

CHAPTER IV

DESIGN OF THE WORK

PART B

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

The quantitative analysis alone is not the sole objective of the study. The investigation also aims at gaining a clear-cut insight into the nature of the problems and adjustment of the old. The ultimate objective is to find out how far the problems of the old emerge as the result of a specific attitude on the part of the young family members.

Looking to the peculiarities of old age, it was felt that a global, qualitative study would yield more fruitful results than a quantitative linear one. Old age is a peculiar stage of development where getting responses from a large sample freely is a rare possibility. For one thing, they are not available in big groups as groups of young workers, officers or students are available. Besides, looking to their decreased social participation and low motivation they may not give the desired responses as easily and freely as the young members.

Taking these considerations into account, it was decided to plan a design for this study that would differ from the usual plans where investigations are carried out on large groups of subjects. It was planned that this part of the investigation would be an intensive study touching the depth aspects, where responses are not superficial or stereotyped. As a necessary outcome of this requirement, the sample had to be small. One more requirement was that it should come from the families of those young persons whose attitude toward the aged was previously measured. The intensive study of this sample is referred to as Part B.

4.2 COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF THE TOOLS

(a) Various tools could be thought of for working with the old subjects. A very common tool that is ordinarily used for collecting data regarding a large number of issues is the questionnaire. No doubt, the questionnaire supplies useful information. Besides, it is considered to be an economical method of data collection. A questionnaire can be easily constructed and the responses can be quickly collected. Coding is also mechanical.

But the main difficulty for the present investigation in using the questionnaire was that the subjects must be educated for responding to it. The sample of

the old had a number of subjects who could only read or write with difficulty. Especially, some of the females had not even completed their primary school education. For the educated subjects also there were some other problems. Owing to diminishing social activities, due to ill health or due to the absence of motivation, getting responses could not have been a simple job. Similarly, there was every possibility of the questions being misinterpreted, without any provision for clarification. The concept of old age as a problem-provoking age, is a recent concept. People have not properly assimilated it yet. At such a stage, questions based upon this presumption are likely to sound queer and irrelevant.

(b) Direct observation of overt behaviour was another possibility. A number of visits in the families would have enabled the investigator to gain an insight into the problems and adjustment level of the old subjects. It could have also served as a reliable check on the attitude already expressed by the young within the same family. But looking to the length of time required for the investigator, to enter into active participation, it was not considered a suitable plan. Besides, the overt behaviour is not necessarily an index to the problems of a person. Nor can it naively express the level of adjustment of the subject.

When one particularly thinks of the various defence mechanisms, it can be seen how they influence one's behaviour, distorting the genuine nature of the existing problems. The overt behaviour also fails to express the level of adjustment in a one-to-one proportion.¹ Evidently this suggests that the observation of overt behaviour can lead no further without additional psychological analysis.

(c) A third possibility was that of making use of some projective techniques. Projective techniques have quite often been successfully used for gaining insight into the dimensions of personality, pressing needs and motives, existing problems and the type of adjustment of the subject. "The several forms of the projective method (pictures, inkblots, incomplete sentences, word association, one's own writings and drawings, and others) are intended to elicit responses that would reveal the individual's 'personality structure', feelings, values motives, characteristic modes of adjustment, or 'complexes'. He is said to project the inner aspects of his personality through his interpretations and creations, thereby involuntarily revealing traits that are below the surface and incapable of exposure by means of the questionnaire type of personality test"²

¹ Sandford, F.H. Psychology : A Scientific Study of Man (Belmont, California : Wadsworth Publishing Co. Inc., 1962), Pp. 421-426.

² Freeman, F.S. Theory and Practice of Psychological Testing. 3rd Ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), P. 612.

The difficulty however was experienced in the availability of a suitable standardized projective technique in Marathi language. Standardizing such a technique in addition to the standardization of the attitude scale would have been much beyond the scope of the present work. It can be an independent work by itself, since obtaining the initial responses alone would have been extremely time consuming. Looking to these difficulties, the idea of using a projective technique was not practised, although it was felt that it would have worked as a wonderful tool.

(d) Ultimately, it was decided to make use of the technique of interview. An interview which is freely used as a tool of social sciences can be defined as "a face-to-face verbal interchange, in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons"¹.

4.3 INTERVIEW AS A RESEARCH TOOL

The interview in social psychological research is a general tool which may be employed in a variety of research designs. It can occupy many different roles in the research process, and may be used to produce several different kinds of data. However, it does not in itself

¹ Maccoby, E.E. and Maccoby, N. Handbook of Social Psychology, (Vol.1. Edited by Gardner Lindzey, Addison Wesley Publishing Company Inc. Reading Mass. U.S.A., London, England, 1959), P. 449.

constitute a complete research method, by which the hypothesis under consideration is tested. This is an important point to note, because the interview is quite often used as a substitute for study design in which hypotheses are not formulated nor designs set up which would provide adequate tests for hypotheses.¹

This particular limitation of the method of interview was all the while not lost sight of by the investigator. But it can be employed to identify the relevant dimensions and to reveal the natural frames of reference existing in the minds of the respondents. It becomes the main instrument of data collection to obtain the base-line measures of a study. In non-experimental studies the interview is commonly used to obtain data for scale measures of a set of variables whose interrelations are to be studied.²

The main objective of this part of the study is to explore the dimensions of the various problems of old people and to probe into the nature of their adjustment. Thus it is an investigation that is completely non-experimental. That is why, it was considered that the technique of interview would suit the purpose of the study.

¹ Stouffer, S.A. "Some Observations on Study Design". Amer. J. Sociol. (1950), V.55, Pp. 355-361.

² Merton, R.K. and Kendall, P.L. "The Focussed Interview". Amer. J. Sociol. (1946), V.51, Pp. 541-557.

When the interview occupies the central position as a study's primary instrument of data collection, then problems of standardizing the interviewing technique and measuring reliability and validity become of greater importance than they would be otherwise. Sometimes the distinction is made between 'structured' and 'unstructured' interviews. This dimension is not identical with the standardized - unstandardized dimensions, but it is similar, and much of the discussion of structure in interviews applies to it.

Unstructured and unstandardized interviews are advocated by Rogers¹, Roethlisberger and Dickson², Piaget³, and Kinsey et. al.⁴ The arguments in favour of such interviews are the following :

- (a) They permit standardization of meaning rather than of the more superficial aspects of the stimulus situation.
- (b) They are more valid, in that they encourage more true-to-life replies.

¹ Rogers, C.R. "The Non-directive Method as a Technique for Social Research". Amer. J. Sociol., (1945), V.50, Pp. 279-283.

² Roethlisberger, F.J. and Dickson, W.J., Management and the Worker. (Cambridge, Mass : Harvard Univ. Press, 1939).

³ Piaget, J. Introduction to the Child's Conception of the World. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929).

⁴ Kinsey, A.C., Pomeroy, W.P. and Martin, C.E. Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male. (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948).

(c) They are more flexible.

In a structured and standardized interview, the main strong point is that it incorporates a basic principle of measurement; that of making information comparable from case to case. But a research worker is not always interested in comparing one respondent with another along some scale. In an exploratory interview (as the present one is), he is interested in finding out what the relevant dimensions are for later systematic measurement, and it is not particularly important that cases should be comparable to one another.

Some proponents of the unstandardized interview believe in the value of making methods similar from one case to another, so that comparison would be possible. But they believe that using standardized wording and question order is not the way to make measurement comparable. They point out that the same words mean different things to different people, that when one asks a standardized question, one has not standardized the meaning of the word to the respondent.¹

Merton and Kendall² have advocated a semistandardized interview, which they call 'The focused interview', and

¹ Crutchfield, R. and Gordon, D.H. "Variations in Respondents' Interpretations of an Opinion-poll Question". Int. J. Opin. Attitude Res. (1947), V.1, Pp. 22-31.

² Merton, R.K. and Kendall, P.L. "The Focused Interview". Amer. J. Sociol. (1946), V.51, Pp. 541-557.

which employs an interview guide with a list of objectives and suggested questions that gives the interviewer considerable latitude within the framework of the interview guide.

It was planned to have some such type of interview, where the questions are not mechanically standardized. All the same, they do not completely lack structure and a standardized frame of reference, in that, the questions cannot divert from a specific context, and the objective they aim at is uniform from subject to subject. It will be seen that the questions¹ are open and proceed from the most general to the specific ones - They were further simplified, wherever simplification was felt essential as in case of subjects with meagre education.

As already mentioned in the last chapter, the pilot work of interviewing a small bimodal sample of the young and the aged was utilized to determine the objectives of the questions. The pilot work along with the literature in some books on developmental psychology and journals in gerontology had shown some major areas of adjustment for the young and the old staying together. They are already mentioned in the previous chapter. It is assumed that any major problems of the old would naturally fall

¹ See Appendix VIII (A) and (B)

within them. The degree of their adjustment too can be explored within the above mentioned areas. The questions in the interview guide are, therefore, clustered according to these areas. In the construction of the attitude scale, the eight areas were combined into four to secure an equidistant spread of the scale values. As there was no such need for the present part of the investigation, their original form was maintained. The objectives within each area are discussed below.

4.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE INTERVIEW

(a) Appearance and Personality

To find out whether the aged are conscious of any marked changes in their appearance and personality, a number of questions are asked : The main objectives are to see how far they are disturbed as a result of them, to see the degree to which they are accepted by them as natural, to see their attitude towards grooming and cosmetics and to estimate the feelings of the old concerning the reactions of the young family members to these changes. The questions also aim at finding out their views about the personality of the young, and to see how they (young) account for these changes.

(b) Social Status and Relationship

The aim is to explore the nature of the social participation the aged are experiencing. Obviously, the aged are having a restricted social field with diminished contacts and opportunities. But the reactions of the aged to them are more important to estimate the social adjustment of the old. If they take their restricted social life as a normal consequence of their advancement in age, they may not repent over them. But if not, they will affect their adjustment. All the questions are aimed at finding out the nature of the opportunities the old get, for social participation, their reaction to them and their ideas as to how far the young are responsible for them. Some questions direct at finding out the degree of satisfaction the aged get from the social participation and the type of participation that suits them best. They are also aimed at finding out the reasons for restricted social participation and the fields where it is restricted.

(c) Emotional Problems and the Nature of the Old

As this part of the investigation becomes a delicate one most of the questions are general, concerning the old as such. But at the end of every aspect of the exploration, the own experiences of the old person concerned are asked for. Thus it is the intention to find out the experiences of the aged with respect to the

major emotions like anger, fear, jealousy, love and affection. It would help to know their own personal reactions in the matter. Similarly the questions aim at finding out the views of the aged about the nature of the aged as such and the reactions of the young toward it. Some questions point at knowing whether the old accept the other young family members and feel accepted in turn.

(d) Financial Status

Once again this problem is a bit delicate one. Answers to direct questions about the financial status within the family are difficult to get. Hence the questions in the beginning are all general. Only at the end some questions become specific and personal, though much of the quality of the personal touch is not obvious. The questions aim at finding out the financial status of the old within their families and how the old concerned feel about it. The main interest is in finding out the nature of the problems arising for the old so far as their financial status is concerned, and to see if they are happy about it. Some questions try to estimate the amount of freedom the aged enjoy in planning their own expenditure or even that of the family.

(e) Health

The questions are directed at viewing the common health complaints of the old people and how they feel about them, to find out whether they take proper medical aid and whether the young encourage them to do so. The feelings of the old concerning how the young treat them in health matters are also probed into.

(f) Family Relationships

Here the objectives are to develop an insight into the nature of the family relationships of the old. The questions aim at finding out the reactions of the old concerning these relationships. If they are satisfied, they will have less problems. On the other hand their adjustment would suffer if they have a grudge against their family relationships. The questions try to see the degree to which the old are satisfied with their family relationships.

(g) Religious Problems

Here the direct aim is to see to what extent the old are religious (conventionally) and what satisfactions they get out of their religious behaviour. Some questions are also based upon the reactions of the young to the religious behaviour of the old if at all they confront it. Information about the type of religious activities of the old can also be obtained.

(h) Moral Problems

The objective is to find out how the old feel about their own moral values and those of the young generation. The reactions of the old to several modern practices can be estimated by the questions asked in this field.

With the help of these objectives the interview guide, it was planned, would be administered on a small sample (defined in Chapter VI). Thus the chief method for study in work B is based upon the personal contact with the subjects to secure information about them and to appraise and understand their problems better.

As the bias of this part of the investigation is thoroughly qualitative further attempts, it was decided would be made to support certain observations. The possibility was that in dealing with this sample there would be some subjects who are comparatively well adjusted and happy. They may be well satisfied with life and accept it normally along with the common problems of old age. Similarly, the possibility of confronting unhappy ill adjusted old who are extremely frustrated and concerned about their problems is also considered. These two types of cases deserve special attention for much can be known about old age and its effects by studying a few such outstanding cases thoroughly.

4.5 NEED FOR CASE STUDIES

By making selective case studies of the subjects at extremes, it was estimated that the contact with the sample would be more close and thorough. Through the intensive case studies of such subjects, every possibility was there that some light be thrown on the nature of some urgent problems of old age.

Even in clinical procedures when the clinician aims at gaining a clear concept of the problems of the subject, an interview ends ultimately in a case work. Of course, here the approach of the investigator is not clinical and interest is not in a single individual as it is for a clinician. However, the cases of extremes were considered important for certain reasons and it was hoped that a detailed case work of them may further clarify the position of other subjects within the sample. "The case study is the most comprehensive evaluation of the subject and includes data secured from many or all of the available techniques for understanding the subject and his problems"¹. The case study is the medium through which all the findings about the subject are organized and evaluated. The interview, social history, observation, laboratory examinations and psychological

¹ Garfield, S.L. Introductory Clinical Psychology. (New York : The Macmillan Company, 1962), P. 201.

tests are the primary techniques that supply the raw material from which the case study is built.

According to Robert Watson,¹ "The individual is the focal point of the case study. In fact, the case study is a technique par excellence for dealing with the individual as an individual in all his uniqueness". This statement gives a strong support for the case studies, if a deep insight into the problems of the subject is the aim of the investigator. Not only that the investigator gains insight into the subject concerned but also in other subjects of the same group, for, the same author further remarks,² "There is a characteristic pattern or style unique to each subject; yet an implicit assumption made by many psychologists is that individuals differ only in the degree to which particular traits, attitudes or symptoms are manifested..... Since individuality coexists with a commonality of characteristics shared with other persons, and since it is not negated even when several individuals are at precisely the same points on any continuum, the portrayal of uniqueness is inevitably huddled against a background of similarity.

¹ Watson, R.I. The Clinical Method in Psychology. Science Editions, (New York : John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1963), P. 37.

² Ibid., Pp. 37-38.

Thus, it was planned to make selective case studies of some subjects at the two extremes to enable the investigator support the findings made by the technique of interview. The case studies are used widely in the clinical evaluation of patients. They have not received as much systematic or critical study by the psychologists as has been the case with other techniques. This, however, does not detract from their potential usefulness. It was thought that the selective case studies would make the investigation more comprehensive in nature.

4.6 SUMMARY

The aim was to study the problems of the old in a global qualitative manner. A suitable tool for this purpose was required. Some techniques like the questionnaire, direct observation of behaviour and the projective technique were comparatively evaluated. Ultimately it was decided to make use of the interview method for studying the problems of the aged. It was a partially structured interview, based upon a fixed schedule of questions. This schedule was spread over the eight different areas of adjustment for the aged. Each area is independent and the cluster of questions within each of them refers to a single dimension. Finally, it was decided that some selected cases at the two extremes of adjustment be intensively studied with the help of the case history method.