as will be shown below, are expressed in the design, methods and process of data collection and analysis employed in this study.

4.2 Why a qualitative approach?

The main reason for choosing a qualitative approach for the investigation, was the fundamental epistemological position that has underpinned this inquiry as a whole, i.e. that a real understanding of any phenomenon in the social world must be based on an understanding of the perspectives of individuals, in particular their motives and purposes, and their interrelationship with the wider social and economic context. A qualitative methodology, which allows in-depth explorations of individuals' perspectives, and interprets phenomena in terms of

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118 The intention here is not to reproduce the large body of literature which discusses the use of a qualitative approach and it's strengths and weaknesses (see e.g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Bryman, 1988; Hammersley, 1992; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Rather, the aim is to highlight the key reasons why such an approach was chosen for this particular empirical investigation.

119 An 'understanding' of individuals' perspectives is in this context to be taken in the Weberian sense of 'verstehen', that is, as a meaningful, subjective understanding of their intentions, purposes, and beliefs. It is understood, in other words, as an understanding of the rationality of actors (see Leat, 1972), not simply as an 'empathetic understanding' in which the researcher merely imagines himself or herself in the place of a person (see Rudner, 1966). Underpinning this position is, of course, the basic assumption that human action is not merely imposed, but that human beings are rational and purposeful actors who know, and who can give an account of why they do the things they do (see e.g. Giddens, 1979).
these perspectives follows almost logically from this epistemological stance. (see e.g. Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative methods are, moreover, particularly suited for investigations, such as this one, which aim to explore issues that are still little understood, and which seek to generate explanatory accounts about why or how a particular phenomenon exists or has occurred. In-depth explorations facilitate the identification of salient themes, causal relationships, and the generation of theoretical models (see e.g. Marshall, 1985; Bryman, 1988; Huberman and Miles, 1994; Creswell, 1998).

4.3 Research setting and sample

The empirical investigation and data collection were undertaken during nine months of fieldwork in Accra, the capital of Ghana120 (see Figure 3). The decision to conduct the research in Accra was made in view of the fact that the symptoms of the decline in support – destitution among older people and emerging charitable relief efforts – are most marked here. Focusing on an urban context was moreover deemed important because it is projected to become the norm for older people in developing countries: “Forty percent of the aged in the developing world already live in urban areas, and the proportion will rise over the coming decades” (Hashimoto, Kendig and Coppard, 1992, p.303). Ideally the investigation in Accra should have been complemented by research in a rural area. However, this was beyond the scope and resources available for this study, and remains a subject for subsequent research.

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120 Accra has a population of 949,100. The second largest city, Kumasi, has a population of 385,000. Ghana as a whole has 17,985,000 inhabitants (see von Baratta, 2000).
Figure 3: Site of empirical research
Within Accra, most of the research was conducted in, and most of the sample of respondents was drawn, from three of the sixteen HelpAge zones: Korle Wokor zone, which includes the St. Vincent de Paul day centre for older people and covers one of the poorest areas in Accra; Dansoman zone which covers a largely middle income area; and Darkuman zone which includes both poor and middle income residents. These three zones were chosen because they have among the largest number of older people registered with HelpAge, and because in each of them, I had already established, during a two-month pilot visit in 1995, a good personal rapport with the zonal leaders.

The three-generational sample of respondents was purposively selected to include dyads of older parents and their adult-child, and where possible, triads with the grandchild. The idea was that such dyads (or triads), by providing two (or three) perspectives on the same familial and support context, would allow more in-depth insights into the nature and causes of possible generational differences in attitudes towards support.

Thus, the overall sample of 51 respondents, comprised 23 ‘oldest generation’ (G1) respondents (aged between 65 and 82 yrs); 19121 ‘middle generation’ (G2)

121 In nine cases no adult child of the G1 respondent could be interviewed. In four cases the adult child, living abroad or in other parts of Ghana, was expected to visit Accra over the Christmas period and an interview was planned for then. However, in all four cases the child failed to visit thus making an interview impossible. After returning to Britain, I attempted, though unsuccessfully, to arrange interviews with two of these adult children who lived in London. One expressed no willingness to be interviewed, the other could not be contacted. In a further three cases the adult child had no time in her daily schedule to participate in an interview, and in another case the adult child unexpectedly moved away to take a job in another region of Ghana before the interview could be conducted. Finally, in one case the old respondent who was mistreated by her children, specifically requested me not to speak to her children for fear of reprisals. Compensating for four of the nine interviews lost, I interviewed, in two cases, more than one adult child of the older respondent, and in another case the daughter-in-law (who lived with the old respondent) instead of the son. In addition one middle generation respondent unrelated to any of the older respondents was interviewed.
respondents i.e. adult children of the older respondents (aged between 31 and 48 yrs); and 9 ‘youngest generation’ (G3) respondents (aged between 16 and 20) who were either children of the middle generation respondents, or unrelated. In addition to including dyads or even triads, the research sample was purposively selected to span a spectrum of gender, three socio-economic, and two main ethnic groups (Ga and Akan).

These stratification criteria were imposed only on the oldest generation respondents, given that they, by virtue of the dyadic or triadic link then determined the subsequent composition of the sample of middle and youngest generation respondents (see Tables 5 and 6).

The decision to stratify the sample in this manner was made because gender, ethnic, and socio-economic group were expected to be possible important influences on people’s experiences of or attitudes towards old age family support. Stratifying the sample thus aimed to capture, as much as possible, the spectrum of possible perspectives on old age support and to allow comparison between these groups in order to detect generic, as well as group specific, features of old age support.

122 The time and resource constraints of this study did not allow a larger number of youngest generation respondents to be interviewed. The small number of respondents was however accepted given that the youngest generation’s views were intended mainly as supplementary to the main focus of the exploration, i.e. the experiences and attitudes of the oldest and middle generation about providing and receiving support.

123 The Ga and the Akan are the two major ethnic groups in Accra. Together they make up the majority of the population. The Ga are indigenous to the Accra coastal region. The Akan, who are the largest ethnic group in Ghana as a whole, are originally migrants to Accra. Apart from these two ethnic groups, Ghanaian society, which is more or less homogeneously black African, also includes the Ewe, which are mainly located in the South-West of the country, as well as the Mossi, Guan, Dagomba, Konkomba, Nanumba, and Gonja groups in the Northern parts of the country (see e.g. von Baratta, 2000).

124 Such a strategy of ‘maximum variation’ has been suggested, for example, by Patton (1990) and Miles and Huberman (1994).
Table 5: Stratification of oldest generation (G1) sample and actual numbers of respondents interviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ga</th>
<th>Akan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'rich' respondents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'middle income' respondents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'poor' respondents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Total three generational sample of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oldest generation respondents</th>
<th>Middle generation (G2) respondents</th>
<th>Youngest generation (G3) respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'poor' older respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Mensah (Akan)</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Prempeh (Akan)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Baddoo (Ga)</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Azu (Ga)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Ansah (Akan)</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Achim (Akan)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Otoo (Ga)</td>
<td>Daughter, Son</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Ayi (Ga)</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. King (Ga)</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>2 Grandsons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Larbi (Ga)</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Kwei (Ga)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'middle income' respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Brew (Akan)</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Mills (Akan)</td>
<td>Son, Daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Thompson (Ga)</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Akpan (Ga)</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Prah (Akan)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Nima (Akan)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Tettey (Ga)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Osu (Ga)</td>
<td>Son, Daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'rich' respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Hutton (Akan)</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Okine (Ga)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Ward (Akan)</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Addo (Ga)</td>
<td>Daughter-in-law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional G2 and G3 respondents unrelated to G1 respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mrs. Ofei (Akan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles Adjei (Akan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth Masi (Akan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert Wilson (Ga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Adom (Ga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience Eket (Ga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria Armah (Akan)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The small numbers in each cell, in particular the small numbers of rich respondents, are of course less than ideal. In view of the limited resources and time available, however, it was not possible to include larger numbers. Limiting the numbers of 'rich' (rather than middle-income or poor) respondents to four, was seen as the least damaging because, given that the majority of Ghanaians are in the lower socio-economic groups, it was considered most important to collect as much data as possible on these.

To protect the identity of the respondents all names have been changed.
Differences in perspectives on old age family support between the Ga and Akan were expected in view of the fundamentally different social organisation of the two groups. Whilst the Ga are patrilineal, tracing family affiliation through the paternal line, the Akan are matrilineal, tracing family affiliation through the maternal line. It was thus thought possible that patterns and expectations of old age family support could differ between the groups.

Gender differences in experiences or expectations of old age family support were expected mainly in view of the disparate economic situation of women and men in Ghana. Women typically have, throughout their lives, less access to and less ability to accumulate resources than men. They are much less likely than men to be employed in the formal, wage-paying sector (which is much better remunerated than the informal trading and farm work typically done by women) and even where they are, they receive less pay than their male counterparts (see e.g. Ghana Statistical Service, 1995a). Thus, women are less likely to have personal savings, or a form of pension, in old age (see Apt, 1996), and thus more likely to be dependent on material family support. Differences in perspectives on old age support between the sexes were also thought possible (though there were no concrete expectations) in view of the existing cultural differences in roles of women and men in family and society (see e.g. Robertson, 1981; Oppong, 1983).125

Finally, differences between different socio-economic groups were expected for two reasons. First different levels of resources in old age imply differing need

125 There is no scope here to discuss in more detail the body of literature that has dealt with the social and cultural gender differences in Ghanaian and other African societies. For a fuller discussion see, for example, Oppong (1983).
for, or dependence on such support; and second in Ghana socio-economic status roughly corresponds with level of education\textsuperscript{126}, and thus 'exposure' to 'modern' values which are assumed to have played a role in changing traditional attitudes towards old age support.

\textit{Recruitment and access to respondents}

All poor and middle income oldest generation respondents were identified and accessed through the zonal leader in the zones. The zonal leader was given the required selection criteria, i.e. ethnic group, gender, socio-economic group, with living child in Accra, and asked to identify, out of the older people in her zone, those who fitted these criteria\textsuperscript{127}. Out of these, and taking into account any other information the zonal leader gave about the older person's circumstances, I then selected those individuals who seemed potentially the most appropriate or valuable as interview partners. These were then approached\textsuperscript{128} by the zonal leader, who informed them of the research and asked whether they were willing to participate. Where they agreed (and in all cases they did) a time and place for the interview was arranged. All interviews were either conducted in the

\textsuperscript{126} That socio-economic level roughly corresponds with educational level is a result of the fact that a high level of education has always been, and still is, a prerequisite for formal sector employment or high level employment in the private sector, both of which, as already mentioned, are better paid than the informal sector (see e.g. Foster, 1965; Nukunya, 1992b).

\textsuperscript{127} All poor older respondents were older people who were in receipt of regular support from HelpAge (either by virtue of attending the day centre which provides free meals, or by virtue of a monthly payment). The 'middle income' respondents were all registered HelpAge members which meant they sometimes took part in HelpAge activities such as fundraising. None of them, however, received any support from HelpAge.

\textsuperscript{128} The host of logistical constraints in many areas of Accra – especially the lack of street names and numbers and the lack of telephones – meant that arranging interviews with almost all respondents had to proceed by personal visits and face-to-face contacts.
respondents’ own home, the zonal leader’s house, or in the St. Vincent de Paul centre where some of the poor respondents spent each day from morning to mid afternoon.

The four rich older respondents were not drawn from the HelpAge zones (given that these do not cover affluent parts of the city), but were identified and approached either through my personal contacts or, in one case, through the president of HelpAge Ghana. All of these respondents were interviewed in their own homes.

The middle generation respondents (i.e. the adult children) were identified and approached through their parent. Each older respondent was asked which of his or her children would potentially be able and willing to participate in the study. Once a potential adult child respondent was identified (and an attempt was made to include roughly equal numbers of sons and daughters129), he or she was approached personally either by the zonal leader or myself, or - in cases where that was not possible - by the older respondent him or herself.

Where the adult child agreed to participate, a time and place for the interview was arranged. Most middle generation respondents were interviewed in their own homes. In some cases, where it was more convenient, interviews were held in the zonal leader’s house or in the St.Vincent de Paul centre130.

129 In the event, as Table 6 shows, it was impossible to include equal numbers of sons and daughters, and the actual sample contained 14 daughters and only 4 sons. In most cases (where sons existed) this was due to the fact that the sons had either left Accra for work elsewhere in the country, or were ‘too busy’ to spare time for an interview.

130 In all cases bar one, the socio-economic level of the adult child was the same as that of their parent, suggesting that at least in this sample there had been no social mobility from one generation to the next.
The youngest generation respondents were either identified and approached in the same way as above, i.e. through their parents, or, if they were unrelated to the other respondents, through my own contacts at the University of Ghana and Ghana International School, or through personal contacts of one of the zonal leaders.

The four older people who had been ‘dumped’ by their families at the hospital and who were interviewed, in a sense, as ‘extreme’ cases, in addition to the main three-generational sample, were identified and approached through the hospital’s social welfare officer. The officer was informed of the aim and nature of the research and asked to identify, if possible, several individual ‘cases’ who would be able and willing to give some information about the background of their situation. Consent was asked of the four individuals suggested by the welfare officer and a time for the interview was arranged. Whilst in two cases the older person was interviewed in the social welfare officer’s office, the other two were interviewed during an outreach visit with the welfare officer.

Finally, consultations with key informants such as the HelpAge zonal leaders, volunteers, academics or other welfare professionals were not planned to a schedule but were arranged whenever the opportunity arose, in order to supplement evidence emerging from the main interviews.

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131 The use of extreme or deviant cases to strengthen the analysis has been suggested amongst others by Miles and Huberman (1994).

132 Repeated attempts were also made to arrange interviews with the relatives of some of the old women apparently ‘dumped’ at the psychiatric hospital. (it was impossible to hold an interview with the patients themselves). Unfortunately, all attempts failed because, each time, the relatives failed to show up at the agreed time. I interpreted this as a sign that they were not truly interested in being interviewed.
In order to explore the perspectives of individuals, qualitative research usually employs a variety of methods ranging from extensive participant observation, or focus group discussions to semi-structured or in-depth individual interviews. This investigation principally used in-depth interviews. The interviews, which followed a broadly defined topic guide tapping respondents' attitudes, experiences and views on old age family support, allowed for a deep and detailed exploration because they gave me, the researcher, ample opportunity for probing, and the respondents ample opportunity to elaborate on and explain the meanings behind their responses (the topic guide is discussed in detail below). Each interview lasted on average between one and two hours, and all respondents were interviewed at least twice, with many, in particular oldest generation respondents, being interviewed up to seven times. In order to retain as much information as possible, the interviews were, with the participants' permission, tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed by myself. In contrast to the lengthy interviews conducted with the main three-generational sample, the interviews with the four cases of 'dumped' older people were much shorter and focused and concentrated on elucidating the background and causes of their situation. The interviews were, moreover, not tape-recorded, but recorded by hand. This more restricted format was necessary because the interviews were conducted in the welfare officer's hours of work, which meant that lengthy interviews would have been too much of an imposition.
The informal conversations with key academics or welfare professionals followed a similar format. They too were recorded by hand, and usually focused on a particular subject or issue that needed clarification.

**Communication between researcher and respondent**

Of key importance for successfully exploring people’s attitudes and views in any interview, is their ability and willingness to communicate with the researcher. In this regard, two particular issues arose in this study. The first concerned the fact that I, the researcher, was a foreigner, an outsider to the respondents’ culture. The second, related issue was ‘language’, the fact that I did not speak the indigenous languages either of the *Ga* or of the *Akan*.

**Being an outsider**

The situation of being an outsider to the social and cultural setting in which one does research is one which faces most anthropologists. As Thompson (1988) argues, this has negative as well as positive implications. On the one hand, being an outsider is likely to render the researcher unable, at least to begin with, to understand the nuances, the social codes and the layers of expressive meanings voiced by the participants. One result of this is that the researcher may, perhaps, be more easily ‘fooled’. Moreover, the researcher may misinterpret the significance of certain responses, or may not carry out the interview in an appropriate manner (see e.g. Kaseras and Hopkins, 1987; Freed, 1988; Baker, Hussain and Saunders, 1991)
On the other hand, however, as Thompson argues, being an outsider enables the researcher to ask for the obvious to be explained, rather than being expected to accept community myths at face value. Equally, respondents may feel more able to express their views in an open and uninhibited manner.

In this study, my position turned out to be a curious, and in some senses ideal one, of being ‘not quite an outsider’. This arose from the fact that I am half ‘white’, half ‘black’. This meant that, although the respondents clearly viewed me as someone who came from the West, they definitely did not see me as a fully western, white person. Rather they saw me, in a sense, as a fellow African. The fact that my father is Nigerian\(^{133}\), rather than any other nationality say in East, North, or South Africa meant that I was viewed as something a bit closer than just a fellow African. This is because Nigeria and Ghana are very close geographically, in terms of trade links, and to some degree in terms of culture. There are, moreover, large numbers of Nigerians in Ghana and vice versa. However, I was obviously also not seen as a fully ‘black’ person. Thus, just as respondents would talk to me about the ‘white man’, they would explain the ‘black man’ or mentality to me in a way which made clear that they did not see me as one.

Being ‘not quite an outsider’ brought definite advantages with it. The respondents enjoyed the fact that they could explain their culture to me, and that I was interested to learn. At the same time, seeing me as a fellow African, I feel, made respondents less defensive about, and more willing to disclose negative

\(^{133}\) All respondents knew this because they all asked about my origin. And, from their point of view the fact that my father is Nigerian makes me a full Nigerian.
aspects about themselves or aspects of Ghanaian culture or mentality. There was no obvious offence taken if I questioned respondents’ motives or actions, or community myths, for example, those regarding the ‘ideal’ portrayals of old age family support in the past. The fact that I was a ‘young’ female student helped further in allowing me to question respondents without being seen as threatening. Nevertheless, I did also experience some of the problems raised by Thompson. Especially to begin with I certainly did not fully understand the nuances, and ‘layers of expressive meaning’, in respondents’ answers, and I do not pretend to have understood them in their entirety even at the end of the study. However, I did have - through the two-month pilot visit and my knowledge of the Nigerian culture - even at the outset of the fieldwork, a basic familiarity with the ‘West African’ way of communicating, for example with elders. Throughout the period of fieldwork I was then able to deepen this familiarity by being in daily contact with Ghanaians (not least the respondents), forging friendships and living with a Ghanaian family.

Language

Given that the official language in Ghana is English, (a reflection of its colonial past), language was, for the most part, not an issue. Most respondents spoke good English (though their use of some words or expressions was slightly different than in Britain), and I had no problems communicating with them. As

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134 There is a body of literature regarding the respective implications of different genders in research which will not be discussed here. My own experience in Ghana was that as a woman, especially a young woman, one is definitely seen as less threatening than a man.
I became more familiar with the indigenous use of words, I began to use these in the interviews. For example, respondents often used the phrase 'it was my mind' to explain or express their motivation for a particular action. Thus, whereas initially I would ask 'why did you do it?', I soon changed this to 'what was your mind?', and obtained much more insightful answers. However, language was an issue with the small number of respondents (poor older and middle generation women) who did not speak English. For interviews with these women it was necessary to use interpreters. Because this was anticipated when planning the study, the (surprisingly sparse) literature on the use of interpreters in research was carefully studied in order to devise the best way of working with them. The most comprehensive of the few sources is Edwards (1993, 1998), and a decision was made to follow her way of working. Edwards rejects the traditional, positivist approach to using interpreters, which aims to minimise their role and influence, in order to enable the researcher to 'interview through rather than with the interpreter'. Edwards rejects this approach first, because it perpetuates the traditional emphasis on the 'superior status', power and control of the researcher in the interview; and second because it is a fallacy to think that an interpreter can ever be a 'passive instrument'. All interpreters – just like the researcher – bring their own assumptions and concerns to the interview. Thus, as Edwards argues, the aim must be to work with the interpreter in an overt rather than 'behind-the scenes' way, and to make him or

135 What does exist, as Edwards (1993) points out, are some rather 'old' anthropological discussions regarding the use of interpreters by English speaking anthropologists doing research in cultures where the 'subjects' mother tongue is the dominant language; and some discussions concerning the use of interpreters in welfare services, especially in the delivery of health services.
her a 'key informant'. This gives the interpreter 'personhood' and 'visibility' and utilises his or her subjectivity as part of the research process. On a more concrete level Edwards suggests that the same interpreters be used as far as possible, and that interpreters should be allowed to translate fluently in whatever form of speech comes most easily to them. In light of Edwards' suggestions the decision was made to use, as interpreters, the zonal leaders in the three HelpAge zones in which interviews were held\textsuperscript{136}, and not to give any 'instructions' about \textit{how} they were to interpret or translate.

The advantage of this was that I had established with these zonal leaders (all women)\textsuperscript{137} a warm 'working relationship' by virtue of 'organising' with them the interview schedule in each of their zones, and by regularly consulting or having discussions with them as 'key informants'. They shared my interest in the issues explored and almost became co-researchers.

I therefore had a sense of their views and concerns and more easily noticed when a zonal leader, in translating, was expressing her own views. In these cases I either attempted to probe repeatedly and extra carefully, or simply asked directly to what extent her translation reflected her own beliefs. It was always possible to do this without any offence being taken.

\textsuperscript{136} In interviews with three respondents the interpreter had to speak to the respondent in \textit{Twi} rather than in \textit{Ga}, her native language. This however did not pose any problem given the fact that \textit{Twi} is virtually a second formal language in Accra, which is spoken by virtually all people. In fact, the ability of Ghanaians to learn and speak different languages is remarkable. Almost all people, at least in Accra, are \textit{at least} bi-lingual.

\textsuperscript{137} The fact that the three zonal leader 'interpreters' were women was not part of the consideration in planning to use them. In the event, however, it meant, luckily, that there was always a gender match between interpreter and respondent. Such a match has been advocated by several authors because it is thought to facilitate a more open expression of views (e.g. Karseras and Hopkins, 1987; Freed, 1988; Fuller and Toon, 1988).
Despite these obvious advantages, the use of HelpAge zonal leaders as interpreters is also likely to have had some disadvantages - most importantly the fact that they personally knew and were involved with the respondents (in particular the oldest generation respondents). Although this evidently did not stop the respondents from revealing confidential and sensitive information, it perhaps may have made them more guarded in the accounts they gave. A further general disadvantage, associated with all uses of interpreters, irrespective of the choice of interpreter, was that some of the richness of the original accounts was inevitably lost.

4.5 Process of data collection and analysis

The aim of the analysis was to generate an understanding of the past basis of and the causes of decline in support not by using an a priori imposed theoretical framework, but inductively, by generating themes and concepts from the respondents’ accounts.

This required that the process of data analysis went hand in hand with data collection. Thus, as in most qualitative research, data analysis thus began shortly after the data collection commenced, continued during the course of fieldwork where it focused and guided data collection (see Morse, 1994; Marshall and Rossman 1995). A final post hoc phase of analysis was carried out after returning to Britain.

138 On a different level, of course, this was advantageous because the zonal leader could give me further information about the circumstances or the accounts of the older person. In one instance for example, the zonal leader alerted me to the fact that a respondent had simply omitted to tell me of the existence of his daughter. It was then possible for me to go back to the respondent and clarify this issue.
Framework for data collection and analysis

Whilst no theories or constructs were imposed prior to data collection, a framework of topics and ‘sensitising concepts’ was, nevertheless, used to facilitate and focus data analysis and give it ‘boundaries for comparison’ with the existing accounts in the literature (see Morse, 1994).

The topics for exploration revolved around people’s past and/or present experiences of, and attitudes to providing and receiving old age family support, as well as their own explanations or interpretations of the diminished adequacy of support. The ‘sensitising concepts’, which were to be probed for and paid attention to during exploration and analysis were the key concepts and conceptual gaps identified in the accounts in the literature. Thus, for example, when exploring the topic of people’s motivations for providing support attention was paid to whether they mentioned normative obligations, exchange, affection/love or an element of reciprocity. If they mentioned reciprocity, an effort was made to probe exactly to what it referred, and what quality it had. If they mentioned a normative obligation, then their conceptions of this obligation were further explored to find out whether there were any conditions, limits, or sanctions attached to it. When exploring the the patterns of support provision, for instance, an effort was made to investigate the costs of support, i.e. how affordable it was and is for the young to support the old. This was done in view of the accounts in the literature, which refer to an economic incapacity on part of the young as the main cause of the decline. In view of the gaps identified in these accounts, for example, an extra set of questions was devised to explore which priorities people gave to young and old generations in the allocation of
scarce resources and why\textsuperscript{139}. The full framework of topics and sensitising concepts (shown in italics) is shown in Table 7.

\textit{Data collection and analysis in the field}

The concurrent process of data collection and analysis that began in the field did not follow any pre-existing protocol or procedure such as for example in grounded theory research (see e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1994). Rather, just like in most qualitative studies, the process was, 'custom built', 'revised' and 'choreographed', and evolved during the study (see Huberman and Miles, 1994; Creswell 1998). The first step involved reflecting on and acknowledging my own \textit{a priori} expectations about the kinds of themes that would arise. These expectations, which had inevitably developed during the course of my pilot visit and my examination of the literature, were much more defined for some than for other topics. For example, I expected that the oldest generation's main reasons for providing old age support especially to older parents would be linked to a normative filial obligation. Equally I expected a broad agreement on their part, that such a filial obligation existed because children had to repay their parents for care received in childhood, and that this obligation may be conditional upon the parent having provided such care.

\textsuperscript{139} The values and principles underpinning decisions on and priorities in resource allocation between the generations were explored primarily through a set of of three specific questions. The first question inquired very generally who – whether self and children or old parents – had priority in decisions on resource allocation. The other two questions were in the form of a hypothetical scenario where an adult child with very limited resources had to make a decision between spending the money on vital medical treatment for the old parent or on education or medical treatment for his/her child, respectively. Although these scenarios are on one level contrived and unrealistic, they nevertheless have some salience given the current unaffordability of both health care and education in Ghana.
### Table 7: Framework of topics and sensitising concepts explored in interviews with the three generations of respondents

**Background Information**
- Brief life, family, educational and employment history of respondent

**Experiences of providing and receiving support**
- Concrete context, patterns and costs of support given to older parents/relatives (oldest and middle generation only)
  - what was/is given to whom, when, in what circumstances and living arrangements; and who else supports/ed the older person?
  - nature and degree of dependency of older person.
  - ‘costs’ of providing support: how affordable was/is it?, and why?: did/does it impact on competing obligations, for example to children?
  - to what extent did inadequacies in old age support also exist in the past? (oldest generation only)
- Own old age support received – concrete patterns, and adequacy (oldest generation only)
  - from whom is support received and why? how adequate is the support received, and why?

**Attitudes towards receiving and providing old age family support**
- Motivations, interests and reasons for and attitudes to providing support (oldest and middle generation only)
  - motives for supporting older parents vs. older relatives?
  - exchange?, affection/love?, reciprocity?, normative obligation?
    - If reciprocity, what exactly does it refer to? what quality does it have?
    - If normative obligation, what are the nature and content of the obligation?
    - who should give what support to older people, and why?
    - under what conditions?, and within what limits?
    - what consequences or sanctions (if any) are attached to not conforming with the normative prescription?
- Own expectations and attitudes regarding future receipt of support and material dependency in old age.
  - whom do/did they expect to support them in what way? what level of dependency did/do they envisage, and why? (middle and youngest generations only)
- Thoughts on what young generations now should do or expect regarding their future old age support and dependency. (oldest generation only)
- Priorities in decisions of resource allocation between old and young
  - in situations of limited resources, which generation should be given priority, and why?

**Explanations and interpretations of decline, and current inadequacies in support**
- Interpretations of the nature and causes of the decline in the adequacy of old age family support from past to present. (oldest generation only).
  - to what extent has there been a decline in adequacy of old age family support?
  - what is the nature of the decline?
  - what are the reasons for it?
- Perceptions and explanations of the current cases of apparent neglect and abandonment, or lack of support of older people by their families.

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*unless otherwise stated, the topics were explored with all three generations*
Further than that, I had no clear expectations, neither regarding the nature of any normative obligations on relatives, nor on the precise content or value basis of the obligation on children. I also had no expectations about the younger generations’ attitudes and motivations for providing support, nor in general about the patterns of support that respondents were to describe. In order to prevent my expectations from pre-determining the data I was to collect, I recorded these, before beginning the fieldwork, in a ‘reflexive journal’140, and, in a sense, consciously put them aside. I, moreover, planned questioning in such a way as to ensure that it remained open rather than simply seeking confirmation of my expectations. Thus, for example rather than directly asking whether there was a duty on children to support parents, I planned to ask only when respondents had mentioned such a duty as part of their account. Equally, for exploring whether there are conditions attached to this duty I would not ask “would you agree that a child’s duty is conditional upon the parent having cared for them in the past?”, but rather “you said it is the children’s duty to support parents because the parents looked after them in childhood - what if the parents did not look after them?”

**Process of interviewing**

The process of interviewing was carried out in such a way that it allowed a continuous comparison of respondents’ accounts within and across generations, and thus a progressive generation and verification of themes. All interviews with

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140 Throughout the fieldwork, as recommended for example by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I recorded in this reflexive journal my personal dispositions, speculations and growing insights, as well as any decisions taken regarding the process of data collection and analysis.
the oldest generation were conducted first, followed by all interviews with the middle, and then the youngest generation. This order was chosen because the oldest generations’ accounts of the past and the present were to serve as the basis against which to explore the experiences, views and attitudes of the second and third generation. Among the oldest generation, the three different socio-economic groups were interviewed in ‘blocks’, one after the other.

Interviewing thus began with the poor oldest generation respondents. Each interview was transcribed immediately, either on the same or the following day. Thus, every day of interviewing (usually 1 or 2 interviews per day) was followed by one or two days of transcription. This made it possible, on the one hand, to supplement the transcripts with notes about the dynamics or process of the actual interview (because the memory of the process was still ‘fresh’), and on the other to immediately review and assess the respondents’ accounts. For each interview a note was made of the main content of the respondent’s answers to each topic; and of the way in which this differed from or concurred with the account(s) of the previous respondent(s). In particular, care was taken to assess whether there were any systematic differences between gender, ethnic, and especially between socio-economic groups. The latter was, of course, facilitated by the fact that the three socio-economic groups were interviewed successively. Thus, when interviewing moved to the ‘middle income’ group, I already had a firm sense of the main features of the poor respondents’ accounts; and the same again when moving on to the rich respondents.

Where the respondents consistently described the same experiences, views or attitudes – for example the low cost of providing old age support in the past, or
emphasis on 'duty' as the main reason for providing such support – this eventually became an established theme in the particular topic. Where there were systematic differences in experiences or attitudes between groups – for example the differences between socio-economic groups regarding the types of old age support they provided in the past, or in terms of their ideas about the some of the sanctions attached to filial obligation norms – these became themes in their own right.\textsuperscript{141}

Whenever a respondent's account raised an aspect or factor that none of the previous respondents had mentioned, this became a potentially important issue which needed to be verified and explored further. One such example was the notion, raised by one respondent, that a new emphasis in Christian preaching had contributed to the decline in support. Another example was the idea that children's duty to support parents was conditional upon the parents having supported them to the best of their capacity, i.e. the idea of an underlying principle of 'incapacity vs. unwillingness'.

In order to verify and further explore such new aspects, they were taken back, as questions in follow-up interviews, to the respondents who raised them and to all respondents interviewed earlier. Usually a whole host of such questions were gathered and then asked in a follow-up interview. Equally, such new aspects were taken 'forward', by incorporating them into the framework of questions for all the respondents that were yet to be interviewed. In other words, there was an ongoing supplementation of interviews.

\textsuperscript{141} There were, in fact, very few such systematic differences. The homogeneity, especially of the older generation's accounts and views, was remarkable.
Care was taken to phrase the questions as openly as possible. Thus, for example I would not ask, "would you agree that the principle of incapacity vs. unwillingness holds?" - to which the respondents would merely have to answer yes or no. Rather, I would ask "what if parents did not support the children well, even though they had the means to?". If respondents, of their own accord, stated the same principle, I followed by asking them to explain why they thought in that way. After successive respondents repeatedly and consistently confirmed an issue in this way, it again became an established 'theme', and questioning could become more direct, simply asking for endorsement or otherwise.

Apart from verifying and exploring emerging issues within the topic in which they arose, they were also probed for in questions relating to other topics.

Taking again the above example, the principle of 'incapacity vs. unwillingness' was for instance explored further by investigating the extent to which it played a role in the respondents' personal assessments of their own or others' provision or receipt of old age filial support. Additionally, emerging issues were often discussed with key informants such as zonal leaders or others.

The continuous process of generation and verification of themes through the ongoing supplementation of past and yet to be held interviews, ensured that in the end - to a large extent - all themes were explored with all oldest generation respondents. The process ended (with the last follow-up interview) when no

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142 It was not possible to explore all themes to the same depth, with all respondents. One respondent, sadly, died before all the follow up interviews could be held. Another so persistently went off on tangents during the interviews that it was impossible - despite lengthy and repeated interviews - to cover all issues with her. A third respondent found no more time in her schedule to accommodate any further interviews. Some respondents, moreover, were simply less expansive in giving of their experiences and views and, inevitably, the breadth and depth to which issues could be explored with them was less than with most other respondents.
more new issues had been raised in the interviews, and when all the generated issues were sufficiently verified (or otherwise).

Once interviewing the oldest generation was completed, interviews with the middle generation began. Again, the three socio-economic groups were, as far as possible, interviewed in blocks, and the same process of immediate transcription, comparison of accounts and supplementation of interviews was used to generate and verify themes raised by the respondents.

At the same time, interviews with the middle generation involved a second level of verification, in which 'verification' was sought for some of the key themes raised by the older respondents. This verification across generations involved, on the one hand, putting specific themes - such as the principle of 'incapacity vs. unwillingness' - to the younger respondents (again in open questions) in order to see whether or not they, too, confirmed them. On the other hand, it involved 'testing' the older generation's explanations of the nature and causes of the decline, by examining to what extent they were actually borne out by the younger generation's attitudes, experiences and own interpretations of the current inadequacies in support. In other words, the oldest generation's explanations served as propositions or claims which needed to be examined and substantiated. Thus, for example, the older generation's claim that the decline in support was in part caused by a reduced fear of sanctions among the young was 'tested' by exploring how the middle generation respondents perceived and felt about such sanctions. Equally, the old people's view that a changed emphasis in

143 At times this strict order could not be kept because interview arrangements had to fit in with respondents' often tight and spontaneously changing schedules.
Christian conceptions had contributed to the decline was examined by exploring the middle generation's personal views and experiences of religion and the extent to which these, indeed, reflected such a change.

The process of testing the older generation’s claims did not just operate at the level of the whole generation, but also at the level of the individual parent - adult child dyads. Thus, an older respondent’s assessment of the support received from his or her child (especially where this support was perceived to be inadequate) was ‘tested’ by carefully exploring the child’s views on the adequacy of support they were giving, and on their parent’s assessment of it. Sometimes, if a child raised a key issue - for example if they described serious neglect by the parent – this was again explored with the parent in an extra follow up interview. Care was taken at all times not to breach confidentiality, not to reveal to one part of the dyad what the other’s views had involved.

In one case where the older parent and adult child presented clearly opposing judgements about the adequacy of support provided, their case was put - disguised as a vignette - to all of the older and middle generation respondents, in order to establish whether there were systematic generational differences on this.

Once interviews with the middle generation were completed, the views and attitudes of the youngest generation were explored, following the same procedure of generation and verification of themes within and across generations.

**Development of themes, pictures and storylines**

Throughout the process of data collection I developed my understanding of the emerging themes by recording, in the reflexive journal, my ideas and thoughts
about each theme and about possible links between them. This involved, amongst others, finding, where appropriate, conceptual labels (often using already existing concepts) for the themes. For example, respondents’ conceptions regarding the conditional nature of children’s duty were termed ‘principle of incapacity vs. unwillingness’. Their conceptions regarding the different obligations of children and relatives were termed ‘hierarchy of obligations’.

At times several themes were grouped together to represent a more overarching theme. For example all themes relating to respondents’ motives for providing support in the past, were grouped as representing the more overarching themes of ‘fear and ‘self-interest’. Where I had arrived at such an overarching interpretation, I fed this back to the respondents in interviews, or put it to key informants to see whether they felt I had made a right interpretation. I usually phrased these question by saying “I have been thinking about... do you think I am right in thinking that...”. For some of the established patterns or themes, moreover, – for example the congruence of Ga and Akan conceptions of filial obligation, or the notion of a change in the emphasis in Christian preaching – I sought further substantiation or confirmation from academic experts at the University of Ghana.

At times, when developing themes in this way, I would speculate on further, associated factors and consequently explore these both with respondents or other key informants. For example, when reflecting on the old respondents’ complaint

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144 These include most importantly Professor Gyekye in the Department of Philosophy, Professor Nukunya in the Department of Sociology and Reverend Atiemo in the Department of Religious Studies.
that young people's fear of authority had become much less, I speculated, (prompted by reading press reports condemning the widespread 'cruelty' to children, and of children suing their parents for neglect), about a possible role of a UN-propagated increasing emphasis on the 'rights of the child' in this. In this case I explored this 'hunch' first through informal conversations with a representative of the recently established Ghana National Commission on Children, and thereafter with the respondents.

Through the process of generating, verifying and developing themes I had developed, at the end of the period of data collection, a 'picture' of the key themes and patterns in each topic for each generation, and a sense of the links between them. I had also developed a sense of how certain themes, for example attitudes towards old age family support, differed between generations, and of the extent to which the oldest generation's views on the causes of decline in support were borne out by the younger generations' attitudes, views, and experiences. Finally, I had also begun to develop some very crude ideas about the two 'storylines' in answer to the main research question, why and how support was (more) adequately provided in the past, and why the decline in support has occurred.

Post hoc data analysis

The process of post hoc data analysis that began upon return to Britain and again did not follow any pre-existing protocol was geared, ultimately, to fully developing these two storylines. To begin with this involved preparing the 'building blocks' for the stories through a) grounding and further development of
each theme, and of links between themes within and across topics; b) systematic comparison of the three generations’ attitudes towards old age family support in order to identify continuities and changes in these; and c) systematic examination of how the oldest generation’s explanations of the nature and causes of decline related to, and were confirmed by, the perspectives of the two younger generations.

In order to ground and further develop the themes all transcripts were, as suggested by Tesch (1990), systematically labelled and read through repeatedly and carefully. Those of the oldest generation were read first, followed by those of the middle and then those of the younger generation. Wherever I was satisfied that a statement or passage expressed or represented a particular theme, this was noted in the margin, often together with some more detailed explanation or thoughts. At the same time each theme was noted and outlined on a sheet (themes grouped by topics) and the location and source of any relevant quotation was noted under it. Where a quote seemed particularly important, it was recorded on the sheet.

By carefully reading the respondents’ verbal accounts and paying attention to the detail of their wording and ways of expressing things, it was often possible to develop a more fine-tuned understanding of the particular theme or feature and of connections between themes. Where it seemed useful, themes were developed further conceptually by drawing, in an eclectic manner, on existing concepts or constructs from the sociological, anthropological, philosophical, or social gerontological literature.
Themes that specifically related to the past and present economic context of support, were further developed and substantiated with data from the literature on wider social and economic trends in Ghana. Themes relating to explanations of the current inadequacies in support were further substantiated with information gained from the four cases of ‘dumped’ older people. Finally, those ‘themes’ that related to systematic gender, ethnic or socio-economic group differences within one generation, were grounded and substantiated by methodically tabulating and comparing all relevant statements and thus identifying exactly the nature and extent of these differences.

Tabulation and comparison of statements were also used to systematically compare the three generations’ attitudes towards old age family support. This made it possible to identify exactly where there have been changes – or continuities – in attitudes over time. These changes and continuities became key themes in their own right.

Finally, tabulation and juxtaposition of relevant statements were used to systematically establish how the oldest generation’s interpretations of the decline related to (and to what extent they were confirmed by) the younger generations’ own views and attitudes. The identified relationships between the interpretations of old and young again became key themes.

**Writing the accounts**

By linking together these building blocks it became possible to generate the two accounts about why and how old age support was provided (more adequately) in the past and about what changes have led to the decline in this support.
The first account, describing the past basis of support, was generated by linking together the themes raised by the oldest generation in their accounts of their past experiences of and attitudes to providing support. In character it thus resembled a combination of life and oral history\textsuperscript{145}. The second account, describing the causes and implications of the decline in support, used as a starting point the older respondents’ explanations of this decline, but developed and qualified these a) in light of the themes raised by the younger generations’ accounts of their experiences, views and attitudes, and b) in light of the identified changes and continuities in attitudes regarding old age family support.

The main analytical ‘challenge’ in developing these accounts was to bridge the key conceptual gaps in the understanding of the basis of support and causes of decline identified in the literature. Thus, when describing the motivational basis of support in the past and present, the key challenge was to elucidate the interrelationship between personal relationship factors such as affection or reciprocity, and structural obligations in compelling people to support older parents and relatives. Similarly, the key challenge in describing the overall basis of support in the past was to explain what the interrelationship was between individuals’ motives and the wider socio-economic context, or as Ryff (1986) puts it, between “...the inner experiences and intentional activities of the individual [and] the options and limits of the surrounding world..”(p.62), in ensuring that old age family support was (more) adequately provided.

\textsuperscript{145} Life history is an approach which explores an individual’s life and the way in which it reflects cultural features of the society, personal themes, institutional features and social histories (see e.g. Cole, 1994). Oral history is described as an approach in which individuals’ personal recollections of events, their causes and effects are gathered (see e.g. Creswell, 1998).
Finally, when describing the causes of the decline in support, the task was to show how cultural and material changes have interacted in bringing about the decline, i.e. to elucidate the link between materialist and ‘idealist’ causes of change. Thus, both accounts, though grounded in ‘thick descriptions’\textsuperscript{146} of the respondents’ subjective perspectives and meanings (using wherever possible verbatim quotations), have ultimately also involved an interpretation or explanation, in a sense, ‘imposed’ by me, the researcher. They thus represent what Giddens (1984) has termed a ‘double hermeneutic’, i.e. the notion that an understanding of social phenomena involves both an understanding of the ‘meaningful social world as constituted by lay actors’, and ‘meta-languages invented by sociologists and social scientists to explain social action’\textsuperscript{147}.

4.6 Issues of verification

A key consideration was thus the question of ‘verification’, of how to ensure, throughout the process of data collection and analysis, that the generated accounts reflect and represent as accurately as possible the ‘reality’ of those researched. The issue of verification in qualitative research is a complex issue

\textsuperscript{146} Denzin (1989) describes thick description as a narrative which “presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships...[and] evokes emotionality and self feelings...” (p.83).

\textsuperscript{147} This of course reflects the fact that this analysis, like qualitative research in general, embraces, as Nelson \textit{et al.}(1992) put it, a tension between “...on the one hand....a broad, interpretive, postmodern, feminist and critical sensibility [and] on the other hand.....more narrowly defined positivist, postpositivist, humanistic and naturalistic conceptions of human experience and its analysis” (p.4).

This tension reflects an underlying ontological position which encompasses both an interpretivist perspective, holding that reality is subjective and multiple as seen by the participants in the study, but also a realist position, which holds that there \textit{are} regularities or underlying patterns to be found in the physical as in the social world, and that research can attempt to capture these (see Huberman and Miles, 1994). This latter stance is, of course, rejected by post-modern perspectives (see e.g. Bloland, 1995)
and, as Creswell, (1998) points out, a multiplicity of perspectives currently exist regarding the importance and definition of and procedures for establishing verification. These include views which argue that verification of qualitative research needs to involve the equivalent of traditional quantitative approaches to validity (e.g. LeCompte and Goetz, 1982) as well as perspectives which reject positivistic terms as inappropriate for qualitative research and advocate alternative means of verification. Lincoln and Guba (1985), for example, arguing from a naturalistic perspective, propose the criteria of 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability', and 'confirmability'\textsuperscript{148} to establish the 'trustworthiness' of a qualitative study (p.300).

Eisner (1991) similarly focuses on establishing the 'credibility' of a study, in terms of 'structural corroboration', 'consensual validation' and 'referential adequacy' (p.110). Verification has also been reconceptualised within a post-modern framework. Richardson (1994), for example, has proposed the metaphor of a 'crystal' which deconstructs the traditional idea that there is a 'single truth', and provides a 'deepened, complex, [and] thoroughly partial understanding of the topic' (p.522). Wolcott (1990) has rejected the notion altogether, arguing that verification neither guides nor informs, but distracts from the aim of qualitative research, which is to 'understand'\textsuperscript{149}.

In this study, unlike these post-modern perspectives, verification has been important to ensuring the credibility or trustworthiness of its findings and

\textsuperscript{148} They see these terms as the naturalist's version of 'internal validity', 'external validity', 'reliability' and 'objectivity' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.300).

\textsuperscript{149} There is no scope here to engage in a more detailed discussion of the differing positions on verification within the qualitative paradigm. For a review of these differing perspectives see, for example, Creswell, (1998).
interpretations. To this end, a set of five verification procedures from the range of currently recommended measures was selected and incorporated into the design of data collection and analysis (see Creswell, 1998). These strategies aimed to ensure, on the one hand, that the evidence collected was solid and corroborated, and, on the other hand, that interpretations were 'accurate' in the light of my own inevitable values or 'biases'. The use of such a combination of strategies has been suggested amongst others by Huberman and Miles (1994) and Marshall and Rossman (1995).

1) In order to generate corroborating evidence from different angles, several different sources and methods of data gathering (i.e. in-depth interviews and informal conversations with a spectrum of respondents and key informants, as well as literature research), were used. Such a triangulation has been recommended amongst others by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1988), Patton (1990), Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) and Huberman and Miles (1994).

2) Through the prolonged engagement in the field and the close and repeated interaction with the respondents, it was possible to 'learn the culture', as well as recognise and guard against misinformation introduced either by the respondents or myself. Such an intensive engagement in the field has been suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1988), Fettermann (1989) and Erlandson et al. (1993)

150 The terms verification, credibility and trustworthiness, rather than 'validity' are used to underscore qualitative research as a distinct and legitimate mode of inquiry in its own right.

151 Such a selective strategy has been suggested by Creswell (1998). He recommends that any given study employs at least two verification procedures.
3) In order to check for any possible effect of myself or the interview situation on the information given by the respondents, the context and dynamics of the interview were recorded for each interview. Such a check has been suggested, for example, by Huberman and Miles (1994). Where a possible effect was suspected this was, where possible, further explored with the respondent in a subsequent interview and/or considered when analysing the accounts.

4) In order to verify my emerging interpretations in the field, these were fed back to the respondents as questions in interviews and/or discussed with key informants. Such member checks have been recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1988), Erlandson et al. (1993) and Miles and Huberman (1994). Unfortunately (given financial constraints and logistical problems regarding mail and the illiteracy of some of the poor respondents) member checks could not be carried out with interpretations emerging during the post hoc phase of the analysis, including the final accounts.

5) Finally, in order to be aware of any influence my own values or biases had in shaping the research and analysis, and especially to prevent my prior assumptions from pre-determining the nature of the data collected, I aimed throughout, to cultivate a reflexive stance. Translating this into practice, meant, at the outset of the investigation, clarifying, making explicit and, in a sense, setting aside any prior conceptions and expectations. Throughout the process of fieldwork it meant recording any emerging dispositions or attitudes, reflecting on how these affected my understanding and aiming always to keep questioning as open as possible. The importance of such a reflexivity has been widely emphasised, amongst others by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1988),
Hammersley (1992), Altheide and Johnson (1994) and Huberman and Miles (1994).

4.7 Ethical considerations

A final, important consideration in conducting this study was the issue of ethics. Throughout, the investigation aimed to adhere to two generally agreed upon ethical standards in qualitative research.

First, rejecting the traditional view of respondents as 'subjects' (see Oakley, 1981; Reason, 1988), an attempt was always made to maintain an open and honest exchange with the respondents and to forge with them '...relationships of respect and trust that were non-coercive and not based on deception' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.22). In practice, this meant being open about the aims, interests, background and procedure of the research and the questions asked, and only interviewing people if they expressed a positive interest or willingness to play a part in the study. It meant, moreover, respecting a respondent's reluctance to talk about a particular issue and maintaining, at all times, strict confidentiality about the accounts people gave.

Second, recognising the importance of *reciprocity* between researcher and participant (see Lincoln, 1995), I aimed to ensure throughout that the respondents (and helpers) got at least some return or benefit from agreeing to participate in

152 A further verification procedure, which this study will, of course be ultimately subjected to, is that of an *external audit*, in which an external auditor, with no connection to the study, examines and assesses both the process and product of the research (see e.g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Erlandson *et al.*, 1993; Miles and Huberman, 1994).
the study. This was particularly important in view of the poverty faced by many of the respondents and the HelpAge zonal leaders themselves.

Thus, apart from reciprocating in less tangible ways by listening and showing sympathy to respondents (many of whom seldom have the chance of voicing their views and concerns), I frequently gave moderate gifts of money to all poor respondents. Additionally, I helped two of the zonal leaders in cash or kind and supported their zones collectively by raising funds for them whilst on a trip back to the UK. For HelpAge Ghana as a whole and for the geriatric patients in the mental hospital, I organised a donation of basic drugs from Germany.

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153 I usually did *not* give the money after an interview so as to avoid the impression of ‘paying’ for the interview. Rather, I gave it on other occasions when I visited the zone, or on days when the particular respondent was not interviewed. Monetary gifts are fully appropriate in Ghana where, unlike in the West, the giving of money is a much appreciated and often used gesture of showing respect and recognition.
INTRODUCTION TO THE EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Premise of the analysis

The main premise of this analysis is that, on the whole, old age family support in the past was at least adequate – in the sense of being sufficient to meet the needs and requirements of older people – but that now it no longer is.

This premise was unanimously confirmed by all older respondents:

"I can say without doubt that the condition of older people is worse now than formerly." (Mr. Okine)

"I am not saying that the whole system has broken down completely, but what I am saying is that when you compare what used to take place things have definitely gone worse." (Mr. Brew)

"... in the olden days even older people who didn't have children would be alright, they would receive help from relatives, but these days, even those who have children find it difficult." (Mr. Brew)

Time period captured by the analysis

The time span from past to present that this analysis captures covers the period beginning from the oldest generation’s recollections of their youth and their provision of old age family support to aged parents or relatives up to 1997/98 when the fieldwork was carried out.

Given that the old respondents’ birth dates ranged from 1914 to 1932, the past captured by their recollections roughly embraces the period from the 1920s to the 1960s. The crucial period covering their experiences of providing support to their aged parents and relatives is narrower, spanning roughly from the 1940s to
the 1960s. Thus, for the most part, the past explored in this analysis still lay in the colonial period, which ended in 1957.

It is important to note that this period of the past was one in which the most fundamental factors of change – Christianity, colonialism, formal education and the introduction of a money-using economy – had already impacted on Ghanaian society for some long time. Thus, the recent decline in old age support cannot be attributed to the introduction of these factors per se. These factors are generally seen as having begun their impact on Ghanaian (and other African) societies around the end of the 19th century. Thus, the year 1900 is customarily taken as the baseline of change (Rwezaura, 1989; Nukunya, 1992b).

Around this time effective colonial rule was established in Ghana and other African societies. Fostered and supported by the colonial administration, the other main factors of change began to extend their influence.

Whilst colonialism was directly responsible for the introduction of a money-using economy, it merely formalised and supported the expansion of Christianity and education. Both had long been present in Ghana.

References to traditional society in the literature thus usually refer to societies before the advent of colonialism etc. (Nukunya, 1992b), though many commentators, for example Apt, talk about traditional society without making such a specification.

In Ghana, British colonial rule effectively began in 1874, in parts of the territory then referred to as 'colony'. In 1896 it was further extended to cover the Ashanti region and in 1889 to what was then referred to as the Northern Territories. By the turn of the century all of Ghana was under effective colonial rule (Nukunuya, 1992b).

154 Initially an effort was made in the interviews to pin down more precisely dates or ages in the respondents' recollections. However, this proved fruitless as the older people typically did not remember or had never known them in the first place.

155 References to traditional society in the literature thus usually refer to societies before the advent of colonialism etc. (Nukunya, 1992b), though many commentators, for example Apt, talk about traditional society without making such a specification.

156 In Ghana, British colonial rule effectively began in 1874, in parts of the territory then referred to as 'colony'. In 1896 it was further extended to cover the Ashanti region and in 1889 to what was then referred to as the Northern Territories. By the turn of the century all of Ghana was under effective colonial rule (Nukunuya, 1992b).
The introduction of Christianity began in earnest in the early 19th century\textsuperscript{157}. formal classroom education in the latter half of the 19th century\textsuperscript{158}.

Thus, for example, all older respondents had been born Christians, like their parents, and many were educated as their parents had been. However, the influence of Christianity or education in the past was not complete. There were still many (in particular, women) who were not educated and the traditional belief system, practised by ‘pagans’, continued to co-exist with Christianity\textsuperscript{159}.

\textsuperscript{157} Although Christian activities and contacts began much earlier, the first churches to be established were the Presbyterian churches, founded by the Basle missionaries in 1829, followed by the Methodist churches in 1835, and much later, the Roman Catholic churches in 1880 and the Anglican churches with colonisation (Nukunya, 1992). For a long time these four churches remained the only ones known in Ghana.

\textsuperscript{158} The earliest educational attempts in Ghana were made by European merchants – the Portuguese as early as the 15th and 16th centuries, and later by the Dutch and Danes in the 17th and 18th centuries. The first British school was founded in 1751 and was remarkably similar to the English charity schools of the same period (Foster, 1965). The curriculum of these early schools was mainly reading, writing, sometimes arithmetic and most importantly, biblical instruction. In the 19th century the missionaries, especially the Basle and Wesleyan missionaries, expanded the introduction of formal education – their main aim being proselytisation. In 1821 the British Crown added to this expansion by setting up a chain of government schools, directly financed from public funds (Foster, 1965). Despite this expansion, by 1850 the majority of the population was not yet convinced of the benefits of Western education. There was a widespread sense that ‘... school was a good thing for white men but not for black’ (Foster, 1965, p.59). It was only in the second half of the 19th century, with territorial expansion of British control, that there was a more significant, though by no means dramatic, extension of educational facilities from 1850-1900, and again from 1901-50. However, it was only after 1940 that there was a significant increase in the demand for primary and secondary schools – most markedly in the growing coastal towns. The attraction of education lay in the fact that it allowed access to the new employment opportunities (typically clerical work) that were created by the European enterprises in the cocoa trade and colonial administration. These ‘white collar’, salaried jobs were typically much better remunerated and seen as more prestigious than the traditional occupations of farming and fishing. Thus, formal education became first and foremost a vehicle for realising one’s economic and social aspirations (Nukunya, 1992b). The expansion of education continued after independence, with President Nkrumah making primary and middle school education compulsory in 1961.

\textsuperscript{159} At present around 60% of the population in Ghana are Christians (40% Protestants and 20% Catholics), 16% are Muslims (especially in the northern regions) and 35% follow traditional religions (von Baratta, 2000).
Structure of the analysis

The empirical analysis spans three chapters. The first two chapters, Chapters Five and Six, examine the basis of old age support in the past. Chapter Seven explores and analyses the causes of the decline in support in recent times.

The basis of old age family support in the past

The exploration of the basis of support in the past begins, in Chapter Five, with a detailed examination of the normative prescriptions that underpinned the provision of old age family support in the past, norms about who should do what for older people and why. This was made the starting point, because these norms were the primary reference point for the respondents in describing their past attitudes to and experiences of providing old age support. In addition, these norms are a key for understanding not just why support was provided in the past, but also why and how the adequacy of support has declined. This chapter thus provides a foundation or frame of reference for the remainder of the analysis.

Chapter Six then goes on to explore in more specific terms how and why old age family support was provided in the past. Thus, it examines first the actual patterns which this support took – who provided what for older people – and the costs of providing such support. It then explores and analyses the motivations and reasons that people had for providing old age support.

160 This was not an unexpected finding for it confirmed the impression I had gathered during the pilot visit, as well as my own personal experience of the Nigerian context. Moreover, the centrality of the norms in understanding the past basis of support clearly fits in with the accounts of the traditional basis of support in the literature, which, as shown in Chapter Three, portray them as the key factor compelling old age support in Ghana.
Finally, drawing together the key themes of this analysis it describes why the system of old age family support worked in the past, why, on the whole, children and other relatives provided sufficient support to meet old people’s needs and requirements.

*The causes of the decline in support*

Having established the basis of old age family support in the past, Chapter Eight goes on to examine the factors that have led to the decline in support over the past decades. Whilst the older generation’s explanations are the basis for this exploration, they are corroborated, qualified and interpreted in the light of the experiences and attitudes of the middle and youngest generations.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE NORMS UNDERPINNING THE PROVISION OF PAST FAMILY SUPPORT FOR OLDER PEOPLE

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the norms about who should provide what for an older person, which underpinned the provision of old age family support in the past.

It explores, on the one hand, the content and basis of these normative prescriptions and, on the other hand, the sanctions that were attached to non-conformity with them.

The sources for this exploration are the older respondents' normative conceptions about old age support. Although the respondents expressed these conceptions in the present, they all confirmed that they reflected the norms that prevailed, that were held by themselves and others in the past, when they were young.161

5.2 The content of the normative prescriptions

The first thing to note about the respondents' normative conceptions about old age support was their striking homogeneity and agreement. Their answers to questions as to who should provide what for older people and why had almost a

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161 When exploring normative prescriptions a point was made of asking the respondents explicitly whether or not their conceptions represented those they or people in general also held in the past. For example, after a respondent had given his/her view in answer to the question “who should provide support for an old person?” he or she was asked a question to the effect of: “Is this what people also believed in the past when you were young?” and/or “Did people believe something different then?”.

All respondents, without exception, confirmed that their normative conceptions were the same as those held by them and others in the past, that this was what people believed. “It was the same in the past … that is what we met” (Mr. Okine).
standard format, and there was an absence of any systematic gender, ethnic\textsuperscript{162} or socio-economic group differences in normative conceptions.

Their accounts strongly suggested that, in the past, the normative prescriptions were clearly defined, recognised and known. They added up to something which people knew and had access to. They knew what their duties and rules of conduct were, they knew how things 'ought' to be. In the same vein, people knew what the consequences were of (not) conforming with the normatively prescribed responsibilities. These consequences were taken as a fact, a given, as part of the order of life.

5.2.1 Who should provide support for an older person?

All respondents unanimously asserted that the principal normative duty to provide support to an older person in the past lay with the person's adult children.

"It is the duty of the children to look after the old person because he or she looked after them." (Mrs. Tettey)

"Oh it is the children who must look after the old man or woman." (Mrs. Nima)

"The old person's children should take care of him or her. It is their duty." (Mr. Mills)

\textsuperscript{162} The similarity of Ga and Akan moral or normative conceptions in general, and especially regarding old age support, was confirmed by Professor Gyekye (Department of Philosophy), and Professor Nukunya (Department of Sociology) at the University of Ghana.
5.2.2 What should adult children do for their older parents?

Just as it was clear that it was the prime duty of children to provide support to aged parents, so it was clear what the content of their duty was. It was to provide material (financial) and domestic support to the parents. Children were supposed to cater for the older person’s basic needs:

"You must be sure that they [the parents] are fed, you must be sure that they receive medicine when they are sick, you must be sure that they are properly clothed, you must be sure that they have shelter." (Mr. Prempeh)

"... if the old parents have needs ... the children ... must try and meet these needs financially, also if the old person is sick they should try and arrange for help." (Mr. Brew)

Slightly different duties were typically assigned to daughters and to sons, undoubtedly reflecting the traditional differences in social roles and opportunities of women and men. The duty of the daughters was to provide the older person with food, wash his or her clothes (or help otherwise in the house), and, if they could, to provide money. The duty of the sons was to provide the principal financial support for the older person.

"The daughter has to feed the old person, wash the clothes and also provide money. The son must provide money for whatever he or she needs." (Mr. Thompson)

"The daughters should give you food to eat, and help you with the bath and your clothes. When you are sick they should take you to the health centre with their own money. The sons should give you money, they should provide for your needs." (Mrs. King)

The respondents’ exclusive mention of domestic and material assistance was striking. It suggests that the dimensions of emotional support or of long-term caregiving for the chronically ill – both prominent in the West – did not feature, in the past, as important components of old age filial support in Ghana.

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The duty on children to provide material and domestic support to parents was part of, or inextricably linked with, an underlying paramount duty to show respect and honour to one's parents.

"If you are the child you have to show respect to your parents." (Mr. Thompson)

"You must honour your parents." (Mrs. King)

Usually, this fundamental duty prescribed, more than anything, the underlying attitude and behaviour a daughter or son had to show their parents. However, in situations where the adult child did not routinely provide for the older parent's material needs, for example, because the parent was self-sufficient, this took on specific significance. It meant that the child had a duty to show respect through token gifts or visits:

"From time to time you have to go and give something to your father or mother ... tradition demands that from time to time we should sort of show our regard or respect to our parents. I mean it is not so prominent in the case between a child and a father but traditionally when you are going to a chief, it is a chief, so you have to bring something. This sort of thing is in the mind of every Ghanaian, even though between a father and a child it is not so prominent as between a chief and subject...." (Mr. Thompson)

"Even if your father has enough to eat – you still have to send your contribution and show your respect. It is an obligation. Don't say because your father has money you won't send anything. You send money. Because he has invested in you so his investment should yield dividends." (Mr. Prempeh)

The comparison with respect owed to a chief, drawn by Mr. Thompson, captures well the nature or spirit of the respect and reverence owed to parents, of which the duty to provide material and domestic support was an obvious extension.
5.3 The basis of children’s normative duty to provide support

Why did children have a duty to honour and support their aged parents?

The respondents clearly indicated that the normative duty on children to honour and support their parents arose from two overlapping, yet distinct, grounds. On the one hand, it arose out of reciprocity, as repayment for the care that parents had given them in childhood. On the other hand, it arose as an absolute religious prescription, decreed by God.

Reciprocity

Most obviously the duty on children to support their parents in old age was rooted in reciprocity. It was their duty to repay the care they had received from their parents in childhood:

“It is the duty of the children to look after the old person because he or she looked after them.” (Mrs. Tettey; emphasis added)

“It is the children’s duty because the parents brought them into this world, and cared for them in infancy.” (Mrs. Osu)

Many illustrated this by quoting the proverb that, as we have seen, has also been cited in the literature (e.g. Apt, 1996), and encapsulates the element of reciprocity:

“Oh but the thing is just natural, they have trained you from infancy till you grow, so now you have to take care of them when they are old. In our language we have a proverb that if your parents take care of you to grow your teeth, you too have to take care of them when their teeth are falling out...” (Mr. Mills)

“Definitely it is the duty of the children to support the older person, because they looked after them. You see, we have a proverb here that if your parents looked after you when your teeth were growing, you must also now look after them when your teeth are falling out.” (Mr. Hutton)
The sense which clearly emerged from their accounts, as the two quotations above indicate, was that this reciprocity was seen as a natural part of the order of life. Implicit in this was, of course, the complementary duty of parents to support their dependent children:

"It is the parents' duty to look after their children." (Mrs. Nima)

"It is the duty of the parents to cater for the children." (Mr. Akpan)

"It is the parents who must look after the children." (Mr. Azu)

In effect, children therefore had a duty towards their parents because their parents had fulfilled their duty towards them.

Just as children's duty towards their parents involved first and foremost material support, so did the duty of parents toward their children. Again, the dimension of emotional care and support was apparently of little significance. All respondents mentioned only that it was the parents' duty to feed and clothe the children, and to 'set them up', i.e. to enable the children to support themselves and 'be somebody'. After that, they 'had finished' 163:

"The mother should provide food for them, clothes and also money for what they need, the father must provide money, educate the children and train them, then when they are ready he has to help them find a business to do, after that he is finished." (Mr. Mensah)

"The mother should feed the children, give them clothes and money for school. The father should provide money for their education and also their food and their clothes. Then the parents have to help the child learn a trade or find work to do, so that they can start to earn their own money. When the daughter has brought forth [given birth] the mother should help her with the children. 164" (Mrs. Nima)

163 This definite boundedness of parents' duty – at least in theory – which meant that after having 'set the child up' (apart from the mother's duty to help with births and childcare), the parents had, to use Mr. Mensah's expression, 'finished' their duty, seems to contrast with contemporary Western conceptions where a parent's duty is said never to end.

164 Although both mothers and fathers principally had the same duty, there was slightly more emphasis on fathers providing the bulk of the money, whereas mothers, although also required to provide money, had to provide in a practical way. This difference again reflected the gender differences in social and economic roles and opportunities.
“The parents should look after the child, clothe it, feed it, send it to school so that this child can be somebody....” (Mr. Akpan)

Although most respondents mentioned education as part of the parents’ duty, they emphasised that, in the past, this was not yet vital.

“By that time taking your child to school was not a necessity. You could reach somewhere without education.” (Mr. Prempeh)

A God-given duty

In addition to, and perhaps more fundamental than its rooting in reciprocity, the duty of children towards their parents was grounded in religion. It was a God-given law, most directly expressed in the fifth commandment: “Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days maybe long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Exodus, 20:12)\(^{165}\). This religious basis was emphasised time and again by the respondents\(^{166}\):

“You know that it is your duty to honour your parents. You must look after your parents. The almighty God will let you know that it is your mother and your father and you must respect them. The almighty God gives it to us human beings.” (Mr. Mensah)

\(^{165}\)The original purpose of this commandment was to protect parents from being driven out of the home or abused after they could no longer work (Reverend Dr. Angus Stuart, University of Bristol, Anglican Chaplain, personal communication).

\(^{166}\)The weight of the religious prescription must be understood in the light of, and as an expression of, the intensely religious character of Ghanaians and Ghanaian life, and the fact that religion has always pervaded every aspect of life. This, what Lucas (1970) described as the “absorbing character” of religion, has been consistently noted by many scholars studying Ghanaian culture, since the time of the early missionaries who remarked that the “… the natives … have not only a very real religion: but – in a way which cannot be said of European races – they live their religion; it is their life….” (Melland, 1922). This intense religiousness, as Assimeng (1986), and Gyekye (1996) have noted, continues to persist, now expressed mostly in Christianity. My own impressions fully endorse Gyekye’s and the other descriptions. The importance which religion and God – in this case Christianity – plays in the lives of the Ghanaians, was one of the things that struck me most. It is in total contrast to the minor role it plays in the West. There were hardly any conversations where reference was not made to God or to some other religious meanings.
“If you fear God you know that you have to take care of your father and your mother.” (Mr. Mills)

“If you have the fear of God, you know that you must respect your parents and you know it is your duty to look after your parents when they are old.” (Mrs. Ward)

Mr. Mensah: “Your parents – father and your mother, they are just like the almighty God. They brought you into the world. You must respect and honour them.”

Q: “How did you get to learn that?”
Mr. Mensah: “I read it in the book [the bible] and I looked over the world, how things are going, so I saw people’s habits. You can learn something from a book or from watching the world, so you see what people are doing.” (text in parenthesis added)

As Mr. Mensah’s comment indicates, the honour owed to one’s parents arose from the very fact that they were the channel through which God had given one life, the very fact that they were one’s parents.

Thus, in contrast to the proverb, this Christian duty did not involve a direct element of reciprocity or repayment. The commandment was not ‘honour your father and mother because they cared for you’; rather it was ‘honour your parents’ full stop. Although one could argue that an element of reciprocity did exist in that a son or daughter was repaying the fact that their parents had given them life (and in the case of mothers gone through pregnancy and labour), the more important aspect is that the care or support they provided were of minor significance compared with this duty.

Although the respondents themselves located the religious basis of the duty to honour parents in the Christian code, they emphasised that this duty was not just a Christian prescription, but was equally enshrined in the traditional belief system.

“Oh it is the same in the traditional custom, the pagans too believed this thing, not just the Christians – because the thing is natural. You know that they have brought you
forth, your mother has borne you ... so you know you must respect them.....” (Mr. Mills)

Again, the traditional reverence towards aged parents was bound up with the fact that they were a person’s link to the spiritual world, most directly to the ancestors. This complex set of conceptions goes beyond the core thrust of this thesis and the reader is referred to Dovlo (1994).

**Status duty and the norm of reciprocity**

The qualitative difference between the two grounds from which the duty on children toward their parents arose - encapsulated on the one hand by the proverb, and on the other by the fifth commandment - is crucial, not only for understanding the provision of old age support in the past, but also for

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167 The traditional Ghanaian belief system, which the missionaries attempted to eradicate, in fact shares some fundamental elements with Christianity, most importantly the belief in a supreme God.

This was part of a three-fold core belief in a supreme being or God, in the ancestors, and in a host of lesser deities and spirits. The supreme being, or God (Onyame in the Akan languages, and Nyonmo in Ga) was, just as in Christianity, believed to be good, omnipotent, and the creator of the world. Thus, as Gyekye (1996) notes, “... when the European missionaries entered Africa to begin their religious work they found that they did not need to convert the African people to a belief in the existence of one God or in a life after death, for both of these fundamentals were already deeply rooted...”(p.4) The ancestors, who came next in importance to the supreme being, were those who (by virtue of their deserving conduct on earth) had departed into a spiritual state of existence. They were believed to be everywhere, at any time (Opoku, 1978, p.155). The deities and spirits (e.g. the spirit of the earth or the water) were believed to be created by God to fulfil specific functions, and did not come into existence by their own volition. As creatures, they were believed to share the limitations and attributes of all other creatures (they were either male or female, good or evil), and their powers were only limited to these specific functions. Unlike in the Christian belief system, the traditional Ghanaian moral code was not prescribed by God, although it was enforced by him and the other supernatural powers. Rather, as Gyekye (1987) has argued, the traditional moral code has a humanistic origin. What is considered good and right (and thus the moral rules of conduct) is that which promotes the welfare of the society, solidarity and harmony in human relationships.(For a full description of the traditional religious belief system see Gyekye, 1987 and 1996, or Opoku, 1978.)

168 The fact that a duty to honour one’s parents was a fundamental part of the traditional as well as the Christian belief system, despite their different origins, meant that when people converted to Christianity, the content of this prescription remained the same. What changed was the source and reference of the prescription.

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understanding the changes that have underpinned the decline in support. It is thus worth pinpointing this difference in more general terms, drawing on concepts addressed by Gouldner (1960, 1973) in his classical discussion of the norm of reciprocity. Using these concepts, the duty on children to support parents in the past can be seen as based on a God-given status duty and at the same time, on the norm of reciprocity.

Status duties, according to Gouldner, arise "... by virtue of the socially standardised roles (people) play" (1960, p.171). They are "binding in their own right" because they "possess a kind of prima facie legitimacy for properly socialised group members" (1960, p.175). Thus, the status duty of children to honour and satisfy their parents—encapsulated in the fifth commandment—meant that children had a duty towards their parents because they were the parents. As already mentioned, the crucial aspect of this duty was the absence of any direct element of reciprocity or repayment for care received from the parents.

At the same time—and encapsulated in the proverb—the duty of children to support their aged parents was grounded in the moral norm of reciprocity, which, as Gouldner argues, is present in all moral codes and holds that "people should help those who help them". Adding an extra compulsory element to the reciprocal duty on children, the norm of reciprocity also stipulates "if others have fulfilled their status duties to you,...you in turn have an obligation to fulfil your status duties to them" (1960, p.176).
Reciprocity and the clause of 'conditionality'

One crucial feature of this reciprocal basis of children’s duty to support their parents is that it entails a clause of ‘conditionality’: ‘if your parents fulfilled their duty to you, then you must honour your duty to them’, or, conversely ‘if your parents did not fulfil their duty towards their children, then the children also have no duty to look after them in old age’. This clause was stated by almost all respondents:

“If you the parents failed to do your obligation the children too don’t have an obligation to take care of you.” (Mr. Hutton)

“If the parents didn’t look after the children, the children don’t have to look after them.” (Mr. Akpan)

What became clear when exploring the respondents’ understanding of this conditionality clause, was that it operated on the distinction between unwillingness and incapacity\(^{169}\). This meant that what mattered in determining whether parents had done their duty towards the child (and thus whether or not the child had a duty towards them) was whether their lack of care or support was due to an incapacity or an unwillingness on their part.

Thus, in principle, as long as the parents had been incapable of doing more than they did for the child, as long as they had done their best for the child, their failure to provide support did not matter. They had fulfilled their duty and hence the child still had a reciprocal duty to care for the parents.

\(^{169}\) This emerged when I attempted to explore how much parents had to have provided in order to confer a reciprocal duty on the child. For example, if they looked after the child when small but failed to ‘set the child up’, did the child still have a duty towards the parents?
Conversely, if the parents had failed to provide fully for their children because they were unwilling to do more, then they had not fulfilled their duty. The child consequently had no reciprocal duty to look after them:

“You see, you always have to consider whether the person was in a position to do it. If the parent was not in a position to do it, then still the children have a duty to look after him or her. But if he had the means and he didn’t do it, then people will know and the children won’t feel it is their duty....” (Mr. Prempeh)

Mr. Mills: “If the parents don’t get the means then it is still the children’s duty but if the parents had the means and they don’t help the child go to school, then the children too don’t have a duty.”

Q: “They don’t have a duty?”

Mr. Mills: “No. Because the parents could have helped but they didn’t.”

Q: “Even if the parents cared for them when they were small?”

Mr. Mills: “Yes, even then. They had the means but they didn’t help, so the children too don’t have a duty.”

“If the parents didn’t have the means to look after their children properly then the children still have to care for them, but if the parents have the means and they don’t do it, it is no obligation on the children.” (Mrs. Achim)

This meant that children had, strictly speaking, a right to withhold support from unsupportive parents:

“If the old person didn’t look after the children, they can do it, they can say ‘no you didn’t care for us so we won’t care for you’. They can say it and nobody will say anything....” (Mr. Okine)

It is thus interesting to briefly consider whether there existed what Gouldner (1960, 1973) terms a norm of retaliation. Such a norm of retaliation would be something like ‘do not help those who haven’t helped you”, or, as Gouldner put it, “do not help hurters” (1973, p.288).

It seems clear that the clause of conditionality did not involve such a direct norm of retaliation, for its prescription was not ‘don’t support your parents’, but rather, ‘you do not have to’.

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170 Gouldner, in fact, poses the existence of such a norm as an empirical question.
Although the clause of conditionality was endorsed by almost all older respondents, a few, significantly, rejected it. They emphasised the absolutely binding nature of the status duty that children had towards their parents, regardless of how the parents had treated them:

Mrs. Kwei:  
Q:  
Mrs. Kwei:

"If the parents didn’t look after the children because they weren’t able to do it, they can’t be blamed, but if they had the means and they didn’t do it, then it is bad.”

"So if this is the case, do the children still have a duty to support the parents in old age?"

"Yes. They should still look after them because they brought them forth."

"The children still have a duty to support their old father or mother … because they are their father and their mother, they brought them into this life.” (Mr. Mensah)

The conflicting positions regarding the clause of conditionality, depending on whether the emphasis is on the reciprocal basis of children’s duty to support parents or their absolute status duty, are crucial. As we shall see, they lie at the heart of understanding the patterns of support in the past and some of the causes of the decline.

A second clause: ‘Give according to your capacity’

In addition to the conditionality clause, the duty of children to support their parents was qualified by a second clause. This, rather obvious, proviso held that children owed support to their parents only to the extent that they had the capacity to do so.

Despite being self-evident, or even banal, this clause is worth highlighting because it too will become crucial in understanding the causes of decline in support.
Initially, it emerged in the way in which many respondents, talking about children’s duty, spontaneously qualified it with expressions such as ‘if they are in a position to help’:

“If the old parents have needs and the children are in a position to help they must try and meet these needs financially, also if the old person is sick they should try and arrange for help.” (Mr. Brew)

“If the children are in a position to help they have to help the parents for everything they need.” (Mrs. Nima)

And, not surprisingly, when asked more directly, the respondents confirmed this principle as something obvious or self-evident:

“Yes, you should look after your parents but if you don’t have the means, of course, you can’t do it, no one will force you or blame you.” (Mr. Thompson)

“Of course it is only if you are in a position to do it, then you have to give to your parents.” (Mrs. Tettey)

The crux, of course, is the issue of how to define whether or not children had the capacity or ‘were in a position to’ support their parents; or, put another way, where the limits of children’s duty lay. Although it was not possible to establish this directly, or in any general sense\(^{171}\), an indication of the criteria emerged from other, more specific statements the respondents gave. These indicated that the principal gauge for defining whether or not children had the capacity to provide for their parents was the following: children were held not to be in a position to support their parents, if what they had was just enough to look after themselves and their children. In other words, they had no capacity if giving to parents infringed on their and their children’s needs:

\(^{171}\) Initially I attempted to establish what these criteria were by asking quite general questions, such as “when would a child not be in a position to support the parents?” However, it quickly became clear that in most cases these kinds of questions did not mean anything to the respondents.
"Those with scanty pay can't take care of anyone else – just yourself and your child.... From the bank to your mouth, clothe yourself, and feed your child...." (Mr. Azu)

"The immediate people you have to feed ... [are] yourself, your wife and children, and, if you have anything left, your parents come next...." (Mr. Prempeh)

5.4 Normative obligations of other relatives

If the paramount normative duty to support older people lay on their adult children, given the emphasis on the extended family, were there any normative responsibilities on other relatives?

The respondents made it clear that there was, in general, no strict or binding duty on relatives to provide support to an older person:

"It is not the duty of the relatives. It is the duty of the children. If the relatives are willing to do it they can do it, but it is not a must." (Mrs. Tettey)

"If the relatives are in a position to help and they are willing they can help, but it is not an obligation." (Mrs. Nima)

However, relatives (in particular, the older person's siblings, nieces or nephews, as the next closest relatives) did have an obligation in situations where the older person had no children:

Mrs. Prah: "Definitely, if the old person doesn't have children the relatives have to help."
Q: "Which relatives?"
Mrs. Prah: "Oh, the brothers and sisters of that old person, and maybe their children."

By the same token, relatives had an obligation of sorts if the older person's children could not adequately provide for them:

"If the children don't have the means then the relatives should help if they are in a position. It is a sort of duty but you can't demand, you can only beg." (Mr. Brew; emphasis added)

"If the children don't have the means, I would say it is almost a duty on the relatives – you cannot take them to court for it, but morally." (Mr. Hutton; emphasis added)
However, the key aspect of this obligation on relatives was that it had a voluntary character. It was, in contrast to the duty of children, not binding or ‘enforceable’.

“You can demand from your children, you can demand that they should look after you, but as for the relatives – you can’t demand from them.” (Mrs. Kwei)

“You can demand from children, it is a must, but not from relatives.” (Mr. Mills)

This contrast between the ‘duty’ of children and the ‘obligation’ of relatives was vividly described by Mr. Prempeh¹⁷²:

“The relatives don’t have a duty to support the old person, it is just an obligation.... You see that children have to look after parents, that it is a duty. But for the relatives it is an obligation, it is a thing which you have to do probably from your heart, a sort of moral obligation, nobody can force you to do it....” (Mr. Prempeh, emphasis added)

“What you give to any other relatives is just a help, it is not a duty, you see.... Kwame has to care for his parents, we all know it; Kojo has to care for his parents, but if he extends a helping hand to any other relative he is just helping, it is not his duty....” (Mr. Prempeh)

5.5 The basis of relatives’ normative obligation to provide support

The principal basis of the ‘weaker obligation’ on relatives, as the respondents described it, was the very general obligation to help someone in need:

¹⁷² Mr. Prempeh’s use of different terms – a duty on children, and an obligation on relatives – although he probably did not deliberate upon it, is, in fact, quite apt in pinpointing the essence of the differences between the two, and the reader will have noticed that this terminology is used throughout, except where globally referring to ‘responsibilities’. The essence of the difference between the two terms which, in everyday discourse, are used interchangeably is also expressed in their dictionary definitions. Collins English Dictionary, 3rd edition, 1994, defines duty as “a task or action that a person is bound to perform for moral or legal reasons” or “the force which binds one morally or legally to one’s obligations” (emphasis added).

In contrast, obligation is defined as “a moral or legal requirement” or “something owed in return for a service or a favour” or “a service or favour for which one is indebted” (emphasis added). One of the American Heritage dictionary definitions describes a further dimension: “The state, fact or feeling of being indebted to another for a special service or favour received” and “a course of action imposed by society, law, or conscience, by which one is bound or restricted”.

These definitions convey the sense that the duty on children is stronger, of a higher order, and more binding – a must, whereas the obligation on relatives is weaker, a felt moral obligation, which at the end of the day, is voluntary.
"If that old relative is in need and you have, you should help, you would feel obliged to help." (Mrs. Achim)

"I am not obliged to do it, but if I know their situation and if there is a need, I know that I have to help." (Mr. Brew)

This was an obligation that in principle applied to anyone, not just to relatives:

"If the old person hasn’t got and you have, you should help. Not relations alone, if you see someone and they are in need you should help that person, you have to help both your relatives and outsiders." (Mrs. Otoo)

"Whether it is a relative or not, if they are in need and you have you can’t say no." (Mrs. Addo)

"I would feel the same way if it was someone outside the family. You see, some of us feel that if someone is in need of something you should give freely if you can.” (Mr. Brew)

"You see, even someone from outside the family can do good to that old relative, anybody can help.” (Mr. Hutton)

"What you give to any other relatives is just a help, it is not a duty, you see.... Anybody at all can come and help." (Mr. Prempeh; emphasis added)

In practice, however, this principle clearly applied particularly to older relatives. This was because the older relative was very likely to have helped the child in the past in one way or another. Thus, the obligation to help an older relative was reinforced by the fact that it was also typically rooted in reciprocity.

"You see some of these old people they were good to you in the past, so you should reciprocate. For example, this old lady, some time ago she was the one who took care of you when your mother was away, or this old man, when your father was struggling to pay your school fees, he helped you out, or this one, when you were sick, she was among the people who visited you, and so on. So you see, you have to also reciprocate. This is how we used to do it...." (Mrs. Ansah)

"This old person, when he was young he was thinking about you so when he is in need you should also help him.” (Mrs. Kwei)

"You see, we Africans we have the extended family so your mother will not look after you alone. Maybe one day you will go to school and one of your aunties will say ‘oh take these three pence to go and buy food’, or someone else will say ‘oh take this material to have a new shirt sewn’, you see, so when you grow you must know that those people who have helped you in the past, you must also help them.” (Mr. Akpan)
Beneficence and reciprocity

This dual basis can again be described conceptually by drawing on Gouldner (1973). Using his terms, the obligation on relatives – in contrast to the duty of children, which was based on a strict status duty and the norm of reciprocity – was based principally on the norm of beneficence, or ‘goodness’. This norm, as Gouldner argues, “requires men to give to others such help as they need without making this help contingent upon past benefits received ... or future returns expected”, and echoes notions of ‘altruism’ or ‘charity’ (1973, p.266).

In practice, the obligation of relatives was typically also based on the norm of reciprocity, ‘people should help those who help them’, i.e. help was given in return for past help received. However, in contrast to the reciprocal duty of children, the reciprocal obligation on relatives was not additionally enforced by the stipulated reciprocation of status duties. For previous help given by older relatives – as the respondents described it – this was not a fulfilment of a strict status duty, but rather was voluntary giving.

Thus the reciprocal obligation on relatives, unlike the ‘compulsory’ reciprocal duty on children, retained a voluntary nature, involving no formal clause of conditionality.

“... that children have to look after parents, it is a duty ... you see it is their duty, because they have looked after you – well, I can bring reciprocation into it.... But you see, you can’t force your relative to be generous. Yes, it is a reciprocation but it is not a duty. If you have helped me you can’t say that I must help you in return. If I like I can reciprocate, I should, and probably it would be just natural for me to help you. But, if I don’t like it there is nothing anyone can say...” (Mr. Prempeh, emphasis added)
Again: ‘Give according to your capacity’

The obvious clause of giving according to one’s capacity did, however, apply to the obligation on relatives just as it did to adult children. This again emerged in the way the respondents used the expression, ‘if the relatives are in a position to...’, or, ‘if they have...’:

“If that old relative is in need and you have, you should help, you would feel obliged to help.” (Mrs. Achim; emphasis added)

“If the children don’t have the means then the relatives should help if they are in a position...” (Mr. Brew; emphasis added)

Although it was again not possible to directly establish the criteria which defined whether or not a relative was in a position to help, a sense of the principal benchmarks nevertheless emerged from some of the respondents’ more specific statements. These suggested that relatives were obliged to help only as long as they still had enough to feed their nuclear family and old parents:

“... the immediate people you have to feed ... [are] yourself, your wife and children, and... your parents come next and anybody else ... your auntie or uncle or your brother or your sister - even if they have no money to eat... well, it is not your lookout.” (Mr. Prempeh)

The limits of relatives’ obligation, in other words, lay where helping infringed on their own, their children’s and their parents’ needs.
5.6 Sanctions attached to non-conformity with normative duties and obligations

Having explored the content and basis of the normative responsibilities of children and relatives towards older people, the discussion now turns to the consequences or sanctions\(^{173}\) that were attached to non-conformity with these normative responsibilities.

As indicated earlier, these sanctions had a very real character and significance. Just as people knew what the normative prescriptions were, so they knew and were certain of the consequences that awaited those who failed to conform to these norms\(^ {174}\).

These consequences or sanctions fell into three broad groups:

- community sanctions;
- family sanctions removing the entitlement to future help and support from members of the family;

\(^{173}\) Sanctions have, in anthropological and sociological interpretations, typically been invoked as a mechanism of social control. Radcliffe-Brown (1969, p.199) has defined a sanction as "a reaction on the part of a society or of a considerable number of its members to a mode of behaviour, which is thereby approved (positive sanctions) or disapproved (negative sanctions)". He notes that the latter are usually much more pronounced, and makes a distinction between diffuse and organised social sanctions – the former are "spontaneous acts of approval or disapproval by members of the community acting as individuals", the latter are "social actions carried out to some traditional and recognized procedure". He moreover notes that some sanctions are carried out by only one person, and take the form of "socially approved, controlled and limited acts of revenge" (ibid., p.202). Apart from sanctions executed by people, Radcliffe-Brown also specifically mentions the existence and significance of what he calls religious sanctions executed by religious or spiritual powers. A further set of distinctions that has been made is between external and internal sanctions. Whereas the former are "the actions of others in relation to the acts they approve or disapprove", the latter are "applied or imposed by the actor himself" (Nukanuya, 1992b, p.82).

\(^{174}\) An indication of how real these sanctions were to the respondents was the fact that many mentioned them spontaneously as part of their normative ascription of responsibilities, e.g.

"It is your duty to look after your parents when they are old, because if you don’t, God will punish you.” (Mrs. Ayi)
• *metaphysical* or religious sanctions, imposed by God, or the spiritual agencies.

Throughout, the sanctions attached to not assisting older relatives were much less grave than those attached to not fulfilling one's duty towards aged parents, further reinforcing the fact that the obligation on relatives was a much weaker normative requirement. This qualitative difference between the two is perhaps expressed by the distinction Adam Smith has made in moral philosophy between a *virtue of justice* and a *virtue of beneficence* (Smith, 1759/1982). Whereas violations of a virtue of justice, like the duty on children, deserve punishment, violations of a *virtue of beneficence* – a virtue which involves benefiting others – do not. Such a virtue merits rewards or praise, but cannot be demanded of people.\(^\text{175}\)

### 5.6.1 Sanctions attached to not supporting one's aged parents

**Community sanctions**

In a community, failure to fulfil one's duty to support aged parents was met with disapproval by the members of the community:

"If you don't take care of your parents people would abuse you, you wouldn't have respect in the community." (Mr. Baddoo)

"If you don't take care of your parents people won't respect you, they would abuse you." (Mrs. Tettey)

\(^{175}\) Equally useful in describing the different nature of responsibilities to parents and relatives, is the distinction between justice and charity made by utilitarian perspectives (e.g. Mill 1861/1998). They see justice as being of particular importance in any moral code because, if enforced, it provides the necessary security for people to plan effectively for the future (in this case future security in old age). In contrast, acts of charity are seen as desirable, they are encouraged and rewarded, but not required and enforced.
"If you didn’t look after your mother and father well, it was a disgrace to you." (Mrs. Ward)

This social disapproval, as the statements indicate, meant that the person lost their respect and standing in the community. It was a public disgrace.

It was not just specifically the failure to support aged parents that led to a loss of respect, but also the failure to conform with normative duties in general:

"If you fail a social duty you become ashamed and people will not respect you." (Mrs. Ward)

"You need to lead a good life to gain respect, you need to honour your duties,... if you conduct yourself [well] people will give you respect." (Mr. Thompson)

This social approval and loss of respect in the community that the respondents described has also been noted in the literature. Opoku (1978), for example, notes that in traditional society:

... offences may be dealt with by public opinion and this may take the form of ridicule or social disapproval which could also result in the offender being ostracised.... (1978, p.160)

Gyekye (1987) describes the gravity of what it meant to undergo shame or become disgraced in the community, and notes that this was expressed in the moral maxim “given the choice between disgrace and death one had better choose death”, which was “ ingrained in the moral consciousness ...of the Akan” (p.139).
Family sanctions

In addition to the censure and loss of respect in the general community, the failure to support one’s aged parents incurred blame by the family:\footnote{At this point it is important to remember, as was earlier described, that in cases where the child was retaliating against the parent for not fulfilling his or her duty, the family did not confront the child, but rather pleaded with them to nevertheless fulfil their duties to the parent.}

"If you don’t look after your old parents, if you don’t do your duty to them – the family will blame you. They will call you and challenge you, they will ask you ‘why are you not doing it?’" (Mrs. King)

"… everybody around you in your family will blame you. ‘Why should you neglect your duty?’ Day in and day out you will get people who will confront you…." (Mr. Prempeh)

Furthermore, and more importantly, as the respondents asserted, the person’s right to expect any backing from the family in future was withdrawn:

“They would call a family meeting, summon the son or the daughter, and challenge him or her, and strongly advise him or her to do his duty. Then they will wait and see what happens for the next month or so. Maybe they will do that once, twice, or even the third time, but if the child remains stubborn they will just say ‘okay we will just leave you’. Then, the next time that child has a problem or needs the family, he can’t go and ask them for help.” (Mrs. Ward)

The severity or threat of what it meant to lose a family’s backing was expressed particularly vividly by Mr. Akpan:

“In the olden days you can’t live without the family, you can’t live without the family, because how can you live without the family? When anything happens to you, to whom are you going to turn? So in the olden days the family lived like one batch. This wasn’t in my own house alone, this was what happened everywhere.” (Mr. Akpan)

This was confirmed by the other respondents:

“The family would say to the person ‘we give your own life to you’. And people were afraid of that because they know that if something happens to them they will not get help….” (Mr. Mills)

“People were scared of the family because if they leave you and something happens what were you going to do…?” (Mrs. Tettey)
The dependence of most individuals on the family, which the respondents implied, and which lent such bite to the threat of family sanctions, has been described in the literature as a core feature of the traditional family system (see Gyekye, 1987). This dependence rested on the fact that an individual's economic and social security hinged on the family. Membership of the lineage ensured access to a permanent home (in the family house), and to a source of livelihood (through permanent rights in the use of land, sea or any other lineage property). Moreover, there was a corporate responsibility for debts, legal or social matters (Nukunya, 1992).

Metaphysical sanctions

More threatening than community or family sanctions were the metaphysical sanctions - the punishment or retribution from God, which followed if one failed to honour and support one's parents. These punishments were threatened by God himself in the fifth commandment (incidentally, the only commandment that comes with explicit, and serious, rewards and the threat of punishments): “honour thy father and thy mother that thy days be long upon the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Exodus, 20:12), and in other bible passages.

People were therefore certain that God would bring misfortune and early death to those who did not honour and support their parents:

177 Gyekye discusses this interdependence further with reference to the traditional ethic of 'communalism'.
178 In the traditional subsistence setting there existed an additional dependence of the individual on the help of family members, especially with physical tasks that required group effort, such as, for example, clearing a farm or building a house.
179 Examples include Exodus 21:15: “Whoever strikes his father or mother shall be put to death”, or Exodus 21:17 “Whoever curses his father or mother shall be put to death.”
"If you don’t look after your father and your mother you will not have a good life, you will not prosper, and you will not live long. That is natural, it is natural. Because God says ‘obey and respect your father and mother so that you will grow old’ it is natural, it is in the bible." (Mr. Mills)

"If you don’t look after your father and your mother – it is unto you. God will punish you.” (Mrs. Kwei)

"God created you, if you don’t fulfil your obligations God will punish you.” (Mrs. Ansah)

Conversely, fulfilling the duty to your parents meant gaining the promised rewards from God:

"You see, we know that if you look after your father and your mother, if you respect them God will see to it that you will prosper, you will have a long life and things will go well for you.” (Mr. Akpan)

“[People] know that when you respect your mother and father you will always prosper.” (Mr. Mills)

In addition to direct punishment from God, the threat of a curse from the old parent was a further potent metaphysical sanction enforcing the duty to support parents. Such a curse\textsuperscript{180}, enforced by God, again brought misfortune and early death:

"If you don’t respect your parents, they will curse you, they won’t speak well of you, and so when God hears it, you will die early.”(Mrs. Tettey)

"If you don’t respect your mother or father … if you don’t cater for them properly, they will say ‘oh this my son, how he is not looking after me’, and God will hear it and it will be a curse onto you. But if you respect them they will talk well about you and it will be a blessing to you.” (Mr. Mills)

Conversely, as Mr. Mills’ comment indicates, if one honoured ones’ parents and they consequently ‘spoke well’ of one, one was assured of prosperity and a long life:

\textsuperscript{180} There are biblical references to such a curse, for example, in Deuteronomy, 27:16: “Cursed be anyone who dishonours their father or mother".
"If your mother or your father speak well of you, you will prosper. By all means your life will go well...." (Mrs. Larbi)

Finally, there was one very specific penalty that divine retribution held in store for those who failed to honour and support their parents – a retribution from their own children. There was an absolute conviction, confirmed by all respondents, that if a person failed to support their parents, they would receive the same treatment from their own children, even if they had cared for their children.

"Yes, that one is also in addition – if you don’t look after your father and your mother the same treatment will come to you. That is implanted in our head, we know it." (Mr. Prempeh; emphasis added)

Mrs. Ayi: "If you don’t look after your parents your children will not look after you."
Q: "Even if you looked after your children?"
Mrs. Ayi: "Yes, even then. If you don’t look after your parents, your children will not look after you."

"If you don’t care for your parents who will take care of you? What you do to your parents will be done to you." (Mrs. Kwei)

Some respondents explained the mechanism by which this would happen:

"You are doing this to your mother, your children are watching it and they will do it to you. They are watching. The way you treat your mother today, they will definitely treat you the same way." (Mrs. Prah)

"If you don’t look after your parents, can your child look after you when you are old? They won’t do it. Anything you do they are looking. And the same thing they will do to you." (Mr. Baddoo)

Thus, although a person’s own children executed this retribution, it was not a deliberate punishment on their part. It was part of the overall retribution orchestrated by metaphysical powers.

It is intriguing to note that the absolute belief in retribution from children as a sanction for neglecting one’s parents that people had in Ghana is strikingly
similar to sentiments that apparently also prevailed in the West, and which were expressed in the following tale from European folklore:

A farmer decides he has no more room at the table for his old father who lives with the family. So he banishes the old man to the barn where the father must eat out of a wooden trough. One day the farmer comes across his own little son playing in the barnyard with some pieces of wood and he asks the little boy what he's doing. 'Oh father', replies the little boy, 'I'm making a trough for you to eat when you get old.' After that day, the old man is returned to his place at the family table. (Moody, 1993, p.229)\textsuperscript{181}

Moody interprets this story as a warning about the consequences of treating one's parents badly, and showing that one’s actions towards them ‘sets an example and acts as a precedent’ for how a person’s children will act towards them in the future, again echoing the respondents’ conceptions.

5.6.2 Sanctions attached to not assisting older relatives

As already mentioned, the consequences of not assisting one’s relatives were much less grave than the harsh punishment that followed failure to support one’s parents.

Rather than incurring severe divine punishment, for example, the failure to assist older relatives merely meant that the person wasn’t going to receive the blessings they would otherwise receive.

"If you don't help you don't get blessing." (Mrs. Ansah)

"If you help your old relatives, the almighty God will also help you." (Mr. Mensah)

\textsuperscript{181} This story was originally retold in Simone De Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age* (1972).
"Well, traditionally we all know that if you respect your elders, and if you help them you will be blessed. We all know it. Those who are not Christians still know it, and they believe that the blessing will come from *asase nyame*" (Mr. Prempeh)

There was, moreover, no prominent threat of a curse from the older relative (only one respondent mentioned it) and a person did not forego their right to expect old age support from their children.

In family and community, failure to assist older relatives did not incur any outright challenges or confrontations. The only thing that did happen, especially within the family, was that was people talked about a person’s lack of generosity:

“If I don’t help my relative ... there is nobody who will come and confront me. The only thing is that people who know you have helped me will talk, and they will know that I am not a good man.... That is all, and nothing else.” (Mr. Prempeh, emphasis added)

“People will know that you are not a kind person, and they will talk about it.” (Mr. Okine)

But there were no threats of expulsion or withdrawal of general family backing.

However, if a person failed to help their older relatives, they could not expect to get much attention from relatives when they themselves were old:

“If you give something to your old relative – your uncle or auntie, you know that by all means when you get old and you need something you too will get help. But if you don’t give them, nobody will do anything for you.” (Mr. Mensah)

“It is young before old. If you are young and you don’t help your old relatives, by all means when you are old your relatives won’t help you too.” (Mrs. Tettey)

By the same token, people in general could not expect to receive much from relatives in general if they themselves had contributed nothing to the family.

“You see, we have a saying here that ‘the hand goes a hand comes’ so that means if you help your relatives someone too will help you ... but if you never think about your relatives, they too won’t come and help you....” (Mr. Prempeh)

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182 An Akan expression for the ‘supreme being’ in traditional Ghanaian religion.
183 This proverb was often referred to by the older respondents throughout their accounts. The literature has also noted this important proverb as expressing the system of reciprocity within families (e.g. Gyekye, 1996, p.81).
"If you don't help your relatives it is your own trouble ... they too won't help you."  
(Mr. Akpan)

Thus, there operated a system of what Lévi-Strauss (1969) has described as cycles of reciprocity. It implies a reciprocity involving a number of people (e.g. members of a kin group) and exchanges between them over a long period of time. Reciprocity is thus not expected from the same person help was given to, nor straightaway, but rather from any other person or persons in the group, or the group as a whole, at any time when a need arises. Moreover, there is no specific expectation of what the help given should be. It depends on the context in which the need arises.

**An overarching belief in retributive justice**

The set of metaphysical, familial and community sanctions that enforced the duty on children and the obligations on relatives were underpinned by an overarching and pervasive belief in a system of retributive justice, an ingrained belief that good would be rewarded with good and bad rewarded with bad.

"If you do good it comes back to you, if you do bad it comes back to you ... in the past people knew this, it was *instilled* in them."  (Mrs. Ward, emphasis added)

"Whatever you do will come back to you. You reap what you sow."  (Mr. Mensah)

"Anything you do, you will be paid back in your own coins."  (Mrs. Tettey)

More than anything it was God (or other spiritual powers) who was believed to be the executor and overseer of this system. Ultimately it was divine retribution

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164 Originally a biblical saying: "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians, 6:7).
that saw to it that those who did wrong were punished, and that those who fulfilled their duties and obligations were rewarded.

"If you do something bad, God sees it and he will punish you, it is a fact... But if you do something good he will also bring blessings for you." (Mrs. Nima)

"We knew it. We knew that if you did something wrong God would punish you...." (Mrs. Achim)

"In the past people... believed that even if you make a small mistake the gods will kill you... but if you do the right thing they will bless you...." (Mr. Azu)\(^{185}\)

### 5.7 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has shown that the provision of material support to older people in Ghana was in the past underpinned by an explicit and definite normative framework of duties and obligations. This framework entailed a clear hierarchy of obligations in which the paramount duty to support an older person was on his or her adult children. This duty was absolutely binding. On the one hand, it rested on the religious commandment to honour one's parents, and on the other hand, on a binding reciprocal obligation to repay the care a person's parents had given them in childhood. Although there existed an obligation of sorts on other relatives – especially on the older person's siblings, nieces and nephews – this obligation was much less binding. It was usually based only on a general obligation to help others in need, and a general obligation to reciprocate past favours done by the older person.

\(^{185}\) The respondents' descriptions are again echoed in the literature, which notes that: "the belief or awareness that God will give due recompense weighs heavily on the conscience of the individual who does, or intends to do, that which [he or she knows] is morally wrong" (Gyekye, 1996, p.19); and that traditionally, God and the ancestors were believed to "...abhor actions which may upset the harmony of the community or ruin family life...punish those who violate the traditionally sanctioned code, and reward those who keep it" (Opoku, 1978, p.155).
An obvious proviso in both the duty on children and the obligations on relatives was that they required people to give support only to the extent that they had the capacity to do so. Whilst the capacity of children to support parents ended where giving infringed on their own and their children's needs, the capacity of relatives to assist an older person ended where giving meant infringing on their own, their children's and their own parent's needs.

Whilst the binding duty on children was enforced by a set of extremely grave community, familial and external metaphysical punishments (which meant withdrawal of family backing, and, even more seriously, misfortune, neglect in old age, or even early death), the consequences of failing an obligation to assist older relatives were much less serious. For the most part they amounted only to the foregoing of rewards or blessings a person would have otherwise received.

This normative framework of old age support in the past in Ghana, shows some clear parallels and contrasts to the normative underpinnings of old age family support that currently prevail in the West (as described in Chapter Two). On the one hand, the normative hierarchy of obligations, i.e. the paramount responsibility of adult children, as well as the apparent limits and conditionality of the normative duty on children parallels that found in the contemporary West.

On the other hand, however the normative duty on children in the West is not regarded as absolutely binding, nor is it enforced by any explicit and defined sanctions. Thus, in the West, the notion of a contract between parents and children\textsuperscript{186}, although it is widely used, has been rejected as inappropriate to

\textsuperscript{186} As described in Chapter Two, this contract holds that "...children must support their parents... in return for having been procreated and nurtured by those parents" (Laslett, 1992, p.27).
describe the nature of the reciprocal obligation that exist between them. Specifically, it has been criticised for assuming that there is a defined (and contractually agreed) binding reciprocal duty on children. Children, so the argument goes, do not owe their parents anything, nor did they agree to any future responsibilities when receiving nurture and support from their parents. (English, 1991; Laslett, 1992)\textsuperscript{187}

Whilst this might hold for the contemporary West, I would argue that in Ghana in the past there definitely did exist a contract between parents and children. Although, of course, there was no element of negotiated consent, there was, undoubtedly, a clearly defined set of assigned reciprocal duties and rights. These assigned, contractual duties existed not because they were formally agreed by the parties but because they were imposed by tradition, by the natural and divine order of life, which human beings, by virtue of being born, had to partake in. A further aspect that reinforced the sense of a contract, was the existence of a clause of conditionality underpinning the reciprocal duty on children: ‘If parents willingly failed to fulfil their duty to children, children had no duty towards them’. However, the crucial point was that this clause was invalidated by the absolute, religiously prescribed status duty, which meant that parents had a right to receive honour and support \textit{no matter what}. Thus, parents and children were, in a sense, \textit{unequal partners} in this contract. Parents, by virtue of their status, had an absolute right to support, a right that was enforced above all by religious

\textsuperscript{187} Laslett puts it this way “The…benefits a mother or father confer on their offspring – support, nurture, education, perhaps financial endowment and so on – are likewise received as of right, as conferring no obligation, in the spirit of love in which they are offered, for as Scripture reminds us, love seeketh not her own” (1992, p.29; emphasis added).
sanctions, which, in part, could be inflicted by the older parents themselves. Thus, although a normative contract existed between children and parents, it was on unequal terms. It was skewed by the greater powers and rights of parents. powers, which, above all, were enshrined in the religious belief system
CHAPTER SIX

THE PATTERNS AND MOTIVATIONS OF PAST FAMILY SUPPORT FOR OLDER PEOPLE

6.1 Introduction

Having described the normative framework that underpinned old age family support in the past, this chapter goes on to explore the actual forms and meanings that this support took. It examines the patterns, in terms of who provided what to older people, the costs of providing support and, finally, the reasons and motivations that people had for providing such support.

Drawing together the key themes it then analyses why the system of old age family support worked in the past, why older people’s needs were, on the whole, adequately met by the support they received from children and relatives.

The basis for this examination is, as already mentioned, the oldest generation’s recollection of the support received by their parents in old age and the old age support they themselves provided.

6.2 The patterns of past family support for older people

Although the respondents’ accounts of the patterns of support generated a wealth of detailed descriptions, it is not possible to describe them in all their richness. Rather, it is possible to present only the key features that characterised the typical giving and receiving of family support for older people in the past. The main feature that emerged unanimously from all the respondents accounts was that on
the whole, such support in the past was adequate, the needs and requirements of most older people were sufficiently met:

"In the olden days things were good for the old people..." (Mrs. King)

"Formerly relatives and children they took good care of their old people....." (Mrs. Tettey)

6.2.1 Who provided support to older people?

The respondents made it clear that the bulk of support for older people came from their adult children. Support from other relatives – typically nieces, nephews, siblings or relatives who lived with or near the old person - played a subsidiary, though nevertheless important, role. Thus, the actual allocation of responsibilities matched the hierarchy of normative obligations that existed.

6.2.2 What was provided?

The older respondents’ descriptions of what they did for their aged parents or relatives, and of what their parents received from others, clearly indicated that old age support involved material maintenance and domestic assistance. An element of emotional support was seemingly absent. Just as in their accounts of the normative prescriptions, none of respondents made any reference to it. Older people primarily received food, provisions such as sugar, soap or cooking fuel, or money to purchase these; money to provide for medical treatment when they fell sick; gift items such as clothes or money; and finally domestic

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188 Given that the focus of this investigation was material support, the role of the element of emotional support was not explored much further. It would, however, be an important topic for further research.
assistance – help with cooking, cleaning and household chores. The prime importance of providing food was emphasised by all of the respondents:

"It was mostly food that children gave to their old parents, normally they wouldn't provide much more than that, because you see, normally the old people, except for the hopeless ones, acquire certain things like clothing and such things during their life, so they have it, so all they really need is food, and maybe when they are not well they need to be sent to somewhere where they can get cured.... Also sometimes the old lady or the old man would receive gifts, you know, some money or maybe a fine cloth or soap...." (Mr. Brew)

"They gave them food! And you know, in the olden days people were many in the home so if somebody was so weak that he could not take a bath or something the children or other relatives will do it. And they would go to fetch water because not many people had pipes with running water.... But food was the main thing they got." (Mrs. Tettey)

The reason why food was the main ingredient of support (apart from domestic help) was, as many respondents noted, that this was usually the only thing old people really needed.

"Food is the most important thing, because you will have the clothing from when you are young, so what else do you need?" (Mr. Mills)

"At a certain age, say at 80, all you need is food. If I need money it will be for something very specific. But usually you don't need money. Apart from food, what else do you want? What do you want money for? Go round shopping or what? Occasionally if an old lady got some pocket money she would only keep it, she wouldn't use it." (Mr. Hutton)

The medical treatment, which old people received when they were sick (and which children or relatives paid for), was usually in the form of local herbs:

"Oh in those days most people depended upon our local herbs, because they started a long time ago and they had a belief in that. For example an old person would be treated with the leaves of the Nim tree. They liked that better than going to the hospital." (Mr. Prempeh)

Some, however, clearly favoured Western medicine.

"When my mother was sick I used to take her to the hospital, because I thought that the doctor at the hospital knows better than the herbalist." (Mrs. Kwei)

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There was no need for children to provide for the other basic need – shelter – because most people lived either in the family house or in their own house.

The juice from the leaves of the Nim tree is still commonly used, for example to treat fevers or malaria.
However, there was no element of intensive, long-term caregiving, as is so prominent at present in the West. The respondents’ descriptions of the care received by the few older parents or relatives who were extremely frail or debilitated clearly indicate that such older people typically did not receive any extra medical support, care or attention:

Q: “You said your grandmother was posopo when she was old. what sort of care and support did she receive every day?”
Mr. Hutton: “Oh, nothing much! She was always in the room. The only thing is in the morning my uncle’s wife used to wash her in the morning and do her laundry, and prepare the breakfast for her. Then she was just in the room and in the afternoon and evening again people would give her something to eat…. Sometimes they would carry her out of the room to sit in the sun…. But, you know, people didn’t spend any time with her. If someone came to the house they would ask ‘aberewa wo ho?’ – is the old lady there?’, and ‘how is she?’, but to go and converse with her, they didn’t do it. I mean it was probably useless because you go there and she didn’t have anything to offer you. All she used to talk about was heaven …. Well as I said, my uncle’s wife used to bathe her and they would give her food to eat, but that is all….”

“When my mother grew old she was very weak, so she couldn’t do anything herself. So… in the mornings, I used to fetch water and bathe her. Then I would wash her things and make some porridge for her. Then during the day I left her in the room with my elder daughter, because I went to the market to … sell some things and get something to buy the afternoon and evening food. Then when I came back I prepared the food for her … at times when she had sickness, like when she had a fever I would buy some treatment for her.” (Mrs. Ayi)

191 By Western standards this lack of attention could be perceived as bordering on neglect.

192 Both Ga and Akan draw distinctions between older people at different stages of the ageing process: the affix posopo in Akan means ‘completely far gone’ and denotes an older person who is physically dependent or ‘decrepit’, unable to do much by him or herself. As Mr. Hutton describes it, for example: “Well, akwakora means an old man, me for instance, I am an akwakora. But akwakora posopo is an old man who is between helping himself and can’t helping himself. Sometimes people regard him as something quite useless in the house”. (The female terms are abwerewa. and aberewa posopo.) The equivalent of posopo in Ga is the appendage kotokoto. As Mr. Azu describes it: “Nomo is an old man, but nomo kotokoto is an old man who can’t even walk, he will be in a room and he can’t even go out.” (The female terms are yomo and yomo kotokoto.)
6.2.3 The typical pattern of support from children

The form of support to their parents depended to some extent on whether they lived with or near the parents, or in a different part of the country. Usually those children who lived with or near their parents provided mainly in kind – most importantly, buying food and preparing meals for the older person and supplying provisions:

"My sisters who stayed in the same village as my mother, in the evenings when they cooked they sent some of the food to the house.... That was normal by that time, you only send food, and when you see that any of them is sick you come to the house and help with house chores." (Mr. Prempeh)

"... we the children used to bring him food every day, and sometimes provisions. My brothers and I used to send food and my sister would prepare it and carry the food to him." (Mr. Baddoo)

Some of these children also gave their parents cash, either regularly or sporadically:

"My brother ... every month he gave her some money.... As for me when I had I used to give her provisions...." (Mrs. Tettey)

"When my mother stopped working it was me who was looking after her. I was catering for her food and I was doing the cooking.... At times I used to give her money...." (Mrs. Kwei)

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193 The focus here is on exploring the patterns of provision and receipt of material support since this is the main subject of this inquiry. Apart from noting that domestic support was typically provided either by daughters, daughters-in-law or by other younger relatives who lived with the older person, there is no scope in this investigation to explore further the patterns of domestic assistance. This would provide an interesting area for further research.

194 The typical pattern of support described below applied to most older people. The general features emerged in almost all of the respondents' descriptions of the support received by their parents or other relatives. Thus, they applied to both Ga and Akan, women and men, and across most socio-economic groups. The only exceptions to this general pattern were the support provided to absent fathers and to the small proportion of very affluent older people. These will be discussed subsequently.
Children who lived away from their parents typically sent money at regular intervals, and/or visited the parents regularly bearing gifts of provisions, money or other items:

"When my father was old and I was working here, always I used to send my father money, every month." (Mr. Mills)

"When my parents were old we ... my sisters and brothers and me, we were looking after them. Whenever we got money we sent it home to them ... when we used to go and visit them in the village we used to bring parcels and provisions." (Mrs. Ansah)

"... my elder brother, myself and then also my younger brother, he also became a teacher.... All of us were living away from our home town so we used to look after them financially, we sent them money regularly." (Mr. Prempeh)

How much and how often each individual child gave, depended, to some extent, on his or her capacity. As the respondents clearly described, the more a child earned the more, and the more frequently, he or she could and did give:

"My brother, because he was earning, he was a pharmacist, he had the money so he gave my mother money every month, as for me, on my part, when I got some I gave her. So when I had something I sent her provisions or sometimes I cooked here and sent food to her at Kaneshie." (Mrs. Tettey)

"It was me who was mostly looking after my mother, I gave her food and when she needed something I would provide it for her.... My brother, because he was a fisherman, often when they didn’t catch anything he had nothing. So only when he had a little he brought some to our mother...." (Mrs. Ayi)

However, children typically did not come together to discuss the distribution or allocation of support provision between them. All respondents emphasised that each child usually just did his or her own bit, with no clear idea of how much or what the others were giving to the older parent:

195 Geographical separation of children from their parents, in particular sons, was not uncommon. Among the sample, seven respondents (five men and two women) reported that they were living in a different town to their aged parents. Almost all of these, except for Mr. Azu and Mrs. Osu, were Akans who had migrated to Accra or to another area for the purposes of employment. Among the Gas, whose hometown was Accra anyway, not surprisingly, most children remained living in the same city. Of those who lived in the same town as their parents, only four (three poor Ga women and Mr. Hutton) lived with in the same house with them.
“Oh not that we used to discuss what to give our mother. All of us were just giving whatever we wanted to give. For example I didn’t know what my brothers were giving to my mother.” (Mr. Prempeh)

The only time where there was something of a joint discussion (and the only instance any of the respondents described) was in a situation where the older person had a specific need, such as needing an operation, which required substantial expenditure. In this case, children did come together to discuss how to jointly provide for this:

“At one time my mother was needing an operation and my brother and sisters and some uncles we met to discuss it.” (Mr. Azu)

6.2.4 The typical pattern of support from other relatives

Apart from being supported by their children most older people also received some form of assistance from relatives. As already indicated, this support was usually much less substantial and was simply given in addition to other support, even though the children were providing for their parents adequately.

The most common form of support from relatives was part of the sharing of food in the extended family. Where older people lived in the family house or in the village, they regularly received food from those relatives who lived with or near them196:

196 This was the common pattern. Of all the respondents the majority reported that their parents lived in a family house (13) or in a village close to other relatives (3). In the latter cases a few other relatives were also in the house, although it was not strictly speaking a family house. Only four respondents (all middle income or rich) reported that their parents had lived in their own house, not directly in the vicinity of other relatives. However, even these parents typically had one or two younger relations living in the house. These relations usually helped with the domestic work.

“My parents ... they lived in their own house here in Accra. But they always had some relation, usually a young boy or girl, to help with the chores, you know.” (Mrs. Addo)
"Formerly, when I was young, any time my mother cooked in the evening it was an obligation to send part of the food to your family members, your mothers, your aunties, your sisters. So we the children used to carry jufa to them." (Mr. Prempeh)

Mrs. Achim: "For an old person, if he was living in the family house, whenever one of the relatives cooked they would give food to the old person, or they would give him or her money to buy food."
Q: "But I thought the children were supposed to provide for the old person?"
Mrs. Achim: "Oh yes, but the relatives would also do it. Everyone would give food...."

Older people often also received occasional gifts of money, provisions or other items from relatives who lived elsewhere but paid occasional visits:

Mr. Mills: "When I was in the Volta region, when it came to Easter, we used to buy things... provisions or sometimes cloth, and go to the village and give to my mother but also to my mother's sisters and so on."
Q: "But were your mother's sisters looked after by their own children?"
Mr. Mills: "Oh yes, they were taking care of them, mine was just in addition."

Mrs. Nima: "When... we went to visit our parents in the village we would also bring gifts to the old ladies and the old men in the family house."
Q: "Were these old ladies and men also supported by their children?"
Mrs. Nima: "Yes their children were also providing for them."

"At times when I went home I would give some small things to my mother's sisters and my father's sister." (Mr. Mensah)

Sometimes older people received more substantial or regular support than just gifts or meals from a relative. In these cases the relative acted like an additional child:

"Yes, my mother for example it was our uncle's son who was also looking after my mother when she was old. You see, when he was young he was brought to our home to attend school and when he finished the school he took my mother to be his mother, and later when he became headmaster of Ebuaba State College he was also looking after her. So every month he would send something, adding it to what we gave her...." (Mr. Prempeh; emphasis added)

"My aunt, my father's junior sister was always taking care of him. She was buying him cloth, sending money, food and everything.... But we the children were also catering for him." (Mrs. Nima)
Although provision from relatives was usually simply an addition to the support provided by children, it sometimes played a more important role. In cases where children could not provide adequately, support from relatives acted as a buffer, compensating for these deficiencies:

“You see, formerly we had the extended family system so that is your mother’s sister and your mother’s brothers and your grandmother or grandfather’s people – we are all related. So when they see that somebody is old and in need – maybe the children can’t look after him well – they come to help you.” (Mr. Prempeh)

It either took the form of meeting specific one-off needs, or more general regular upkeep:

“When my mother was taken to hospital ... it was my grandfather’s brother who paid for the hospital fee because, you see, he had the means to pay for it. You see, it all depends upon the means and we didn’t have it.” (Mr. Azu)

“When my mother became old she couldn’t work anymore and she didn’t have any savings. And me too, I was not working so I usually couldn’t provide for her, so it was my mother’s brother who was giving her money to cook, and another relative paid for her medical bill whenever she needed it.” (Mrs. Otoo)

“For example I used to remit my late uncle’s wife, you see.... I knew her situation I knew that she would be very grateful and happy if she received something from me because her children were not in a position to really cater for her well.” (Mr. Brew)

Of course, the compensatory role of support from relatives was most important for older people who were childless.

“Formerly, if an old person had no children by all means at least someone from the family would help him or her.” (Mr. Azu)

“In the past because of the extended family there was always someone. So even if the old person had no children it never happened that they were completely left alone with nobody there to help them.” (Mr. Brew)

In general, whether compensating for or simply providing extra support, the assistance from relatives meant that, although the onus was on the children, the
overall responsibility for an older person's welfare was, in a sense, carried by the whole family: it was a *shared* responsibility.\(^{197}\)

### 6.2.5 Older people's dependency on support

The respondents' descriptions of their parents' situation clearly indicated that some older people were fully dependent on the material upkeep they received from their children and relatives:

> "My parents did not have any savings.... They never went to school and they couldn't save from the fishing they did. So they depended on us the children to provide for them, so we used to send money for food or provisions." (Mrs. Ansah)

> "My mother didn't have any money of her own... no we had to use our money to support her so she could buy food and provisions and what she needed." (Mr. Azu)

However, most older people were only *partially* dependent on this support. They received material assistance from children and relatives, even though they had some means of their own:

> "When my mother stopped working it was me who was looking after her... [she] had some savings of her own but she didn't use them, I was providing for everything...I didn't mind because at the time I was working and it wasn't difficult to provide for her...." (Mrs. Kwei)

> "My father wasn't totally dependent on us, only partially. We helped.....he could have survived if we hadn't given him anything because he was having some savings ... and he was collecting some rent from people staying in the house...." (Mr. Baddoo)

> "When my mother grew older she continued to do some small trading and she had savings. She had her own house at Kaneshie and that even could have maintained her. There were some tenants in there who were paying the rent.... Still, my brother and I were catering for her." (Mrs. Tettey)

\(^{197}\)Although support from relatives was pervasive and characteristic in the past, it should be noted that there were some older people who did not receive any assistance from relatives. One such example among the respondents' parents was Mrs. Kwei's mother, who did not receive any support from relatives because they were all in conflict with each other:

> "None of the relatives in my family contributed to my mother because they were all quarrelling with each other, they didn't get on." (Mrs. Kwei)
As these statements already indicate, older people's resources were typically in the form of savings, income from assets such as a house which was rented out to tenants, or in the form of earnings from continued work.

The pattern of dependency and support that prevailed in the past - the fact that most older people received support despite having some means of their own, and the fact that children each did their own thing, with relatives giving on top of that - meant that most older people had more than was necessary to meet their basic needs.

The degree of surplus they had obviously depended on how much - in particular money or other valuable items - children and relatives gave, and on how much of their own money the older people had. To the older people, possession at least of some surplus resources in old age was vital, most importantly because it meant that they were able to bequeath something to those who came after them.198

"After my mother died - she didn’t save in a bank but she had a box in which she kept things. So when she had died we called the relatives and we went to check the box, and the money we found in there my uncle used to build a house there." (Mr. Mensah)

198 An older person’s funeral was performed by the extended family. The costs of the funeral, however, were borne first and foremost by the children, though the family contributed. In contrast to what prevailed, for example, in the 19th century in the West, the deceased’s estate was not to be used to pay for the funeral expenses.

The traditional inheritance rules meant that the deceased’s property was inherited in order of generation and seniority, i.e. children did not receive the main share. Among the Ga a person’s personal property went principally to his or her living siblings, the children getting their share through them. However, any particular wishes the deceased expressed before dying, regarding the allocation of the inheritance, were fulfilled (see Azu, 1974). Among the Akan a person’s individual property became family property, held by the group of the deceased’s siblings (i.e. the children of full sisters with a common maternal grandmother). Although it was possible to dispose of property by gift or will, this depended on the consent of the owner’s matrilineage (see Oppong, 1974). After decades of protests against this traditional order, especially from wives and children, a formal inheritance law was imposed in 1985. This intestate succession law (PNDC Law 111), stipulated that upon intestate death, the deceased’s houses and chattels should go to the spouse and children, whilst the rest of the estate should be divided as follows: 3/16th to the surviving spouse, 9/16th to the surviving child, 1/8th to the surviving parent, and 1/18th to the matr- or patrikin in accordance with customary law (see Nukunya, 1992b).
Failure to leave something behind meant that one had failed in life:

“In our culture, when you die you have to leave something for those who follow you. If you don’t people will say that you were useless.” (Mr. Baddoo)

“For us, forty days after you die the relatives come and check your box. If they find that you have left nothing people will abuse you that you are useless. You come from this world but you don’t do anything....” (Mr. Mills)

“Well, you must leave something behind for everybody to know that you haven’t been useless.” (Mr. Thompson)

“You see if you die and you leave something behind it is a credit to you. If you do people will speak well of you and remember you well, but if you don’t they will not speak well of you. They will say, ‘Oh, as for this one, he didn’t leave anything at all’....” (Mrs. Tettey)

Apart from being able to bequeath something, having surplus in old age also meant that one was able to contribute when family matters arose:

“In the olden days, whenever someone was in need of something, we all sat down together and contributed to help his or her case, if he needs money for hospital or he has a case. We all contribute.” (Mrs. Ayi)

or to help younger family members:

“You see in the olden days it wasn’t just your parents who looked after you. Maybe one day you will go to school and this auntie will say ‘oh take this material to go and sew a shirt’, or this old lady will say ‘here take three pence to go and buy some food’.” (Mr. Akpan)

In effect it meant that older people continued to have something tangible to give.

The importance of this was part of the ethic of responsive ageing, which, as Apt (1996) describes, underpinned traditional Ghanaian attitudes to older people. This ethic held that an older person who has nothing to offer to the young “forfeits the respect reserved for the elders” (p.24).

The fact that old age support created a surplus for older people points to an important aspect of this support: it was more than just geared towards meeting
the older person’s needs. It was also a symbol, giving older people their due respect.

The symbolic role of old age support emerged most clearly in the specific pattern of support given to parents who were wealthy and fully self-sufficient, and to fathers who had been absent for most of their children’s lives.

### 6.2.6 Respect and appreciation shown to affluent parents

The support given to older people who were obviously affluent – and thus fully able to provide for their own needs – was an expression of respect and/or gratitude, through gifts and token gestures:\(^{199}\):

> "Now and then we gave her a little present here or there, some nice soap or even if it was in cash... but she didn’t need it, she was alright... She was having some income from her share of the property that her mother left for her... so... she wasn’t dependent on us children." (Mrs. Addo)

> "My mother wasn’t financially dependent on us at all. She could do everything in her own right. She and her sister had inherited all the family property, they had cocoa farms. It belonged to these women in her generation... So all I did was sometimes give them this or that, but it is not as if she was living on that. It was more of a gesture you know..." (Mr. Hutton)

> "From time to time we had to go and give something to our father, to sort of show respect to him, but it wasn’t that we were looking after him. He wasn’t dependent on us. You see he had... a very good pension and savings and it didn’t appear to us as if our father had a problem living... " (Mr. Thompson)

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\(^{199}\) This form of support was described by all rich respondents whose parents had also been rich, coming from affluent families, and having inherited family wealth and property. It was also described by two of the better-off middle-income respondents. Their parents – although not obviously rich – were nevertheless visibly comfortable, and definitely not dependent on material support from their adult children. Their financial independence was a result either of the government pensions they received for having been senior government employees, or through large savings and assets they had accumulated throughout their working lives, usually in business or trade.
In addition to tokens of gratitude or respect from their children, affluent older people also received occasional gifts from other relatives, typically when they came to visit:

"... her nieces and nephews, when they came to visit they would bring things for her." (Mrs. Ward)

"Some of the relatives would occasionally come and give things to my mother, provisions or other things." (Mr. Okine)

It is worth emphasising, as all respondents stressed, that only very few older people enjoyed affluence and financial independence in the past. Typically it was those who were senior government employees or involved in the cocoa trade:

"Some of the old people had money because they had worked all their life. Some of them are cocoa farmers; some of them work in government offices, so they were able to save money or they had the pension...." (Mr. Azu)

This usually meant men:

"... in those days the old men were the ones who had the money, maybe sometimes some old women had, but usually it was the men." (Mr. Mills)

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200 Cocoa, now Ghana’s major cash crop, started to be cultivated in the latter half of the 19th century. Although the first exports to Europe began in 1885 it only became a large-scale business in the early 20th century. By 1910 it was Ghana’s (then the Gold Coast) largest export. Apart from the cocoa farmers there were brokers, factors, and clerks involved in the cocoa industry who served as intermediaries between the producers and the European firms. Although cocoa was cultivated on land inhabited mainly by Akan people, the Ga played a very important role in its expansion right from the beginning. Some of the wealthier Ga men became 'credit or farmers' or 'farmer financiers', using a sort of tenant farming system. Others became cocoa buyers or small farmers.

The relationship between brokers and farmers became very close and there were numerous buying associations and firms that were run by the farmers themselves. Whereas before agricultural production had been characterised by communal (lineage) usage and labour, the cocoa trade brought, as Agbodeka (1992) put it, "an individualistic spirit" into the production. In time, with expansion, most of the cocoa farmers turned into owners and supervisors who employed labourers to work on their farms.

The cocoa trade made Ghana the most highly developed ‘peasant’ export economy in Africa. Its whole economy became increasingly dependent on this one cash crop which, although profitable at the time, was to become disastrous later. In the early 1930s cocoa prices fell and cocoa diseases drastically jeopardised production and trade (see Robertson, 1981). At an individual level the cocoa trade brought wealth to many of the farmers and intermediaries, and they represented an emerging entrepreneurial class who effectively defended their interests vis-à-vis the European firms (see Agbodeka, 1992). The unprecedented opportunities for accumulating individual wealth through cocoa farming and trading are well documented in the literature. Nukunya (1992b) for example notes that “by the second and third decades of this century the term Ashanti cocoa farmer became synonymous with wealth and prosperity” (p.189).
"... formerly it was usually the old men who had the money but sometimes too the old women had money, if they were bead traders for example, but the old men were in a better position than the old women." (Mrs. Nima)²⁰¹

Nevertheless, the fact that there were older people who were affluent – gender inequalities notwithstanding – is significant. It clearly implies, in line with some arguments in the literature (see Rwezaura, 1989), and contrary to common assumptions, that the advent of a cash-based economy had not simply undermined the economic position of all older people but had also created, at least for some, new opportunities for wealth accretion²⁰².

6.2.7 Respect shown to absent fathers

The second symbolic pattern of support was that given to fathers who (due to divorce and remarriage) had been absent for most of the children’s lives²⁰³. Despite the fact that these fathers, once they had left, had typically ceased providing for their children, the latter did occasionally take presents or make occasional visits as a sign of respect. The bulk of the older man’s needs, if any, were provided for by the new wife and children:

"My father never lived with my mother, he had other children and he only at times gave my mother something. When he was old I used to visit him sometimes and bring some

²⁰¹ The better economic situation of older men compared to older women was clearly an expression of the unequal access to and control of economic resources and assets that prevailed between men and women throughout their lives. It was the men who owned and controlled economic assets, and who (not least by virtue of the fact that it was primarily men who were educated) had access to government employment which guaranteed pensions after retirement.

²⁰² The apparent advantageous effect of the cash economy on the economic situation of older people presents an interesting line of inquiry, but not one which can be further explored here.

²⁰³ The ceasing of contributions to the children’s upbringing once a marriage failed has been noted in ethnographic descriptions of traditional society. For the Akan, for example, Fortes notes that:

"Even after a divorce a father is held by custom to be obliged to support his children. However, the divorce often makes him less amenable to claims on the grounds that a wife and children from an existing marriage require prior consideration” (Fortes. 1950).
small thing ... it was his new wife who was looking after him. She was still trading.”
(Mrs. Kwei)

“My father was not the serious type, that is why the marriage broke down, because ... he
didn’t work much and he didn’t know how to look after money. So it was usually
always my mother who paid for our education, my father didn’t do much.... When he
was old we used to visit him at times and take some gifts for him.... His other children
and the wife they were catering for him.” (Mrs. Ward)

“My father divorced my mother when I was small. So he wasn’t living with us ... he
wasn’t providing for me. Then he had other children with another wife. When he was
old it was his cousin and these other children who were looking after him. I used to go
there at times and visit and bring some small parcel.” (Mrs. Larbi)

6.3 Patterns of non-support

Although, as all respondents asserted, most older people in the past received
support from their children, (even if only as token gestures), there definitely were
some cases – though rare – where children provided nothing at all to their
parents. Most of these cases were ones of ‘retaliation’. Children withheld
support from fathers who had wholly failed to provide for them:

“There were some children who didn’t mind their father. Because the father didn’t look
after him or her, they also wouldn’t do it....” (Mrs. Nima)

In some cases, particularly ‘disrespectful’ children also withheld support from
fathers who had only partially provided for them, although – as we have seen -
the majority did provide at least token gestures to such fathers:

“Most children...would still give something to the old man.... But some didn’t because
they were disrespectful.” (Mrs. Kwei)

“Sometimes what happened was that the old man had married many wives and had stuck
to one and hadn’t cared much for the others and their children. So when he was old the
children didn’t also come to look after the father ... they didn’t respect.” (Mrs. Ward)
Apart from this retaliation towards fathers, there were rare cases where children refused to provide support to their mothers because they accused them of witchcraft\textsuperscript{204}:

"There were some old ladies...they would brand them as witches. And if they declared you a witch people would not look after you much, but at least someone would have mercy." (Mr. Prempeh)

"When the children called her a witch ... she wouldn’t get much care. Most of her own children they would not want to care for her, but at least someone would definitely help." (Mrs. Prah)

However, as the statements clearly indicate, this did not mean that the older person was totally without support. The family again acted as a buffer, ensuring that such women had at least their most basic needs met.

6.4 The costs of old age support in the past

What were the costs of providing support to aged parents and relatives? How easy or difficult was it, in financial terms, for children to support aged parents or relatives?

\textit{Providing old age support was easy}

There can be no doubt that providing old age support to parents and relatives in the past was not financially difficult. It was, as all respondents stressed, easy.

"I was providing for everything for my mother, but it wasn’t difficult... I was working and in those days \textit{kenkey}\textsuperscript{205} was only half a penny." (Mrs. Kwei)

\textsuperscript{204} All respondents confirmed and emphasised that it was usually mothers who were accused of being witches: "The women was most, always we saw women become witches but we didn’t see old men become wizards, only one." (Mr. Mills).

Most respondents could not explain why it was mostly women, although some mentioned that older women were more quarrelsome than older men:

"Maybe, you know, these old ladies, sometimes they are too troublesome, the way they behave..." (Mr. Azu)

\textsuperscript{205} \textit{Kenkey} is one staple food in Ghana made from fermented corn.
“It was not difficult at all. I was working at the Public Works Department and my pay was 4 pounds a month.... So the 30 shillings I gave to my mother didn’t worry me at all.” (Mr. Azu)

“Oh formerly, it was easy to look after your parents, it wasn’t difficult.” (Mrs. King)

“It was easy to give things to your relatives in those days. You see, in those days there was plenty of food, so it wasn’t difficult.” (Mr. Baddoo)

The fact that providing old age support was easy was due to a number of interlocking factors.

**Low costs of living**

First, and most important, it was due to the *low cost of living*. The most basic item – food – was cheap and affordable:

“In those days you could feed a whole house with 2 or 4 shillings, 10 shillings went a long way and a crown was a million to them, so what people received was enough for them.” (Mrs. Addo)

“In the olden days you could buy cheap, cheap, cheap things … formerly you would buy *kenkey* and fish for one *peswa* only.” (Mr. Azu)

Medical care (usually in the form of herbs) was equally cheap:

“… in those days we got good medicine - the traditional one and the new one – and it was cheap.” (Mr. Azu)

“In those days they could afford to go to hospital, the drugs were of reasonable prices,... and of course ... many people used herbal treatments which cost next to nothing at all.” (Mrs. Ward)

Other basic needs of living, too, were easily affordable. Where people lived in the family house, accommodation was free and building one’s own home was inexpensive; water was free; and electricity, if used at all, was cheap.

“In those days you didn’t need much money. What have you got to do with money? You are ... not paying rent, you are not paying the electricity bill and no water bill, and everybody goes to farm to collect foodstuffs and you make a trap to catch animals for your meat.” (Mr. Prempeh)

“Formerly you could just go and build a house, it was cheap, and even you didn’t have to buy a plot.” (Mr. Azu)
Moreover, there was not much need to pay for routine transport and there weren’t many other consumer needs, such as television, cars and so on\textsuperscript{206}. Finally, the costs of education for children (especially elementary education) were low:

“Formerly it was cheap to give your children education.” (Mr. Okine)

“In the past you could afford to send children to school….” (Mrs. Addo)\textsuperscript{207}

\textbf{Little need for medical care}

Apart from the nominal low costs of the items provided to older people, it also appears as if the amount that needed to be provided – especially in terms of medical treatment – was relatively little. On the one hand this was due to the fact, as all respondents emphasised, that most older people were more or less ‘strong until they died’ and thus did not need much by way of medical treatment or care:

“You see, in those days people were strong till they died, and people lived longer in those days…” (Mr. Thompson; emphasis added)

\textsuperscript{206} The respondents’ accounts of the low costs of living in the past are corroborated by the descriptions in the literature. They show that from the 1920s to the 1960s Ghana enjoyed a generally good economic situation. Although in the 1920s and ‘30s, Ghana, like the rest of the world, experienced a depression, this did not noticeably affect the standard of living. In fact, it was noted that during this period salaried wage-earners in particular were ‘rather well off’ (Robertson, 1981). The period from the 1940s to the 1950s saw an economic boom (largely due to high cocoa prices on the world market), and the 1950s were the most prosperous era the country had ever seen. Although the economy began to decline in the late 1950s, the population was still not too adversely affected and, at least until the mid-1960s people’s wages and income still kept substantially ahead of food prices (Donkor, 1995).

\textsuperscript{207} The respondents’ accounts of the affordability of education in the past are borne out by the data on the history of school fees as far as it has been possible to trace this in the literature. For example, it is clear that between 1952 and 1966 – the period in which most respondents will have been sending their children to school – the central government progressively eliminated tuition fees in public primary, middle and secondary schools, as well as in teacher training institutions. (Until then secondary school fees had presented a very real barrier to education.) In 1952 primary school fees were eliminated followed by middle and secondary school fees in 1961 and 1965 respectively. Textbooks were made free in 1963 (see George, 1976). School and book fees have, since then, been variously reintroduced and eliminated by successive administrations and policies. The more recent trends are discussed in the following chapter.
"Oh... the other older people then... they had no protracted sickness. Short time sick then they died" (Mr. Prempeh)

On the other hand, it was due to the fact that even where older people were debilitated there were no particular medical treatments, such as, for example, physiotherapy or hypertension drugs, that were available.

**Shared responsibility**

The third factor that contributed to making old age support affordable for the individual was the joint or shared responsibility for the welfare of the old and young within the family. This ensured that even if a particular item of support — for example, an operation — was unaffordable to the child or children, the family would share the costs.

By the same token, the family would share the costs or assist if a particular item of support for one's children — for example, secondary school education — was too expensive for the parents:

"If one didn't have enough means say to send the children to secondary school the others would help with paying the school fees." (Mrs. Addo)

"For example, one of your relatives may have a very brilliant child but can't afford to pay for the secondary school. So then the uncle or so helps." (Mr. Hutton)

**Low opportunity costs of support**

Together the above three factors meant that people's resources were sufficient to cater for their own, their children's as well as their older parents' (or relatives') needs. In other words, the opportunity costs of providing support for older
parents (or relatives) were not too high. It did not conflict with the present needs or future aspirations of the young and their offspring.

Having examined the patterns and costs of family support for older people in the past, the question is now, why did people provide such support to aged parents and relatives? What were their reasons and motives?

6.5 Reasons for supporting older parents

There can be no doubt that people supported their parents because it was their duty to do so. All respondents, without exception, expressed their reasons for supporting their aged parents exclusively in terms of their normative duty as children to do so.

Filial duty

Many respondents expressed their filial duty as a duty to repay the care they had received in childhood; some quoting the proverb:

"My mother looked after me so I should also look after her...We have a proverb here in Ghana that if your parents look after you when you are growing your teeth you must also look after them when they are losing their teeth." (Mrs. Tettey)

"Because ... he looked after me, so I know I have to look after him." (Mr. Mills)

"It was my duty you see, she was my mother, she took care of me when I was young, so it was my duty to take care of her." (Mr. Prempeh)

"She brought me into this world, I have eaten her food and all that, and now that she couldn't work, I had to take care of her." (Mrs. Prah)

Others, including the four respondents talking about their absent fathers, made no spontaneous reference to the reciprocal aspect. They saw their duty simply in
terms of the formal status duty on children. They had to support their parents

*because they were their parents:*

"Because they brought us into the world, it was our duty to look after them." (Mrs. Nima)

"Because I had to do it. It was my duty, so I can’t ignore it. He brought me forth so when he was old it was my duty to go and take care of him." (Mr. Baddoo)

"It was something we had to do, he was a father … we felt we had to do it." (Mr. Thompson)

"Because he brought me forth, it was my duty." (Mrs. Larbi)

Most, when questioned further, invoked the reciprocal aspect of their duty:

Q: Mrs. Nima: "But why was it your duty to look after your parents?"
   "Because they looked after us when we were small."

However, those who were talking about their absent fathers did not refer to reciprocity. They simply repeated that their duty existed because he was their father, despite there not being any obvious element of reciprocation:

Q: Mrs. Kwei: "Why did you feel it was your duty to look after your father – you said he didn’t support you when you were young?"
   "Your father brought you into this world so it is still your responsibility."

_Fear of consequences_

The only two respondents who did not refer directly to their duty as children were two older women, both poor and uneducated. They expressed their prime reason for supporting their parents in terms of the _sanctions_ attached to not fulfilling their duty. Their prime motive was to _avoid_ the consequences that would have otherwise come about. They wished specifically to avoid retribution from their own children:

Q: Mrs. Otoo: "What was on your mind when you were looking after your mother?"
   "I was thinking that if I don’t take care of my mother my children won’t take care of me."
Mrs. Ayi: "Why did you look after your parents when they were old?"
"Because I know that when I take care of my mother and my father, my children too will take care of me. Whatever you do and you do it good, you don't just do it like that, people have seen it and you will be rewarded."

Although for the other older people the fear of consequences was not the primary reason for providing support, it was nevertheless there as a motivating force in the background. Several respondents (who again all had comparatively little education) expressed this directly. Some referred especially to the fear of punishment from God or curses from the older person:

Mr. Mills: "Because my father, he looked after me, so I know I have to look after him. If I hadn't sent money to my father, my father would have spoken bad of me, cursed me, and when the old people speak bad of you it is something like cursing - then you will not prosper, you will not prosper."

Q: "But is that why you sent money to your father?"
Mr. Mills: "Oh yes, oh yes, so that my father speaks good of me before he dies."

"[I took care of her] because she took care of me during the time of my youth, so if I don't do it God says I will not get a long life." (Mr. Mensah)

Others referred to the fear of family sanctions:

"We were afraid of the old man's brothers, uncles. Everybody was afraid of them. If you don't take care of the old man they will get you out from the family." (Mr. Baddoo)

The other respondents, although they did not refer to the fear of sanctions as a motivating force, nevertheless expressed their acute awareness of the serious consequences that would have come about had they not supported their parents.

Again they especially feared the threat of family sanctions:

"The people in my family and in the community they would have challenged us if we hadn't taken care of our parents. It would have been a disgrace to us." (Mrs. Nima)

"I fail to do it, they, the family will blame me. They will call me and ask 'why are you not looking after him'. And if you don't mind them they will finish with you. So when
something happens to you and you go to them ... they won't mind you, they won't help you.” (Mr. Akpan)

Then there was the threat of punishment from God:

“I feared, because of what I had been taught in the bible. In the ten commandment there is a line saying that if you respect your parents you will be rewarded, you will have a long life, but if not you will not have a long life.” (Mr. Prempeh)

“If I hadn’t taken care of my father it would have been a sin, because God says you have to respect your father and mother, and God will have punished me.” (Mrs. Tettey)

or the curse of the old parent:

“If I hadn’t taken care of my mother, and she would say something like ‘ah this my child, what I have done for this child but he doesn’t remember, is that how he is’, God would hear it and he would punish me. It is like a curse.” (Mrs. King)

“If I hadn’t done it the old man would have talked and it would have been a curse on me. If you don’t take care of your parents and you don’t respect them it is a curse on you from God.” (Mr. Baddoo)

or, finally, the threat of retribution from one’s children:

“If I hadn’t looked after my father my children wouldn’t look after me.” (Mrs. Kwei)

“If I hadn’t taken care of my parents my own children would also not take care of me when I am old.” (Mrs. Osu)\(^\text{208}\)

Intriguingly, the threat of such external metaphysical sanctions was not prominent among the few older people who were highly educated or ‘enlightened’ (for example, who had lived in the West). They invoked only an internalised sanction, a sense of conscience and guilt: (although one respondent, Mrs. Ward, did link this to a perceived external punishment)

\(^{208}\) The fact that it was again exclusively women (especially poor women) who feared the loss of their own old age support from children, and that in general (as mentioned in the previous chapter) poor women were most acutely aware of this threat, was very possibly a reflection of their much greater dependence on children for security in old age.
"If I didn’t do it my conscience would disturb me ..., and it will mean that if things are not going well I would put it to the fact that I didn’t look after my mother." (Mrs. Ward)

"I would have felt so guilty, I wouldn’t have felt free." (Mrs. Prah)

"I would have felt bad. She has looked after you, cared for you, it would have felt guilty not doing it." (Mr. Okine)

Their feelings echo the sense of guilt and shame that, as described in Chapter Two, children in the West experience when they fail to support their older parents. The fact that here it was only the highly educated respondents (or those who had lived in the West) who perceived an internal sense of conscience rather than external punishment from God, raises intriguing questions about the possible effect of ‘enlightened’ conceptions on the internalisation of metaphysical sanctions. However, it is not possible to pursue them further here.

6.5.1 Familial and social background of filial duty norms

The prime importance of filial duty and the attached sanctions as the main reason why people provided support to parents can be better understood if one considers that this duty and the consequences of failing to conform to it, were ingrained in people from an early age. Children usually got to know of their duty through verbal instruction, typically from older people in the family, though not the parents themselves:

"It is natural, this is my father, he is old, I have to look after him. We came to meet it. And some of the elderly people in the house used to talk about it, how to live your life and that you have to take care of your parents when they are old and they would tell us that if you don’t do it you too won’t live long and your children too won’t take care of you.” (Mr. Azu)

209 Most respondents emphasised that parents usually did not tell their children of their duty towards them. Only two said that parents sometimes, when making particular expenditures, reminded their children of the expected reciprocation:

“They used to say ‘I am sending you to school so you too when I am old I know you will look after me.’” (Mr. Mills)
"Everybody knows it is your duty to look after your parents when they are old. Everybody knows it. You see we have a proverb here that if your parents look after you when you are growing your teeth you must look after them when they are old and losing theirs ... and the old people, at times, they would be telling us this proverb." (Mrs. Nima)

In school and church they were additionally reminded of their duty to honour and respect parents (and old people in general):

"In school the teachers always insisted that we should respect and serve the old men and women. They told us that if we did that we would get a blessing, we would prosper in life and I wanted that kind of blessing. And the elders in the family they told us the same, that if we respect the old men and women we would get blessing. And they preached this to us in church. You see we had our own children's service, and this they hammered into us. 'Honour your parents.' They drummed that into our ears: so everywhere they told us to honour the old people, everywhere — in school, at home and in church." (Mr. Prempeh)

Most importantly, however, children learnt about their duty by repeatedly seeing it fulfilled around them:

"It is not something you pass on by word. It is part of life.... When you grow up in this society then you get to learn it. You learn it because it has been done repeatedly in your lifetime. So you know that this is what you have to do. This is your duty." (Mr. Hutton)

"No one taught me or told me that this is my duty, you just know that this is your mother — she brought you forth, she took care of you — you have to take care of her, it is natural and you saw others doing it." (Mrs. Prah)

They learnt, moreover, that it was a binding duty by seeing people being challenged or punished for not conforming:

"When you are growing, you sometimes see other people being punished and challenged for not looking after their old mother or father properly — so you know it is your duty, you know you have to do it." (Mr. Mensah)

"You see nobody told me that this is my duty. You see I learnt it from seeing ... that people who are not looking after their parents are being rebuked, they are blamed by other people inside and outside of the family. So all of us who were children we listened and gathered some fact from it." (Mr. Prempeh)

Thus it was precisely seeing others being punished for non-conformity that reinforced its status as a duty. This raises interesting issues about the
reproduction of social norms, but again it is not possible to pursue these further here.

**An ingrained knowledge of right and wrong and fear of punishment**

Children's knowledge of their binding duty towards parents and of the sanctions for not fulfilling it, were part of a whole culture in which a person knew what was required of them and feared the consequences of not conforming. This culture of right and wrong and the *fear* of punishment was inculcated in the young right from the start. It was a key element of the socialisation of children:

"You see, we knew that if we don't listen to our parents we get punished. So you do the right thing. *And it gets to a time when it becomes part and parcel of you. You know what is good and you know what is bad. And you know what happens to you if you do what is bad.....* You see, that was the thing." (Mrs. Prah; emphasis added)

"You see we had fear when we were young. We had in our heads that 'if I do anything wrong I will get punished' - so we didn't do it..." (Mrs. Addo)

"You see in the past...we were always looking out for what we should or shouldn't do. You yourself wanted to know because you knew you would get punished if you do something you shouldn't do..." (Mr. Hutton)

The fear of punishment was achieved through strict and often extremely harsh disciplining and corporal punishment of children:

"When I was young – how I was trained, eh! My mother was so strict on me – the least mistake and I would be punished, so I was afraid. I would be afraid to do anything wrong, so I humbled myself to my mother." (Mrs. Tettey)

"In our days parents were harsh on you, they were really harsh. They wouldn't beat you to death or anything, but they were really harsh – for you to remember it always that this is not something you should do. They would beat you...and sometimes they wouldn't give you any food." (Mr. Hutton)
“We feared our parents and elders ... if you misbehaved your father ... would not even let you eat – and that put some fear into us. And my uncle could whip you even if you were a grown child.” (Mr. Thompson)

The importance accorded to strict disciplining was such that if parents were felt to be too soft on their children, they were sent to relatives or to schoolteachers to be trained and to ensure that they would not go astray:

“My relatives thought that if I stayed with my parents I might be spoilt and not disciplined properly, so they sent me to stay with my father’s sister so that she should train me properly.” (Mrs. Nima)

For those who went to school, the strict disciplining and inculcation of fear that children received at home was continued by the teachers:

“At school we were disciplined harshly. One of my principals at school would punish me by not giving me food for one day, or they would beat you, sometimes on the head.” (Mr. Brew).

Fear of the family and fear of God

The fear of punishment instilled in children manifested itself, on the one hand, in general fear of the authority of the family – embodied in the elders or the family head:

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Some of the statements already indicate and all respondents emphasised that although it was first and foremost parents who disciplined their children in this way, others were also involved. It was, in fact, a feature of the extended family setting in the past that children were not only disciplined by parents but by other senior family members or even people in the community:

“Formerly, if you tell a child ‘don’t do this’ it won’t do it. Any child that committed an offence and you would beat it, nobody would say anything. And the parents would come to you and thank you that you have disciplined the child to become a good citizen.” (Mr. Azu)

The communal socialisation of children within the extended family is also described in the literature. Nukunya (1992) for example notes:

Though the upbringing of the young is the direct responsibility of the parents, in practice this is not so. All the adults, the youths and the bigger girls are involved in the process. Whether the mother is around or absent, there is no fear that the child will be without the necessary care, sanctions or instructions. Nor is this limited to the enclosed compound. A child who needs attention of any kind outside its house will have some from a relative passing by. The same applies to the one who deserves a reprimand, lecture or even beating. This is done on the principle that the good of the child is the benefit of all its relations just as anything bad about it affects them. (p.171)
"You see, in our time when there was a message that the family head wants you, you start to shake, you ask yourself so many questions. 'What have I done?' 'Has somebody gone to report me?' Because you are afraid." (Mr. Akpan)

"During our days, if a senior uncle gives an order it is an order - that is all - you have to obey it. During our times whatever an uncle says - it is law." (Mr. Akpan)

"In the past we wouldn't dare to ignore what the family says." (Mrs. Prah)

On the other hand it manifested itself in a strong fear of God.

"You see we feared, we feared. There was God fearing in people..." (Mrs. Ward)

"In the olden days we had the fear of God. We knew that if we do wrong we will get our punishment." (Mrs. Nima)

"Oh we feared God." (Mrs. Kwei)

Both the fear of the family and of God crucially underpinned the threat of family and metaphysical sanctions that made people conform to their duty to support their parents.

**High visibility of actions**

The specific threat of family sanctions was further enhanced by the high visibility (or audibility) of people's actions. Living in a family house, or close to one's relatives, meant that people knew how to conduct themselves, including how a person treated or provided for their parents:

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211 At this point it is interesting to note that although it is commonly assumed that in traditional society the older one was the more power and influence one received, several respondents indicated that that was not necessarily the case. Mr. Hutton for example noted that the real power or decision making rested with middle-aged or young-old people, rather than the very old:

"The oldest people in those days, they would say, I am above you, but in reality it was the ones around 50 or 60, they would do and decide and they would not even tell the oldest people about it. 'Your canoe has reached the shore, you know', 'don't bother the old man'. The point is that when they tell them something the next day they will have forgotten everything."

His account clearly resonates with the earlier mentioned arguments in the literature that in traditional society it was not the oldest, but rather middle aged males who had the power (e.g. Douglas, 1963).

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"I fail to do it, they, the family will blame me ... they would know. Whenever you are doing something they [the family] will see it, they will see it." (Mr. Baddoo; emphasis added)

"In the olden days people in your family, and outside would know, because they would see it or hear it. They knew exactly what was going on." (Mr. Hutton)

This lack of privacy and close scrutiny has also been described in the literature as a key feature of traditional residence patterns. Nukunya (1992b), for example, notes how:

... whatever one does comes under the close scrutiny of relatives who may openly debate it and make pointed suggestions whose neglect will lead to further reproaches or even resentment. Even the food one eats, the amount one spends and the treatment given to spouse and children are all matters that form the subject of comments, suggestions or discussion. (p.173)

However, it should be noted that despite their potency, family sanctions were not 100% effective in ensuring conformity. All respondents agreed that there always were some people for whom the sanctions held no threat. These people were mostly those who were rich or self-sufficient enough to be able to afford to ignore the family:

"Some people would just go and not mind the family. Probably he is in a good position, earning, working, he is a prosperous person, or he has a job working as a labourer somewhere, he will go." (Mr. Prempeh)

"... some of them who were rich, they have their own means, they wouldn't be scared...." (Mr. Mills)\textsuperscript{212}

\textsuperscript{212} Just like the respondents, the literature has also noted that for some individuals - those who had a secure and independent income - the traditional dependence on the family and thus the threat of sanctions, was considerably weakened:

The ability of the people to sell their labour and to migrate ... meant that people could earn their living quite independently of their lineages and kin groups. The outcome of this was the weakening of the kin group's hold on the individual with all its consequences and implications. The fact that the individual could earn his own living led to independent action and a threat to interdependence of kinsfolk (Nukunya, 1992b, p.124).
Or they were 'rebels' who simply did not care, despite the negative consequences for them:

Mr. Okine: "There were people that were rebels- don’t you think that it was like this throughout – they were rebels.”
Q: "What used to happen to them?"
Mr. Okine: "Oh they were outcast, people didn’t bother about them, they were branded. They would survive running around different houses, some would have compassion on them, but they didn’t survive very well."

6.6 The motivational basis of support to older parents

Having established that conformity with filial duty was the children’s main reason for supporting aged parents, and that this arose in a context in which, right from childhood, emphasis was placed on compliance with social norms, it is now possible to analyse in more depth the nature of the motivational basis that underpinned their support. This requires first of all a consideration of those factors that evidently did not figure as reasons for providing support to parents.

No exchange

The first of the factors not involved in compelling support was an element of mutual exchange. The respondents made it clear that they were repaying the care and support they had received in childhood. They were not providing support in exchange for help (for example, help with childcare) that the older parents were giving them:

Q: "When your mother was old and you were living with her, was she helping you in some way?"
Mrs. Ayi: "She was helping me to look after the children so when I was going out to do the trading she was watching the children. At times she would help me prepare the food."
Q: "You said you were providing for your mother – were you doing it because she was helping you like that?"
Mrs. Ayi: "Oh no, no. She catered for me when I was young that is why now I had to cater for her."
Q: "So even if she hadn't helped you with the children and at times cooking, you would still have to cater for her?"
Mrs. Ayi: "Yes, because she took care of me...."

Nor were they providing support in exchange for a significant share of inheritance after the parents' deaths. All respondents maintained that inheritance was not a factor in their consideration. However it cannot be ruled out that this simply reflected a reluctance to admit such motives, but this is unlikely given the respondents' general openness. The relative unimportance of inheritance as a factor compelling filial support was further indicated by several other factors.

First of all, support was often given in cases where parents did not have much (useful) property to bequeath:

"You see my father also was poor so I did not have anything in mind about inheritance, my mother too also had nothing, even if she left something it would be cloth or some jewellery which is of no use to me. So when she died I didn't even get a peswa legacy. No, it was the fact that she looked after me that forced me to look after her." (Mr. Prempeh)

Second, the traditional rules of inheritance typically meant that property was usually distributed in the customary order of generation and seniority, which, as mentioned before, meant that the children did not receive the main share.

Finally, even where children were the main beneficiaries\(^\text{213}\), it does not appear as if the share of each usually depended on the amount of support they had given:

\[^{213}\text{As described earlier, the customary format of inheritance began to be changed in favour of children and spouses with the advent of the cocoa industry and was enshrined in law in 1985.}\]
Mrs. Osu: “Although it was my sister who was taking care of my father when he was sick, we all shared the estate among each other.”

Q: “So it is not that the one who cares the most inherits the most?”

Mrs. Osu: “No, that is not what usually happened...”

No economic coercion

Apart from the absence of exchange, there was also no obvious element of economic coercion compelling the provision of support to parents. None of the respondents mentioned coercion, nor any economic dependency (which would form the basis for coercion), in their accounts.

No affection or gratitude

Most crucially, however, support was apparently not compelled by any element of affection or love. There was no obvious sense of wanting to support parents out of gratitude and appreciation. The tenor was exclusively on having to.

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214 What did sometimes happen, however, as Mrs. Osu further described, was that promise of extra inheritance was given as a reward for those who showed particular concern:

“Only what sometimes happened was that if the old person was sick or in need and some of the children refused to help him then he would especially reward the one that did by making the will so that he or she gets the largest part.”

215 It is possible that the absence of such a basis for economic coercion is a feature of the changes to the traditional subsistence setting that had already taken place by the time the respondents were providing support. However, the descriptions in the literature, although not the most comprehensive, seem to indicate that even in a traditional agricultural subsistence society such a basis for economic coercion was not obviously given, since for the Ga and the Akan, access to land, which was communal property and ultimately belonged to the ancestors (the living merely being custodians of it), was free and guaranteed. As mentioned earlier, lineage membership alone gave every member a permanent right in the use of land, sea and other lineage property. The elders’ role was to merely administer the allocation of land ‘for the benefit of the lineage’ members. Thus, right to access to the land was for the most part not at the discretion of parents or elders (see Nukunya, 1992b). Thus the role of economic coercion in the anthropological interpretations seems to have played a minor role, if any at all.

216 Even though a hint of gratitude did emerge in very few of the rich respondents’ accounts of the token gestures given to affluent parents, it certainly did not emerge in their accounts of their motivations.
Not only did the respondents not mention affection, love or gratitude when describing their motivations for providing support for their aged parents\(^{217}\), they also did not invoke any such sentiments when talking about their parents in general\(^{218}\). Such an apparent absence of affection for parents was, it seems, common in the past:

"It is natural that people don’t have sympathy for their parents. It happens everywhere, also in the olden days ... but they still took care." (Mrs. Tettey)

However, it was clearly more marked for fathers than for mothers. All respondents stressed that, if at all, children felt more love for their mothers than for their fathers, because mothers were more caring and loving, and, in contrast to fathers, rarely shirked their responsibilities\(^{219}\):

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\(^{217}\) The apparent absence of feelings of affection and gratitude obviously stands in stark contrast to the situation in the contemporary West where, as described in Chapter Two, the personal relationship plays an important role in underpinning the provision of old age support. It may be one reason for the apparent unimportance of the emotional dimension in old age support compared to the West.

\(^{218}\) The lack of mention of emotions such as affection or love was clearly not a reflection of a general lack of emotional expression. Nor was it simply a manifestation of the general relatively low emotional content in personal relationships in Ghana, which has been imputed in the literature (Pellow, 1977) and which reflects my own experience of Ghanaian and also Nigerian interpersonal relationships and their contrast with the typical, often intensely emotional, or psychologically involved relationships in the West. Respondents directly expressed and referred to feelings of love when talking about other issues, not least, as we shall see, about help between relatives. Thus it is clear that the absence of love or feelings of affection signified something specific about the relationship between parents and children and the motivational basis for providing support to older parents.

\(^{219}\) The notion of mothers sacrificing for their children has also been described in the literature as an established feature of the traditional Ghanaian family. Fortes (1950), for example, notes:

A mother stints no labour or self-sacrifice for the good of her children - it is mainly to provide them with food, clothing and nowadays education that she works so hard, importunes her husband and jealously watches her brother to make sure that he discharges the duties of legal guardian dutifully. (p.263)

In the same vein, Apt (1996) categorically states that “… mothers in Ghana are generally more striving in the care of their children” (p.42)
"Mothers love their children more than fathers. Some fathers don’t bother about the children, so we loved our mothers more than our fathers." (Mr. Baddoo)\textsuperscript{220}

"Usually in Ghana here we love our mothers more than our fathers because the mothers love their children more than the fathers." (Mrs. King)

"People love their mothers more than the fathers because the mothers suffer more for the child." (Mrs. Ayi)

Thus, as the above statements clearly indicate, children felt love, affection and gratitude towards their parents only if their parents had loved and cared for them. In other words, affection and gratitude of children was dependent on the parents having shown love to them.

This raises the question of why children in the past commonly did not feel much love for their parents, despite the fact that their parents had raised and provided for them? Although it is not possible to explore this question in much depth here, two plausible arguments can be addressed.

The first reason is perhaps precisely because it was a parental duty. Children had a right to expect such support from their parents, so receiving it did not elicit any particular feelings of affection and gratitude. Thus, it seems that what mattered in creating a sense of affection and gratitude was the degree to which parents, in a sense, went beyond the call of duty, really cared about and showed their love to the child. This is directly linked to the second factor, which probably underpinned the absence of affection for parents, and this was the harsh disciplining that fathers\textsuperscript{221} in particular gave their children. Parents were first

\textsuperscript{220}The greater irresponsibility of fathers is reflected in the cases of absent fathers.

\textsuperscript{221}Although mothers were undoubtedly also involved in the harsh disciplining of their children – as the respondents’ earlier descriptions testify – they were perhaps not as harsh not as disciplinarian as fathers. Indications of this are given in the literature describing traditional parent–child relationships. Azu (1979), for example, notes: 

\textldots a son does not ‘fear’ his mother as much as he does his father who is a symbol of ‘hardness and harshness’. (p.68)
and foremost figures of authority who were feared because of the punishments
and harm they inflicted. It is thus very unlikely that children felt an emotional
closeness and affection for their parents\(^{222}\) or indeed, felt that their parents loved
them. The crucial implication of the above is that in the past, children supported
their aged parents \textit{even though} these parents had not shown them much love and
even though they thus felt no particular gratitude or affection towards them:

"If the child knew that the old parent didn't love him or her they too would not feel to
care for the old parent…. But most took care because they had the fear of God in
them….." (Mrs. Achim)

"It was my obligation to take care of her, even though she never helped me much…. I
felt that whatever way I look at it, she brought me into the world. I have eaten her food
and all that, when I was tiny she carried me, she washed my clothes, so I owed her
something….." (Mrs. Prah)

In the most extreme case, as already described, they even provided support to
parents (usually fathers) who had largely failed to provide for them\(^{223}\).

Thus, in the past, support to older parents was \textit{not} dependent on the parents’ past
conduct. Whether or not parents had shown love to their children and fulfilled all
their responsibilities, and whether or not children thus felt gratitude and a
positive wish to reciprocate and help their parents did not matter. They provided
support anyway. The reason for this, of course, was that the duty on children to
honour parents (and repay them for the nurturing received in infancy) was

Nukunya (1992) makes a similar observation:

… as opposed to father, the mother is not so much concerned with discipline. Love and
care for her children are her main concerns. (p.28)

\(^{222}\) This ties in with the entire discourse about the psychological effect of different modes of
raising children, especially the use of harsh discipline on children, on the relationship between
parents and children. It is unfortunately impossible, here – apart from raising the connection – to
engage in or discuss this in detail.

\(^{223}\) Although it could be argued that the fact that only token rather than substantial support was
provided was a withholding of support, this is not necessarily the case, because the fathers’ needs
were typically already taken care of by their new wives and children. Had this not been the case,
it seems very likely that the children would have provided more substantially.
absolutely binding. This overriding duty meant that most children did not judge their parents' performance and make full use of the clause of conditionality, which, strictly speaking, would have allowed them to withhold support from parents (usually fathers) who had wilfully neglected part of their parental duty. The only times where children did perhaps withhold all support was in cases where fathers had not provided for them at all, had not fulfilled any part of their parental duty, and where mothers were accused of witchcraft. In the latter case the duty to honour and repay the care and nurture received in childhood was suspended.

The fear of consequences and self-interest

Why did most children fulfil their filial duty to support parents, even though they felt no positive wish or gratitude, and received or expected nothing in exchange? The answer is that they did it, ultimately, because they feared the grave consequences that would otherwise have accrued to them. These consequences—the metaphysical and familial punishments—meant that not looking after, or honouring, one's parents was simply not an option:

Q: “What if you didn’t take care of your mother?”
Mr. Azu: “By all means you have to give.”
Q: “But what if you decided not to?”
Mr. Azu: “You can’t refuse to, you see, you can’t do it….224

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224 It is tempting to speculate that it was precisely because of the widespread absence of affection for parents in pre-modern society that there was a need for adults in most such societies to formulate a binding moral duty on children to support their aged parents as part of the religious or moral code, and to enforce it by the threat of sanctions and the promise of reward. This idea fits in with Gouldner's (1973) argument that an obligation must be institutionalised precisely because the impulse to fulfil it is not very powerful, and because it must be assumed that people who do have this impulse are relatively few, the rest being unwilling. It also fits in with arguments put forward in moral philosophy, for example by Warnock (1971), that the general objective of moral norms is to "... countervail [people's] limited sympathies and their potentially most damaging effects" (p.26/27). Mackie (1977) in the same vein, notes that "the function of morality is primarily to counteract the limitation of men's sympathies" (p.108).
The fear of the curse of the old parent in particular meant, moreover, that the support had to be to his or her satisfaction.

People thus provided (satisfactory) support because they knew that it was *in their own self-interest*. It was not only necessary for maintaining their standing in the family and community, but also for their general welfare and chances in life, and most specifically for their own welfare in old age. This self-interested or self-protective awareness which underpinned the provision of support is perhaps best captures by the notion, put forward by Gerth and Mills (1954), that human beings to some extent anticipate a future for themselves, and to an extent act to bring it about.

**Egoism in altruism**

The underlying self-interest was, of course, expressed most directly by those respondents, quoted above, who stated explicitly that they supported their parents *in order to* avoid the negative consequences of not doing so. To them, this was a self-evident, and perfectly natural reason for supporting parents. However, such self-interested, almost instrumental motivation was not just particular to them. It was, as the respondents indicated, the common motivation

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225 The power and influence, traditionally, of particularly metaphysical and familial sanctions in compelling behaviour in conformity with norms has also been noted in the literature. Nukunya (1992b), for example, notes that:

"The fear of reaction from relatives is...one of the factors which make people play the game of life according to the rules..." (p.172).

Sarpong (1974), referring to metaphysical sanctions, observes that they have traditionally served "as a deterrent against aberrant behaviour and an incentive to good conduct" (p.133).

226 In making this inference I agree with Gerth and Mills’ argument that “the vocabularies which persons choose for their statements of motive tend to be those which are accepted by others” (1954, p.120).
that made people do good and fulfil their obligations to others and arose out of their belief in retributive justice:

“If you do a bad thing you do it for yourself, if you do a good thing you do it for yourself . . . oh everyone knew this thing.” (Mr. Azu)

“You . . . do good because always when you do something you get something.” (Mr. Mills)

This selfish motivation, which effectively meant that there was an egoism in altruism, has also been described in the literature. Sarpong (1974) for example notes:

“The Ghanaian, being this world centred, wants to see the fruits of his labours here and now. He expects visible results of what he does to others, and if these will come to him in the form of praise, reciprocal rewards, health, escape from danger, riches, he is contented.” (p.67)

Gyekye (1987) in the same vein argues:

“It can be said that any wrong act is disgraceful but the pertinent question is whether it should be avoided in order to avoid disgrace or because it is wrong in itself. Akan moral thought leans heavily, I think, to the former alternative. The consequentialist stamp of Akan morality thus appears glaring”. (p.139)

227 Gouldner (1960) discusses the notion of altruism in egoism in relation to the effect of the norm and belief in reciprocity on social systems. He notes that it:

... actually mobilises egoistic motivations and channels them into the maintenance of the social system. Benthamite utilitarianism has long understood that egoism can motivate one party to satisfy the expectations of the other, since by doing so he induces the latter to reciprocate and to satisfy his own. (p173)

Gouldner goes on to argue that “there is an altruism in egoism, made possible through reciprocity” (p.173). Although he discusses this concept with respect to the norm and belief in reciprocity and its implications for social systems, the same principle applies here. There is an altruism in egoism or, more to the point, an ‘egoism in altruism’, made possible through the system of serious sanctions attached to non-conformity with normative prescriptions and fostered by the belief in retributive justice.

228 Gyekye (1987, p.131) refers to morality, as “patterns of moral behaviour, that is attitudes and responses to moral norms, rules, etc.; moral practice and commitment.” He contrasts this with morality, which he refers to as “moral beliefs, norms, rules, principles, ideals”.

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What is interesting is that this 'consequentialistic' orientation prevailed even though it ran counter to formal Christian ethics. The disapproval of self-interested motivations, or 'prudent' motives, i.e. of 'giving with reckoning' is, of course, a key emphasis in Christian thought. As Preston (1991) notes. Christianity demands that one should not do good for the sake of the reward but for the sake of love alone.

The fact that people nevertheless held and expressed such consequentialistic motives, and moreover typically related these to the Christian God's divine retribution, was thus clearly an example of syncretisation. In this case, this syncretisation was not far-fetched at all. Rather, it drew on the many biblical passages – not least those prescribing respect and honour to parents and elders – that positively lend themselves to consequentialistic thinking, because they explicitly promise rewards for good conduct and threaten penalties for bad.

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229 Syncretisation here refers to the process whereby Christian scriptures were effectively taken and interpreted in a way that was congruent with and fitted traditional orientation. The literature describes various forms and instances of syncretism in the practice of Christianity in Ghana and other African societies (e.g. Assimeng, 1986; Atiemo, 1995).

230 The apparent normality of such self-interested or even instrumental motives in the past also contrasts with contemporary Western conceptions, which typically disapprove of such essentially egotistical motivations, especially when helping and doing good to others (Baier, 1991). In moral philosophy, arguments to this effect have been put forward, for example, by Bernard Williams (1972), who maintains that "genuinely moral action must be motivated by the consideration that it is morally right, and by no other consideration at all" (p.29). One reason, therefore, for the fact that none of the highly educated, 'enlightened' respondents voiced such self-interested motives, may have been a reflection of their – at least partial – embracing or at least awareness of Western values.
6.7 The motivational basis of support to older relatives

There can be no doubt that the motivations for assisting older relatives were very different in character to those underpinning the provision of support to parents. In contrast to the compulsion that marked the support to parents, the giving to older relatives was much more voluntary in character. It was not the fulfilment of a strict and binding duty. Rather, people helped older relatives out of a sense of wanting to, or feeling they should. In some cases this arose simply out of a sense of beneficence, because the older person was in need:

Mr. Brew: “For example I used to remit my late uncle’s wife, you see this for instance, I wasn’t forced to do it, but I felt that if there is a need I will have to do it. Because I knew her situation I knew that she would be very grateful and happy if she received something from me…. So I sent some money. When somebody came from the village I said ‘look kindly give this to her’.”

Q: “So did your uncle’s wife help you in any way in the past, so that you were reciprocating something?”

Mr. Brew: “No, I just knew what her situation was, I knew she needed something so I felt I should give as I was in the position to do so.”

Mostly, however, the wish to help the older relative arose additionally out of a sense of reciprocity, because the older relative had, in one way or another, been good to them in the past (even if only by showing friendliness):

Mr. Prempeh: “I used to give to several of the old relatives, but there were some whom I didn’t mind. If I sat down and considered I don’t know what help they ever gave to me, but there were particular ones I liked.”

Q: “But what was on your mind, what was your reason for helping them?”

Mr. Prempeh: “My mind was that I was repaying what they had done for me, others I just liked them because the way they spoke to me, the way they entertained me, the way they would welcome me anytime I visited them and so on, that made me like them.”

“You see when I gave to my aunt I was thinking about the times when something happened and she helped, so I too should help her.” (Mrs. Larbi)

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231The sharing of food is not considered here because it was part of everyday sharing within families between all ages; it was not specifically directed at older people.
Why did people feel gratitude or even affection for older relatives who had helped them in the past (no matter how insubstantial the help had been)? Why gratitude for older relatives and not, as described earlier, for parents despite the fact that the latter had nurtured them in childhood? Again there are two sets of possible reasons. First, favours from relatives – unlike parental support – had not been the fulfilment of a duty, but had been voluntary, a giving ‘from the heart’. As such they evoked feelings of gratitude and affection\(^{232}\). Second, it was easier for people to feel affection for relatives, because relatives, unlike parents, were \(\textit{not}\) primarily ‘harsh’ figures of authority\(^{233}\).

Although people gave to relatives primarily out of sympathy or gratitude, they were nevertheless also motivated by the same self-interest or ‘egoism in altruism’ that guided the provision of support to parents. And again, that self-interest was linked to the social and metaphysical consequences that people believed would otherwise occur to them. Thus, people gave support to their relatives knowing that by doing so they were gaining rewards and avoiding forfeiture:

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\(^{232}\)This also emerged clearly from the way in which the respondents spoke about the love they felt for relatives in general. They asserted that people in the past felt love for their relatives \textit{because} the relatives had helped them in the past:

Mrs. Otoo: “You know ... we felt love for each other in the family, and you would help your relative out of your heart....”

Q: “Why did you love your relative?”

Mrs. Otoo: “Because if that person helped me before I will feel love for that person. Even the littlest thing the person does for you, you love them...”

Q: “But if they have never done anything for you, will you still love them?

Mrs.Otoo: “No”

\(^{233}\)The greater emotional closeness of children to relatives has, in fact, been noted in the literature as typical of the Ghanaian family. Azu (1974), for example, notes that on the whole “children are on more familiar and informal terms with their aunts and uncles than with their parents” (p.71). Similarly Azu (1974) and Nukunya (1992b) note that the traditional relationship with the grandparents was cordial and affectionate, and marked by love and trust.
“If I hadn’t helped them I wouldn’t have got blessing.” (Mrs. Nima)

“I thought that these are my mother’s sisters so when they are old and you ... them something ... they pray for you and all that you do will go on well. But if you don’t do it they will say ‘oh this man came and he didn’t give me anything’ and it will become like a curse and whatever you do it won’t go on well.” (Mr. Mills)

“The reason I used to go and help my uncle is if I don’t do it, nobody will do it for me when I am old. It will come to my turn to, so I will go and do it.” (Mr. Baddoo)

“... I helped her [mother’s sister] because I know that if I am young and I don’t help my relatives, by all means when I get old and I need something nobody too will do anything for me.” (Mr. Mensah)

What is clear, however, is that these consequences were nowhere near as threatening as those associated with not honouring one’s parents. Not giving to older relatives definitely remained an option.

6.8 Summary and conclusion

This exploration has shown that in line with the normative prescriptions, family support for older people in the past involved first and foremost material support and was principally provided by the older person’s adult children. Assistance from relatives nevertheless also played an important, typically supplementary, but at times complementary role. Together, the support from children and family ensured that most older people (many of whom also had some resources of their own) were adequately catered for. They not only had their basic needs met but also had a certain degree of surplus and leverage.

The fact that this system of old age family support was adequate or worked in the past was due to two main factors, which together meant that the weights were stacked in favour of (or at least nothing militated against) giving to the old.
On the one hand, it was affordable. The low cost of living and the shared responsibility within the extended family meant that the young could afford or had the capacity to provide sufficiently for their parents and give to their relatives. It did not conflict with their own or their children’s needs and it did not jeopardise their economic security.

On the other hand, and most importantly, the system worked because providing satisfactory support to older parents and relatives was in young people’s own interest – and they knew it. Apart from wanting to help older relatives – out of gratitude and affection – young people knew that doing so would bring them rewards and especially blessings from God.

By the same token, children knew – given the seriousness of the familial and metaphysical sanctions attached to their duty to honour parents – that supporting parents was vital for securing their own future welfare and security. Thus they supported parents, even un-loving parents for whom they felt no sense of affection or gratitude, and no positive wish to help them. In other words, they provided support irrespective of the parents’ past conduct and their own feelings for them.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CAUSES OF THE DECLINE IN FAMILY SUPPORT FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Having established how and why family support for older people was adequately provided in the past, this chapter now examines why and how this support has declined in recent times.

7.1 The nature of the decline

As the respondents made clear, the decline in family support has occurred on two levels. First, there has been a decrease in support provided by adult children, made manifest a) in the general reduction of the level or adequacy of such support:

"Nowadays the children ... the little they give you it cannot satisfy you." (Mr. Mills)

"Nowadays many children are not looking after their parents as well as in the olden days." (Mrs. Nima)

"In the olden days old people were looked after better by their children than these days...." (Mr. Brew)

And b) in the increasing incidence of children who do not care at all for their aged parents:

Mr. Mills: "These days some children just neglect their parents – I have seen it so many times."

Q: "But did that sort of thing also happen in the past?"

Mr. Mills: "Very very few, I can say, you wouldn’t see it hardly. But now there are many."

"These days some children ... they don’t do it, they don’t look after their parents at all, and that is why the old people in Ghana are suffering these days." (Mrs. Addo)

"Formerly, during our time when I was young it was better children used to look after their parents but in these days, there are some children who don’t take care of anything ... they will just look at you like a doormat, they won’t mind you. There are so many old
women and men for example here in Accra I have seen, the children don’t look after the parents at all.” (Mr. Azu)

“These days there are many children who don’t take care of their parents at all.” (Mrs. Ayi)

In addition there has been an almost complete erosion of support provided to older people by other relatives.

“In the olden days the relatives would also try and give the old person something, but now … they don’t do it anymore.” (Mr. Azu)

“In the olden days older people were cared for not just by the children but also the relatives. Everybody was sharing food and so on but now … only the children look after the old person.” (Mr. Thompson)

It is important to note that it is not just older people who have been affected by this decline in extended family help, but, as older respondents stressed, relatives in general, whether they are old or young:

“Now relatives they don’t want to give out their money but formerly we were not like that. Formerly there were no fences between the houses, but now people make fences. Formerly we helped each other. When this man cooks he will call the whole house to eat, when the other one cooks, the same thing. Now everybody chops in his own corner.” (Mr. Azu; emphasis added)

“This present time is worse than before, because you know during our time … there was something called love we felt for each other in the family more than people do now. You see, within the family if your sister’s son or your brother’s daughter is going to school and you know you can help, you help out of your heart. But right now it is like

234 The respondents’ description of the lack of support from relatives is clearly consonant with the survey findings from Ghana and other developing countries which, as discussed in Chapter Three, show large proportions of older people not receiving any financial assistance from their relatives. Their perception of a shift in responsibility solely to adult children (and perhaps the spouse) moreover supports the assertion in the Ghanaian literature described in Chapter Three, that such a shift has occurred.

235 The stark fall in support from other relatives, which the older people perceived, was borne out by the fact that almost none of the middle generation respondents reported providing any support to older relatives except their parents. The only exception were a few (mainly better-off respondents) who mentioned that they occasionally brought gifts to relatives when visiting their hometown. One of these was Mrs. Ward’s daughter:

“Occasionally when I go to the village I give something to my father’s sister. I suppose she is needy, but I don’t send her anything regularly, it is more like a present.”
each one for himself and God for us all ... that help doesn't come anymore.” (Mr. Akpan; emphasis added)

The young respondents confirmed this, often speaking from their own bitter experience:

"You see we were told that we have the extended family but as for me, I have not seen the use of it. The extended family is not helping, so you are always disappointed because you are expecting from them and they are not doing it...” (Mr. Mills’ son)

"... we have reached a stage where the extended family is not helping you. Formerly it was different but now if you rely on the extended family you fall. If you rely on them you fall. So you are on your own, only God can help you.” (Mrs. Otoo’s son)

"The family? Nobody! In this Ghana here, excuse me to say nobody looks out for their relatives ... they won’t help you. They only look out for their own children but not their brother’s or sister’s children. So you yourself must do it, you must fight on your own.” (Mr. Mensah’s daughter)

This general erosion in family help, as the above statements indicate, has meant that the responsibility for the welfare of older people has shifted exclusively onto the children or spouse, i.e. the nuclear family, just at a time when growing deficits in their support have made extended family help (which in the past would have compensated for such deficits) needed more than ever.

At the same time it has also meant a narrowing of responsibility for the welfare of younger people. Individuals alone are now responsible for their and their children’s material welfare and security.

236 The respondents were clear, however, and this was also confirmed by all younger respondents, that there are a few areas where the extended family still assists: these are first and foremost funerals, and to a lesser extent other ceremonies such as naming ceremonies (outdooring) and engagements:

"Though the family doesn’t help anymore, they still help when there is a funeral or when there is an outdooring.” (Mrs. King)

"You see although we say we have the extended family system, you can’t see it when it comes to finances and all those things. When it comes to someone to pay for something, to do this or that, you won’t find it... But it is things like funerals or outdooring. It is there that you see the extended family system. Because you can’t do it alone. But when it comes to money everything comes back to the nuclear family.” (Mr. Akpan’s son)
7.2 Manifestations of the decline: current inadequacies in family support

The manifestations of the decline in family support for older people were apparent in the inadequate support received by the poor and many of the middle income older respondents themselves. They receive no tangible help from their relatives (despite the fact that many lived together with relatives in the family house, or in the same neighbourhood or town as their relatives):

“These days all the relatives in the house, though they are my relatives but you know, they don’t help … nobody takes care of you, they don’t give you any food…. unless maybe there is a big crisis, they will say ‘oh I should give this my uncle a peswa or a penny’.” (Mr. Azu)

They also do not receive sufficient support from their children:

“What my children give me is not enough....” (Mr. Mills)

“What my children give me it is not sufficient. It is not sufficient for what I need.” (Mrs. Tettey)

“What my daughter is giving me is not enough.” (Mr. Mensah)

There were two respondents who did receive support from relatives: Mrs. Otoo was helped by one of her sisters who lived in the family house with her. Mr. Baddoo regularly received meals from one of his nieces who lived in the same house. Their experiences indicate that support from relatives has not completely disappeared.

All the Ga respondents lived in family houses and had further relations living either in the same neighbourhood or in other areas of Accra. The four Akan respondents did not live in a family house, as their families came from towns or villages outside Accra. However, most of them had relations in Accra. Most of the poor respondents lived in the old heart of Accra, which is characterised by overcrowding and poor housing. Of the middle income or rich respondents, none lived in family houses. They all lived in their own (or their spouses’) houses which they had built in newly developed residential areas rather than the old heart of the city. The fact that it was only the poor who lived in family houses echoes the findings of other studies (e.g. Pellow, 1977). It reflects the fact that if affordable, living in one’s own house, is the preferred option. The respondents themselves all described that a person’s status depended significantly on whether or not they owned their own house. Someone who had to live in the family house, who did not own their own house, was not well respected.

The Western literature has noted that judgements of the adequacy of support often raise the potential problem of differing assessments on the part of the older parents and adult children. Johnson (1993) has pointed to the fact that the young often give a ‘more solid account’ of what they give to the older parents than the older parents say they have received. However, among the respondents this appeared not to be an issue. Most adult children readily agreed with their parents’ assessment and noted that what they were providing was not enough:

“What I give my mother is not up to standard.” (Mrs. Otoo’s son)

“It is not sufficient what I give my mother....” (Mrs. Ansah’s daughter)
And in some cases, they receive nothing at all:

"My son, I haven't heard from him for many years now, he doesn't give me anything."
(Mrs. Tettey)

"My children don't provide any money or anything to me."
(Mr. Prempeh)

"My children, they don't give me anything...."
(Mr. Baddoo)

"My son like this, he doesn't give me anything. I have asked him to give me, I have asked him three times, four times, but he doesn't mind me."
(Mr. Mensah)

The effect of these inadequacies is most poignant for the poor older people.

With insufficient (or no) support from children, no help from relatives to compensate for this and no resources of their own, they have no recourse except to hope for help from charity in order to have at least some of their needs met.

Thus, most poor older people depend on going to the HelpAge day centre to receive a free meal or rely on other charitable support\textsuperscript{240}:

"The money that my daughter is giving me is not much, it can't reach anywhere. But I have to force to manage it.... At times when I feel today things are going wrong with me I will maybe go and ask her. If she got she gives me, if she hasn't got she will just give me some small thing and whatever she gives me I have to accept it because she also has to look after her children. So if I usually chop three times a say, that day I will chop only once ... here at the centre. So I will force to tighten my belt because there is nowhere for me to go. She can't help, and the relatives too they are not helping, so ... when she says there is nothing you have to go home and sleep, just like that.... This is how we live now."
(Mr. Azu)

They cannot expect to receive medical treatment when they need it:

"The thing that worries us most is we are praying to the almighty God that sickness won't come. If sickness attacks me I think I will die, by all means because now there is no money. The moment you are suffering you won't get that money to buy the drugs, and before you manage to get the money you will have died. If there is money I know that if sickness attacks I can do something, but if there is no money you I can't do it."
(Mr. Azu)\textsuperscript{241}

\textsuperscript{240}A few poor respondents are recipients of the HelpAge 'adopt-a-granny' scheme which gives them a small sum of money every month. All benefit from HelpAge's occasional free medical check-ups and distribution of drugs, or distribution of foodstuffs.

\textsuperscript{241}This high anxiety is a result of the recently introduced\textit{cash and carry} system for medical care which means that you have to pay before receiving any form of treatment or diagnosis. If you are unable to pay, you don't receive any treatment.
Although the situation for middle-income older people is clearly not as dire, the inability to afford medical treatment is still a problem\textsuperscript{242}:

"These days the situation now is worse, it is worse and worse, even yesterday I was trying to get money for my prescription drugs — I don’t know how to go and buy it — no money." (Mrs. Tettey)

"Eh look, my sister, if you have to go to the hospital, you weep. And even right now if you are sick and you don’t have much money, you die. Because the prescription alone — you can’t buy it. When I myself went to the hospital the doctor said I should buy 30 of these tablets, and one alone is 4,300 cedis. How can I afford it. So right now, if you haven’t got money and you are sick — you die. That day at the hospital I met a woman who had to go to the laboratory for some tests — even the laboratory cost 15,000 cedis — and she couldn’t pay it." (Mr. Akpan)

7.3 The causes of decline

What has caused the decline and the current inadequacies in support for older people? In order to fully understand the effect of factors that have led to the

\textsuperscript{242} Although several of these respondents received pensions, it was clearly inadequate to cover their needs. The inadequacy of the current pensions, which are not indexed, was bemoaned by all who were in receipt of one. Mrs. Tettey’s remark is typical:

"The pension? How much pension do we receive? Today the pension is nothing, at some point it was good but now it is useless, it can’t reach anywhere."

The issue of pensions received prominent exposure on the occasion of the death of the former president Hilla Limann, during the fieldwork period in Accra. Limann’s death exposed his poor financial condition, and almost total dependence on the meagre support from his wife. This evoked an outcry in the media and demands for an improvement of the pension system to enable older people to live a dignified life in retirement. The following excerpts from an article in The Statesman are an example of this:

... it is not only presidents, serving or out of office who are entitled to a dignified retirement. We all are. It is a common occurrence to encounter senior citizens with distinguished public service careers behind them, wasting pitifully away in their twilight years because society has failed to provide for them adequately. They are unable to provide for themselves and their families.... They are to be seen all over the country in frayed jackets, cloths, smocks or gowns, unable to pay their medical bills nor afford the special diets required to make them hale and hearty. It does not speak well of us as a society.... Days were when the extended family system cushioned against such things, but the system itself ... is now all but in name.... There are many ex-ministers, headmasters, teachers, civil servants, etc. who are on retirement and on the long list of destitution ... let us remember that all of us, the tax payers, no matter how small our contribution to the national kitty, are entitled to live out our lives in comfort, dignity, and happiness ... we may be waking up to the painful reality that ours is no longer a human society, for the question can be legitimately posed: ‘who takes care of us when we are out of office’? (The Statesman, Vol.3, No.29, 27 February-5 March 1998)
decline, it is necessary first to point out one crucial factor that has definitely not been a cause.

7.3.1 Persisting normative duties and obligations

The decline has definitely not been due to a weakening of the normative duties or obligations towards the old. These traditional prescriptions are still alive. All old people asserted that the young still know it is their duty to support their aged parents:

"Oh no, they know it, that one everybody knows." (Mrs. King)

"The children know it, they know it is their duty to look after their parents." (Mr. Brew)

Similarly, they know that they should help older relatives (or relatives in general):

"Oh, they [the young people] still know that they should be helping their old aunties and uncles." (Mrs. Larbi)

"You see the custom is still there, we have the extended family and the family should help, but they don't act like that." (Mr. Azu)

The young respondents themselves confirmed this. All without hesitation, assigned the prime responsibility for older people to their adult children:

Mr. Akpan's son: "You see we have a proverb here that 'if your parents look after you when you are growing your teeth you must look after them when they are losing their teeth'. So everyone knows that in fact you should look after your parents when they are old."

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243 The persistence of the traditional normative duty was also asserted by Professor Nukunya (Department of Sociology, University of Ghana) in an informal conversation. He argued that whilst some norms were clearly subject to erosion, this one wasn't: "this one, everybody still believes and knows it."

244 In contrast to the past, however, all younger respondents saw the duty on children as being rooted in reciprocity rather than in an absolute status duty to honour parents - a shift that will be discussed later on.
"Where did you get to know that proverb?"

"I cannot remember specifically where I heard it but it is like the elderly people have been saying it and we also took it from them. And also it is there, my parents came to meet it and we came to meet it, because everybody is doing it."

"The children... have to do it... the parents gave them life, they took care of them till they grow so they have to do it... they should provide for what the old person needs, food, medicine, clothes, all these things." (Mr. Brew's daughter)

The middle generation moreover, referred to this duty as the main reason why they were providing support to their parents:

"Because it is my duty, it is my duty. Because here in Ghana this is our culture. You the child have to take care of your parents when they are old." (Mr. Mills' son)

"It is my duty. I have to do it because they were looking after me when I was small so now I too have to do it." (Mrs. Osu's daughter)

By the same token, all younger generation respondents endorsed the obligation towards old relatives:

"If the children don't have enough means... the relatives, say like the old man's sisters or brothers, they should come in, they should do it, but it is not a force." (Mrs. Otoo's daughter)

"The relatives? Well maybe they have some obligation.... Maybe the nieces and nephews.... If the old person helped them when they were young, then they should definitely help." (Mrs. Ward's daughter)

And again, those of the middle generation who gave such assistance, referred to this obligation as their main motivation:

"I guess I feel obliged because she is needy and she is my relative... I am from the town, you know, I am a doctor...." (Mrs. Ward's daughter)

245 Most, just like Mr. Akpan's son, mentioned that (apart from hearing the proverb or reading it in the bible) they had learnt about the duty by seeing it done repeatedly, by 'coming to meet it'. This also indicates the persistence of the mode by which the normative duty is reproduced and transmitted.

246 Although 'duty' was the exclusive motivation for most adult children, 3 (all rich or more affluent middle income), emphasised that duty, though important, was not their paramount motivation. They emphasised their wish to show their parents appreciation out of gratitude and love. This significant difference will again be discussed below.

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The continuing endorsement and persistence of these normative duties and obligations raises the question: if the younger generations still recognise that they have a duty to support parents and assist older relatives, why has family support for older people declined? Why is it often provided inadequately, if at all? The answer is, as the older people’s accounts made clear, that the decline and inadequacies in support are the result of the combined effects of the following seven key factors:

- increasing economic hardship
- a declining capacity to provide
- an escalation of needs
- an increased reluctance to spend on older people
- a decreased fear of sanctions
- an increased expression of lack of love and gratitude by children
- increasing retaliation

Each of these factors are discussed in turn.

7.3.2 Increasing economic hardship

The older respondents left no doubt that the single overarching factor that has underpinned the decline and current inadequacies in family support for older people is growing economic hardship:

"In my view, you can say that it is this economic hardship that has brought all these things." (Mr. Thompson)

"It all comes back to the economic situation." (Mrs. Prah)

"It is the economy that has brought all these things." (Mr. Azu)

"... the economy is affecting all the things we are seeing now." (Mrs. Ansah)
This economic hardship has had myriad direct and indirect influences on all of
the other key factors that have contributed to a decline in support. In order to
fully appreciate these various influences, it is necessary, first of all, describe the
nature of the economic hardship and some of the effects it has had on the
population, in particular its effects on religion.

The growing economic hardship in Ghana, as the old people made clear, has
been caused by widespread unemployment and underemployment, a low level of
pay, and, most importantly, the rising costs of living, of food, Western medical
care and new inescapable expenditures such as rent, education, electricity and
water rates\textsuperscript{247}.

"... the costs of everyday living are so high that it eats deep into whatever you have.
Even the basics are so costly – rents, food, rates, school fees, medicing all the everyday
things are getting more expensive, and your salary can’t cover it. And if you have no
proper job it is hopeless.” (Mr. Okine)

"You see, this time things are hard.... In the olden days you could buy things cheaply,
but now things are dear. How can I take 200, 300 cedis to buy one ball of kenkey, and if
I want to eat well I need two balls – and my pay is only 2,000 cedis? But formerly you
would buy kenkey and fish for one peswa only, but now this one peswa can’t buy
anything.” (Mr. Azu)

"You see, formerly, taking your child to school was not a necessity and the education
was cheap. But now it has become obvious that you must educate your children, you
must educate them very well because without education, you are nothing.... So you
have to buy books, stationery, school uniform, everything for them. And then you have
to pay something called educational levy, and then you have to pay exam fees. So in
fact, this free education thing is just political. They call it fCUBE\textsuperscript{248}. That should mean
that there shouldn’t be any child on the street. But there are so many. Many parents
they just can’t afford it. Even the school uniform will eat up a full month’s pay\textsuperscript{249}.”
(Mrs. Addo)

\textsuperscript{247} These factors are, of course, also those that feature in the literature.
\textsuperscript{248} She is referring to a recently introduced policy of ‘free compulsory universal basic education’.
\textsuperscript{249} During the fieldwork period, I witnessed on many occasions the inability of parents to afford
to pay for their children’s education, which Mrs. Addo’s daughter-in-law describes. I
encountered many cases where children were ‘sacked’ from school – no longer allowed to
continue their schooling – because their parents were not able to pay the school fees. The high
drop-out rate from school because of parents’ inability to pay has also been noted in the literature
(Boateng, 1996).
Together these factors have meant, as the older people’s statements indicate, that more and more people, even those with regular salaries, are struggling to make ends meet and are living, more or less, from hand to mouth:

“Right now, look you need three meals a day, but people now can only afford two meals. There is no money. And even the two meals they get is not a good diet – just anything that can fill the stomach, because the going is too difficult. This is what is happening now.” (Mr. Akpan)

Many of the middle generation respondents, such as Mr. Mills’ son, confirmed this general scenario with descriptions of their own plight:

“Ghana, oh it is very terrible. Sometimes I sit down, and by the time I have just eaten and checking everything I have spent about 2,000, 3,000 already, you see. And at times I don’t even get 1,000 cedis a day. So where are we going? Are we going forwards or backwards? And I am saying I want to establish myself. How am I going to do it? And I go through this and I go to the relatives, but no help, wherever you go, no help. So the only thing you must do is trust in God, but trusting is not easy. So you really have to learn how to understand the words of God and God himself.” (Mr. Mills’ son)

Their accounts illustrate two key features of the economic hardship. First, they show that individuals’ dire situations are aggravated by the disappearance of extended family help, just at a time when people most need it. Second, they show that the ensuing sense of desperation has left many people only with the hope of help from God.

The respondents’ assessment of the dire economic situation among the urban population is clearly borne out by the evidence provided in the literature. In 1996, the Ghanaian government’s Technical Committee on Poverty noted that the earnings, even of those in salaried employment, were now “clearly insufficient to meet consumption requirements” (Government of Ghana, TCOP, 1996). The unaffordability of education and Western healthcare for large proportions of the population – and the resulting decline in uptake – has been noted in several other reports (Ghana Statistical Service, 1995b; World Bank, 1995; UNDP, 1997).

The hope and faith that people pin on God is evident everywhere in Accra, expressed in various slogans on car stickers, posters, baseball caps etc. Here is just a selection:

‘With Jesus I can achieve anything’
‘I will make it in Jesus’ name’
‘Don’t give up. Your miracle is on the way’.
"Right now, because of the economic situation, you can't ask anybody, so I only pray to God so that by His grace the work I am doing will go well because there is nobody to help. Only God can help." (Mrs. Ayi's daughter)

This desperate hope has, as both young and old respondents emphasised, caused more and more people to fervently\(^{252}\) turn to church and religion\(^{253}\):

"People go to church because they want miracles, they want God to help them. Everyone is desperate. Everyone wants God to help them, that he will help them prosper, that is why they go to church." (Mr. Mills)

It is particularly the mushrooming spiritual and charismatic churches\(^{254}\) with their promise of help and miracles from God that have attracted the largest numbers.

Many respondents described, some from their own personal experience, how

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\(^{252}\) The fervency of religious practice - manifest in the number and prominence of Christian rallies, crusades, all night worships etc. - was one of the aspects that struck me most during the fieldwork period. (Islamic faith is, in contrast, much less visible in Accra.)

\(^{253}\) The respondents also emphasised that for the same reasons many people are increasingly turning to traditional fetishi and juju practices. They typically do this alongside their Christian practice. Many people I spoke to, including some respondents, recounted their own use of or experience with fetishi powers. The apparent resurgence of traditional practices in the current climate of economic hardship has also been noted in the African religious literature (e.g. Agbo, 1993; Imasogie, 1993) and was confirmed by Reverend Atiemo (Department of Religious Studies, University of Ghana) in one of our informal conversations.

\(^{254}\) The spiritual churches belong to what have been called African independent churches, 'healing movements', or 'separatist churches'. These are indigenous churches which "split away from or sprang up in relative independence of the older mission churches" (Parrinder, 1953, p.107). The term spiritual churches derives, according to Bäta (1962), from the fact that these churches usually engage in activities which are "either meant to invoke the Holy Spirit of God or are meant to be interpreted as signs of His descent upon the worshippers" (ibid., p.1).

The charismatic churches have grown in importance over the past 20 years. They are part of the Christian renewal phenomenon in Ghana that has taken place in the last two to three decades (i.e. since the early 1970s) (Dovlo, 1992). The charismatic churches or ministries arose from non-denominational charismatic groups and evangelical fellowships, which spread across the country in the 1970s. They include among others the Victory Bible Church, Fountain of Life Ministries, the Christian Action Faith Ministry, and, most prominently, the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), led by Dr. Mensa Otabil. In recent years the charismatic churches have gained increasing importance and, in terms of numbers of church attendance, there has been a redistribution away from the established in favour of the charismatic churches. Moreover, through regular spots on local radio stations, Dr. Mensa Otabil is listened to and widely appreciated by a large audience.
people seek out these churches in the hope of solving their problems, particularly financial ones:

“There are so many of these spiritual churches coming up, so many. Anybody who says ‘oh I can heal’ or ‘I can make you prosper’, ‘I can do this, I can do that’, people just follow them. And some are weak, you know, they just believe in anything. You see the priest will tell them ‘oh I can double your money for you’ and people will go because they are desperate, they are desperate so they will do anything where there is a little hope. They believe that the priest can work miracles for them, because the priests really convince people that they can do anything. And also you get people who boast that they got what they wanted from the church.” (Mrs. Addo)

Mr. Mensah’s daughter: “Before I went to the Roman Catholic and the Methodist, but I decided to go to the spiritual church because it is good for me ... because if something bad is going to happen they see it and they tell you before so you can take care of yourself and they do miracles. Even tomorrow, it is a Tuesday. We go to prayer group every Tuesday to pray. 7.30 in the morning, every Tuesday and we close at 1 or 2 p.m.”

Q: “What kind of miracles do they do?”

Mr. Mensah’s daughter: “It is always different, sometimes they give somebody a message, a lot of things.”

Q: “Has it ever done a miracle for you?”

Mr. Mensah’s daughter: “Yes, I found a husband.”

The charismatic churches in particular have fuelled people’s hope of God-given economic success, by preaching a powerful message that falls on fertile ground in the current climate of economic deprivation: ‘God did not create you for you to be poor but to enjoy the riches of this world’:

255 It is interesting to note that this emerging ‘instrumental’ approach to Christian religion and faith – revived among others by the spiritual and charismatic churches – goes full circle back to the original orientation of African traditional religion. Gyekye (1996) describes this as follows: “...traditional African religion... is considered essentially as a means for attaining the needs, interests, and happiness of human beings in this life...[Thus] prayers offered by practitioners of African religions are full of requests to the supernatural beings for material comforts and the things necessary for a happy satisfying life.” (p.14, emphasis added)

256 The message ‘God did not create you for you to be poor’ is an important part of the emancipatory emphasis in the charismatic preaching in all of the African Diaspora, which has aimed to create a sense of empowerment of black people, or ‘Africa’ vis-à-vis the white ex-colonial masters. Dr. Mensa Otabil in particular focuses on this theme. Apart from exposing and redressing eurocentric biases in established Christian teachings, he asserts that the time has come for Africa to be prosperous, not least in view of the principle ‘the last shall be the first and the first shall be the last’ (Matthew 20:16), and encourages Africans toassert themselves and work against the stereo-typical image of black people being poor, badly educated, inferior etc. (see Mensa Otabil, 1992).
"You see the thing is God wants your inner mind not your outside.... Formerly the orthodox churches, they didn't believe in luxury life or riches or anything. But in the bible it says that God created good things for his people, so if I know I am a child of God I have to enjoy anything God has put on this earth. So why should I say 'because I am a child of God I shouldn't have telly, I shouldn't have a car. I shouldn't have much money'. The orthodox churches believed in that, that it wasn't good to have all these riches, but it is wrong. God created all these things for his children. God wants us to enjoy the riches of this earth. So once I am a child of God I should enjoy everything good." (Mr. Thompson's daughter, herself member of the ICGC; emphasis added)

Apart from fostering a hope for help from God through miracles or otherwise, the spiritual or charismatic form of worship, not authoritarian and dictated by the minister, but encouraging members to form a personal and direct relationship with God, has had another important effect. By changing the way God is related to – no longer a remote and harsh authority who must be obeyed, but a 'loving' father and friend who is on your side – it has caused a sense of empowerment for the individual. The apparent success of the charismatic ministries has led many mainstream churches to copy some of their ways of preaching and worship.

7.3.3 A declining capacity to provide

Growing economic hardship has meant, most obviously, that providing adequate support to older people has become increasingly difficult for the young. The

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Again this message is evident everywhere in Accra, expressed in slogans such as:

'God loves you'

'With Jesus all fear is gone'

'Make Jesus your own personal saviour'

Reverend Atiemo, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ghana, personal communications.

It is important to note, however, that in parallel (or perhaps in reaction) to the growing 'instrumental approach' to Christian faith, there is a growing and contrasting movement of born-again Christians (within the charismatic and mainstream churches) who reject the instrumental attitude to worship although they do also emphasise a personal relationship with God. They dismissively refer to people who go to church for what they can get as mere 'church-goers'.
rising costs of living, exacerbated by an apparent increase in the need for health care among the old, have raised not only the costs of what needs to be given to older people, but also the costs of what the young need for themselves and their children. The result is that people simply no longer have the financial capacity to provide adequately for their parents or to help their other relatives, and at the same time meet their own and their children's needs.

"One thing is, now people need invest so much to educate their children so they don't have the spare for their old people...." (Mr. Prempeh)

"... it has become more and more difficult for the young person to look after himself and cater for his children, and then also his parents.... They must try, they must try but it is hard, it is hard going...." (Mr. Okine)

This diminished capacity, as the old respondents emphasised, has been the principal reason for declining support from children:

"... many younger people today can't look after their parents properly because of the economic situation. They have no means ... and when their means are small like that they will put their children first. Nowadays they will do that, but in the olden days there was no need to do that, I mean, it didn't arise. There was enough to cater for everyone. But now you have to make the decisions.... And people make the choice for children." (Mr. Hutton)

"Because of these economic problems...people don't have enough to fend for themselves, so they hardly have some to spare. So the care for the elderly is becoming

260 All older respondents asserted that compared to the past, there has been a decrease in health and longevity among older people:

"The old people in those days, they lived longer ... all the elderly people I knew grew very very old, both men and women. Unlike these days, people are dying from 58 to 70,...I think it is because nowadays you can't get food that makes you strong ... it is too expensive. Formerly you could get vegetables... but now people just eat cassava or bread, just starch." (Mr. Mills)

"Old people were stronger formerly...It is because they worked hard and they walked a lot...but nowadays even if you just go to the market you take a taxi." (Mrs. Ward)

This indicates that the trend towards a modern diet and urban, sedentary lifestyle, compounded by poverty and deprivation typical of the third world, has had a detrimental effect on the health and life-chances of older people. Although clearly not amounting to solid epidemiological evidence, the respondents' accounts nevertheless challenge common assumptions and raise important questions about the impact of development on health and longevity in old age in Ghana or other third world countries. Whilst these questions cannot be further pursued here, they clearly present an important focus for future research.

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less and less. There are some people who do have and what I have said might not apply to them. But generally the average Ghanaian is not earning enough to be able to look after the old parents properly as well..." (Mr. Thompson)

It has also been the principal reason for declining support from relatives other than children:

"These days all the relatives in the house, though they are my relatives but you know, they don't help. They are taking care of their own family. Everybody with his family. Nobody takes care of you, because there is no money. So they take care of their own old father or mother but they can't look after me - unless maybe when there is a big crisis they will say 'oh I should give this my uncle a peswa or a penny'." (Mr. Azu; emphasis added)

"Formerly, in the olden days the relatives came together and the old person would get food from relatives but these days it is not like that anymore ... because there is no money, so they only look after their own old father and mother." (Mrs. Tettey)

The old people's assessment was confirmed by those adult children who described with regret their incapacity to do more for their parents or relatives:

"What I give my mother is not sufficient, but because I am not well established, with this petty trade it is not always that I have. So I can't give her the things she wants or needs, the medicine, everything, so that she has a good life.... As for other relatives - I don't have it to help them." (Mrs. Ansah's daughter)

"Right now I can't help my mother how I want to because I don't have. I don't get the means.... And now that even I can't help my mother ... how can I be giving to my aunties?" (Mrs. Otoo's son)

261 Just as the respondents saw a broad incapacity as the main reason why people no longer help older relatives, so they also saw it as the main reason why many people no longer help relatives in general:

"I mean, living these days, having to pay the high electricity bills and what not, you hardly have enough to look after yourself. So how much more can you be thinking about people outside the immediate family?" (Mr. Thompson; emphasis added)

"Formerly, when I was young, anytime my mother cooked in the evening she would send some to other family members ... and all of you come to eat together. But now that love is no more there because of hardship. Now you look at your stomach and my stomach and because the money you have is not enough, you cannot give to others.... You have to feed the immediate family first, that means your wife and children, and then next your parents. Anybody else is nobody for you nowadays, anybody else is a secondary matter ... even if your brother or your sister are not in a position to get money to eat, well it is not your look-out." (Mr. Prempeh; emphasis added)

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The crucial aspect of this growing incapacity on the part of the young – implied in all the statements above – is that it hinges on the fundamental decisions of resource allocation. These are decisions in which everybody seems to give priority to their own parents over more other (older) relatives, and to themselves and their children over their older parents\(^2\). What increasing economic hardship has therefore done is to crystallise a clear hierarchy of priorities. This hierarchy reads needs of self and children before old parents, and needs of self. children and old parents before old relatives, or, more generally, self, children and old parents, the nuclear family, over other relatives\(^3\). What is the basis of this hierarchy? The way in which the older respondents judged and spoke of this set of priorities (including the way most initially mentioned them as somehow self-evident without any need for elaboration), leaves no doubt that they saw and accepted them as somehow legitimate and inevitable. To them it was natural to put one’s older parents before other older relatives:

"Relatives do not help the old people as much as they used to, because of the economic situation. They have to take care of their own parents first – I mean it is just normal." (Mr. Brew; emphasis added)

"Yes, a man who has his wife, his children, and his parents, he is trying to do his best with his limited means, he can’t look after his uncles or aunts or nephews or nieces. So the natural tendency must be that people satisfy their immediate family first,...their children and wife and their parents. And in extreme cases if they can afford it they will try to help the relatives but it is not anything to be relied upon." (Mr. Hutton; emphasis added)

By the same token it was natural to put oneself and children before older parents:

\(^2\) The respondents’ accounts of the priority of self and children over older parents echo the descriptions in the Western historical and developing world literature which imply that, in conditions of constrained resources, priority is given to the young, which means that the old ‘lose out’.

\(^3\) This order of priorities reflects the hierarchy of normative obligations, and the limits of one’s normative obligations to relatives and children described in Chapter Five.
"Yes, the children are right. They and their children must come first. They are facing life and they have their children and it is their responsibility to look after their children first, and then their parents. I am not saying they should ignore their parents but they have to fend for themselves and their children first before they can think of others. That is the natural thing." (Mrs. Prah; emphasis added)

Mr. Thompson: “I don’t blame the children. You see the average person is trying to survive. Only if he has more than he needs to survive, only then is he going to think of helping somebody else to survive. The average Ghanaian has sympathy but there is a limit to which sympathy can go. Survival comes ahead of sympathy, and your own survival and your children always come first.”

Q:
Why do they always come first?

Mr. Thompson: “I don’t know whether I have an immediate reply but I mean, you yourself have to live, and our love tends to go towards our spouse and our children. It looks like a natural thing. Probably God has given this so that we will be able to look after them and bring them up. Because it is most important to look after your children.” (emphasis added)

That the priority, especially of young over old, is indeed seen as somehow natural or fundamental, was reinforced in the answers that all respondents, young and old, gave to the set of questions about generational priorities.

Not only did the respondents unequivocally assert that the needs of self and especially one’s children had undoubted priority over those of old parents,

"... people have to help themselves and their children first, and then if there is any money left they can help their old parents." (Mrs. Tettey)

264 The acceptance of these priorities as legitimate was further indicated by the way in which they were honoured in practice. Typically the affected older people did not, and felt it was wrong to, ask or expect more from children or relatives, knowing that they were themselves struggling:

“You see, you know your child, has a husband and three children. you can’t go there today, the next day and the next day and ask for money or food – it is bad, it is very bad to do that. You know they too are struggling, you can’t go there and ask them.” (Mr. Azu)

265 As outlined in Chapter Four, respondents’ views of priorities between young and old were explored through a set of three specific questions. The first inquired in general terms whether self and children or older parents had priority in decisions of resource allocation. The other two questions were in form of hypothetical scenarios in which an adult child with very limited resources had to make a decision between spending the money on vital medical treatment for the older parent or on education or medical treatment for his/her child, respectively. Although a further exploration of priorities between nuclear and extended family members is clearly also of interest and importance, it was not of immediate relevance and was not further explored. However, it is a line of inquiry that should be addressed by future research.
they also insisted that saving the life of one’s child was more important than saving one’s older parent:

"You must pay for the child’s treatment, the child is more important." (Mr. Akpan)

"If I had to choose between paying for the child’s treatment and that of my old parent... I would look after the child because the old lady has seen everything in the world, but the child is now coming. If you have no money you have to save the young ones because they are the future, so you have to leave the old person to die." (Mrs. Ofei)

Some even saw a child’s need for education as more important than saving an older parent’s life, (although most gave priority to the duty to preserve life266):

"If I had to choose between paying the school fees and for the old person’s medicine, I would pay for the school fees, because now education is very important, the old people can die, but you can’t leave the child. At all costs you have to take good care of the child.” (Mrs. Ofei)

"You don’t want your old mother or father to die, but you don’t want your children to lose school – that is the most important thing to you. Your parents are your parents – I know that but your children, they are now coming into the world, so you must take care of them.... Your parents are old, they have seen a lot of things in the world and it is time for them to go.” (Mr. Mensah)

The basis of the fundamental priority that the respondents gave to young over old, lay in the fact that the young represent the future:

"You and especially your children, they have priority because they are the new generation, they are now coming. If you ignore them and you say I am giving instead to the old lady or the old man, and probably you can’t even give them the education they should have, then I think you are not doing the right thing.... You are not doing the right thing because it is your responsibility to look after yourself and your immediate family, you have brought a child into this world and you ignore him because of your father or your mother? – it is not right. It is your father’s and your mother’s duty to look after you, and it is your first duty to look after your own - yourself and your children ... and if you can you have to try to also cater for your parents. I am not saying you should be greedy, no, but your children come first.” (Mr. Brew; emphasis added)

For several (in particular, the poorly educated) the priority of children lay specifically in the fact that they were the future providers of old age support:

266 One example of this majority view is Mr.Thompson’s statement:
"... the life of your parent comes first, you must save life. Life comes first before any other things.” (Mr. Thompson)
“Your children are more important than the old parents because if you look after the children and they grow up well...they will look after you” (Mrs. Nima)

“You must take care of your children first because then, when you grow old, they will take care of you.” (Mr. Mensah’s daughter)

Whatever the specific reason, the fundamental rule or principle that the respondents invoked when asserting the priority of young over old, is the following: The needs of future life have priority. The older generation has no right to stand in the way of— or absorb resources that are needed for— the future life and well-being of the younger generations. Mr. Okine expressed it as follows:

“Your children and their children have a future themselves and you, you must not hinder them. You have had your time.”

The weight of this principle in Ghana is further indicated by the fact that it also underpins the notion of responsive ageing, which, as described earlier, has traditionally shaped Ghanaian attitudes to old age and holds that an older person—if he or she is to be respected—should actively enhance the lives of those younger than himself/herself.

Interestingly, the apparently fundamental priority of future life is clearly not just a specifically Ghanaian, or even African, conception. It is also salient in other cultures. In the West, for example, it has been raised most recently as part of the debate on the contract between the generations, in the notion of the processional nature or transitive order of justice between generations (Laslett, 1992; Moody, 1993). This holds that:

No matter what the older generation has done for the younger, each generation’s primary obligation is transitive. That is, we ‘repay’ the generosity of the preceding generation by giving in turn to our successors. We return the benefits in turn to our children. Whatever claims older
people may have are limited by this overriding transitive obligations across the chain of generations. (Moody, 1993, p.229; emphasis added)

This principle is illustrated in the following tale from European folklore, which intriguingly, exactly echoes the Ghanaian respondents' conceptions:

... a mother bird [has a] little baby bird, who rides on her mother’s back while the mother forages for food. One day the mother bird says to the baby bird: 'Baby bird, when you are a big bird and I am old and frail, will you take me on your back just as I am doing for you now?' And the baby bird replies, 'No, mother, but when I’m a big bird, I’ll carry my little bird on my back just as you’re doing for me now'. (Moody, 1993, p.229)

It is tempting to speculate – although this cannot be further pursued in this inquiry – that the priority of the needs of future life is, perhaps, a universal principle, found not just in the West and Ghana, but in the moral codes of all cultures and societies.\(^{267}\)

7.3.4 An escalation of needs

Although the growing incapacity of the young to support the old has been primarily a result of economic constraints, it is in part also due to the escalation of perceived needs among the young. Nowadays, as the older respondents asserted, the young have less to give to the old partly because, compared to the young in the past, they feel they need more and more things for themselves:

"... these days people have less to give to their old parents because the needs of the modern youth are getting more and more. That means the money they have left over to support the old people is diminished.... You see formerly there were maybe a few dances but nothing much. But now they think they need TVs, mobile phones, and all these things. Or they think they have to go to bars or drink beer. So naturally, the money they have left to give to their parents is nothing. But the question is, where are they putting their priorities?" (Mr. Okine; emphasis added)

\(^{267}\) An investigation of the moral codes of other cultures to identify whether such an elementary principle exists would clearly be of interest for future research.
"My daughter, when it comes to contributing something to me, she will say ‘Oh I don’t have money’, always ‘I don’t have money’. But the thing is that she buys expensive things. Like fancy dresses, sometimes, earrings or bangles or dresses, and she will buy it on loan, and pay small, small. So she is always in debt, you see, and it means there is nothing left to give to me.... But if she had respect she would keep the money to give to me.” (Mr. Mills)

"... nowadays people’s eyes are too much opened. We are seeing too many things, there is too much civilisation. They see all around them different things they want, they see it in the shops, on the television, and they see other people having them.... And they want to have what the other people have.... Formerly people didn’t see so many things they want.” (Mrs. Tettey)

As these accounts indicate, there are two particular types of new needs that have emerged in the process of modernisation or ‘civilisation’: new consumer items such as TVs, hi-fis, or fashionable clothes, and new leisure or entertainment activities, such as going to bars, cinemas etc.

The crux, as the older people see it, is that they consider these things as unnecessary wants, which could and should be foregone in order to have more to spare for them, but the young really think they need them. They think they need these things not just because they are now available but, more important, because other people have them and because wealth and possessions – status symbols – have become crucial in determining a person’s standing in society.

"The young want these things because now it is the person who has flashy clothes and has a flashy car, can change suits ten times, fly to New York or London or whatever, it is that person who is on top. You see now it is money, business success, your car, your clothes, that is what counts, not the old things of decency and courtesy, which family you come from and all that.” (Mr. Brew)

"These days people want the outward things because ... now people judge you more by appearances. It is how much money someone has and how he can show it, formerly it was more the kind of life someone led, whether you conducted your life well....” (Mrs. Tettey)

Thus, as the older respondents’ implied, the escalation of perceived needs among the young has been closely linked to the shift in status criteria from conduct
toward outward wealth\textsuperscript{268}, which has occurred over the past decades in the wake of modernisation\textsuperscript{269}.

Their interpretation was confirmed by the younger respondents' assertion that it is necessary, these days, to have nice clothes, a TV, hi-fi or even a video\textsuperscript{270}.

These things are necessary precisely because they are vital for one's standing in the community:

"I think with civilisation you are entitled to certain things. For example, to me, you are entitled to a television set, a radio or hi-fi, and video cassettes for your children. That is important because if you don't have these things the children will go to someone else's house and that would be an insult to me because ... it means I can't provide it for them." (Mrs. Osu's son)

"It is important to have good clothes, because if you don't people won't respect you." (Mr. Mills' daughter)

"People will judge you from how good your clothes are, yes! Even in church. They will say 'Look at him, he always wears the same thing, always one pair of shoes' and they will laugh at you..." (Mr. Mills' son)

"In Ghana here, right now, money talks. If you don't have money, if you don't have a car and certain things, who are you? You have nothing to offer." (Mr. Thompson's daughter)

\textbf{7.3.5 An increasing reluctance to spend on older parents and relatives}

Although the increasing incapacity of the young has been the \textit{principal} reason for the inadequacies in providing support, it is clearly not the whole story. Very

\textsuperscript{268} This shift or difference in status criteria seems to reflect the distinction made by Parsons (1951) between \textit{ascriptive} (origin, family, 'being born of') and \textit{achievement} values of status, with the latter dominating in economic institutions in industrial society, the other in kin-groups. I do not draw any connection here to Parsons' argument about the relative role of these values, but rather just use the concepts.

\textsuperscript{269} Although the respondents themselves did not explicitly make this connection, it seems very likely that the charismatic message 'God did not create you for you to be poor' has further reinforced, and at the same time sanctioned, the striving towards material wealth.

\textsuperscript{270} None, however, felt that you really needed to have \textit{leisure or entertainment activities}:

"Some people like to go out to bars, to me, that is unnecessary..." (Mrs. Osu's son).

It can be speculated, however, that few would have admitted to holding a contrary view.
often, at least part of the story is that the young are *unwilling* to do more. In other words, many people do not provide as much for their parents or other relatives as they *could*\(^{271,272}\) and often refuse the older person’s requests, especially for money:

> “Usually people don’t fail to give their parents food. But actual money, many don’t give them ... they could give but they don’t want to ... and usually they will just say that they don’t have....” (Mr. Prempeh)

> “My children who are staying with me in the house, I am always asking them to help me to pay the bills but they don’t help much. I mean, when they cook they give me food...but physical money they don’t give me. They are working and they don’t pay anything. Always when I ask them they say ‘oh the money is not there’. I know they don’t have much but they could try harder....” (Mr. Mills)

> “What my daughter is giving me is not enough ... she should try more to give me, but she doesn’t do it.... Yesterday too I told her that I needed something in my pocket, but she just went, she didn’t give me anything and I haven’t seen her.” (Mr. Mensah)

The most potent expression of this unwillingness, described and bemoaned time and again by all respondents, is the fact that people, whilst spending large sums of money on their parents’ funeral, are not prepared to spend much on their support while they are alive\(^{273}\). Equally, people are willing to contribute to an older relatives’s funeral but are not ready to assist whilst he or she is alive:

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\(^{271}\) The same opinion was voiced by many of the HelpAge staff. They emphasised that in many cases that have come to their attention, the children are not doing as much for the old parent as they could.

\(^{272}\) The older people were clear, however, that in some cases a simple incapacity was the whole story. The sentiment which they used to express this was their certainty that if the children could, they would give more. One respondent who voiced this was Mrs. Ansah:

> “All my children try to give me, but often they don’t give me. But ... I know that it is because they don’t have, if they had they would give....” (Mrs. Ansah)

\(^{273}\) The issue of people spending huge sums of money on funerals – sums that are in total disproportion to what they are willing to spend on the old person whilst alive – has in fact been noted in the literature by van der Geest (1995). In Ghana itself it has become such a topical issue that it is part of the public discourse in the media. There have been calls for legislation to limit the expenditure on funerals. In the past, as all older respondents explained, this issue did not arise mainly for the simple fact that there were no mortuaries. This meant that people did not have time to organise elaborate parties. Moreover, many of the items that now contribute to the huge costs of funerals – fashionable coffins and shrouds, and elaborate catering for the guests – did not exist.
Mrs. Nima: "They are doing it! When the older person is alive the children and the relatives they don’t want to spend their money on that old lady or man, but once he has died they will come and make a big funeral."

Q: "Why do they do that?"

Mrs. Nima: "Because ... if you don’t make a big funeral people will talk and you will lose your name, so people do it to save their name ... and they think that they will get back the money from the donations."

Q: "But what about if you don’t look after your old person well – will you not also lose your name?"

Mrs. Nima: "No, not so much because when the person is in the house or the room nobody knows what is going on there, but when you die, everybody sees it, it is public."

"You see the children and relatives they will spend on the funerals because they are spending on themselves, they are showing off 274, and they know that they will get most of their money back from the donations.... But they are not willing to spend on the person when he is alive, to them it is wasted money.” (Mr. Okine)

"When you are alive they don’t bother about you. For example my relatives, now I am living they don’t hardly give me even peswa, but when I die they will come and buy cloth for themselves, this and that and spend big money.” (Mr. Azu)

The most immediate reason why many people give less than they could to older parents and relatives is a reluctance to spend on older people because, in the present context, it is effectively seen as wasted money:

"Some children, they don’t want to waste money on you when you are old because they think you are old and you will just die, so they would just be wasting their money. But formerly people didn’t think like that....” (Mr. Azu)275

In contrast to spending on funerals, for example, giving to the old does little to boost one’s status and, moreover, means a financial loss. And in the current

274 It is interesting to note, as Mr. Thompson pointed out, that the elaborate ceremony starkly contrasts with the total lack of care of the grave afterwards:

"... as the person goes into the ground they forget. You don’t even see any remembrance of the person. So when you go to our cemeteries it is an eye-sore.”

275 The older people’s perception of this almost cruel sentiment among the young was corroborated by many adult children who said that this was a common consideration of people in general, when thinking about spending money on supporting an older parent. Several, like Mrs. King’s son, described it in a way that gave the impression that it was not an unfamiliar thought to them. However, none admitted to personally holding this view:

"You see, the thing is, whatever you do, the money you spend on the old lady is wasted. She has outlived her usefulness, you see now, you will be wasting your money because she won’t get 2, 3 years then she will die so whatever you put in you won’t get it back, although of course you must also try and help the old lady if you can....” (Mrs. King’s son)
economic climate, with individuals increasingly responsible for their own welfare, people (unless they feel a particular wish to act out of gratitude or affection) have become more and more reluctant to incur expenditure or indeed spend money on anything that will not bring tangible returns.276

"Nowadays people are not so willing to spend money on anybody except themselves and their children. Unless they know that they will get it back from you, then they will be ready to give you." (Mr. Okine)

"These days people don't want to give out their money ... because of the economy. Everybody is worried and people don't want to give out their money." (Mrs. Prah)

"The way things are going, now it seems everyone is concerned about himself and their own benefit, they don't want to give to others...." (Mr. Mills' son)

This reluctance, as all respondents emphasised, has not just contributed to the inadequacies in support to older people, but to the erosion of support to relatives in general:

"These days they even won't lend their relatives money because they know probably they won't get it back. So rather they will lend money to their friends because they know that by all means the friends will pay it back.277" (Mrs. Osu's son)

"Now people don't give money to their relatives unless they know they will get something good back from them.... You see, we blacks this is how we are." (Mr. Azu)

276 An illustration of the reluctance to spend on the old is the idea – mentioned by several of the older respondents – that, given the chance, many children these days would like to shirk their responsibility in having to provide for the older person:

"You see I don't think here in Ghana we should have homes for old people where the old people are catered for. I don't like that idea at all because otherwise those who don't want to do anything for their elderly, they will just dump them there and you won't see them again...you see, because of the economic situation, they don't want to spend money on the old person." (Mrs.Prah)

277 The notion that people do not give or even lend their relatives money, even if they theoretically could, was clearly affirmed by several of the more well-to-do middle generation respondents who admitted to it themselves:

"You see, you are somehow more ready to lend money to your friends because you know that when you give money to relatives it is hard to get the money back ... so when they come and ask you for money you always pretend that you don't have." (Mrs. Addo's daughter-in-law)
What lies at the bottom of this general unwillingness to give is — as the respondents stressed and Mr. Azu’s statement above already indicates — the basically self-interested orientation of Ghanaians:

“People here in Ghana, deep down they are selfish, they are just concerned about their own advantage.” (Mrs. Ward)

“The important thing in the mind of a black man is to cater for him or herself, yes. He doesn’t want to achieve anything in the interest of others … he is interested in himself.” (Mr. Prempeh)

“You see, we the blacks, we have a certain mentality…. Whatever we the blacks do, we want to benefit, we want to make money out of it for yourself....” (Mr. Mills’ son)

However, what the respondents also asserted is that this underlying ‘selfishness’ is not a new thing. People have always been interested in their own benefits, even in the past. Now, however, the economic insecurity has made them act selfishly:

“You see the thing is people were selfish even in the olden days. Though they were more ready to give to others. But you see, it was very easy to give. If you went to your relatives they would give you to eat but in fact, they had plenty … even they would throw some of the fufu away. So it was very easy to give to you, you see. So the wickedness did not come out, do you get me?. So I don’t take it to mean that they were kind. So they were wicked a long time ago. But now, because now the things are not plenty, now you see that the wickedness is coming out.” (Mr. Prempeh; emphasis added)

In the case of relatives, this new selfishness, the reluctance to give material help to relatives, seems to be somehow accepted, even though, as we have seen, the obligation or custom of extended family help still exists as a general value. To some degree the selfishness is even endorsed:

“Now everyone has to struggle on his own, so only the lazy man thinks the family should help him. Some people still think it is the family’s damn duty to assist whereas I don’t think this holds anymore. Traditionally it has been so, they helped each other in the family but today, as I said, it is only a lazy man who should look to the family to help him. It is a bonus if they help, but if you are relying on the family you are not respecting yourself....” (Mr. Okine; emphasis added)

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278 Fufu is another staple in Ghana made from cassava and green plantain.
“There are still so many people they expect their families to help them out, but this is Accra, this is 1998, it is no longer appropriate to expect that because everyone is trying to get along, to make ends meet, so you shouldn’t think that you can rely on your relations ... you should try and get on yourself.” (Mr. Thompson’s daughter)

Although this sentiment was expressed mainly by the more well-to-do respondents, i.e. those who may have wanted to justify their own failure to assist relatives, the powerful message that in the current economic situation it is no longer appropriate to expect help from relatives is, nevertheless, very significant. It indicates that a new value of self-reliance may be emerging in support of the increasingly widespread practice of not assisting relatives.

Whatever the expectations, what seems clear is that over time the general reduction, even ending, of support between relatives who are young or middle aged now will progressively remove any basis for reciprocal obligations towards relatives once they are old. It will thus further seal the fate of extended family support to older people.

7.3.6 A decreased fear of sanctions

Whilst the old people were clear that incapacity and a reluctance to spend on the old – both consequences of the economic crisis and shifts in status criteria – more or less explained the decline in support to older relatives, they stressed that in the case of the declining support to older parents, a further crucial factor was involved.

279 Although this possible value change is of extreme importance it was not possible to explore it fully in this investigation. It is clearly a vital focus for future research.
The fact that many children provide less than they could to their parents is, as the older respondents stressed, a sign of a *decreasing respect and lessening fear of consequences* among the young:

"Many children now they don't have that thinking, they don't have that mind that they should keep the money to give to their parents.... They don't have that mind because they don't fear anymore. It is only few who have God-fearing, they will do it." (Mrs. Nima)

"The younger ones these days, do you think they fear? No! They don't fear like we used to...." (Mr. Okine)

"My children ... could try harder ... but the talk they talk, you can see they don't respect. So at times I tell them that it is against the bible what they are doing, but they don't mind...." (Mr. Mills)

"My daughter is giving me is not enough. She should try more to give me, but she doesn't do it ... is because she doesn't respect. She is too proud...." (Mr. Mensah)

Some (in particular the less educated) older respondents could not explain this diminished fear of consequences:

"I can't tell. They are a new crop, they just don't fear." (Mrs. Ayi)

Others simply saw it as a fulfilment of biblical prophecies:

"It is because even the bible has predicted it, that there are worse times coming when children will not even respect their elders - and it is coming, you see, we are experiencing it." (Mr. Mensah)

**Decreased fear of God**

Most, however, saw it as an expression of a diminished fear of God among the young:

"There is no God fearing anymore. People are not afraid. Formerly we were afraid...." (Mrs. Prah)

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280 It is interesting to note that the older people also attributed the rising incidence of crime to a diminished fear of God:

"There is no God fearing anymore...Formerly...people were law abiding.... But now what are we seeing? People have become worse, people are stealing, mugging they do things with impunity." (Mrs. Prah)

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"I can tell you that the younger ones now, they don’t fear God, they don’t fear him how we used to fear him ... and they don’t know that they must honour their parents.” (Mrs. Ayi)

In part this reduced fear of God’s punishment is seen as a result of ‘enlightenment’ or education:

"People now know that the Christian God takes a long time to punish you – after death and even he will forgive you if you repent. You see now they are reading scripture themselves. So they feel they can do bad things because there is always time to repent. So people are doing more bad things.” (Mr. Mills)

"You see the thing is people have discovered that God won’t punish them now. Only after they die, but there is not instant punishment, at least here on earth they won’t see any punishment.” (Mr. Hutton)

"It has happened that people are more alive, they are more aware.... In the olden days they would group you together and tell you nonsense and the people would take it. But now they ask questions. They want to know for themselves.... In those days hardly anyone went to school, but today....” (Mr. Okine)

Most important, however, as the old people stressed, it is a result of the new message preached in charismatic and spiritual, but increasingly also in mainstream churches:

"In my church, the Methodist church, in the olden days they used the same bible as today, but these days they teach it with a different understanding. These days they teach them that if they give more money [church donations] God will help them to prosper. But in the olden days they taught us just to fear God.” (Mrs. Nima)

"Nowadays we have so many churches in Accra here, but they don’t teach the fear of God. They don’t teach people humility. Instead they preach that God will help you to be rich and prosper....” (Mr. Akpan)

"You see in the past the emphasis was you have to obey God, you must obey him.... Now it is just you accept him, and automatically you get salvation.” (Mr. Brew)

It appears that there are differences between different denominations with respect to the degree to which they embrace this new message. A few respondents indicated that the Catholic church in particular seems to resist it:

"In the olden days they were preaching God fearing, that is what I remember. Nowadays it seems that they are telling us that God is loving, you know, he is like a mother, forgiving and kind, if you change your ways. But it depends on some churches, the Catholics, they are very strong in this respect. Even though they tell their members that the Lord is good and he forgives and he looks after us and all that, yet they tell them if you do wrong this is what is going to happen. They are very strong.” (Mrs. Addo)
"You see people now see God as merciful, kind and forgiving, that is how they are preaching it now, so they have taken advantage of this and they feel they can get away with doing wrong things.... But formerly they were teaching us how to fear God." (Mr. Hutton)

That there is indeed a diminished fear of metaphysical punishment among the young these days is further indicated by the notions that the younger respondents had about the consequences that would accrue to them if they did not support or satisfy their parents. None of them feared or even mentioned a curse from the older person as a possible consequence. Half, moreover, also did not fear or mention punishment from God but merely invoked their conscience. The fact that these respondents were the more educated ones further indicates the role of 'enlightenment' or education in diminishing the fear of external metaphysical punishment:

"Nothing would happen, but my conscience wouldn't make me clear...." (Mrs. Osu's son)

"Oh I would just feel very very guilty." (Mary Adom)

Mr. Brew's daughter: "I would feel very very bad, you know, I would feel guilty."
Q:
Mr. Brew's daughter: "Some people have mentioned that they believe God will punish them or will not give his blessings...."
"I have never thought of it that way you know, no. Even if from this day onward I would stop giving them anything I wouldn't feel that God is going to punish me or that I would be deprived of a blessing. No, I have never thought of it that way."

"I will feel, my instinct will tell me that it is not nice, that it is very very wrong. I know some people they think that God will punish them, but to my mind you can't say that God will punish you ... but your own instinct will tell you that you are doing a bad thing." (Charles Adjei)

Even among the lesser educated there were signs of a weakened fear of God. Although still expecting sanction from God, most did not anticipate harsh punishment, but only to forego blessings:
"If I didn’t look after my parents … there are certain blessings attached to it that I won’t receive. It will mean that I won’t get my ‘break-throughs’, my blessings...." (Mr. Mills’ son)

"If I didn’t do it, it is not good and God will not bless me. God will not bless me...." (Mrs. Osu’s daughter)\textsuperscript{282}

\textit{Decreased fear of family sanctions}

Apart from the weakened threat of divine punishment or a curse from the old parent, the diminished fear of consequences among the young is, as the older people maintained, also due to a waning \textit{fear of the family}:

"These days, people don’t bother about the family, they are not afraid...." (Mrs. Osu)

"These days the young people don’t fear the family as much as we did...." (Mr. Mills)

"Right now, even when the family calls, the person won’t come ... they won’t come, they just won’t mind the family. These days nobody will even mind the family head. You see in our days there was respect, and we feared the family, but right now it is not there anymore." (Mr. Akpan)

This diminished fear of family sanctions is particularly evident in the increasing number of cases in which children - knowing or assuming that others will do it – provide nothing at all for their parents, not even token gestures\textsuperscript{283}.

Mr. Prempeh: "I know someone … he never sends anything to his mother but he is having money staying in Accra here and having about three, four, five girls, taking them to the beer bars, drinking pubs, and to the mother he would not even send a peswa."

Q: "Why not?"

\textsuperscript{282} It was not possible in this inquiry to explore further the influence of the younger respondents’ education and of their religious affiliation (i.e. the message preached in their church) on their conceptions of divine punishment. This again would present an interesting strand of inquiry for further research.

\textsuperscript{283} The older people, and all HelpAge workers, judged this as inexcusable. The tenor that was voiced time and again was the following:

"Even if you have nothing, the little you have, you must \textit{at least} give something to your old parents, even if it just a small thing. At least something. Or visit them from time to time and bring something small." (Mr. Azu)
Mr. Prempeh:  
"I don't know, one thing he is a bad person. And he thinks 'oh she is staying in the village, there are plenty of foodstuffs over there, they can eat...'. The second thing is he is not in the community where his family is. He has travelled all the way to Accra so how will they come and challenge him? Even if they come, the life he is living here, he has got his own house, he has got his own car, probably he even has more money than the family head. So, what does he bother about the family?"

Mrs. Tettey:  
"My son, I haven't heard from him for many years now, he doesn't give me anything."
Q:  
"Why not?"
Mrs. Tettey:  
"Oh I don't know, it is wicked, it is wickedness. I looked after his children, provided for his schooling, sheer wickedness."
Q:  
"Did such a thing happen also in the past?"
Mrs. Tettey:  
"No, very very few maybe, but most took care because they had God-fearing and they were afraid of what the family would say."
Q:  
"What about now, do you think your son fears what the family says?"
Mrs. Tettey:  
"Oh he doesn't mind the family. If they would call him he wouldn't even step there..."
Q:  
"Why not?"
Mrs. Tettey:  
"He won't mind them ... he is living somewhere outside Accra, how will they go there? And then too, if they called him he would say that 'did they ever help him?' So he wouldn't mind them."

Mrs. Aidoo284:  
"My senior brother, he is now 90, he can't walk and also he can't hear. He is living with us in the family house and I am the one looking after him. My brother has four children, two sons and two daughters, but they don't help at all, though he took care of them. They are living in Darkuman285, they are all doing some sort of work, but they don't try at all. They don't even come to visit."
Q:  
"Why not?"
Mrs. Aidoo:  
"I don't know. They are bad. A delegation from our family even went to their house to confront them. We asked them that they should help to provide something for their father, but they just refused, they just didn't mind us. You see, they just didn't mind us. They said they don't have anything to give to the old man."
Q:  
"Why do you think they didn't mind you?"
Mrs. Aidoo:  
"Oh, they will say that we the family didn't help them before, so why are we now coming."

284 This was a case I encountered right at the beginning of the fieldwork. My attention was drawn to it by one of the HelpAge zonal leaders. It was a case that she was ‘investigating’. I went to the house and interviewed the old man’s sister (Mrs. Aidoo). Throughout the period of my stay I made several attempts to get in contact with the children, to speak to them to hear the side of the story. Several meetings were arranged, but they never turned up, indicating to me their wish not to speak to me. It was thus impossible to explore this case further.

285 An area of Accra.
As these accounts indicate, and as the older people explained, the declining fear of the family – which now makes people feel they can get away with shirking their responsibilities to parents – is the result of two key factors. One is the increasing geographical separation of family members, which has made it more difficult for families to enforce their control:

"In the past ... people were not all that spread out, I mean many relatives would stay in one family house or at least in the same village or part of town. But this time, many are living in different areas from the family so it is not easy...." (Mr. Thompson)

The second, more significant factor\(^ {286} \), is the fact that for many people the threat of family sanctions, such as the withdrawal of family help, has, in a sense, become an empty threat – empty because they no longer need the family. This applies, on the one hand, to those who are financially self-sufficient and thus have nothing to gain or to lose:

"You see now many they don't mind the family because, the person is financially sound, he has his good job and all that, he has money, he doesn't even need them...." (Mr. Hutton)\(^ {287} \)

On the other hand, importantly, it applies also to the growing number of those who, in the current economic climate, are struggling and would have much to gain from family help. The fact that the family no longer helps, however, has meant that they too have nothing to lose by ignoring their relatives. More than that, the family is seen as having no right to question, let alone sanctions them:

"There are many when the family calls them they won't come, and if the family tells them something they don't care, it is not their matter.... Because they think that when

\(^{286}\) This factor is more significant because, as described in the previous chapter, even in the past many people already lived away from their families but still sent money or gifts to their parents.

\(^{287}\) As mentioned in Chapter Six, the weakened fear of family sanctions and control among people who were financially self-sufficient and independent had been noted in the past. The respondents' accounts indicate, however, that the scale had increased.
they were asking them for help the family didn’t help them before, so that is why they will just do their own thing.” (Mrs. Ayi)

A further factor which may also contribute to the sense of not needing the family is, as some older respondents pointed out, that there are now groups, especially church groups, that the young can join and that give them support:

“These days the young people don’t fear the family as much as we did because now they have gangs and groups they can join.... Like many of these church groups. This my son for example, he is always staying with his church group....” (Mr. Mills)

That there has indeed been a reduction of the fear of family sanctions is again indicated by the fact that none of the younger respondents feared or even mentioned sanctions from the family as a consequence of not supporting their parents. All asserted, moreover, that young people in general are no longer afraid of the family:

“I think a lot of people now don’t really fear their ‘family’. I mean, if the family call them, they may not even bother to turn up.” (Mrs. Ward’s daughter)

“There are many when the family calls them they won’t come, and if the family tells them something they don’t care, it is not their matter.” (Mrs. Otoo’s son)

Mrs. Otoo’s daughter:  "Oh many people they don’t mind the family."
Q:  "Why not?"
Mrs. Otoo’s daughter:  "Because the family is also not helping them so they don’t mind them."

Some, moreover, vividly described their own lack of fear:

Mr. Mills’ son:  "Most people won’t mind the family because if the family were in a state of helping you or being concerned about you, you would listen to them. You would take advice from them, but if they are not helping you and you yourself are struggling and if they come to you and what they say is not to your liking you can reject it you see. But if they are taking care of you then you must obey them because you know that by all means you are getting something from them."
Q:  "But if you reject them and then they ‘leave’ you – does that not matter to you then?"
Mr. Mill’s son:  "No, because so far as you don’t provide for me, you don’t do anything for me, I don’t care, I will carry on what I am doing."
"If my family call me probably I won't go ... I am not scared of them ... I had to struggle to feed myself from childhood and to get something going, nobody of them ever came to help me so ... whoever you are I am not scared of you, never ever." (Mrs. Ofei)

Although no younger respondents specifically mentioned membership of a church group when describing their lack of fear of the family, many did say they would turn to such a group if in need, thus indicating that the existence of such groups has contributed to the reduction in fear of the family.

Despite the decreasing threat of family sanctions, it is important to note that they have not lost all of their bite. The family clearly retains some residual clout. This is due to the fact that, as all respondents stressed, people cannot do without the family when it comes to funerals. The threat of losing family support in the face of death is thus still powerful:

"But people still mind the family in some points. You know why? Because they will tell him that one day you will see. One day you will die and it is the same family who will come and bury you. So if you don't mind us, who will bury you? Or they will say, 'One day your father or your mother will die and you have to bury them. Who will help you?' Then they will sit up. I don't know what the magic is in this death and funeral business...." (Mr. Hutton)

"Right now you don't need the family, because, like my case, now that I am in hardship they are not helping me. But on one part too, you still need them, because when your mother or your father dies, you need them. Because you alone can't bury your mother or father, you alone can't do it. That is why you still have to respect them...." (Mrs. Otoo's son)

"It is when your parents die, this is the time you need your relatives. You need their help, because you the child cannot bury them by yourself." (Mrs. Addo's daughter-in-law)

288 It is interesting to note that whilst all younger respondents themselves felt they still needed family help for their parents' funeral, a few of the youngest generation mentioned that they knew of people who had ignored the family and buried their parents by themselves:

"Yes normally we say we still need the family to do the funerals but I know that some people actually bury their corpses without involving the extended family - they just do it." (Charles Adjei)

It was not possible to follow this up or substantiate it, but it may be an indication that this last bastion of family influence may also be waning.

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**Diminished fear of retribution from the children**

The third and final expression of the diminished fear of consequences among the young, is the fact that they no longer seem to be afraid of retribution from their own children. That is, as the old respondents put it, they shirk their responsibilities towards their parents without fearing, as people did in the past, that they will receive the same treatment from their children. However, the old people could not explain why:

Mrs. Addo:  
"These days some children haven’t got the sympathy, they don’t do it, and that is why the old people in Ghana are suffering these days. Because it is the children who won’t look after them… They don’t try. They don’t do anything. They like the easy life, and they don’t feel ashamed…. But I don’t understand them because what they are doing to their parents, their children will do the same thing to them."

Q:  
"But do you think they don’t know that?"

Mrs. Addo:  
"Probably they know it, but they don’t mind, they don’t care … I don’t know why, they just don’t fear.” (Mrs. Addo)

That the fear of retribution from children has indeed diminished is, again, indicated by the fact that none of the younger respondents mentioned it as a possible consequence of not supporting their parents.

**7.3.7 An increased expression of lack of love and gratitude by children**

The fact that the weakened threat of sanctions has made children do less than they could for their parents and refuse their parents’ requests, indicates one crucial thing. Children, no longer fearing the consequences, are now giving expression to their *lack of love for and gratitude to* the parent. They are expressing the fact that they have no positive wish to do much for their parents first, because the parents, though they fulfilled their basic duties, showed little
love or concern and, moreover, because support has become so costly. This crucial fact, interestingly, was not mentioned by any of the older respondents; it was the young respondents who pointed it out:

“...it depends on the way the parents have brought up their children. Sometimes we get so much attached to a parent because of something, the way maybe she was sacrificing, you saw how much she sacrificed for you when you were in need of something. In that way you will do it back. But if you didn’t see anything like that, you don’t care much and if your money too is little you won’t be trying much....” (Mrs. Addo’s daughter-in-law)

“If the children love the old man or the old woman they will spend the money on them, but if not they will just keep it for the funeral.” (Mrs. Otoo’s son)

“The whole thing is that there are things we need to sustain us in life, but certain things we just want them.... So if you want to help your parents you must forego these things. But...it depends on how much your parents tried for you.... If you really try for your child, every child on this earth, no matter how wicked he is, by all means he or she will try to look after you... because we humans have remembrance. But if you didn’t try for that child... instead of him to sacrifice he won’t do it....” (Mr. Mills’ son)

What this means, in effect, is that now, due to the diminished fear of consequences, the past conduct of the parent – and the resulting degree of gratitude and affection felt by the child – have become important in determining the degree to which an older person’s needs or requests are satisfied. The crux about this new state of affairs is that whereas the older people condemn it, maintaining that children should do more than they do, the young clearly endorse it. They see it as just that, particularly now where supporting older parents has become so costly for the child, parents should receive according to how much they ‘tried’ for the child. Thus, where they are themselves accused of withholding support, they express no regret about this:
The most marked and palpable expression this new way of things lies in the increasing incidence of retaliation, i.e. of children who deliberately withhold all support from their older parents because the latter neglected part of their duty to them.

7.3.8. Increasing retaliation

Although retaliation against parents (mainly fathers) did, at times, occur in the past, it is now, as all respondents asserted, so common that it has become a widely recognised social problem, which has caused outright neglect or visible destitution among many old men 289.

“But do you have money you are saving for the funeral?”

“Yes, I keep some in the house....”

289 All respondents emphasised, the women particularly vehemently, that (just as in the past) it is the men, fathers, who are irresponsible and are thus retaliated against:

“It is the fathers! Actually, you know, Ghanaian men are useless. Normally they are useless. Oh I am serious. Normally, Ghanaian men, most of them are useless because all they know is ‘this girl is my daughter’, ‘this boy is my son’. That is all. They give you a name, do the outdooring and after that they won’t take good care of you, whether you go to school, whether you have clothes to wear. It is your mother who will be providing it.” (Mrs. Achim, Mrs. Osu’s daughter)

However, the respondents did note that retaliation against mothers also does occur, albeit very rarely.
Instead of seeing them up to a certain level they didn’t, they neglected them, so now the children are paying them back.” (Mr. Mills’ son)

“These days there are many cases where the children are refusing to look after the parents … because usually the child bears a grudge from something – probably he or she was sent home from school because the parents never paid and didn’t bother when the child dropped out. And that child will say ‘If they had sent me to school, if they had paid my fees I would be in a better position now’. As for that one I have heard it over and over.” (Mrs. Prah)

“Now there are many who refuse to look after their parents … most of them because they didn’t educate them. I know of people who speak so vehemently against their parents for having neglected them, for failing to educate them. I know of people who have even said they want to change their names, they don’t want to bear the names of their parents.” (Mr. Thompson)

This attitude has also underpinned the dumping of older people (again usually men) at the hospital.

“You see it, it will be somebody who was working, earning money and everyone knew he was having money but he didn’t care much about his children or any family member.… So when this person falls sick or something bad happens to him … they too won’t bother. They won’t come and pay the bills because you did not think about them … they will just repay you in your own coins.…” (Mr. Prempeh)

“Oh they do it because that old person he must have done something bad before. If you didn’t mind your children or your family they will also not mind you. And they will say they have no money.” (Mr. Mensah)

Several older respondents, for example Mr. Prempeh and Mr. Baddoo, described themselves as being victims of such retaliation:

290 It was, as mentioned in Chapter Four, not possible to fully explore what reasons lay behind the apparent dumping of older women in the psychiatric hospital.

291 The respondents’ view that the dumping of older people in hospitals is one expression of this retaliation was borne out by the specific cases of such dumping that were explored as part of this investigation. Most involved such an element of retaliation. One example is the case of a 75-year-old man, whose daughter and relatives, after admitting him, ceased to visit him or have any form of contact. When the bills were accumulating the hospital welfare staff contacted his daughter and relations – his only sister and brother – for payment of the bill. However, they all refused to pay arguing that the patient had led a wayward life, had not been committed to the family and had not looked after his daughter. Therefore, they said, they had nothing to offer him. The relatives and especially the daughter were embittered about the patient’s past lack of commitment and said they were ‘paying him back in his own coin’. Although the relations and daughter were counselled to show some concern and help with the bills, they refused. The patient was therefore recommended for being granted pauper status, which would mean waiving his fees.
“My older son, he is not providing for me at all though he has means. But he is saying that I neglected him, because when he was in form two at secondary school I stopped providing for him.” (Mr. Prempeh)

“My son and my daughter they are not remitting me anything.... They are complaining that I didn’t take care of them for their schooling.” (Mr. Baddoo)

Several adult children, including Mr. Baddoo’s daughter, meanwhile vividly described their own retaliation:

Mr. Baddoo’s daughter: “My father didn’t try for me at all, and my brother too. He didn’t even send us to school. So because of him I am struggling now, I am just sitting here, going up and down selling petty petty things. If I had education I would be somewhere better. Even my brother, he tried his best and started to learn fitting, but my father had to pay some small amount for him to learn it properly – he didn’t pay, so my brother had to come and sit in the house, then he managed again by himself to learn how to drive, my father didn’t help. When he finished he told my father that he has tried his best to learn so he should help him to buy the license so that he can be a driver. But my father didn’t, so my brother came here and insulted him that he doesn’t want to do anything for us ... that he didn’t try at all for us.”

Q: “Do you know why your father didn’t try for you?”
Mr. Baddoo’s daughter: “When he had money he used it to go and drink and chase women rather than taking care of us. When I used to hear that my father had been paid I would go there and ask him but to give me some, but he would tell me that there was nothing on him ... but it wasn’t true. If he had taken care of me at least now I would be somewhere. So these days I don’t have and my brother too, he won’t give him anything. Even my father is afraid of him. So when my brother comes my father locks his door because sometimes my brother would go and search him and if he finds any money he would take it away.... I know that my father isn’t satisfied but what can he say. He didn’t try at all.”

Others described the retaliation of their friends or acquaintances:

Mr. Thompson’s daughter: “I have a friend who doesn’t even want to see the father because the father never educated him. He had to go through life alone and he always wanted to be somebody, but now he is a nobody. If the father had educated him he would be a somebody today, you know. So he doesn’t even want to see the father.”

Q: “But was it that the father simply didn’t have the means to educate his son?”
Mr. Thompson’s daughter: “No! The father had the means but he got married to somebody else when the children were small and he stopped supporting his children because he had found a new wife.
You know that is what some fathers do. Some don't even get married but they neglect their children. So in this case when the child grows up, the father shouldn't expect anything from him or her. And if the child doesn't do it there is nothing you can say or do because you failed in your duties.

What the respondents emphasised and what the above accounts already indicate, is that in most cases children retaliate against their fathers because they only provided up to a certain stage but then stopped, usually upon divorce or separation from the mother. Most often they retaliate specifically because the father has failed to pay for their education and/or to set them up, leaving them with nothing to build on:

Mrs. Tettey: “Usually it doesn’t start from the beginning. They will start taking care of the children for a while but when they reach some age, say to go to school, they stop.”

Q: “Why?”

Mrs. Tettey: “Often the mother and father will quarrel and the marriage will break or the father will find a new wife and he will stop looking after the children... That is why, when they are grown they don’t have a proper job or anything, and they will blame the father and they won’t take care of him.”

The old clause of conditionality

The key aspect in this increasing retaliation is that in retaliating, children are judging their fathers' decisions and actions; for example, the decision to marry another woman.

292 An apparently common scenario, as one of the HelpAge zonal leaders pointed out, is that the children learn of the father’s neglect from their mothers.

“Often it is because the mothers tell the children how the father neglected them, that the children become bitter and they won’t take care of the father.”

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They are retaliating against the fact that the father could have done otherwise. had he wanted to\textsuperscript{293}. Because his lack of support was wilful, rather than being due to an incapacity, the children feel that they, too, have no duty to support him\textsuperscript{294}. They are thus putting into practice the conditionality and unwillingness/incapacity clause that children in the past did not make use of given their overriding duty to honour and respect parents no matter what.

Now, however, children have become increasingly ready to judge their parents' actions:

"Nowadays the children give you marks. If you don't educate them children, because for instance, you spend your money on drink and women and night-clubs and so on, the children ... will know that you are doing this thing purposely, especially if there is a wife that is complaining. So ... when you are old they too won't come and take care of you.... In my days we didn't think of giving our parents marks like that. Whatever they did, we just took it like that." (Mr. Hutton; emphasis added)

\textsuperscript{293} Such a judgement was, for example, clearly expressed in Gilbert Wilson's account of his father:

\begin{quote}
Gilbert Wilson: "...My father he provided for my schooling up to preparatory school but when I started 'O'-levels, my father paid only a little bit and that was all. Since then he has not provided anything....."

Q: "And do you know the reason your father stopped providing for you?"

Gilbert Wilson: "I know very well....[He] found a new woman who also had children and there was a quarrel between my mother and my father and that caused the split between them.....Then he too got into financial problems and he wasn't finding it easy but it was because he took this new woman and her children, and also the money wasn't coming so much. But I blame my father for marrying that other woman. Because of that I can say that he didn't do his duty to us, his children...."
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{294} An important aspect that would be very likely to influence children's judgement of whether their father is/ was unable or unwilling to provide more for them is the way in which he communicated his refusal to help, and the way he communicates, or 'is' with the child in general. It is very likely that the less affectionate or open the father, is the more likely the child will assume that any failure of support is due to an unwillingness, a lack of care or love on the part of the father – he has other priorities.
The increased readiness of children to judge their parents is, as the respondents' accounts indicated, the result of two mutually reinforcing factors — a greater courage on the part of children and a greater bitterness by neglected children.

_The greater courage of children_

On the one hand, and most tangibly, the readiness to judge parents is due to an increased courage on the part of the children, which in part, stems again, from the diminished fear of the consequences of not honouring one’s parents:

“In the past only one, one would do it, because most had the fear of God. But now plenty are doing it. You see, they have lost that fear of God, they don’t have it in them....” (Mrs. Nima)

Mr. Baddoo: “My children ... what they are doing to me — it will happen, it will happen on them too.... The day will come their own children will do this thing to them.... They should come to me and say ‘oh father I beg you I won’t do that again’.”

Q: “Why?”
Mr. Baddoo: “My age should tell them. I am getting old...my age should tell them that I can curse them.”

Q: But do you think they are scared of that?
Mr. Baddoo: “No, they don’t fear”

295 Mr. Baddoo’s daughter confirmed her father’s perception by emphasising that she did not fear of his curse or retribution from her own children:

Mr. Baddoo’s daughter: “By all means when I am old my children will take care of me because I am taking care of them.”

Q: “Even if you are not taking care of your own father?”
Mr. Baddoo’s daughter: “Yes, because I am taking care of them.”

Q: “But are you scared that your father might curse you because you are not looking after him?”
Mr. Baddoo’s daughter: “I am not scared because he never took care....”

The same lack of fear was expressed by Mrs. Ofei who was not providing for her mother out of retaliation:

“My son will look after me because I am trying my best to put him on a good foundation... it was my mother who destroyed my life, and her curse can’t touch me. It can’t touch me. You know she actually cursed me, she cursed me wickedly in front of people.... but I am not afraid. Her curse can do nothing to me because I know I am right.” (Mrs. Ofei)
On the other hand, this new courage stems from the importance that is being increasingly given to the notion of the rights of children, in particular the rights of children vis-à-vis their parents.

The most concrete expression of this increasing emphasis is the establishment in 1979 of the Ghana National Commission on Children, which, in 1998, launched the first ever report on the state of the Ghanaian child. The Commission is a direct result of Ghana’s subscription to the UN declaration on the rights of the child. Its objective is to raise awareness and to promote children’s rights to ensure that adults begin to respect children as full human beings entitled to recognition and respect. Partly as a result of the Commission’s work, the notion of the rights of the child is being increasingly publicised in the media and in schools, with the effect that children have become much more aware of what their rights, and their parents’ duties, are:

"The children nowadays they know what their rights are. They are aware of what their rights are. We were not!" (Mr. Brew)

"Children now they know all about their rights but they don’t know their duties anymore!" (Mr. Hutton)

"I think children these days they know about their rights.... They know ‘My parents have to educate me’, ‘Mummy has to do this for me, daddy has to do this for me’. So they know the parents are supposed to do for them, they know what the parents’ responsibilities are. They are getting more and more enlightened, you know. They watch films, and listen to the news and they will hear it at school.... So if you know your right as a child, you start claiming it ‘Daddy I need this from you’ or ‘Mummy I need this’, because it knows that that is what mummy and daddy should do...." (Mr. Thompson’s daughter)

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296 The Commission has so far concentrated on raising awareness by holding talks especially in schools, working with local NGOs, and organising annual events for children, such as on the occasion of the OAU (Organisation of African Unity) Year of the African Child. More systematic programmes have not yet been set up, but plans are in progress. (Mrs. Addo, representative, Ghana National Commission on Children, personal communication.)
One of the most important aspects in this regard is the children's growing awareness of their right to take their parents to court and legally enforce the parents' duty to provide support\textsuperscript{297}. This is being increasingly made use of by children. A prominent example, which occurred during the period of fieldwork and was widely covered in the media\textsuperscript{298}, was the case of seven secondary school pupils who petitioned the Legal Aid Committee over the refusal of their fathers to cater for their education. During the trial the judge called on all children whose parents were refusing to take care of them to take their parents before the Legal Aid Committee.

Several middle generation respondents described the use of this legal framework by their peers:

"I know a lot of people, some of them are not even up to my age, they report their parents, when they reach the age where their parents should give them a room and the parents are not doing it, they report them to this rent office or something. A friend of mine he reported his father to them and they called the father and told him that his son is up to age and he should give him a room in the house. You see the father wanted rather to give the room to a tenant to collect money. So he was forced to give the boy a room.... You see I too could force my father to give me a room.... This is what is happening in the whole world now. Children have power. I have heard the same thing in Britain and America...." (Mr. Mills' son)

The significance of this increasing emphasis on children's rights, as the above comment indicates, is that it has led to an \textit{empowerment} of children vis-à-vis their parents. It has brought about a greater \textit{equality} between them. Parents are

\textsuperscript{297} By law, both customary and common law, every child has the right to maintenance from the father. And by statute this obligation to maintenance has been stretched to cover both parents. This right to maintenance expires when the child is 18 unless he or she is still in need of support (e.g. if still in education). Although there is no defined and agreed list of duties the parents have toward the child the most commonly recognised are the duty to physically and morally protect the child, to maintain the child and to secure the child's education and training. The obligation on the parents to provide maintenance for the child is absolutely binding and legally enforceable (see Mensa-Bonsu and Dowuona-Hammond, 1996).

\textsuperscript{298} \textit{Daily Graphic}, 15 August 1997.
no longer above judgement; they are accountable for their actions and are open to challenge by their children.

What is clear, however, is that although this trend has already impacted on the current generation of adult children, in particular the younger cohorts, its full force will be felt by (or benefit) the current generation of young children and those that will follow them. One aspect of particular importance – in addition to the legally enforceable right to parental support – is the growing public condemnation of cruelty to or harsh disciplining of children. This, as many middle generation respondents described, has already begun to affect people's parenting:

"In Europe and America they are teaching the children about child battering and all ... I mean in Ghana in my days there was also child battering but it was all put down to 'Oh she was a naughty girl so she was beaten harshly', end of story. They would never think 'Oh this girl's parents are bad', they would rather think they are teaching them well. But now they are taught. If you are naughty, fine, you know, you will be reprimanded, but if you get bruisings or marks questions will be asked. Is this mother cruel to her children or what? Because it is quite easy to go overboard with beating when you are upset. You know as a parent I sometimes start beating my children and I think, 'Hmm, do I really want to stop?', you know. I am not proud of it but it is something that is inside of you. You think 'This is my own child so you can do what you like with it' and you can go overboard you know. So the teachers are now teaching them to be aware of situations like that...." (Mrs. Ward's daughter)

299 An example of the growing discussion of this issue during the period of fieldwork was the newspaper article 'Who protects the children' (Public Agenda, 16-22 March 1998), which focused on two particular incidents of cruel punishment and disciplining of children. It argued amongst others that:

"... a clear line needs to be drawn between the demands of discipline and the rights of individuals, especially children because of their inability to protect themselves ... [that] misguided forms of socialisation and upbringing need to be abandoned [and that] ... what is pressing now is the need for a comprehensive and appropriate legal framework to be put in place that addresses issues of children's welfare, spells out their rights and puts in place workable arrangements to protect them from abuses from even their own parents if necessary" (p3).
The bitterness of neglected children

The second factor that, together with growing courage, has made children increasingly ready to judge and retaliate against their parents, is an increasing bitterness on their part:

"These days people are tending to punish their parents ... they say 'When the going was good for him, he didn't look after me and that is why I am now in this position' ... they are so bitter now...." (Mr. Hutton; emphasis added)

This is a bitterness that stems from the fact that in the current economic crisis the effects of paternal neglect, in particular, the failure to provide for good education, are so much more grave than they were in the past. First, there is no longer a buffer of extended family help which, in the past, could compensate for any lack of paternal support:

"In those days families would step in, you know ... members of the family would go to the other family and talk it over and try to arrange it.... They would pay visits and pay expenses instead of the father, so the child gets to know them.... But these days families don't do that anymore...." (Mrs. Addo)

"You see, formerly if a father was neglecting his child like that, the aunties and uncles would take care, the relatives would provide for the child. But that we are not seeing that anymore." (Mr. Thompson)

Second, someone without a complete education has today virtually no chance of any professional or economic success, the very things that (in addition to being educated itself) have become necessary for a person's standing in society:

"If you don't educate your children, these days it is very bad ... because right now, here in Ghana we have a problem. There are no jobs, even people with academic qualifications don't get a job. So what about those illiterates?... If you are illiterate you are out ... if you are not educated it is a painful thing. Even people who are semi-educated they can't get anywhere." (Mr. Akpan)

"Now it is a struggle, you know, fighting for existence it is a struggle. People now need to get higher education if they want to get anywhere. So nowadays the competition is great, everyone is struggling." (Mr. Okine)
"In this Ghana now, if you are not educated you are not a proper person." (Mrs. Oto's son)

Thus, as the last quotation expresses, the failure of fathers to provide, in particular for schooling, has condemned many children to a life of being a nobody, without hope and chance of escape. That bitterness should arise in such children is not difficult to imagine.

**Increasing paternal neglect**

Although the growing readiness of children to retaliate has been the principal reason for the increase in retaliation against fathers, its effect has been compounded by an increase in paternal neglect. More and more fathers have, in the last few decades, begun to shirk their responsibilities towards their children:

"It is happening so often these days, it is pathetic. The men come, they befriend the women, have the children and then they don't pay anymore. We are seeing it more and more and more." (Mrs. Addo)

"It wasn't so bad in my days, it wasn't so much. Now so many are doing it." (Mrs. Ansah)

"The way I see it the thing is increasing." (Mr. Brew)

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300 It is very likely, though none of the respondents mentioned this directly, that this bitterness is exacerbated by the widening gap between rich and poor in Ghana, with the rich flaunting their life-styles and possessions (in real life or TV). This is likely to make people even more aware of their relative deprivation and low status.

301 An increase in the incidence of non-support by fathers was already noted in the 1970s. In fact, the problem of non-support was seen to have become so pervasive that the government tried to deal with it by introducing ever more stringent laws making husbands and fathers accountable for their offspring, and by instructing social welfare departments and courts to deal with such cases. However, by the early 1980s, none of these laws seemed to have made any significant impact on curbing the problem (Robertson, 1981). The older people strongly asserted that the incidence of paternal non support has increased even further since then.
Ironically, the main factors that have led to this increasing neglect of children are the same as those that have enabled children to shirk their responsibilities towards their parents. First, the economic crisis has meant that not only do many fathers want to avoid spending money on their children (assuming the mothers will provide), but also that many fathers are unable to provide adequately for their children. And, rather than being associated with failure, they run away:

"You see these days it is becoming so difficult to afford to bring up a child properly. With the high cost of living of education and so on, the fathers just run away because they think they can't afford it. And they don't want to be associated with failing to do it properly." (Mr. Brew)

"... formerly men too had many wives and produced children with them, but because life was not at all that difficult, in the past people could be understood for marrying, two, three, or four wives. In the past it wasn't a problem to cater for your children, but now people can't afford it, so they want to run away from it." (Mr. Thompson)

Second, waning family control and fear of family sanctions has meant, in addition, that men can get away with neglecting their children much more easily:

"You see ... in the olden days you didn't just take a women and decide to take her as a wife. No. It was a formal affair with negotiations between the two families ... so when you marry you marry the whole family. So if a husband was irresponsible the wife could go to the man's family and report him and the family would check him and make him conduct himself well. So men could not get away with being irresponsible, you see. But nowadays, often people just marry or take a wife and the families don't even know. Or the men just impregnate the women and disappear, and the woman doesn't even know where his house is or his family. So now the wife cannot go to his family and ask them to discipline the man. Or if she goes and the family talks to him, he maybe will not mind them, he will just do what he wants to do... So, I think these days men can get away with it." (Mr. Brew; emphasis added)

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302 A concrete example of this was recounted by Mr. Baddoo's daughter. The father of her children had been shirking his responsibilities and had not responded at all to family pressure:

"You see, like my own case. The man has a wife and children, but you the woman, you don't know. So when he comes to you and you accept and you have relations with him and then you bring forth, he just runs away because he knows he has to go back to his wife and children. So I went to inform the man's elder brother and some of his relatives so that they should advise him to bring some contribution. And they talked to him but he just said that these people he doesn't respect them at all so they can't tell him to take care of the children." (Mrs. Baddoo's daughter)
7.4 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has explored the factors and processes which have led to the decline in family support for older people. It has shown that the decline in old age support both from relatives and children, has, first and foremost, been the result of the worsening economic situation. This, compounded by the shift in status criteria towards material wealth, has meant not only that many people can no longer afford to adequately provide for their parents or relatives — because that would jeopardise their own and their children's needs — but also that people have become increasingly reluctant to spend money on them unless they feel a positive wish, out of affection and gratitude, to do so.

Thus, whilst most of the current inadequacy in support for older people is due to an incapacity of the young, it is often also due to an unwillingness on their part to do as much as they could to help the older person.

The increasing reluctance to assist relatives other than parents is more or less accepted by the old as a consequence of the economic crisis (with some evidence of attitudes emerging in support of this shift). In contrast, the unwillingness of children to do as much as they could for parents — usually parents who showed little parental concern and for whom children feel no particular gratitude or affection — is not accepted. The old see it as a clear breach of the old established normative rules, a breach of the absolute, God-given duty of children to honour and respect their parents. Ironically, the extreme cases of this, where children withhold all support from parents because they wilfully neglected their parental duties, are not unanimously condemned by the old: Some older people.
especially those themselves affected, again see such retaliations as a breach of the old order:

"These days some children...don't take care of their parents and they give the excuse that the parents didn't take care of them, that they didn't send them to school...But they should still take care of the parents because they brought them forth and they looked after them in infancy." (Mrs.Kwei, emphasis added)

"Some children are bad. You see, their father...gave them life, gave them shelter, clothing, when they were sick he took them to hospital...The only thing he failed to do was that he didn't send them to school. And because they don't respect they depend on that and forget entirely about what he did do for them. So they...levy false charges against their parents and they say 'oh my father did not look after me that is why I am not doing well so I am also not going to look after him'..." (Mr.Prempeh)

Other older people, however, though they do not explicitly endorse them, do not condemn such retaliations. They understand the bitterness of neglected children and/or emphasise that their retaliation is in conformity with the basic principle of reciprocity and conditionality that has always underpinned children's obligation to support parents in old age:

"Those old men whose children are not looking after them. I can't blame the children. You see, we have a proverb here in Ga "the left arm washes the right arm, the right arm washes the left arm". So if you get money and instead of using that money for your children you use that money for drinking and for chasing women and you don't do anything for them - do you think the children will come and look after you? They won't. This is how it is" (Mr. Akpan)

"I know of many people who refuse to look after their parents because they neglected them...they didn't educate them. For example, I know of a case of a child and I said to him 'look a father is a father you should try and look after him' but he said 'No, I just can't love my father'... So that is what they are feeling and, you know, I can't blame them..." (Mr.Thompson).

A new order

That children increasingly withhold some or all support from unloving or neglectful parents, for whom they feel not affection, gratitude or appreciation signifies that there has been a shift towards a new order in the basis or contract of intergenerational support between parents and children. In this new order the
past conduct of the parents, and thus the resulting degree of gratitude and affection felt by the children, has become the important criterion in deciding to what extent an older person can expect or deserves support. Thus, parents receive support not according to fixed status rights but, in a sense, according to their merits\textsuperscript{303}.

That this new order is emerging is mainly the result of two factors. First, a decreasing fear of the metaphysical and familial sanctions that in the past made children conform to their duty to honour and support parents no matter what, and second, an increased readiness and empowerment of children to judge and hold parents responsible for their lack of concern.

Although this investigation has produced no hard evidence for it, it seems likely that the rules of the new order in filial support – in particular the right to retaliate – apply less to mothers than they do to fathers. This is not only indicated by the virtual absence of outright retaliation against mothers (although this to a large extent reflects the fact that most mothers do \textit{not} neglect their children), but perhaps also by the rising incidence of witchcraft accusations against mothers:

"I know of cases when the children prepare the food they don't give any to the old woman. And when she asks for something they just tell her to go away because the children say that it is her who caused them to not prosper...and they blame her as a witch. This thing is going on so much nowadays ... it is more rampant than we used to see it." (Mrs. Achim)

\textsuperscript{303} Further signs of this emerging new order are a) the earlier mentioned fact that all the younger respondents conceived of their filial duty as being rooted in reciprocity, \textit{not} in an absolute status right of parents, and b) the fact that some adult children see their reasons for supporting their parents in terms of gratitude and appreciation rather than conformity with a strict duty:

"Why do I do it? Well duty sounds too strong a word, it sounds like it's dictatorial but it's not. It is also my pleasure, you know. The duty and the pleasure are at the same level. Yes it is my duty, but I also want to do it, I am grateful to my mother and... I want to show her that I appreciate her...so maybe I can say it is even more of a pleasure than an obligation." (Mrs. Ward's daughter)
"Oh it happens a lot. You see we in Ghana believe in a lot of things and a woman can cater for her children till they grow ... but they won't look after her. Maybe they can't get ... a husband, or their business is not prospering, and they will say the old woman is doing it ... and they will tell them so in these spiritual churches, they will say that the mother is a witch...[and] they believe it" (Mr. Mills' son)

This increase in witchcraft accusations – fuelled by the spiritual churches – may be a reflection of the fact that it remains the only legitimate way to withhold all support from a mother who perhaps did not show much love and concern, but nevertheless gave birth and provided nurture in childhood.304

A Christian counterforce to the new order

Despite the persuasiveness of the new notion of equality between children and parents and judging parents (especially fathers) according to their merits, it is important to note that there exists among the younger generations a significant counterforce, which may militate against its establishment in practice.

This counterforce – perhaps a reaction to the growing problem of retaliation and the resulting destitution of older people – is provided by the widespread assertion of the fundamental Christian principle of forgiveness and sympathy which negates the right to repay parents 'in their own coins' (especially if it would result in deprivation of the old parent):

“If your parents didn’t look after you, when you see their condition, you still have to cater for them. Not for them to just be there wretched. No, the bible says you should forgive them and God will bless you.” (Kenneth Masi)

“The bible says you shouldn’t repay evil with evil...we should do good and...in due time we shall reap for what we are doing.... So if you don’t look after your parents because they didn’t look after you it is not right ... you must look after them, you must forgive them....” (Mr. Mills' son)

304 It is clear, however, that witchcraft accusations are not conscious strategies or deliberate rationalisations or excuses to express harboured resentment or lack of love for the mother. People really believe them.

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A second Christian principle that has more rarely been reasserted as a countervalue to the new order, is the fifth commandment, the binding duty to honour one's parents:

"If you really know God you know that God expects from you that you should honour your parents. He used them as a channel to bring you into this world and you must make sure that you do what God is expecting of you, not what your parents can be expecting from you. And God expects you to honour your parents. So you must do it not because of them but because of what God says." (Mr. Mills' son)

To what extent this assertion of religious principles will affect the establishment of the 'new' order in the contract between children and parents in the following generations remains to be seen.

The future: a new system?

What is more important for the future of support for older people in Ghana, however, is the fact that there seems to be a change in people's expectations regarding material old age support in general. In the past, as the old respondents made clear, people (apart from those who were rich enough to be self-sufficient) expected to be financially supported by their children in old age. They saw the children, in effect, as an investment for their old age security:

"I helped my children so that when I grow old and I haven't got [money], they will help me". (Mrs. Ayi)

"...when you are sending the children to school it is like you are saving money, when the child finishes school it will come and look after you". (Mr. Mills)

"You see when I was investing in them [the children]...I was expecting that when I am no longer able to support myself then they will come to my help". (Mr. Thompson)

It is only possible, at this point, to briefly outline and hint at the apparent changes in normative expectations regarding old age support in Ghana. However, this is a crucial strand of analysis to be pursued in future discussions.

The notion of children as an investment which the old respondents expressed is consonant with the 'old age security motive' for fertility which has been widely discussed among demographers, particularly regarding the developing world. (see e.g. Caldwell, 1982; Cain, 1985; Nugent, 1985)
"When I bought her [the daughter] a sewing machine...what I thought in my mind was 'one day I'll become very weak and nothing will be in my hand, and this sewing will feed me even 100 cedis or 200 cedis every day'. This was my aim of buying this machine". (Mr. Azu)

Now, however, there are strong indications that the recent trends – especially the shrinking capacity of the young to cater for the old – have led to a widespread view, expressed by most young and old respondents, that it is no longer good or wise to expect or rely on support from one's children in old age. First, it is unlikely that this support will be adequate:

"These days in Ghana you cannot know what the treatment your children will give you will be when you are old – not that they want to disappoint you, but we know that these days even if your child is a graduate, he will hardly find employment, so if you ... rely on them, you will be disappointed. So it is important that you rather put something aside for when you are old." (Mr. Prempeh)

"You just can't rely on your children. People still have that idea but it is wrong because you can't be sure of them. Even if you invest in them, they may not get to a position where they can look after you. So if you rely on them you are going to suffer, yes...." (Kenneth Masi)

"With the trend that is going on you have to try and prepare yourself because your children may not be able to do it, they will find it too difficult." (Mr. Thompson)

"You have to save and rely on your savings more than on your children because you don't know if they will take care of you." (Mrs. Larbi)

Second, perhaps more important, the burden on the children would be too much:

"These days it is not good to be depending on your children for everything because it will not be easy for them and they have to worry about their own children. So you shouldn't put your burden on them.... Formerly the burden wasn't too much...." (Mrs. Ansah)

"Our economy is getting more rotten each day. So if you should relax and rely on your children it is bad. It is bad. It is not good because you know what they will be going through. Now it is up to the individual, you know, some people just live by the day, they don't have the foresight ... but you have to start planning your life, plan your future...." (Mr. Thompson's daughter)

"It is not good to depend on your children when you are old, it is not good. Many people still make that mistake, they just think their children will cater for them.... But it is stupid, they have such traditional conceptions ... they are not aware of the realities of today." (Charles Adjei)
What these statements, and especially the frequently used expression ‘it is not good’ clearly indicate, is that there is in progress a shift in values or norms regarding the material dependence on children. The shift is away from reliance on filial support towards an emphasis on independence and self-reliance in old age. This value change has clearly manifested itself in the personal expectations of old age support among the young. Most middle and youngest generation respondents stressed that they do not want to depend on their children in old age but plan to be self-sufficient (although they realise how difficult it is to achieve this):

“I don’t want to depend on my children because ... if you start impinging on them, they have to divide whatever they get. When they are working, instead of concentrating on what they are doing ... they have to think about mummy .... So I wouldn’t want to be an impediment in their way. They should have their life and I will take care of myself. This is what I want to do .... The planning is very very important – everyone should do it.” (Mr. Thompson’s daughter)

“I am not going to depend on my children when I am old. I want to be independent because they can fail me, they can fail me .... Maybe I invest in them and still nothing good will come out of it .... So you have to plan, failing to plan is planning to fail. You must plan for yourself, for your future.” (Mr. Mills’ son)

“I have in mind to plan to set up something that will look after me in my old age so that I won’t have to put any burden on my children ... I mean they also have to live their lives ... and I don’t want my children to experience what I am experiencing now with catering for my mother. It is difficult, it is really difficult.” (Mrs. Addo’s daughter-in-law)307

Those young people who do not have such plans of self-reliance are the very poor and uneducated, those who cannot even dream of saving in the present, let alone for their future old age. Even if they could inflation and economic instability would soon erode their savings’ value. Thus, they have no choice but

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307 It is interesting to note, and confirms the recognised difficulties, that none of the respondents made any reference to the existing SSNIT pension scheme. When asked directly, the majority (except the better off and highly educated) either said they had not heard of the scheme, or were not aware that it was relevant to them. Most were under the impression that it was only for government employees.
to continue to bank on their children, knowing that this now requires particular
effort and the demonstration of love:

“My son will look after me. That is why I am trying my best to put that boy in a good
foundation. He knows I am trying my best....” (Mrs. Ofei)

“I will look after your children very very well, so that when they grow they will look
after me.” (Mrs. Nima)

“I am thinking that when I am old my children will look after me. That is why I am
trying to do everything for them, take them to good education, so that they will cater for
me..... If you do everything in the world for your child then the child will take care of
you too.” (Mrs. Ansah’s grandson)
PART III

DECLINE IN FAMILY SUPPORT FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN GHANA:
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS
CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents a concluding discussion of the provision of material family support for older people in Ghana in the past and the causes of its decline in recent times. It draws together the key findings of the empirical analysis and relates these to the theoretical discourse and existing understanding in the literature regarding the past basis of and causes of decline in family support for older people. The chapter moreover speculates on trends in the future, discusses some implications relating to policy and highlights important areas for further research.

8.1 Family support for older people in the past

The existing interpretations of traditional family support for older people in the literature portray such support as compelled, first and foremost, by a strict normative filial duty enforced by sanctions, but also by exchange between parents and adult children and an element of economic coercion by the old. These classical anthropological structural-functionalist interpretations do not, however, consider the perspectives of individuals or explain the basis of support from relatives other than children.

The empirical analysis has provided a fuller understanding than is offered by these interpretations because it has explored in detail the motives, interests and attitudes of individuals – and their relationship to the wider socio-economic context – that underpinned support to both elderly parents and older relatives in the past (see Figure 4).
Figure 4: Motivational basis of past support to elderly parents and relatives in Ghana

Felt obligation to assist elderly relative
Based on:
a) **Reciprocity**: gratitude for past favours done by the relative, and/or
b) **Beneficence**: sense of duty to assist relative in need.

Expected rewards (blessings) for assisting elderly relative. No blessings if no assistance is given.

Assisting elderly relatives is in **self-interest** of the young

**Support to older relatives is given**

Low costs of support
Supporting elderly parents or relatives is affordable. It does not conflict with needs and aspirations of the young.

**Adequate support to older parents is given regardless of their past conduct and children's feelings for them**

Binding filial duty enforced by sanctions
Duty based on
a) God-given, absolute **status duty** to honour parents
b) reciprocal obligation to repay parents for care received in childhood

**Fear** of consequences (metaphysical and familial sanctions) of not fulfilling duty

Honouring and supporting elderly parents is in **self-interest** of the young
Motivational basis of support from adult children – support for structural-functionalist interpretations

As far as past support by adult children is concerned, the empirical analysis has, in the main, confirmed the main elements of structural-functionalist interpretations. It has shown that support to elderly parents was mainly compelled by a binding normative filial duty, more specifically, fear of the sanctions attached to this duty, and was thus provided regardless of the affective relationship between parents and children. The analysis has also shown, however, that the two other proposed elements, exchange and economic coercion, were not important in driving support. Moreover, the analysis has identified several key aspects of the basis of past filial support, which, though they fit in with the structural-functionalist model, have not so far been recognised. It has shown that the filial duty on the part of children was based on two distinct elements. On the one hand, it was rooted in the principle of reciprocity which required children to repay their parents for the care received in childhood. On the other hand, it was rooted in a God given, absolute ‘status duty’ which required children to honour and respect their parents regardless of the parents’ past conduct or their feelings for them. The sanctions that enforced this duty were a range of family, community and external metaphysical punishments, which threatened withdrawal of family backing, misfortune, neglect in old age or even early death to those who did not comply with their filial duties. Children supported their parents not out of any obvious sentiment of affection or obligation, but out of fear of these sanctions, in particular the certain punishment from God. What ultimately drove support was
thus an underlying self-interest and instrumentality. Children knew that providing support, fulfilling their duty was in their own interest. It was necessary for their future welfare and security.\textsuperscript{308}

\textit{Motivational basis of support from other relatives – no support for structural-functionalist interpretations}

The picture that the empirical analysis has generated of the past basis of support from relatives other than adult children clearly does not fit in with structural-functionalist interpretations. In contrast to support to elderly parents, assistance to older relatives was clearly not compelled by a strict normative duty and the fear of sanctions. Rather, it was provided out of a wish or a felt obligation to help the older relative. This was based either on beneficence or sympathy because the older relative was in need, or, more often on reciprocity, a sense of gratitude or affection for the relative and a wish to repay his or her past favours. Thus, assistance to older relatives, unlike support to elderly parents, was driven mainly by motives arising from the personal, affective relationship between young and old kin. At the same time, however, it too was underpinned by an

\textsuperscript{308} This underlying self-interested motivation also fits in with structural-functionalist perspectives. A key assumption in structural-functionalism is that social action is underpinned by individual’s self-interest which is geared towards attaining the rewards of conforming and avoiding the negative consequences of not conforming to social norms (see Parsons, 1951; Craib, 1992). An assumption of underlying self-interest and outcome-oriented motives of course also underpins rational choice explanations of social action (see e.g. Elster, 1989a; Jary and Jary, 1995). However, these explanations do not accommodate the paramount importance that structural norms and sanctions in the past in Ghana had in defining individuals’ self-interest. The difficulty that rational choice theories have had with reconciling the role of social norms with individual rational behaviour is well known (Craib, 1992; Jary and Jary 1995). Elster (1989b), for example, argues that social norms provide an important kind of motivation for action that is irreducible to rational, future-oriented action.Whilst this argument may hold for the contemporary West, it clearly does not hold for the past in Ghana, at least for the provision of filial support to elderly parents. A further theoretical discussion of the motivational basis of this filial support is beyond the scope of this thesis, but is an issue for further research.
underlying self-interest which related to the consequences of providing support.

People anticipated the rewards, in particular blessings from God, that awaited them if they helped an older relative and that they forewent if they did not.\(^{309}\)

**Patterns of support**

For the most part the empirical analysis has confirmed the ideal descriptions of traditional family support in the literature. Family support for older people in the past was, on the whole, adequate. Most older people were supported by their children and received additional or supplementary assistance from other relatives. This support, moreover, was sufficient to their needs and requirements. Nevertheless, it was not, as the literature portrays, a 'golden past'. There clearly were some people (though very few) who were not adequately supported. Usually these were fathers who had neglected their children and whose children were now retaliating, or they were mothers who were accused of witchcraft.\(^{310}\)

What made people provide adequately for their elderly parents and relatives was, in effect, a combination of two factors. First, providing adequate support was in young people's self-interest and second, it was affordable. The material situation was such that providing old age support did not conflict with the needs of the young.

\(^{309}\) In general, this motivational basis, characterised by a more voluntary giving driven by a personal element of reciprocity and/or sympathy rather than by strict conformity to structural obligations/norms echoes social exchange or rational choice models of action, in particular if one considers that rational choice explanations also encompass more subjective elements of self-interest, such as for example sympathy (see Sen, 1977). However, the important role that social norms and external metaphysical sanctions played in defining self-interest is again not captured by such explanations.

\(^{310}\) It of course remains possible that there did exist a period - before the past captured in this analysis - where even these kinds of non-support did not occur.
8.2 The decline in support

The point of departure for this analysis of the causes of decline in family support for older people in Ghana were the two strands of explanation that have been put forward in the literature. These are on the one hand, modernisation arguments which see weakening traditional norms and values as the main cause of the decline and, on the other hand, materialist arguments which emphasise the key role of the worsening economic situation in Ghana in causing the decline.

The empirical analysis has generated a fuller understanding of the causes of decline than is offered by these explanations because it has elucidated what the interrelationships have been between material and normative changes in bringing about the decline in support from both adult children and other relatives. It has done so by grounding the analysis in an exploration of individuals' personal experiences, motives and perspectives and of their relationships to the wider economic and social context.

The causes of decline: Dominant role of economic crisis reinforced by the effects of modernisation

Overall, as this analysis has clearly shown, the decline in family support for older people in Ghana has been caused by a complex and mutually reinforcing interaction between modernisation and the worsening economic situation, whereby the latter has, without doubt, been the dominant factor. The role of modernisation, for the most part, has been to exacerbate the effects of the economic crisis (see Figure 5).
Figure 5: Causes of decline in family support for older people in Ghana: Dominant role of economic crisis reinforced by effects of modernisation

- Economic crisis
  - ↑ Costs of living
    - Low level pay
    - Unemployment
  - New inescapable and consumer needs.
  - Increasing importance of material status symbols
- Modernisation
  - Education
  - Geographical mobility
  - Ability of young to earn independent living
  - ‘Western’ notions (UN convention) of rights of child
  - ↑ Weakened metaphysical sanctions
  - ↑ Weakened family sanctions
  - ↑ Support to older parents
  - ↓ Support to (older) relatives
- Support to older parents
  - ↑ Support from relatives
  - ↓ Support from relatives
- Grave effects of parental neglect
- ↑ Costs of support:
  - Providing for the old is increasingly unaffordable. It conflicts with needs & aspirations of young and their offspring.
  - (in general: supporting others increasingly conflicts with self-needs)
- The young
  - ↑ focus on their nuclear family
- Children
  - ↑ ready to withhold some or all support from parents who were unloving or neglectful and for whom they feel no gratitude or affection
  - ↑ Empowerment of children vis-à-vis their parents. Parents are more accountable
  - ↓ fear of consequences of not honouring & supporting parents
  - ↑ Support from relatives
  - ↓ Support from relatives
  - Support to older parents
  - ↑ focus on their nuclear family
Whereas the identified causes of decline confirm some of the elements and mechanisms proposed by modernisation theory and materialist explanations, they also indicate several faults or omissions in both these explanations, at least in their application to the decline in support in Ghana. Thus, whilst the two shifts that immediately underlie the decline in support are precisely those predicted by the modernisation model – an increasing focus on the nuclear family and a change in the basis of filial support, the underlying causes of these shifts are for the most part not those posed by modernisation theory. Similarly, though the main cause of the decline – increasing unaffordability of support – is exactly that proposed by materialist accounts, these explanations do not capture the other important effects the economic crisis has had in causing the decline, nor the important contributory role modernisation has played.

**Increasing focus on the nuclear family**

The principal shift that has led to the decline in family support for older people, just as the modernisation model proposes, is the fact that the young have increasingly begun to focus on their nuclear families. Whatever resources they have are spent on their children, spouses and themselves at the expense of older parents, let alone older relatives. The cause of this narrower focus however is not, as modernisation theory implies, rising individualism and a weakening of values of familism. The general value of assisting older relatives (or relatives in general) and the obligation to support older parents clearly persist and are endorsed by the young. Moreover, though there are indications that normative expectations are shifting away from family help towards self-reliance and
material independence in old age, these have not caused the decline in support
from relatives, but are emerging as a response to it.

What has caused the increasing focus on the nuclear family, rather, is the
worsening economic situation of the population. Increasing un- and
underemployment and the drastic rises in the costs of living have meant, just as
the materialist explanations in the literature propose, that people no longer have
the resources or capacity (and feel increasingly reluctant) to provide adequately
for their elderly parents, let alone other relatives. What the materialist
explanations do not consider, however, is the important role that modernisation
has played in exacerbating the incapacity on part of the young. The emergence
of new inescapable needs such as education and electricity, new consumer needs
such as TV, HiFi or fashion items, and the shift in status criteria toward an
increasing importance of such material status symbols has meant that people
have even less resources available to give to the old.

More importantly, the materialist interpretations have failed to identify the
crucial factor that has underpinned the incapacity of the young to provide for
elderly parents, let alone relatives. This is the apparently fundamental normative
hierarchy of priorities, which holds that in situations where resources are
constrained, the needs of ones immediate family (children, spouse and older
parents) have clear priority over those of more extended kin and, more
importantly, the needs of the young (self, spouse and children) have priority over
those of older parents.
Increasing importance of the affective relationship between parent and child

The second shift that has contributed to the decline in support specifically from adult children, again as predicted by the modernisation model, is the fact that filial support has become increasingly dependent on the affective relationship between parents and children. More specifically, it has become dependent on the existence of gratitude, affection or appreciation for what the parents have done for them in the past.

The shift is expressed in the fact that children have become increasingly ready to withhold some or all support from parents who themselves showed little concern or support in the past, and for whom they thus feel no affection or gratitude. In extreme cases, where parents wilfully neglected their parental duties, many children now withhold all support, arguing that they, in turn, have no duty to support the parent. In doing so they express the principal conditionality that has always been inherent in children’s reciprocal duty to support parents in old age (if parents wilfully neglected their duty to the child, the child has no duty to support them). Though recognised in the past, this principle was rarely made use of, given the overriding duty to honour and respect parents. The increasing incidence of retaliations against neglectful parents has affected mostly older men, reflecting the fact that it is typically fathers, not mothers, who renege on their parental duties. It appears moreover that such open retaliation against mothers is seen as less justified because labour and nurturing of the infant alone confer on them a duty on children to care for them. Instead, perhaps as the only ‘legitimate’ way to withhold support from mothers who showed little concern,
there has been an increasing incidence of witchcraft accusations against older women.

Although the shift in the basis of support is precisely that predicted by modernisation theory, the causes of this shift, are for the most part not those proposed by the theory.

The change in the basis of support is not, as the modernisation model would hold, the result of a weakening of the norm of filial obligation _per se_. The obligation to support parents out of reciprocity, in return for the care received in childhood clearly continues to be recognised and endorsed. What has weakened, however, is the absolute, God-given status duty that in the past, in addition to the norm of reciprocity, underpinned filial obligation and required children to honour and support parents no matter what. That this status duty has weakened is not, as modernisation theory would propose, a result of value changes such as the rise in secular values, but rather is the result of the effects of the economic crisis. In a context where providing support to an older parent has become so costly for children and the consequences of parental neglect – e.g. failure to provide the child with education or a professional training – have become so grave, children have increasingly begun to reject a duty that requires them to do all they can for parents who failed to give them the necessary support. Their view is that these parents do not rightly deserve to be supported much or at all.

The second factor that has, in addition to the weakened status duty, contributed to the shift in the basis of filial support is a weakening of the sanctions that enforced this duty in the past. The young no longer fear, as much as their parents did, the consequences of reneging on their filial duty. Although this weakening
of sanctions is a key factor predicted by modernisation theory, it is not just a result of the effects of modernisation. Thus, whilst education, geographical migration and economic independence of the young have contributed to the weakening of sanctions — by informing the young of the forgiving nature of God, replacing fear of direct punishment from God with an internal sense of guilt, removing many young people from the sphere of family control, and making them 'immune' to threats of withdrawal of family support — two effects of the economic crisis have had an even more important impact. The fear of family sanctions has been weakened particularly by the declining aid between extended relatives. This has meant that threats of withdrawal of family support have increasingly become 'empty threats'. The fear of punishment from God has been significantly undermined by the shift in religious conceptions that has emerged in the context of economic crisis and the growing charismatic movement. This shift has changed the traditional view of God as a harsh punishing authority, to one which sees God as a supportive friend whose aim it is to help one to achieve one's goals.

The final factor that has contributed to the shift in the basis of support is again one that has not been considered by modernisation theory, despite the fact that it is a clear effect of modernisation. This is the increasing emphasis that has been placed, in Ghana, on the rights of children, in particular their right to full parental support. This emphasis, sparked by the UN convention on the rights of the child, and increasingly propagated in the media, has led to the institution of a legal framework to safeguard children's right to support. It has thus fostered an increasing empowerment or equality of children vis-à-vis their parents, and a
greater accountability of parents. Thus, it has fuelled the weakening of the status duty itself, and the threat of sanctions that enforced it.

**Material changes drive normative shifts**

The analysis of the causes of decline has clearly documented the dominant role of material factors in driving change. This is further indicated by the fact that the evident shifts in normative attitudes and expectations – away from family and filial support towards material independence – are emerging mainly *in response* to the economic crisis, in particular the increasing costs of support. This fits in with interpretations which see material not idealist factors as the driving force of social change.

The emergence of attitudes which emphasise that in the current economic context people should no longer expect support from relatives, and which are usually held by those asked to give such support, specifically resonates with the materialist interpretation of change that Anderson (1971) has proposed on the basis of his investigation of family structure in 19th century Lancashire:

"if material conditions favour the establishment of new behaviour patterns which will better assist the actors involved to achieve their goals, then those who are able to disregard the prevailing normative system without serious sanctions being imposed upon them will do so. Once new behaviour patterns are established new normative beliefs will then emerge to support them." (see Qureshi and Walker, 1989, p. 117)

The emergence of normative views which emphasise that it is no longer appropriate or acceptable to expect material support from children and which are held by both old and young, perhaps expresses a different principle, a variation to
Anderson's argument: If material conditions change to such an extent that fulfilment of a particular normative prescription becomes harmful to a significant part of the population (especially the future generations), and thus necessitates new behaviour patterns, then the normative prescription is no longer tenable, it must change.

8.3 The future of old age family support

The causes and trends identified in this analysis as underpinning the decline in family support for older people in Ghana suggest several important implications for the future of such support – in particular in view of the fact that the economic situation in Ghana continues to worsen\textsuperscript{311}.

Support given to older people by relatives other than children is likely, for the most part, to disappear completely. The waning, even ending of support between relatives who are young or middle aged at present due to the worsening economic situation, means that in future there will be no basis for any reciprocal obligations towards relatives once they are old.

At the same time, support for older people from their adult children is also set to deteriorate further. The continuing economic decline is likely to make such support even less affordable. Children in future (in particular those whose parents at present are financially unable to provide them with sufficient education or training) will have even less capacity and will not be in a position to adequately provide for their parents without jeopardising their own or their

\textsuperscript{311} J. Annan, director, JSA Health and Development Consultants, Accra, personal communication, May 2000.
children's needs. Thus, even though they might want to take good care for their parents, they will be unable to do so. Tragically, this is set to occur at the very same time as future generations of older people – who at present, whilst still of working age, are unable to save or accumulate any resources for their old age – are bound to become even more dependent on material family support.

In addition, the shift in the basis of filial support is likely to continue. Unless the apparently increasing reassertion of fundamental Christian values (forgiveness and the commandment to honour parents) among younger people prevents it.

Older parents in future can expect to receive significant support only if they are deemed to deserve it – i.e. if they showed their children love and fulfilled their parental duties to the best of their ability. Filial support, in other words, will increasingly come to depend strictly on the principles of reciprocity and just desert\textsuperscript{312}. Again, unfortunately, this is set to occur at the same time as the incidence particularly of fathers who neglect their parental duties is likely to rise even further. For the future this suggests a growing number of older men who.

\textsuperscript{312} As such it clearly contrasts with the values underpinning current financial state support for older people in the West. These are beneficence and the notion that older people have the right to have their needs met, regardless of their past conduct (see e.g. Dowd, 1984). Beneficence, the obligation to help older people out of sheer need, was also the main force driving the initiation of formal support for older people, in the UK beginning with the Poor Laws in the late 16th century (see e.g. Finch, 1989, Dowd, 1984). Despite this basic underlying value, however, the notion of 'just desert' based on the older person's past conduct crucially influenced the extent of support to the aged, in particular in Victorian times. Specifically, the notion was central in the development of the 1908 Pensions Act which granted public pensions only to those older people over 70 who were 'deserving' (see Anderson, 1977). The argument was that only certain older people – those who had lived good lives and had fostered affectionate family ties – were morally fit or deserved to receive a pension from public funds (see Finch, 1989). Booth (1892), for example, expressed this sentiment as follows:

"To have lived at all goes for something, to have asked for no relief goes for more, and to have secured through savings, or through friendly feeling, or through the loving duty of children, a chimney corner where 5s. a week will be adequate, may be accepted as proof that the pension is not ill bestowed" (p. 237)
out of retaliation, will receive no support from their children. With no resources of their own these older men will have no option but to rely on charitable support. For older women who showed little parental concern, the future may perhaps hold not an increase in open retaliation but rather in witchcraft accusations by their children. The effect will be the same: they, too, will have to hope for charitable support.

What remains possible is that with time the increasing neglect of older people will rebound in favour of the old. The more visible neglect, destitution and the sheer need of older people become, the more the Christian demand to forgive and show sympathy to old parents will be strengthened, perhaps giving rise to a more morally binding obligation to support elderly parents based not on reciprocity but on beneficence alone. This obligation may, possibly, be further buttressed by a growing emphasis on the notion of the rights of older people. This notion has become increasingly prominent in western and international development debates\(^{313}\) and is therefore likely to gain salience in public discourse and attitudes also in Ghana (just as the notion of the rights of the child has done). This notwithstanding, however, any support given to older parents out of beneficence is – given the worsening economic situation – bound to remain inadequate.

Moreover, that beneficence and/or increased recognition of the rights of older

\(^{313}\) In the West, the notion of the rights of older people has been emphasised as part of current debates on the changing contract between generations in a rights based society. In international development debates the notion of the rights of older people, strongly advocated by charities such as HelpAge International, has gained specific relevance as part of the emphasis that is increasingly (particularly since the 1995 World Summit on Social Development), being placed on the need to see human well-being and the welfare of vulnerable groups, rather than economic growth, as the main development objective (see Gorman, 1999).
people will prompt, as in the West, the initiation of comprehensive state support programmes for needy older people is also highly unlikely. Arguments will point to the lack of public resources, and to the fact that not just old but also young population groups are in need of, and have claims to state support. And, in a situation where the needs and rights of young and old are in contest for limited resources – this time at state level – priority, most likely, will again be given to the young.

The bleak prospects for the future of filial support in Ghana are, in a sense, reflected in the emerging shift in normative expectations in Ghana towards self-reliance and material independence in old age. The shift indicates that future generations of older people no longer want to depend upon material support from their children knowing that it is either likely to be inadequate and a burden on the children, or that their children may not be willing to support them. By the same token, future generations of adult children are likely to feel that it is no longer appropriate for parents to expect support from them. This suggests, things continuing as they are, that family and filial support can no longer be counted on to be the mainstay of material security in old age.

8.4 Policy implications

The spectre of waning old age family support as a result of the continuing economic strain, and the unlikelihood of any comprehensive state assistance clearly indicate the urgent need for policy interventions to ensure economic security for present and future cohorts of older people in Ghana. The need for
such policies is, of course, already recognised, and current policy discussions place emphasis on a mix of traditional and 'new' schemes. That is, on the one hand, strategies to strengthen the traditional intergenerational support system and, on the other hand, initiatives to expand the scope of the existing individual contributory pension schemes (see e.g. World Bank, 1994; Apt 1997; Heslop, 1999).314

Whilst principally affirming the need for such kinds of interventions, this study's findings do also indicate that, ultimately, the achievement of adequate economic security for older people in Ghana will hinge on policies to effect a substantial and general reduction in the poverty of the population as whole.315 Such policies, if successful – for example in reducing un-and underemployment and curbing the rising costs of living, health care and education – would have three key effects:
First, they would help to improve support for the present generation of older people by enhancing the financial capacity of their children or relatives to provide such support. Second, and perhaps more importantly, such policies would contribute to ensuring economic security for the next generations of older people. On the one hand, they would enable those currently of working age to accumulate at least some resources (in the form of savings or investments) to contribute to their own old-age support. On the other, they would enable parents

314 There is no scope here to discuss in more detail the various proposals and ideas that have been put forward in policy discussions. However, it is a theme that will be pursued in further publications.

315 The view that the welfare of older people in Third World countries must be addressed by national, regional or even global policies that tackle the current poverty and inequalities facing the majority of the population clearly resonates with political-economy arguments (see e.g. Neysmith and Edwardh, 1984).
to provide their children with adequate education and training thus ensuring that they will be in a position, economically, to support their parents if needed.

In the absence of a substantial, population wide reduction of poverty, however. (and all indications are that in countries such as Ghana any such improvement in the near to medium term is extremely unlikely)\(^\text{316}\) the trends identified in this study do indicate that what is needed at present, is action to strengthen family systems and to expand the scope of the existing individual old age security scheme.

In this regard, the trends also highlight some important issues that must be taken into account if such a mix of strategies is to be effective, appropriate, and responsive to the prevailing and changing social and cultural context.

First, the emerging shift in normative expectations away from reliance on family support towards an emphasis on material independence in old age suggest that there is a desire for, and that the emphasis in policy development should be on finding strategies that allow individuals to save for or work towards an independent income in old age.

Most obviously, such strategies would include intensified efforts to expand the scope and coverage of the existing pension scheme SSNIT. This requires, on the one hand, measures to curb employers' evasion of registration and defrauding of employees. On the other hand, importantly, it requires strategies to expand usage of the scheme among those in the informal sector.

\(^{316}\) Current prognoses for sub-Saharan African countries predict only minimal improvements in the economic situation in the coming decades (see e.g. World Bank, 1992, 2000)
Apart from programmes to raise awareness of the scheme, this would involve the development of terms and conditions that are responsive to the often irregular nature of earnings in the informal sector, and adjustments in contribution levels to make the scheme more affordable.

Other strategies to develop individual old age security could, for example, take the form of innovative income generating schemes which build on the myriad contributions they continue to make to community and society. Alternatively, there may be a role for state, charity or community assisted saving or investment schemes.

Successess in such strategies notwithstanding, it is clear that individual systems of old age security alone cannot be enough, in a situation where so many do not even earn enough to meet their requirements today, let alone save - and where, even if they were able to, inflation would rapidly erode their savings' value. In addition, there remains the fundamental question, given the widespread poverty among the working population, as to the overall benefit of schemes in which income in old age is dependent on (earlier) earning ability.

Thus, complementary strategies to strengthen the traditional family support are clearly also necessary.

However, as the findings of this study suggest, such strategies - if they are to be effective - must be very carefully thought through:

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317 The general need, in developing old age economic security policies, to give more consideration to older people's substantial contributions to family, community and society, as well as to look at the possible role of community-based organisations such as for example burial societies or churches has been emphasised, amongst others, by HelpAge International (see HelpAge International, 1999; Heslop, 1999)

318 This point has been raised, amongst others, by Neysmith and Edwardh (1984)
The apparent shift in the basis of filial support towards an increasing dependence on parents' past conduct, as well as the 'fundamental' hierarchy of priorities that underpins the way families allocate their money indicate, for example, that one cannot simply assume that any extra funds children receive will be used for their old parents [especially if there is no general improvement in the resources available to families overall].

Potential strategies to respond at least to the shifting basis of support could perhaps involve efforts to re-inculcate or emphasise Christian commandments to honour and support, or forgive parents. Alternatively, and especially in the long run, they could involve efforts to inculcate in young parents the need (and the consequences of not doing so) to show love and concern to their children.

Finally, for older people who fail to be covered by either individual or family systems, a need for minimal state assistance, perhaps administered through churches or community organisations, is also indicated.

8.5 Further research

Three broad areas for future research emerge from this study’s empirical analysis: a) further research in Ghana in order to develop a more solid understanding of the decline in family support and thus a sounder basis for policy development, b) exploratory research in other developing countries geared towards identifying the causes of decline in support and c) research of more academic interest concerned with specific conceptual issues that have arisen in the empirical analysis.
Further policy-oriented research in Ghana

Given that the findings of this empirical analysis strictly speaking apply only to the sample population, and cannot be generalised to the population in Ghana as a whole\(^\text{319}\), there is a need for further investigations to explore the causes of decline in support in other urban and rural areas of Ghana. Such research would contribute to developing a solid understanding of the changes underpinning the decline in support and thus a firm basis for policy development. The findings of this analysis could serve as ‘working hypotheses’\(^\text{320}\) for such further investigations, providing leads and foci for exploration.

Of more specific importance for policy development, is further research to explore in more breadth and depth the nature, basis and patterns of the apparent shift in normative views and expectations regarding material support and dependency in old age. Such research – complemented by explorations of primary and institutional stakeholders’ own views on how to achieve income security for older people in future\(^\text{321}\) – is necessary for identifying the most appropriate and effective policy-framework/mix to ensure old age economic security in Ghana against a changing social, cultural and economic context.

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\(^{319}\) There currently exist multiple perspectives on the question of generalisability of research findings in qualitative research. These range from broad rejections of generalisability in its classical sense as an inappropriate goal for qualitative research (Huberman and Miles, 1994; Janesick 1994) or even an impossible goal for any research (Lincoln and Guba 1985), to reconceptualisations of generalisability for qualitative research (Stake, 1995), and finally to positions (most notably grounded theory perspectives) which maintain that generalisability is an achievable and appropriate goal for qualitative research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Mitchell, 1983; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

\(^{320}\) The use of research findings as ‘working hypotheses’ for further research has been suggested by Lincoln and Guba.

\(^{321}\) Such a participatory approach is being increasingly employed in poverty research linked to policy development and delivery (see e.g. Heslop, 1999; Holland and Blackburn, 1998)
A final area for further exploration, perhaps of specific interest for public health policy, is the apparent negative trend in health and longevity of older people, which this analysis has indicated, and which appears to be the combined result of changes towards modern, urban sedentary lifestyle and diet on the one hand, and deteriorating economic conditions on the other.

**Further research in other developing countries**

Just as the findings of this investigation can serve as working hypotheses for further studies in Ghana, they could serve as foci or starting points for research to develop a fuller understanding of the nature and causes of decline in family support for older people in other developing countries. By the same token, the methodology used in this empirical investigation could provide a model for the design of such studies. Future comparisons between the findings from other developing countries and those from Ghana could provide important insights about generic and country specific processes and changes in family support in the developing world.

**Further research of academic interest**

In addition to research concerned with the problem of declining old age support, the empirical analysis has also raised a number of areas that are of more academic or theoretical research interest:

a) Further research exploring the nature, patterns and causes of the emerging shift in normative expectations regarding material dependence in old age could add important empirical insights to the theoretical debate on the mechanisms of
social change. It could, in particular, illuminate the still poorly understood question of why norms change (see Elster, 1989b), and the relative role of material and idealistic factors in driving such change.

b) Further exploration and comparison of the motivational basis of filial support in the past and present (as well as comparisons with the West) could illuminate the theoretical debate about changes in the basis of individual social action (e.g. the lessening influence of social norms) in the wake of development. An area of specific interest in this regard is the apparent process of internalisation of metaphysical sanctions and the role played by education in this, as well as changes in the way in which social norms are reproduced.

c) Research to explore in other societies the possible existence of a fundamental normative hierarchy of priorities such as that identified in this analysis could provide several important insights. Apart from establishing to what extent such a hierarchy, in particular one which gives priority to the needs of the young over the old, exists universally, such research could offer insights for understanding decline in family support for older people in other societies and/or time periods. If found in small-scale societies living at the subsistence level, for example, such a hierarchy of priorities could illuminate the apparent 'death hastening' of older people in these cultures. If found in the West, it could throw light upon the decline in financial support of older people by the family in 19th century Britain or America. Moreover, it would suggest that if economic conditions in the West were to deteriorate to such an extent that support to older people – at family or state level – truly conflicted with the needs of the younger generations, the same choices in favour of the young would be made.
On a more theoretical level, further research exploring the existence of a normative hierarchy of priorities in the West could provide for a clearer understanding of the nature of current filial obligation norms, in particular the limits to this obligation. This in turn could provide interesting stimuli for the more philosophical debate on the contract across generations and the limits to the moral obligation on families to act as caregivers for the old.

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