

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **SOCIAL WORLDS OF THE ELDERLY**

Aging is a series of processes that begin with life and continue throughout the life cycle. It represents the closing period in the lifespan, a time when the individual looks back on life, lives on past accomplishments and begins to finish off his life course. Adjusting to the changes that accompany old age requires that an individual is flexible and develops new coping skills to adapt to the changes that are common to this time in their lives

The external and internal elements together formulate and reformulate the social worlds of the members of any age-cohort. The external elements are the living conditions which, in turn, are influenced by the local, national and global currents. The socio-psychological states or the personality systems make up the internal elements. If the former refers to the objective socio-historical conditions, the latter explains the degree of involvement in and integration into the external conditions. The latter may also be referred to as 'good adjustment' or constant re-socialization. Transition from membership in one age-cohort to the other and transformations taking place in the living conditions change the nature of the social worlds (Somayaji 2003:6).

In the case of the elderly, matters of retirement, widowhood, declining economic resources, and relocation affect the transforming of the nature of the social world (Unruh, 1983:47). Changing social roles and subsequent re-socialization, level of economic activity, past time activities, health conditions and social security contribute to the formation of the social worlds of the elderly. Hence it is important to understand the

changes in the lives of the ageing, in their identification in the world around them and involvement in activities. All these affect the character of involvement in society.

Living arrangements also determine the social network and social support a person enjoys. The type of intergenerational interactions, the flow of resources and help from one person to another depends on where and with whom people live. As a result of rapid industrialization, urbanization and modernization, radical changes have taken place in society, particularly family. Therefore, taking a look and examining the social world of the elderly will help to see the degree of involvement and integration in the community.

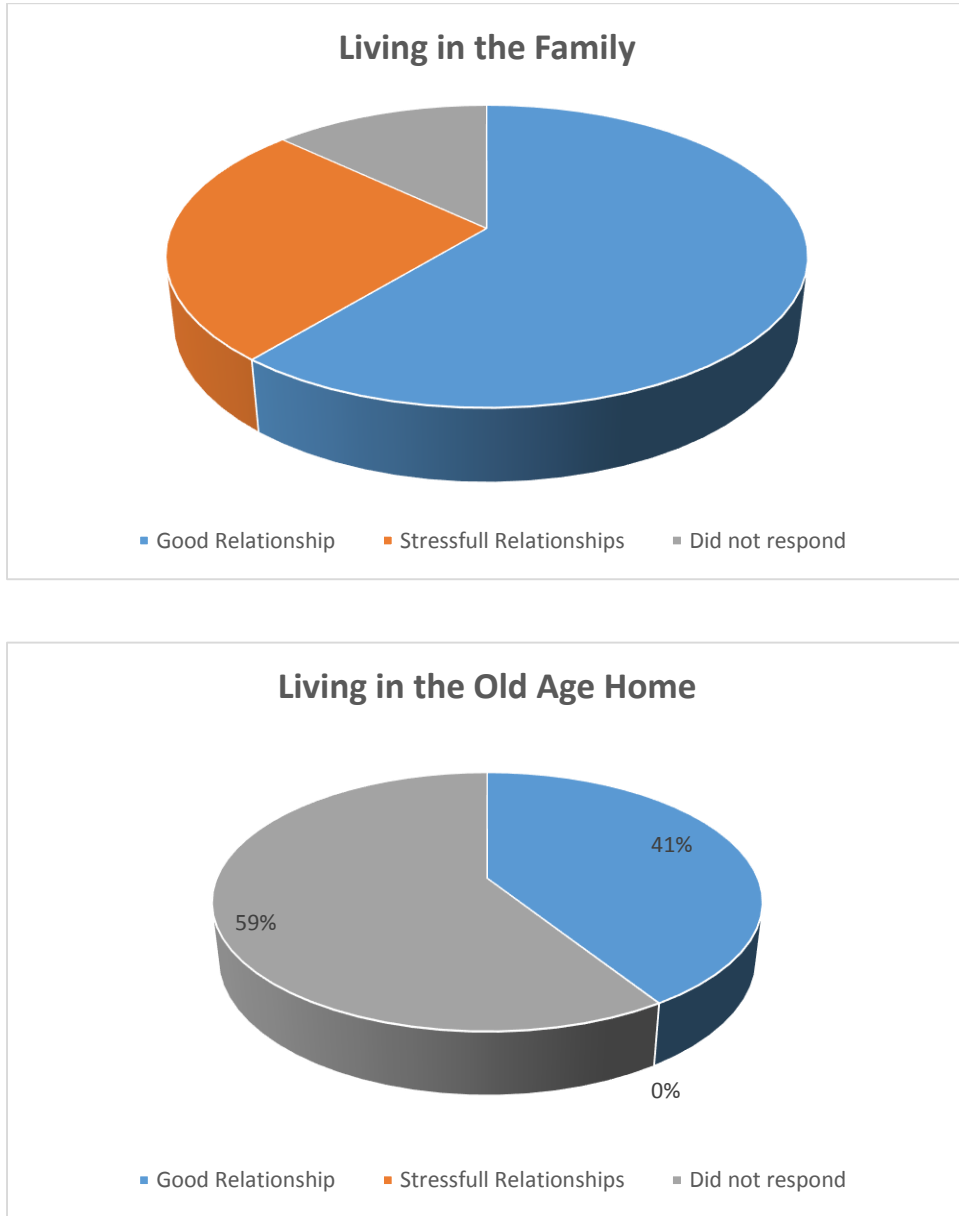
#### **4.1 SOCIAL INTERACTION**

##### **Social and Healthy Relationships**

Social interaction is an innermost human need at any age and especially for an elderly.

Social interaction helps the elderly not only to be socially active but also helps to maintain one's physical and mental health. Hence, exploring the kind of relationship they maintain with their children is important.

**Figure 4.1: Elderly that maintain healthy relationship with children**



With regard to relationship with children, sixty one percent of the respondents staying with their families reported that they were happy to be living with their children and that they enjoyed a good relationship with them. 26% of the elderly said that they have

a stressful relationship with their children and 13% did not respond. The study further finds that staying with their children makes the elderly feel optimistic and confident and gives them a feeling of being supported and cared for. As regards to the respondents staying in old age homes, 41% have reported good relationship with their children. The respondents staying in old age homes were happy to express that their children are the main source of support to them. The maintenance and other expenses of their elderly are all met by their children. 59% of them did not respond since they said that it is not applicable to them either because they do not have children or not married. This shows that like the rest in India the younger generation still have respect towards the elderly in the family and take it as their responsibility to safeguard them in all the possible ways so as to provide the feeling of security, belongings and adequacy (Sarala and Latha,2010:175)

### **Social Networks**

The study further investigated into the types of contact maintained by children of respondents who do not live with them. Maintaining contacts with loved ones builds strong bonds of relationships. Covering of such support systems and social networks will help comprehensively to understand ageing issues.

**Table 4.1 Social Networks – Percentage of Children who do not live with the elderly use different means to be in contact with them.**

	Living in the family				Living in the old age home			
	Sometimes	Never	Often	Unanswered	Sometimes	Never	Often	Unanswered
Through visits	32	02	37	29	20	03	18	59
Phone contacts	15	02	56	27	14	03	24	59
Email contacts	27	49	05	29	12	25	04	59
Write letters	38	28	05	29	31	03	07	59

. With regard to personal visits, thirty seven percent of the respondents staying at home reported that their children visit them often, 32% responded that their children visit them sometimes and 2% said that their children never visited them while 29% did not respond many of whom do not have children. Among respondents residing in old age homes, 18% said that their children visit them often, 20% responded that their children visit them sometimes while 3% said that their children never visited them. 59% did not respond either because they are not married or do not have children.

With respect to contact on telephone, 56% of the respondents staying at home, reported that their children telephonically contacted them often, 15% said sometimes, 2% said never and 27% did not respond mostly because they are single and have no children. Among those residing in old age homes, 24% had regular telephonic contact with their children, 14% reported sometimes, 5% had on telephonic contact and 59% did not respond.

In modern day writing letters has reduced drastically. Today it is limited to

merely sending cards to wish people during festivals or birthdays. With regard to postal mail contact, 5% of the respondents staying in the families and 7% of the inmates staying in old age home reported contact with their children through letters stating that they exchanged letters with their children often. 38% of the elderly staying in the family reported such contact to be sometimes and 28% percent reported no mail contact with their children, while 29% did not respond. 31 % of the inmates residing in old age home kept correspondence with their children sometimes, 3% of the inmates did not correspond with their children and 59% did not respond.

E-mails have replaced postal mail in the modern times being easy to send, speedy and with no direct cost. Twenty seven percent of the respondents said that their children are in touch with them via e-mail sometimes, where as 49% said never and 29% did not respond. Only 5% responded saying that their children are in touch with them through email often. For the inmates staying in old age homes, access to internet is restricted. It is operated by the Superiors of the homes. Hence, in comparison to the aged in the families such contact is less.

Even today, there are quite a few folks in their seventies who are using the basic functions of Facebook. It seems highly likely that in ten or twenty years, there will be nothing unusual about an octogenarian commenting on articles or submitting a comment on YouTube (or something similar to it depending on how the internet evolves). The internet has fundamentally changed our ability to share our voice. Today the elderly consume information and relay their reactions to a small feedback loop local to them and maybe over the phone to a small circle interesting in hearing them out. Tomorrow, the

feedback loop becomes wider and will last longer because their voice can echo across the planet.

### Experiencing Loneliness

One of the widely studied aspects of old age is the nature and degree of loneliness among the old persons. Loneliness is a subjective, negative feeling related to the person's own experience of deficient social relations. The determinants of loneliness are most often defined on the basis of 2 causal models. The first model examines the *external factors*, which are absent in the social network, as the root of the loneliness; while the second explanatory model refers to the *internal factors*, such as personality and psychological factors.

**Figure 4.2 Percentage of elderly experiencing loneliness**

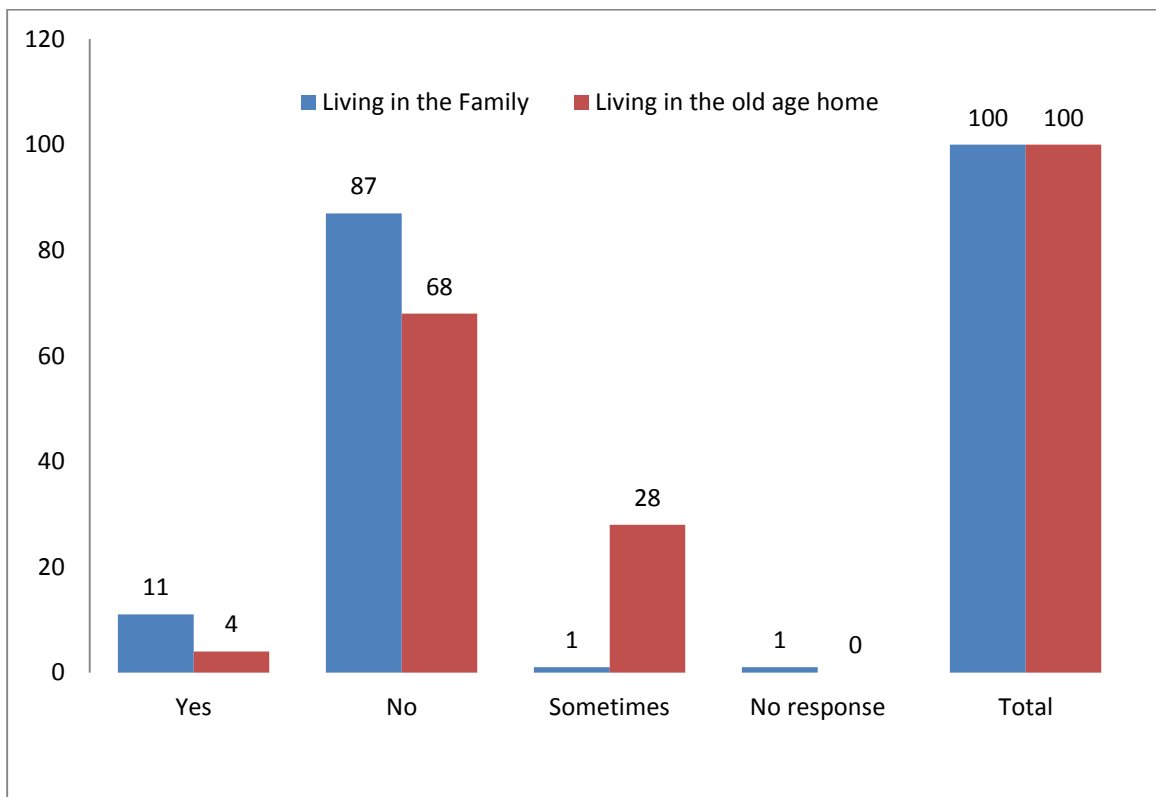


Figure 4.2 provides information that 87% of the respondents from all age groups from 60 to 90 years and above staying in the family do not feel lonely or isolated. 11% of the respondents accepted the feeling of being lonely. 2% of the respondents said that they sometimes feel lonely and 2% did not respond. 68% of the inmates living in old age homes reported that they do not feel lonely, since they have other companions to interact. Moreover, many volunteer groups visit them and interact with them. Their children also keep in contact with them from a distance and support them in times of need. 28% expressed that they experienced loneliness sometimes even as they live amidst other inmates and activities. Others who experienced loneliness were specific about the reasons for their loneliness like, death of the spouse, absence of children or grandchildren, lack of adequate work etc. Only 4% of the inmates staying in old age homes felt that they are isolated. Thus it is observed that the feeling of loneliness is felt more among elderly residing at old age homes, than in families. It only proves that old age homes are not a substitute for a home.

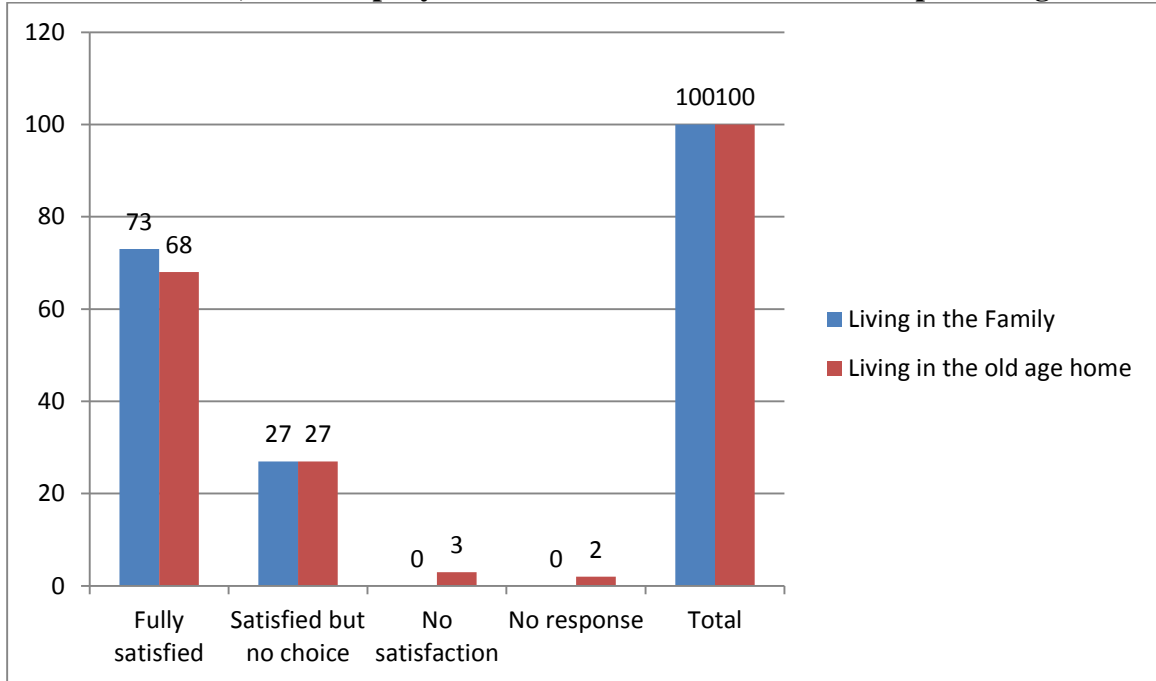
Old people do not like the idea of going to an old age home. This was because they were fully integrated with social and religious life in their locality. They enjoyed the proximity of children and grandchildren. Hence old age homes are needed only for the helpless and the destitute (Dandekar 1993).

### **Level of Satisfaction**

The study also aimed to find out level of satisfaction of respondents with basic Necessities of life classified as access to accommodation, food, medical needs and time for prayer and Leisure.



**Figure 4.3 Level of Satisfaction of life with regard to shelter, food, medical care, time for prayer and leisure activities in terms of percentage.**



. The most encouraging observation is that most of the inmates staying in old age homes were fully satisfied with the facilities and security provided. The food is provided in time keeping their diet in mind. Most rooms had a shared accommodation for three to five persons. There are separate rooms for bedridden elderly because they need constant care and monitoring. All the homes have one or two trained resident nurses and so the medicines are dispensed on time. The homes also provided some rudimentary medical facilities. Doctors visited the homes on certain days of the week. In case of serious illness, they were shifted to the hospital.

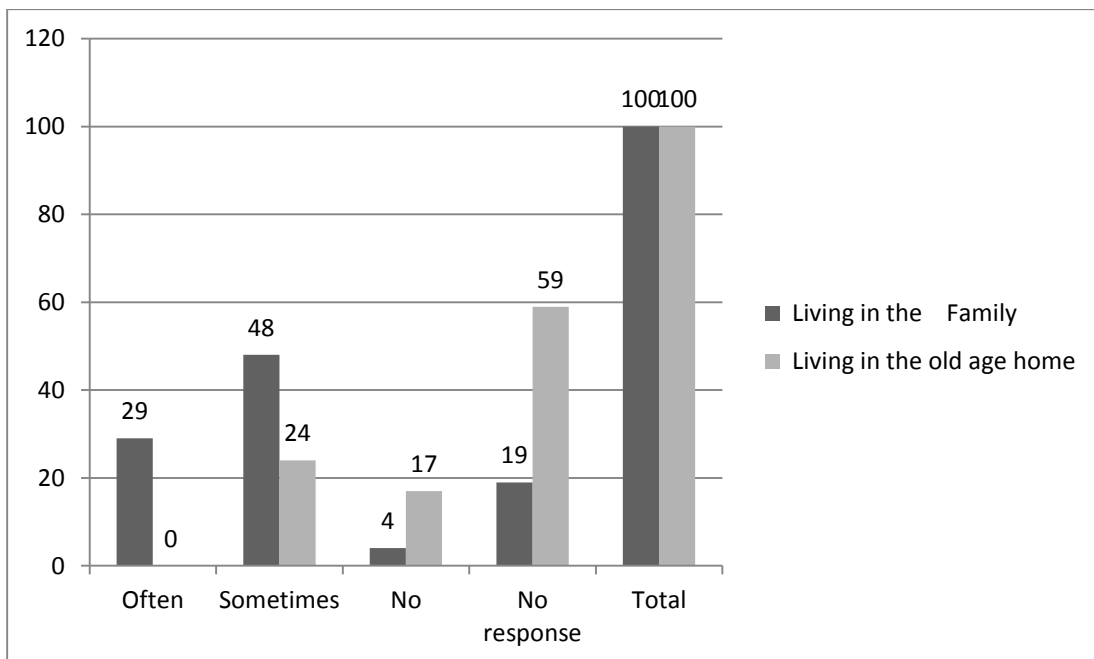
Their schedule also includes a time for prayer and other leisure activities. All the homes have developed a schedule of activities by which the residents can participate to the extent they can. This provides them with a healthy way to occupy their time. Keeping all these parameters in mind, figure 4.3 reveals that 68% of the inmates were fully

satisfied with their conditions. About 27% of the inmates said that they were satisfied but had no choice. Another 3% of the inmates were thoroughly dissatisfied especially with regard to the choice of food in the old age home and 2% did not respond. 73% of the respondents staying with their families are fully satisfied with what they get and 27% of the respondents said that they were satisfied but there was no choice. The elderly staying at home were sometimes dissatisfied with regard to the availability of medical facilities and felt unable sometimes to join the religious activities.

### Frequency of Visits of Parents

The study also investigated whether the respondents made an attempt to meet their children who were not residing with them. This will help to understand the healthy bonding in the family.

**Figure 4.4 Percentage of Parents visiting children who do not stay with them**



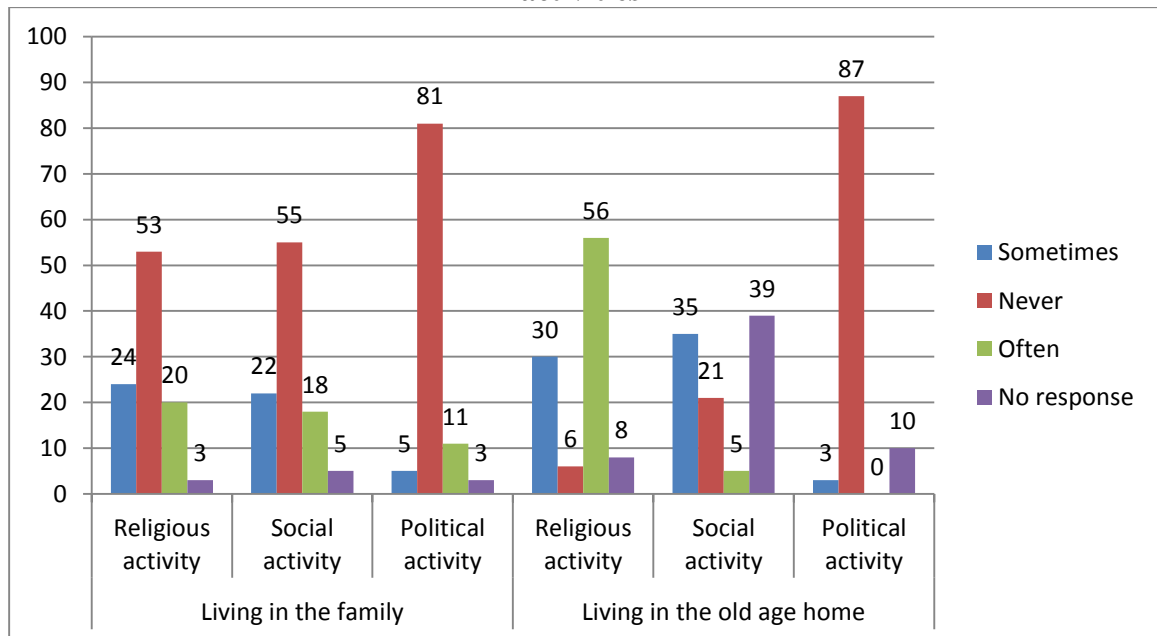
From figure 4.4 we find that, 29% of the elderly parents said that they visit their children often, 48% said that they visit their children sometimes, 3% never visit their children and

19% did not respond. It shows that although the children are not staying with them, the elderly still want to maintain closeness with their children to create a healthy bonding with them. The study further reveals that the relatively younger among the elderly keep more close contact with their children. 59% of the inmates staying in old age homes have no children and therefore the question of visitation does not arise. 24% of the inmates visit their children sometimes specially when there is a family function at their homes or when their children come from abroad. 17% of the inmates do not feel the need to visit their children because the children themselves come to visit them. Thus, even old age home respondents kept a healthy bond with their children.

### Involvement in the Society

The study also investigates the level of involvement of respondents living with the family and in the old age home in religious, social and political activity. This helps one to understand if this involvement helps the elderly to face boredom.

**Figure 4.5: Percentage of the elderly involved in Social, Religious & Political activities**



. Figure 4.5 reveals that 63% of the respondents are not involved in any social, religious or political work, 16.33% of the respondents are involved often and keep themselves busy, 17% are involved sometimes and whenever required and 3.67% did not respond. It also reveals that the elderly are more inclined towards religious and social activity rather than political activity. The reason is religion and social activities provide a sort of social support in the form of personal contact with other people at religious and social gatherings with whom they are able to share their thoughts. It is believed that, 'it is around this social and religious participation that the life of the old revolves.' It was observed that 42% percent of those living in families reported participation in social and religious ceremonies. They expressed that their interaction with relatives and friends was due to their involvement in the religious and social functions.

Figure 4.5 also reveals that 38% of the inmates staying in old age homes are not involved in any kind of activity, about 23% of the inmates are involved sometimes but mostly in religious and social activity rather than in political activity. They are involved in helping others by giving tuitions and organizing stitching and embroidery classes for the neighboring children and people. The elderly in old age homes are more involved in religious activity since all the old aged homes which are run by congregation of sisters have a Chapel attached to their homes. This gives them an opportunity to pray as well as to meet and interact with people of their neighborhood, who come to participate in the worship service.

## Utilization of Leisure Time

One of the immediate problems faced by the elderly is the proper utilization of the free time available to them. People in employment are generally habituated to follow a set routine of daily activities. But during the old age, the problem arises as to how to fill up the free time with activities which would keep them properly engaged. Life satisfaction is strongly related to satisfaction in leisure activities since the function of leisure is to give one relaxation, diversion and development of personality. The study investigates the leisure activities of the elderly as life's satisfaction is strongly related to satisfaction in leisure activities

**Table 4.2 Percentage of the elderly involved in the activities during leisure time**

Activity	Living in the family		Living in the old age home	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Watching TV	97	03	49	51
Reading	89	11	23	77
Walking	66	34	15	85
Prayer	98	02	76	24
Games (chess, carom)	19	81	11	89
Gardening	58	42	04	96

The study finds that 97% respondents who are staying at home watch TV programs often, whereas at old age homes only 49% of the inmates watch TV programs. At home the younger among the old age groups watch the news, serials and religious channels, whereas older respondents watch more spiritual channels. At old age homes they tend to tune into religious channels under the direction of the superior of the home.

89% respondents who reside at home reported that they often spend their spare time reading newspapers, spiritual books and magazines, while 23% of the inmates at old age homes spent their time in reading activities. Study of light literary works like novels and detective stories and serious works in the area of philosophy and social sciences; have not been found popular among the elderly.

66% respondents who reside at home said that they keep themselves fit through exercises like walking, while only 15% inmates at old age home go about walking and have a fitness regimen.

A large percentage, 98 respondents who are staying at home spent time in prayer and other religious activities, whereas 76% inmates at old age home spent time in prayer and other religious activities. It has been observed that a large number of such respondents spread their religious activities over the entire day. For most of them, it was a lifelong habit that they acquired during their earlier days and has intensified in their old age. It was also observed that the worship was conducted in the institution itself, since there was a chapel in the old age home itself. Religion therefore has great leisure value for the aged. Prayer provided them strength and moral courage.

With regard to indoor games like chess, cards, carom etc., 19% respondents staying at home said that they play such games while in old age homes only 11% inmates indulged in these games.

Talking about the family members seemed to be a favourite pass time for the residents of both the settings, especially for those living in the institution. Recounting old happy memories and sharing these with their inmates are tinged with nostalgia and result in a feeling of accomplishment of sorts. It also acts as a catharsis for the elderly. Mostly

they have their own company to sit with and gossip. Their exchange views, ideas and experiences with each other.

Canada is one of the European countries that can be called an aged country. The elderly Canadians do not associate free time with leisure. Hence, many older Canadians engage in a variety of volunteer work. They devote less time to paid work and more time to unpaid work in the home and leisure activities. While some is done through formal organizations, much takes the form of assisting others in the community in an informal way. They take old age as an opportunity to pursue other interests and to spend more time with family and friends. Moreover, they devote more time on average to active leisure, such as physical exercise, reading and going out and socializing, than to passive leisure such as watching television, listening to music or radio. Whatever their age, the seniors who are the least healthy and the least satisfied are those who spend the most time on passive leisure (Jhansi, 2010: 212,219).

### **Frequency of Going Out**

The study also enquires into the frequency of elderly going out of their homes. Such activities give the elderly an opportunity to be in touch with their family & neighbor's and refreshes their minds

**Table 4.3 Frequency of elderly going out**

Age group	Living in the Family (%)				Living in old age home (%)			
	Sometimes	Often	Never	Total	Sometimes	often	Never	Total
60-69	39	06	09	54	19	02	01	22
70-79	21	02	07	30	27	02	05	34
80 & above	05	01	10	16	31	02	11	44
Total	65	09	26	100	77	06	17	100

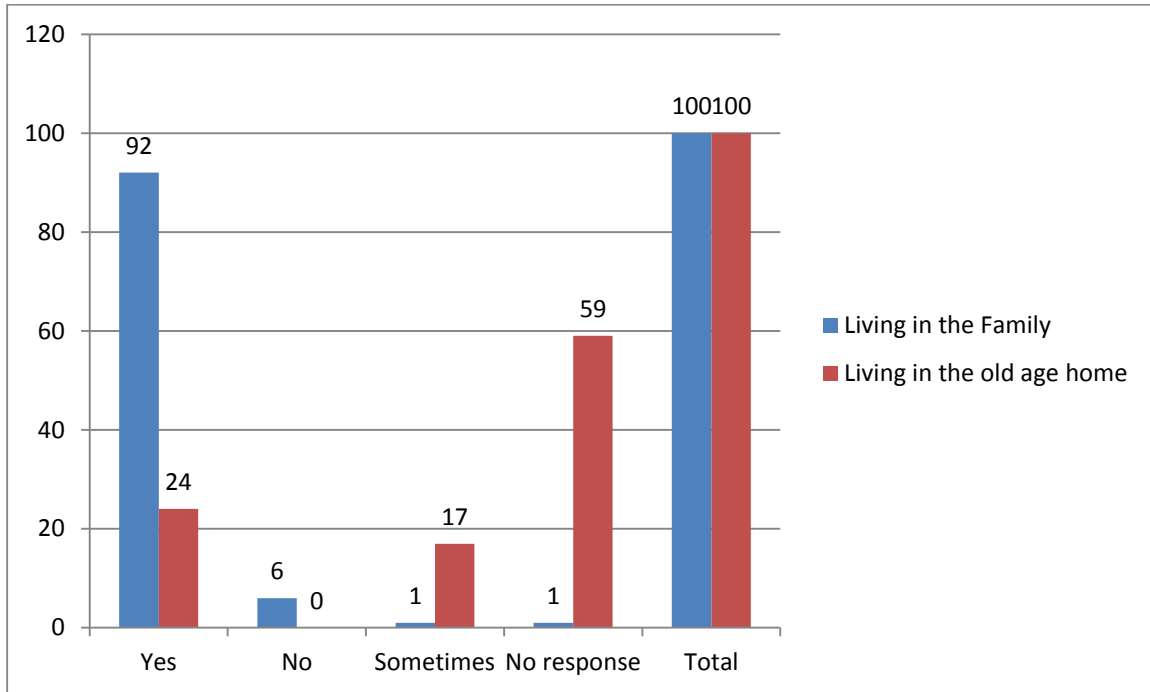
It is observed from table 4.3 that the frequency of going out is found more with the inmates residing at old age homes than with the elderly staying in their ancestral home. 9% of the elderly staying at their homes and 6% of the inmates staying at old age homes went out regularly. A large percentage went out sometimes and whenever required and 43% of the elderly staying at both the homes never went out. Thus it brings out an important point that institutional settings should not promote social isolation of elders from the rest of the community. It also brings forth that the elderly values social relationships.

**Decision Makers**

The elderly in India have commanded a place of respect in the families and are usually decision makers in the family and/or are consulted on various matters. This aspect is investigated here.



**Figure 4.6: Percentage of Family members consulting the elderly**



According to figure 4.6, 92% of the respondents staying with the family and 24% of the elderly staying in old age home revealed that their family members sought their advice in domestic matters like buying and selling of property, marriage in the family, education of children, buying durable goods etc. 6% of the elderly staying with their family said that their family members do not consult them because of their illiteracy and low financial status. 1% of the elderly staying with their family expressed that sometimes they are consulted and 1% did not respond. In the case of those residing in old age homes, 17% stated that they were consulted sometimes and 59% did not respond since it was not applicable to them.

Thus the findings show that the elderly persons are given their full share of respect and reverence by the family members. Their experience of life is still treasured and they are respected by the family members.

## Work Schedule

Keeping oneself busy doing some work at their respective homes makes one feel that life is worth living. The person feels that he or she is part of the home and avoids going to depression. Their contribution may be in a small way gives them a sense of usefulness and purpose.

**Table 4.4: Percentage of elderly working at home and in old age homes**

Work	Living at Old Age Home		Living in the family	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Nothing	58	42	16	84
Kitchen work other than cooking	11	89	82	18
Cooking	05	95	48	52
Gardening and farming	02	98	46	54
Sweeping	05	95	86	14
Helping others	06	94	85	15

With regard to performing various chores the study finds that,42% of the inmates residing in old age homes helped according to their capacity in the daily routine of kitchen work, cooking, serving food, washing their own utensils, keeping the premise clean and other sundry work. This encouragement given to the elderly to do any form of work keeps them busy and avoids going into depression. Fifty eight percent of the inmates however did none of the chores needed to run the old age homes since most of them belonged to the category of old-old group. Their work is carried out by attendants.

Among those residing at home, 84% of the respondents helped in carrying out the chores. They did something or the other and kept themselves busy at home. The rest worked in a variety of ways. Thus the elderly at home and in old age homes contributed to run their homes which enabled them to also enhance their sense of usefulness and purpose.

## 4.2 GENERAL FEELINGS

### Respect towards the Elderly

Today modernization, technological change, mobility and exposition in the lateral transmission of knowledge have introduced changes in the life-styles, attitudes and values of society. Therefore, the elderly who were understood as repository of age old wisdom are losing significance in the fast changing world.

**Table 4.5: Percentage of Youngsters having respect towards the elderly**

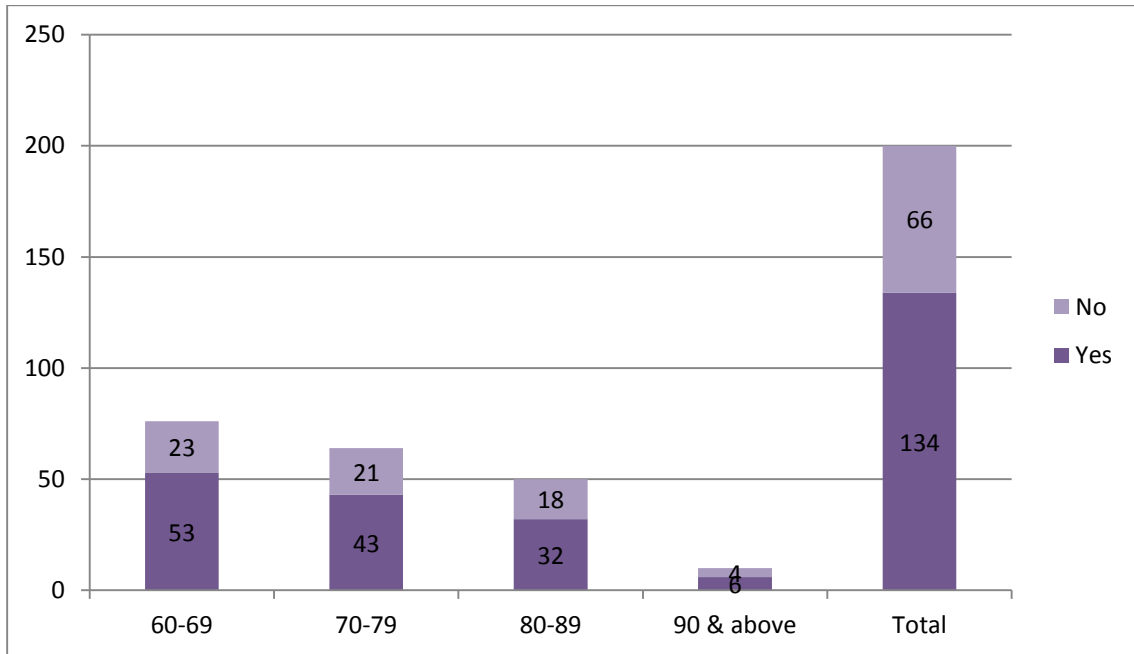
Age group	Yes	No	Same
60-69	23.5	8	6.5
70-79	19.5	7.5	5
80 & above	15	7.5	7.5
Total	58	23	19

While investigating the attitudes of the youth towards the elderly the study finds as seen in Table 4.5 that, about 58% of the elderly felt that the generation gap was widening and respect for the elderly among the youth was waning. This feeling is felt more by higher age groups who expect more care and respect. 23% of the elderly said that the youngsters still respect the elderly, whereas 19% of them felt that nothing has changed in this regard.

### Children – Main Source of Support

When there were joint families and people were not hard pressed for time, there was always someone to take care of the aged. Today, the aspect of elderly care is gathering greater significance because families are becoming nuclear and want to stay that way. In a fast growing consumerist mentality in our society people give priority to their own comfort and income rather than to relationships. With such perspectives the traditional moral and religious values no longer motivate them

**Figure 4.7: Percentage of children as the main source of support for parents**



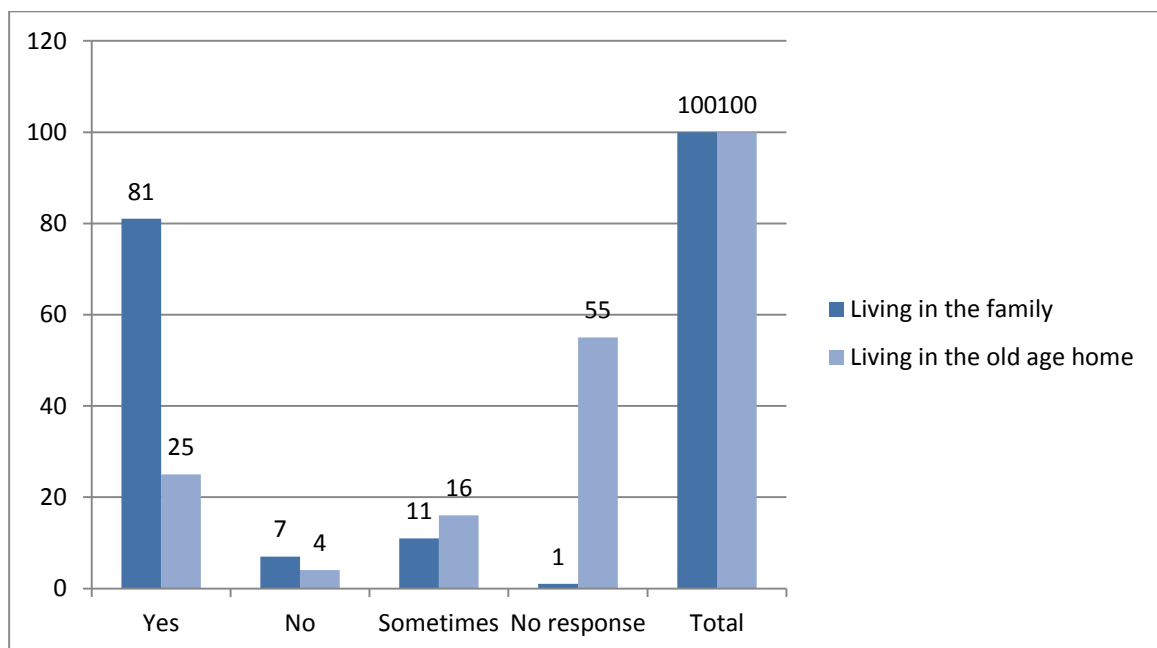
. In spite of the background mentioned above, figure 4.7 reveals that 67% of the elderly still consider children as the main source of support for parents in old age. They feel that children have an obligation to love, revere and show gratitude to the elderly in the family. The elderly believe that since it is the duty of the parents to look after their children it is equally incumbent upon children to look after their dependent parents. They also believe

the best place to live in their old age is with their families. However, 33% of the elderly did not accept the idea that children are the main source of support for parents in their old age. Instead, they were of the opinion that instead of waiting for the support of children, they would prefer to depend on themselves.

### Respecting the opinion of the Elderly

The elderly are considered as a repository of age-old wisdom and cumulative experiences. And hence the elderly felt that they were consulted and their opinion were asked and respected.

**Figure 4.8: Respecting the opinion of elderly at home**



In the figure 4.8, eighty one percent of the respondents residing with their families and 25% of the inmates staying in old age home said that their opinion or advice sought on domestic matters like buying and selling of properties, marriages in the family and such is respected by their family. The elderly had a feeling that they were consulted not merely as a formality, but because of their experience. 7% of the respondents staying at home and 4% of the inmates residing at old age homes gave a negative reply. 11% of the

respondents staying at home and 16% of the inmates residing at old age homes said that sometimes their opinion was respected and 1% of the aged staying at home and 55% of the inmates staying at old age home did not respond. Thus it becomes clear that the elderly persons are given their full share of respect and reverence by the family members. The experience of life is still respected by the family members. Therefore, the traditional advisory role of the elderly has still not lost its significance in the Goan society.

### **Best place to live**

A caring family and a shelter which is comfortable, safe and secure are needed by all persons, more so by the elderly since they are vulnerable.

**Table 4.6: Best place to live in their old age**

Age Group	Old age home	With Children	Living Alone	Depends on the situation	other family members	Total
60-69	19	37	10	09	01	76
70-79	11	38	05	08	02	64
80 & above	19	26	05	09	01	60
Total (%)	49 (24.5%)	101 (50.5%)	20 (10%)	26 (13%)	04 (2%)	200 (100%)

. When elderly were asked about their opinion as to which is the best place to live in their old age, their opinions differed. In table 4.6, 50.5% of the elderly said that the best place to live in their old age was with their children. The first step of life is always guided by their parents. Hence, they said that why not the children extend their hands for the last step of their parents. 24.5% of the elderly preferred to live in old age homes, 13% of them

said that they would act as the situation demands, 10% said that they would prefer to stay alone and 2% preferred to stay with their family members.

Thus it reveals that most of the elderly prefer to live their old age at home, since elderly people are offered better care when living at home. As a family only looks after one or two elderly people, other members can immediately satisfy their needs. Moreover, their children understand old people's habits, so they can easily give the most suitable care. In contrast, in old people's homes, there are many old people while the number of nurses is limited. Therefore, they cannot get good care instantly. Additionally, many nurses only care for the old to earn their livings, so they are probably less enthusiastic than old people's family.

Secondly, the old usually consider family as a good environment motivating them to live happily. They can enjoy the cozy atmosphere when having meals with their family or playing with their grandchildren. Witnessing their children's success and grandchildren's maturity always gives them a great sense of self-fulfillment. On the other hand, living in old people homes, they cannot usually meet their family. They probably feel isolated, which affects their health badly.

Some people may argue that nurses specialize in giving health care to elderly people. Therefore, they can play the role of caregivers more professionally than old people's family. However, what old people really need is not only good care but also a happy atmosphere of family with their relatives surrounding them every day. Therefore, family is definitely a better place for elderly people.

In short, the elderly accept that family should be responsible for taking care of old people. By doing this, young people do not only help the old enjoy their lives but also express their respect and gratitude to their elderly relatives.

### **Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law conflict**

In the Goan cultural scene, when a woman gets married, she leaves her parent's family and joins the family of the husband's parents. When the parents of her husband get old, it becomes her duty as daughter-in-law of the house to care for the aged mother-in-law. She becomes their primary caregiver. But sometimes prejudicial inter-perception between the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law vitiates the caregiving relationship among them. Their relationship becomes strained in their day to day interaction negatively impacting the care giving relationship. The study thus investigates the perception of respondents on the aspect of mother-in-law, daughter in law conflict.

**Table 4.7: Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law conflict**

Age Group	Increasing	Decreasing	Same	No Conflict	Other
60-69	44 (22%)	10 (5%)	40 (20%)	04 (2%)	10 (5%)
70-79	14 (7%)	22 (11%)	20 (10%)	02 (1%)	02 (1%)
80-89	12 (6%)	02 (1%)	14 (7%)	00	04 (2%)
Total	70 (35%)	34 (17%)	74 (37%)	(3%)	16 (8%)

Table 4.7 reveals that about 37% of the elderly felt that the mother-in-law, daughter-in-law conflict has neither increased nor decreased. It has remained the same. 35% of the elderly felt that mother-in-law and daughter-in-law conflict was increasing, where as 34% felt that it was decreasing. The perception thus is largely that the conflict is high. If this



conflict continues to remain high, there will likely be a decrease in elder care by adult children in the future, which will create more demand for old age homes.

## **Conclusion**

Majority of the elderly who are staying with their families at home and also who are staying at old age home do not feel lonely. It is because they are not alone at home. At least one person is staying with them. That person may be spouse or son or daughter or brother or sister. There are other elderly who are staying in old age home and whose children are not staying with them, but still are maintaining intimacy from a distance by different means of communication and supporting them in times of need. Thus family ties are not dead in Goan community but have changed in quality. Moreover, many felt satisfied because their basic necessities of life and health care were met.

The elderly who are residing at home are contributing for the expenses of the house. This in return helps them to receive more caring attitude from others in the family. The elderly who are residing at old age home also pay for their stay at aged home but for many others children are paying for them.

Although majority of the elderly are involved in their family affairs but for many their involvement in any social or political work is less. Their involvement in religious activity is more than social and political. But there are some who are actively involved in the community.

The elderly who are staying at home with their families spend more time in leisure like watching TV, reading, walks, prayer, gardening etc than of the inmates residing at

old age home. This is also true in regard with the help rendered in carrying out the chores. This enhances their sense of usefulness and purpose.

It was observed that the elders are still consulted by their family members before taking any major decisions at home. Moreover their opinions too are respected by their family. This shows that their experience of life is still treasured and is respected by the family members.

The elderly have accepted the fact that children are the main supporters of elderly at their old age.