CHAPTER VI

ADMINISTRATION OF THE INTERVIEW

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6.1 SAMPLE OF THE OLD

There was provision in the forms[1] distributed to secure information about the presence of any old member/s in the family of the young subjects who had responded. From the information thus collected, 546 subjects reported to have had old persons staying with them.

At times, more than one form were distributed within a single family unit. As a result, there was an overlap, and the final list of the old persons available within the families of the young sample contained 390 old persons. The group of the old to be interviewed was to be selected out of these subjects. Removing the overlapping forms (which could be identified from the details of the family information) the 390 forms were arranged in a random order. A selection of every alternate form was made which resulted in 195 cases.

While scrutinizing the forms, it was noted that only a minority of subjects had expressed a negative attitude

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[1] See Appendix VII (A) and (B)

toward the old. This group of subjects and consequently
the old persons residing in their families had attracted
special attention. To include such cases, the remaining
195 forms (from which the old were not included in the
group) were checked up; and 19 more cases were added to
the previously selected group making a sample of 214 cases.
Not more than one person was selected from a single
family.

When actual visits were paid to these 214 families,
it was found that all the subjects could not be available
for the interview. Some were out of station staying
with other relatives and the date of their return was
not definite. Some had acute health problems, one had
died and some were reported (by the young members) to be
unwilling for any such communications.

Actually, the cases who were reluctant for the inter-
view or those down with ill health had attracted special
attention and there was an intention of including them
within the sample. But in spite of repeated efforts,
they were not available, except for 4 cases who could
be persuaded to respond. One of them had refused
initially due to the fact that he had recently undergone
an operation and was so weak that they conversation
proved taxing to him. After about four weeks' period
when he had regained some strength, he agreed to respond

to the interview and remained cooperative after that.
The remaining 3 were females. Their nature was reported
to be peculiar. One of them was illiterate and the other
2 had only primary education. Although they contributed
to the domestic chore, they remained aloof from all
social contacts. They were, especially, suspicious of
strangers and always talked the least. It was noted
throughout the later interview sessions that they were
constantly subject to a feeling of insecurity and
inferiority. Their suspicion extended not only to the
strangers but also to the young members within the family.

Ultimately, 160 old persons made up the sample for
interview. Their mean age could not be decided as a
member of cases could not report their age accurately.
This was the case more with some females. A few men
too failed to report their age correctly. The age,
however, ranged between 62-86 years. Further information
was collected about the subjects' education and the
family income. Taking these variables in consideration
the sample can be represented as shown in the following
table. Total number of males and females were 74 and
86 respectively.

Table 6.1   Table Showing the Sample of the Old
             Interviewed

Income of the Family	Males			Females		
	Primary	Education Secon-dary	Univ-er-sity	Pri-Mary	Education Secon-dary	Univer-sity
below Rs. 6,000 a year	2	15	17	13	8	6
between Rs. 6,000- Rs.12,000	1	12	14	16	12	4
More than Rs.12,000	3	7	3	15	9	3

6.2 PLAN OF THE INTERVIEW

The interview was fixed with the subjects with a
previous appointment according to the time and place
that suited them. No time limit was fixed and there was
the freedom of extending it in any number of sessions
according to the mood of the respondent. The only
requisite condition was that full responses to the inter-
view guide be gathered.

In many cases, a single session sufficed whereas in
a few cases 2 to 3 sessions were necessary. This was
partly due to the fact that these cases required a longer
period for establishing rapport and partly due to the

elimination of responses during some sessions because of such atmosphere as could not be counted congenial for a psychological interview.

The time and place for meeting was decided in consultation with the subjects. Some agreed to meet at home. Some females preferred to talk at the temple or the friends's place they were habituated to visit. Some males decided to talk at the spot they regularly visited for their evening walk. A few subjects even showed the willingness to respond at the place of the investigator. Whenever one appointment was missed or found not to be adequate, a further date was fixed for the next session.

6.3 SOME PROBLEMS ARISING OUT OF THE
      NATURE OF THE SAMPLE

(a) Rapport

The problem of establishing rapport confronts every interviewer. "One of the problems in conducting most interview studies is that of getting the respondent's cooperation in being interviewed"[1]. A number of measures are, however, discussed and suggested by research workers to get over this difficulty. While the best methods for getting rapport, vary with the time, place, subject

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[1] Maccoby, E.E. and Maccoby, N. Handbook of Social Psychology. (Vol. I, Edited by Gardner Lindzey, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., Reading, Mass., U.S.A., London, England, 1959), P. 464.

and identity of the respondent, there are a number of
general points that can be made that apply to most inter-
view situations. Such points were continuously kept in
mind. But taking the special feature of the present
sample into consideration, rapport was thought to be a
critical difficulty in the present study. As the chara-
cteristic features of old age and old people were
already studied (Discussed in Chapter IV), some points
presented themselves that marked off the group of aged
as a radically different group.

For one thing, the aged are often found to withdraw
from social life and social activities. Their interests
and motivations are limited and they life a very limited
social life. It was expected that the withdrawal of the
old from the social life may cause them to be less
communicative; and this may present itself as a special
difficulty in establishing rapport.

In addition, it was assumed that some sense of
identification between the interviewee and the inter-
viewer is essential to facilitate free communication.
Such sense of identification, it was expected, may not
be possible on account of the age difference between the
two in the present case. The aged are more likely to
identify the interviewer as a representative of the
younger generation rather than an individual with a

neutral stand, or as one amongst them. During the first meeting to fix the interview, steps were taken to get over this possible bias.

It was also felt that getting responses from the female subjects may be easier for the investigator as the females may feel at ease with an investigator of the same sex. Rapport with the male subjects was expected to be more difficult.

The first meeting, in fact, was treated as the first session of the interview, wherever it was possible to do so. All efforts to establish friendly relationships were consciously brought into practice. Deliberate attempts were made to know the special interests and likes and dislikes of the subjects. His views on various matters, not directly connected with the theme of the present investigation, were also discussed.

The subjects were told that the investigator was connected with some research activity concerning old age. Many subjects accepted this explanation without further questions. But others, mainly from the educated class asked for further explanations and the purpose of the research. They were told that the research is to know more about the nature of old age which is an important phase of life. As there has not been any survey of this type in our country so far, this was an effort in the

direction. No further details were explained to them. But all possible steps were taken to make them feel that they are taken into confidence, so as to provide scope for adequate identification.

(b) Lack of Privacy

In a number of families, the main difficulty experienced was the lack of privacy for conducting the interview. Although the original forms (of attitude scale) were distributed in the same families, privacy was not a requisite for responding to them. However, it was essential for an interview of the present type, where the subject has to express a good deal of personal feelings.

Out of the 160 subjects interviewed, only 7 had their own separate rooms. Among these 7 cases, 5 were males. Almost all the females were without a separate room. The usual place suggested by the younger members of the family for the interview would be, in most of the vases, the living room, with any of the other persons in the family seated around. This was certainly considered not to be a suitable atmosphere for a research interview.

(c) <u>Inconsistency</u>

It was noted in some cases, especially, where the interview was conducted in a number of sessions that some inconsistency was markedly shown by the subject. A certain subject would report excellent health in spite of advanced age, boast of his superior physique and explain its causes, expressing extreme optimism. The same subject would complain of his deteriorating health and decreasing strength, due to age, in a pessimistic tone, after a period of two or three weeks. Similarly one who may complain of the inferior moral values of the present generation, would try to justify them during the next session of the interview.

This was an embarrassing experience and it was difficult to decide as to which response should be treated as more reliable. Although such cases were few, they required some deliberation in their interpretation and hence, required careful consideration.

6.4 MEASURES TAKEN TO GET OVER THE DIFFICULTIES

(a) It is important to note that during the interview some of the presumptions proved to be out of place. The expectation that due to diminished social contact, the subjects may be less communicative, was found to be unrealistic. A majority of the sample was found to be extremely, and at times, even excessively communicative.

They showed willingness to express their feelings about several matters. They showed interest in talking about themselves, their likes and dislikes, their difficulties and problems along with their health complaints or other grievances. This was unexpected but it facilitated the scheme of the work.

Hence it was not necessary to take any further steps to establish rapport than are essential ordinarily while working with any type of sample. Though it cannot be said how far identification with the investigator was possible for the subjects, at least that did not come in the way of eliciting easy responses.

The male subjects also co-operated adequately. They even showed some interest in the problem of investigation. (as they had understood it). This was so, specially in case of the educated class. The subjects of this class seemed to be enthusiastic throughout the interview.

(b) The main difficulty was of the lack of privacy. After starting a session in the drawing room where there was privacy initially, other family members gradually gathered around either for their own work or out of sheer curiosity. No other room also could be available in the house except the kitchen. Under such circumstances the interview could not be conducted. However,

it was not shown outwardly to the subject and some talk
was carried on with him so that it may appear to be a
part of the interview. Throughout the talk an attempt
was also made to estimate a possibility of contacting the
subject in a suitable atmosphere. The real interview
was not conducted unless such an atmosphere was available.

This difficulty was not only a recurring feature of
the lower and middle income group families, but also of
the higher income group, especially in case of the females.
It may be a characteristic feature of life in Indian
urban society where accommodation is inadequate. This
difficulty can be experienced by any researcher with
any kind of sample.

(c) The difficulty of inconsistent responses was
experienced only with a few cases. A large number of
subjects were firm and consistent in their expressions.
After deliberation it was viewed that some amount of
inconsistency was quite natural even for a normal person,
as a result of changing moods and incidents he has to
go theough. Such subjects were interviewed for a longer
time in order to arrive at their more permanent back-
ground tendencies.

Thus, in spite of all the difficulties experienced
in conducting the interview, ultimately it was concluded

that none of them was specially due to the peculiar type
of sample that was to be dealt with. Similar difficul-
ties are common-place for many research projects.

6.5 RECORDING THE DATA OF THE INTERVIEW

The central problem of interview methodology is
that of how the respondent's answer shall be recorded.
Interviews have been generally recorded in the following
way :

    (1) Writing up from memory : The interviewer
        attempts to remember as much as possible of
        what the respondent has said, and makes
        notes on the content after the interview.

    (2) Field ratings : The interviewer proceeds
        with a set of field rating forms and rates
        the respondent on the dimensions which the
        study is seeking to measure.

    (3) Field coding : The interviewer codes specific
        answers to specific questions into predeter-
        mined categories during the interview.

    (4) Verbatim note-taking : While the respondent
        is talking, the interviewer attempts to take
        down his answer verbatim, or as nearly so as
        possible.

(5) <u>Mechanical recording</u> : The respondent talks
into a microphone (which is either open or
concealed). His remarks are recorded by means
of a tape, wire or disk recorder.

Out of these methods, the last was not possible as
the required mechanical aids were not easily available.
Field ratings cannot be commonly used unless the inter-
viewer is very thoroughly familiar with the dimensions
of the study. In addition, the dimensions to be rated
should be relatively small in number. As the main
objectives of the present investigation (Part B) are to
explore the underlying dimensions of old age, it was not
possible to proceed from any such clear-cut dimensions.
It is obvious, looking to the nature of the study, that
the field coding method also could not be adopted. The
only possibilities open were the 1st and the 4th viz. -
Writing up from memory, and Verbatim note-taking.

Both these methods have their own advantages and
disadvantages. Recording from memory has the obvious
disadvantage that it permits more distortion via the
interviewer's biases than does immediate recording.
All the forms of memory distortion which Bartlett[1] led

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[1] Bartlett, F.C. <u>Remembering</u>. (Cambridge, England :
Cambridge University Press, 1932).

us to expect should appear in this form of recording.
Apart from distortion, memory recording involves a
considerable loss in the sheer amount of interview content
that can be retained. The study made by Symonds and
Dietrich[1] is a good example. It has been found that
while most of the items thus recorded are accurate, the
write-up is very greatly condensed (omitting important
points) and introduces many changes in the temporal
sequence of the interview. Points are brought into
conjunction and made to seem related which were separated
and unrelated in the actual interview.

The argument which has been advanced in favour of
memory recording is that it helps to maintain the
feeling of ease for the respondent.

Verbatim note-taking on the other hand, it is
feared, may upset the respondent, destroy his confidence
in the anonymity of the interview and produce an unnatural
atmosphere. However, according to expert interviewers
it is difficult to assess the damage, if any, that note-
taking during an interview does to rapport. Experienced
interviewers who do take notes report very few instances
of the respondent's raising questions about the notes
or asking him not to take notes. Some respondents even

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[1] Symonds,P.M. and Dietrich,D.H. "The Effect of
Variations in Time Interval Between an Interview and Its
Recording". J. Abnormal Soc. Psychol. (1941), V.36,
Pp. 593-598.

find it flattering that someone considers their views important enough to write them down, and in such cases, note-taking helps rapport. Actually a majority of respondents seem to regard it as perfectly natural that the interviewer should take notes. "Nearly all social scientists employing the interview feel that the advantages in accuracy of taking notes during an inter- view far outweigh any disadvantages, so that some form of recording during the interview itself is almost universal practice"[1]. He further adds that "if the interviewer notices that his notebook seems to be making the respondent nervous, he can talk about the note-taking a little before he begins the interview"[2].

Considering all these points, it was decided to make a verbatim record of the responses. The actual experience was also adequately optimistic. The subjects did not show any signs of nervousness at the procedure except for two female cases who were initially unwilling to respond and then persuaded. They said that what they talked may not be quite right and not worth writing down. However, after a little more talk with them and a few explanations, they did not stick to their objection.

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[1] Maccoby, E.E. and Maccoby, N. Op.cit., P.468.

[2] Ibid.

6.6 CRITERIA FOR SELECTING SUBJECTS
     FOR THE CASE STUDIES

It has already been stated that it was planned to make some case studies at the two extremes of adjustment. The importance of these case studies is also explained. The level of adjustment or certain common problems may be discussed as peculiar of a particular phase of development. But ultimately they have a purely individualistic impact. To that extent they cannot be treated collectively alone. After analyzing the responses of the interview collectively, it was hoped that the individual discussion of some outstanding cases may reveal some aspects of old age problems and adjustment in a better manner.

To enforce a strict methodology, the degree of adjustment could be decided by administering a personality test to the entire sample. But as the present aspect of the study was only a part of the total investigation, it was considered not advisable; and it was decided to make use of some handy commonplace criteria for deciding the level of adjustment.

Adjustment is recognized as a continuous process, since every age and every situation calls for something new. Methods of adjusting undergo continuous modification as the individual develops with age and experience and
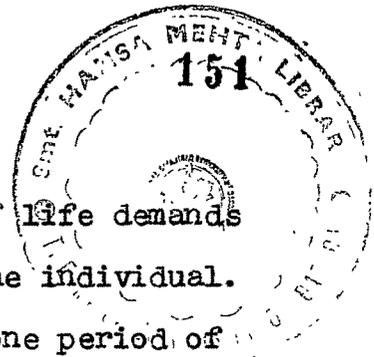
as his environment changes. Each period of life demands somewhat a unique set of adjustments for the individual. Behaviour patterns which were adequate at one period of life become inappropriate and maladaptive at another age. Thus it was not possible to decide the adjustment level of the aged subjects by applying a general static notion of adjustment.

Still, there is some sense in recognizing an adequately adjusted person and identifying the reverse by referring to some broad concepts of mental hygiene. "Implicit in the mental hygienists' concept of adjustment is hormony within the individual. The integrated, self-consistent, self-accepting 'happy' person is the goal of the adjustment process. Stating this concept in the negative, the well-adjusted person is conceived of as free of internal conflicts, external coercion, self-condemnation, and inconsistencies in belief and action. The subjective component of 'good adjustment' according to this concept, is a sense of well-being"[1].

According to the above idea, the well adjusted person is free of pangs of conscience, he has a satisfactory self-concept and behaves consistently with it.

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[1] Sawrey,J.M. and Telford,C.W. Dynamics of Mental Health : The Psychology of Adjustment (Boston : Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), p.18.

He feels that he is right in most of his decisions and actions. He is subjectively happy in a socially acceptable manner. Such an individual also maintains a pleasant optimistic emotional tone.

It was not difficult to trace such individuals or their opposites from the contact during the interview. Some subjects were adequately objective about their perception of a number of difficulties and handicaps due to their advancement in years. Yet they maintained a pleasant optimistic point of view. In spite of some normal worries they were happy, had their own interests in life and pursued some ideal with zeal. They had firm convictions about right and wrong. Their company was found, during the interview, quite interesting. It was also noted that in spite of age they had some constructive goal of life. It was seen, in short, that their life was valuable to society as well as to themselves. Some outstanding cases were selected from such subjects for making case studies.

Some other subjects, on the contrary, showed quite opposing tendencies. Their general outlook was pessimistic. They either accentuated the intensity of their difficulties and handicaps or tried to put the blame on others. They showed evidence of excessive preoccupation

with their problems. They were, most of the time,
subject to worries and anxieties, were found to be far
from being happy, and had no specific interests or
constructive goal of life. Contact with them showed
that they could not enjoy the normal pleasure of social
participation. Most of the time, their company was
found to be boring because of their extreme pessimism
and too many complaints. Their life was not valuable
both to themselves and to society. Some cases from such
subjects were also selected for the case studies.

6.7 SUMMARY

A sample of 160 old persons was selected from the
families of the young subjects who had responded to the
attitude scale. They were interviewed in order to decide
the various dimensions of their adjustment and to develop
an insight into the nature of their problems. The inter-
view was partially structured. It was based upon an
interview guide, the questions in which spread over the
eight initial areas of adjustment. Lack of privacy and
occasional inconsistency of responses were the main
difficulties in conducting the interview. Measures were,
however, taken to overcome them. For recording the
responses, note-taking method was found suitable among
the different methods. From the subjects interviewed

a selection was made of cases belonging to the two
extreme levels of adjustment. Intensive case studies
of them were carried out in order to emphasize the
individualistic impact of adjustment.