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Wisdom is matter of culture

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Toronto, Aug 31 (IANS) Do we really get wiser with age or does culture shape wisdom? Having wisdom implies that one is also good at resolving conflict. But conflict is not handled the same way across cultures.

Americans are known to emphasize individuality and solve conflict in a direct manner. Conversely, the Japanese place a greater emphasis on social cohesion, and tend to settle conflict indirectly, relying on mediation through another person.

Psychological scientist Igor Grossmann of the University of Waterloo, Canada and his colleagues investigated how the resolution of conflict and, by extension, wisdom, differs between Japanese and American cultures, the journal "Psychological Science" reports.

Japanese and American participants, aged between 25 to 75 years, were asked to read newspaper articles that described a conflict between two groups and respond to several questions, including "What do you think will happen after that?" and "Why do you think it will happen this way?"

Next, they read stories about conflict between individuals - including siblings, friends, and spouses - and answered the same questions. As Grossmann and colleagues predicted, young and middle-aged Japanese participants showed higher wisdom scores than same-aged Americans for conflicts between groups, according to a Waterloo statement.

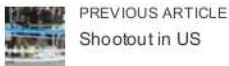
For conflicts between people, older Japanese still scored higher than older Americans, though this cultural difference was much smaller than the difference observed between the younger adults.

Interestingly, while older age was associated with higher wisdom scores for the American participants, there was no such relationship for the Japanese participants.

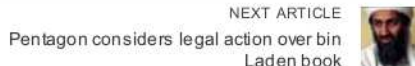
These findings underscore the point that culture continues to be important for human development, even into old age.

While wisdom may come with winter for Americans, the same may not be true for other cultures.

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