



## **IMAGES OF RETIREMENT**

# **AN EXPLORATORY STUDY AMONG BLACK DOMESTIC AND SERVICE WORKERS**

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This case study is the product of a joint effort on the part of The Johannesburg Association of the Aged (JAFTA) and the Centre for Applied Social Sciences at the University of Natal.

In 1982 the then Director of JAFTA stated his intentions of embarking on an inquiry into the needs of elderly black domestic workers on the Witwatersrand. The Centre for Applied Social Sciences expressed interest in the project which fell within the Centre's field of expertise, and offered to support the research and collaborate in the venture.

Work on the project commenced in earnest in late 1982 when the research problem was conceptualised and a fieldworker was engaged to carry out the in-depth survey under the supervision of JAFTA. However, work on the study soon had to be temporarily interrupted in the earlier part of 1983 while JAFTA was undergoing a period of internal reorganisation. It was not until later in that year that work on the project was resumed. At this point a practical decision was taken that the Centre should now assume full responsibility for carrying out the research. As it would be too difficult for the Centre to supervise fieldwork at a distance, the remainder of the survey work would be conducted in the Durban area.

Owing to the chequered history of the project the study turned out to be very much smaller in scope and methodologically less exacting in some respects. However, in the author's opinion at least, the richness of the data more than compensates for any technical or methodological deficiencies of the study.

The inquiry highlights an area of need among black workers which has by and large been overlooked in South Africa. This exploratory research seeks to identify the problems which elderly workers face in this phase of their lives, and reconstruct the images which black domestic workers project onto life after retirement from wage labour. The study is conceived as the first in a series of inquiries into old age issues conducted in this Centre.

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Acknowledgements go to the Trustee: The Roberts James Family Holdings who donated the funds for this research.

The author wishes to specifically thank Peter de Vries who as former Director of JAFTA initiated the project and carried it through the first stage. It has been a great pleasure to work with Peter de Vries on this project.

The writer is also indebted to the present Director of JAFTA Laurie Starfield, for his continued support and encouragement to see the project through to the end.

Thanks go to colleagues and staff at the Centre who assisted in the data processing and production of the report, in particular to Ulla Bulteel, Lynn Davies and Nicolette Wells.

The author also wishes to thank the fieldworker in Johannesburg, Julia Mavimbela, and the members of the Centre's interviewer team: Barbara Mthembu, Themba Mzimela, Toko Nene, and Constance Ngcobo for their assistance in the data collection. Large sections of this report have in fact been written by the field staff. Copious use of the responses recorded verbatim by the fieldworkers has been made in the text for illustrative purposes.

A special vote of thanks go to the 51 prospective retirees who gave of their time to share with us their experiences of a lifetime. This study would not have been possible without their co-operation. Their interest in this type of research is perhaps indicative of the general need to look into retirement issues among black wage-earners.

Some of the respondents in the survey may not live sufficiently long to see any tangible changes in old age policy for blacks. However, it is hoped that this research may promote greater awareness of

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old age issues in the black community, and that future generations of black workers may reap the benefits of current research into the needs of retired workers.

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CHAPTER 1INTRODUCTION

This is an exploratory study which seeks to define the images of old age and life in retirement evoked among black domestic workers. The study is conceived within the theoretical framework of modernisation and migration. In broad outline two major assumptions have provided points of reference for the inquiry. These may be briefly described as follows:

- (1) In traditional societies ageing is the culmination of the life process which brings peace and prosperity. The aged have a definite role to play in society upon which the continuity and the well-being of the community depends. Their wisdom and experience is a source of wealth to the community. For these reasons the elderly command a position of power and respect in society.
- (2) The migrant labour system in South Africa as in many other parts of the world has in time destroyed the delicate balance of mutual dependencies between young and old in traditional society. Perhaps most important, migrancy has disrupted the traditional pattern of family life. As a consequence the position of the elderly in the community has become unsettled. This process is regarded as a consequence of modernisation.

Thus, it would appear that it is the old people who must suffer most from the passing of traditional society. They must bear the burden of the modernisation of society. Fear and dread of old age may be the price one has to pay for becoming modern. This is certainly an implicit assumption made by social scientists working in the field of modernisation such as Inkeles and Smith (1974) and Bengtson and colleagues (1975).

Indicators of individual modernisation which are used in this study suggest that a negative image of old age and the elderly is a "correlate" of if not a "constituent" factor in becoming modern (Michalos, 1982). By way of illustration let us look at the three

indicators of modernisation with an old age theme which were used in the study. They read as follows:

- (1) *Some people look forward to old age with pleasure, while others dread (fear) the coming of old age. How do you personally feel about the coming of old age?* (The modern answer is fear of old age.)
- (2) *Thinking about older people: What are the obligations (duties) which young people owe to old people?* (The modern answer is no or few obligations to old people.)
- (3) *Some people say a child learns the deepest and most profound truth from old people; others say that a child learns most from books and in school. What is your opinion?* (The modern answer is learns most from books and in school.) (Bengtson et al. 1975.)

It is postulated that among other factors persons who have become modernised will endorse the modern emphases. If these indicators are taken at face value, modernisation is purely a statistical fact, obtained by means of a correlational exercise. If, however, one seeks to read an intrinsic meaning into the statistical evidence, that is, assume that the indicators are constituents or integral parts of becoming modern, the implication is that modern persons by definition are destined to live out the last phase of their lives in misery.

The fact that the situation of elderly people has become a focal issue of concern in modern societies is certainly indicative that all is not well. This concern is mirrored in the rapid growth of new fields of interest in the social sciences which are devoted to the study of ageing in modern society. New perspectives and solutions to "growing old gracefully" are sought. In particular, research into the quality of life of the elderly has pioneered research projects which have increased our knowledge and understanding of the problems experienced by the elderly in modern societies. These research efforts have been undertaken with a view to reorienting individual and societal efforts to meeting the needs and aspirations of the elderly.

Thus, one of the chief aims of this study was to determine the extent to which black workers living in a society characterised by rapid change were influenced by modern concepts of old age. The intention was to test reactions to growing old in a society in transition, and to identify the major problem areas.

The focus of this study is on domestic workers. For research purposes domestic workers are conceived of as a special group of migrant workers. Among circular migrant workers the retirement phase of life is coincidental with return migration to the area of origin. In recent times social scientists and practitioners have shown great interest in patterns of retirement among return migrants. Originally, it was postulated that return migrants were the ideal vehicles for disseminating modern ideas and assisting in the development process. Ideally, the rural-to-urban migrant would absorb modern ideas and learn skills while working in town which he or she could pass on to the community in the home area. According to this way of thinking the "successful" return migrant would be the innovator who introduced progress and prosperity into the rural community.

However, the innovator-returnee proposition did not hold true as expected. Many factors are involved and we shall single out only a few for mention here. First and foremost, it was discovered that migrants were not necessarily learning new skills in the industrial world because they were employed to do menial work. If migrants did acquire skills, these were not applicable or appropriate in the area of origin. Furthermore, the wealth which migrants accumulated whilst working away from home was infrequently used to promote development in the home area. Instead it was used for consumption rather than production purposes. In some cases, the introduction of income from outside the community served to stifle local production. Thus, instead of contributing to the development of the rural area of origin, migrancy and innovation had a deleterious effect on the welfare of the people left behind. It was also found that the proportion of innovators in the return migration stream was much smaller than initially anticipated. In fact they were in the



minority.

Clearly, the original conception of return migration needed revision. Cerase's (1974) research into the effects of return migration showed that the majority of return migrants were "conservatives" rather than innovators. That is, people who uphold the traditional value system and translate the rewards from wage labour into conservative or traditional symbols of wealth rather than progressive means of production. The conservative return migrant was found to be instrumental in maintaining the *status quo* in the home community. Cerase also identified a third type of returnee: the migrants in this category returned to rest and spend their last days in their area of origin. According to Cerase's observations this group had little impact on the development of the home area because its members were not economically active upon return, or only marginally so.

Since Cerase developed his typology of return migration in the 1970's, a number of empirical studies have confirmed his views. In this study a review of the concept of "successful" retirement and "successful" return migration is made in order to test the salience of the argument that workers exposed to modern-industrial life represent a development input in rural traditional society.

### 1.1 The target group selected for study

The group selected for study consisted of black domestic workers. Domestic workers, together with agricultural workers, belong to a special category of migrant workers, which is marginal to the mainstream of migrant labour. Domestic workers are less likely than other migrant workers to advance occupationally or materially. In terms of prestige, domestic work is considered a menial job, especially for men (Schlemmer and Stopforth, 1979). Domestic workers, broadly speaking, still fall under the antiquated masters and servants legislation, which means that domestic workers in private employ have little job security or bargaining power. Today, domestic work tends to be a dead-end job which is accepted only by

workers who lack the educational qualifications and skills or the urban residential qualifications to apply for other types of work.

All these factors taken together tend to suggest that domestic work will attract the less progressive type of worker who will remain rooted in traditional values. Among male domestic workers at least, there is some empirical evidence that this is the case. Members of urban leisure groups with a traditional flavour, such as dance groups, are mainly recruited from the ranks of domestic workers. However, the domestic worker, especially the live-in worker, may be exposed to modern living to a far greater extent than other industrial or service workers. Contact with western ideas and procedures are not limited exclusively to the work situation. Domestic workers' contact with their superiors at work, who might be viewed as carriers of modern-industrial values, may be more intensive than in other occupational spheres.

Thus, the domestic worker is a particularly interesting category of migrant worker to involve in a study of changing attitudes toward ageing and retirement. Elderly domestic workers were selected as a target group, mainly because it was thought that ageing and retirement issues would have greater relevance to older than younger workers.

## 1.2 Research methods

### 1.2.1 Selection of the respondents in the study

A case study approach was deemed to be the most suitable for the purpose of the study. In-depth interviews were conducted among 51 elderly service workers, mainly domestic workers, in the Johannesburg and Durban areas. According to the original research design an equal number of respondents was to be recruited in very affluent and low-income suburban areas, respectively. However, this method of sampling was not rigidly adhered to in the first twenty-five interviews that were completed in the Johannesburg area. In the Johannesburg sample, roughly equal numbers of male and female workers were interviewed.

It would also appear that a loose definition of domestic worker was accepted in the Johannesburg sampling.

An attempt was made to match the selection procedure used in the Johannesburg inquiry in the Durban one. A mix of more affluent and less affluent residential areas was obtained. In Durban the vast majority of domestic workers are female, therefore only a small proportion of men was included in the sample. A more rigid definition of domestic work was adopted in the Durban subsample. Only full-time domestic workers employed in detached homes were included in the sample.

Later, in the course of the analysis it was discovered that the categorisation of cases into respondents working in the more affluent and less affluent urban neighbourhoods was not sufficiently clear-cut and yielded minimal differences. Hence, no references will be made to this categorisation in the reporting.

### 1.2.2 The fieldwork

In all, 51 interviews were obtained, 25 in Johannesburg and 26 in Durban. The fieldwork in Johannesburg was conducted in the months of September 1982 to June 1983. The Durban interviews were all conducted in November 1983. The interviewer who carried out all the fieldwork in Johannesburg adopted a method whereby she approached elderly persons travelling by bus to specific target suburbs. The four Durban interviewers canvassed target areas asking after suitable persons to interview. Interviewees were frequently approached in shopping centres, in parks, and on the streets where they worked. The interviews were conducted at or in the vicinity of the place of work, usually during breaks in the working day. Some respondents felt their employers would take exception to their being interviewed on the premises or to their being interviewed at all. Therefore, some interviews were conducted in public or semi-public places on sidewalks or grass verges, or in parks.

The interviews were long and lasted approximately three hours

or more. Interviews were conducted on the basis of a schedule which contained mainly open-ended questions. Interviewers were instructed to probe extensively and to follow up any interesting points which developed in the course of their conversations with the respondents. In the Johannesburg inquiry the interviews were recorded on tape in the field. Transcription and translation into English was effected in the office. In Durban, responses were for the most part translated simultaneously in the field and recorded verbatim onto the questionnaire schedule.

### 1.2.3 A brief characterisation of the sample

The sample covered a wide spectrum of black elderly workers.

Age, sex and marital status: Sixty-three percent of the respondents were women, the remainder men. A significantly greater number of men were interviewed in Johannesburg (56%) than in Durban (19%). Age, which was estimated in most cases, ranged from some 44 years to over 90 years with a median age of some 57 years. The median age was significantly higher in the Johannesburg (64 years) than in the Durban (53 years) group. Half of the sample was married, some 27 percent were widowed and 12 percent separated or divorced.

Residence and workplace: Interviews were conducted in some 24 Johannesburg and Durban neighbourhoods and suburbs. Approximately 60 percent of the respondents lived on their employers' premises, one-fifth lived at a township address and about 8 percent lived on the urban periphery. A further ten percent lived-in for most of the week and commuted to work from a township or peri-urban address once or twice a week.

Education levels: Varied from no schooling to Standard 6 - 7. Three-quarters of the sample had completed Standard 3 or higher levels of education. The standard of education of the respondents in the survey tends to be higher than among male migrant workers in general. (A 1978 Durban investigation discovered a median Standard 2 level of education among male migrants.) Over two-thirds of the sample were Zulu speakers, and roughly 10 percent of the respondents gave Tswana and Swazi as their home language.

Urban rights: The majority of the respondents were no longer required to renew their working contracts annually. Some two-thirds of the respondents stated they had land in the rural areas and planned to retire to the country.

Working conditions: Working hours varied from 5 to 15 hours per day. On average, it was calculated that the respondents worked some 11 hours. However, this might be an overestimate of actual hours worked. Some fourteen percent of the respondents stated their working hours were not fixed. The majority of the respondents (55%) worked six days a week, and just over one quarter worked five or 5½ days per week. Two persons stated they worked seven days a week and one person in a retirement job worked only part-time. Information on overtime was obtained from 45 respondents. Just under three-quarters of these respondents worked overtime but only approximately one-third were remunerated for extra work.

Wages and benefits: Monthly wages ranged from the R20 earned by one part-time domestic worker to R540. Wages over R250 were for the most part earned by the non-domestics in the sample. The modal wage was R60 and the median wage R90.<sup>1)</sup> The wages earned by the Johannesburg respondents were significantly higher than those earned by the Durban respondents. Just over one-third of the respondents stated that they received benefits in cash or kind. Four percent of the respondents stated they were members of a pension scheme and just under ten percent indicated that their employers had organised a savings scheme for them. Just under one-fourth indicated that they received gifts from their employers.

Job History: The respondents stated they had worked a median 13 years in their present jobs, a median of 35 years during their working careers, and that they had held a median 3 jobs. Only some 33 percent of the sample had held more than 5 jobs during their working lives. These

1) By comparison the household subsistence levels (HSL) for a hypothetical black family of 6 in the Johannesburg and Durban areas in September 1983 were R281,86 and R270,57, respectively. In Johannesburg the HSL had only increased by some 3,7% and 1,5% since September 1982 and March 1983, respectively (the dates corresponding most closely to the period of data collection in the Johannesburg area). (Potgieter 1983). In 1983 the South African Domestic Workers Association recommended a minimum monthly salary of R121 plus benefits (see schedule of recommended wages in the appendix).

data are an indication of extremely high job stability.

Activities: Over two-thirds of the respondents stated they were members of clubs and organisations. Membership in church groups, savings clubs, women's groups and burial societies was dominant.

Rural resources: Some three-quarters of the respondents had access to land in the country. Sixty-three percent of the respondents had access to plough land and 8 percent stated they only had a house site. In most cases the spouse or the children were caring for the respondents' rural property while they were working in town. Half the respondents owned small livestock, but only some thirty percent owned larger livestock.

Home-visiting patterns: Distance between workplace and the rural home varied from under two hours to over a day's travel. Just under 40 percent reported that they spent a day or more on the road when they returned to their areas of origin. Approximately one-third visited their rural homes monthly or more often, whilst one-third visited once per annum or less frequently.

The frequency distributions on a selection of personal characteristics is given in the appendix. The rationale for collecting this information was to provide a background to the study and to view retirement ideals and aspirations in proper perspective. The assumption made here was that retirement projections are shaped by past and present life circumstances as well as future expectations.

#### 1.2.4 Data processing and analysis

The transcripts of the interviews were subjected to a content analysis. An attempt was made to quantify wherever possible, either by handcounts or by coding response categories for computer-processing. Thus, the impressions gained from the qualitative analysis could partially be substantiated in numerical form. The coded data was transferred onto punch cards and processed in the usual manner on the university's computer.

### 1.3 Reporting on the study

The study is essentially exploratory, therefore reporting remains largely on the descriptive level. However, quantified data, e.g. frequency distributions and the results of the multivariate analyses, are presented where available. In Chapter 7 the findings emerging from this study are compared with those obtained in an earlier pilot study conducted in 1981/82.

In a descriptive study it might be thought appropriate to illustrate the text with excerpts from the interviews. Copious use has been made of the source material which is by far more poignant and richer in meaning than academic language. Through the quotations in the text the respondents in the survey can communicate directly with the reader.

The report is divided into three sections dealing with the present, past and future life circumstances of domestic workers. Within these sections the following topics of inquiry are discussed:

#### I The present job situation

The chain of work experience: In order to fully understand the respondent's conception of late life, it was considered necessary to first inquire into present circumstances in order to be able to link projections into the future to the past. This assumption is based on the idea that the chain of experience is one of the major factors involved in shaping individual decision-making regarding future life (Kapferer, 1972; Campbell *et al.* 1976).

Chapters 2 through 4 look into the present job circumstances, and the opportunities and satisfactions afforded by domestic work as well as the problems and grievances generated in the domestic work situation.

#### II Past job situations

Chapter 5 explores the past work experiences of the respondents in the sample.

### III The future

Retirement plans: In a third section the respondents' view of their prospects for the future are explored. In Chapter 6 the respondents in the study outline their plans for the future and their expectations of realising these plans.

Attitudes toward ageing and retirement: Chapter 7 deals with perceptions and evaluations of late life. In this section the meaning of old age and retirement is explored in some depth.

Images of retirement: Chapter 8 is devoted to the development of scenarios of return migration and retirement and the identification of reference models for retired workers. The concept of "successful" retirement is explored.

Successful ageing and retirement: In Chapter 9 an attempt is made to identify the major problems which elderly black workers face and to advance solutions for successful ageing in a society in transition.

In conclusion the implications of the findings for further research and the formulation of social policy with respect to elderly workers are reviewed in Chapter 10.



I

THE PRESENT JOB SITUATION



CHAPTER 2

ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Before turning our attention to the retirement plans of the interviewees in this study, let us first review their current work situation.

Of the 51 respondents in the survey, the majority was occupied with housework (74%) and/or garden work (27%) as shown in Table 2.1. Typically housework was the domain of the women, outdoor work of the men in the sample, but this division of labour was not rigid. Some few of the older members of the sample were in what might be called retirement jobs. For example, two Johannesburg men indicated that they had been "demoted" from higher-ranking positions in the occupational hierarchy, from chefs in a hotel to part-time and casual gardeners, respectively. One respondent was employed several days a week to do light housework and spent the rest of her time with club activities. As mentioned earlier, some cases refer, strictly speaking, to non-domestic workers, and these cases will not be reviewed in this section. These cases include a woman who was employed as a fry-cook in a fish and chips shop, and some of the cases listed below.

<u>MAJOR FUNCTION AT WORK</u>			
	Total	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Housework	41	11	59
Housework and gardening	19	32	13
Housework and childminding	14	-	22
Caretaker	10	26	-
Gardening	8	21	-
Cooking	6	5	6
Driving	2	5	-
	100	100	100
	N = 51	N = 19	N = 32

Apart from the male gardeners in the sample who for the most part also assumed some of the heavier cleaning duties the occupations of the men in the sample included

- 1 messenger/teamaker in a firm;
- 2 caretakers/supervisors;
- 1 school-gardener who also served as nightwatchman, handyman, teamaker, and supervised a younger assistant messenger;
- 1 industrial cook who worked in a canteen which served some 100 workers daily;
- 1 nurseryman;
- 1 chauffeur who did a bit of gardening in his spare time;
- 1 cook-cum-gardener, who by his own admission, spent most of his time and efforts caring for the pedigree dogs bred by his employer who operated a kennel;
- a nightwatchman/caretaker in a block of flats whose daytime duties included cleaning floors.

In many of these cases, it was difficult to ascertain whether workers were employed by individuals or by organisations. The Durban sub-sample was by design more homogeneous and included only workers employed in private households.

Regarding only the work situation of the domestics in private employment in the study, the scope of work and the responsibilities assumed by the respondents are impressive. One respondent, when asked to describe what her job entailed, resorted to counting activities on her fingers as she progressed through the typical working day:

- *"Well, there is so much. Now let me count with my fingers. I do washing, ironing, I cook and make orders, I take the child to school and fetch her and give her clean clothes and dinner and let her go and play. I then prepare supper for the family, lay the table, and wash dishes afterwards."* (16)<sup>1</sup>

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1) Numbers in brackets following excerpts from interviews identify the interviewee as listed in the appendix.

Overall the following activities were enumerated by the respondents according to a rough handcount:

Washing 28  
 Ironing 26  
 Cooking, preparing meals 25  
 Cleaning, general housework 20  
 (Flower) gardening 11  
 Cleaning windows 10  
 Placing orders for groceries/household goods  
 (includes signing for, checking, and unpacking  
 orders) 8  
 Baking 4  
 Sewing 4  
 Answering the telephone 4  
 Caring for:  
   School children 11  
   Elderly persons 3  
   Babies 3  
 Other activities (1-2 mentions): Dusting, polishing  
 metal objects, washing cars, serving meals, planning  
 meals, changing linen, watering indoor plants, occasional  
 nightwatchman duties, cooking for other workers, washing  
 dishes, arranging flowers.

Many respondents gave the impression of being extremely independent and conscientious workers. The responsible and caring attitude of the respondents may in part be a reflection of age and experience which has placed them in positions of trust. A substantial number of the respondents stated that they had already been in the employ of the parents of their present employers and regarded themselves as part of the household.

- *"I was only 22 years old when I started to work for these people.... I did all sorts of things and was accountable for everything. I have seen these babies grow to be the big men you see now. Two are married and have raised families. My mistress has asked me to take lighter work rather than leave them." (13)*

Apart from housework, a fair number of the respondents were concerned for the welfare of the pets in the household (at least 11 cases). Care also extended to the household plants:

- *"I see that the indoor plants are watered in the right way and on the right days." (22)*

Although only one respondent specifically referred to her occupation as 'nursemaid', three respondents had older children in their charge, and a further three cared for elderly members of the household on a full or part-time basis. One respondent described her child-minding duties as follows:

- *"I have to fetch the young boy from school, see to it that he washes, changes, and then prepare his meal. Then I tell him how long to play and when to return home to wash, change and do his studies." (12)*

Another respondent spoke of the trouble she was currently experiencing with the children in the household where she worked:

- *"I have two naughty schoolchildren to make sure they get breakfast every morning. Then I see that they have their school bags, lunch boxes, pencils. But I tell you they are giving me such trouble that at times I must spank them. Then I take them to their bus-stop and see them off.... Then I prepare lunch for the children whom I meet at the bus-stop every day. Before they do anything I let them open their school bags to go over every item. And if anything is missing the little ones try to bribe me and do all sorts of things to persuade me so as not to tell their parents. Then they wash, go to table and rest on their beds. Then they have a fruit drink and we go to the park till 5 p.m. I then prepare the family supper. You know when there is something the children have done wrong they are like little angels and help me wash up and put things away....." (26)*

Although this may simply be due to the fact that more detailed job descriptions were obtained among Johannesburg respondents, it would appear that a larger proportion of Johannesburg than Durban workers assumed full responsibilities for the running of the household. It is noteworthy that over half (7 of 13) of the Johannesburg domestics referred to themselves as 'housekeepers' rather than domestic workers. Johannesburg workers also appeared to have been delegated responsibilities for placing and signing for household orders, planning meals and organising children's activities. To illustrate the capable, professional attitude aired by the Johannesburg domestics, some excerpts from the interview transcriptions are given:

- *"I run the house, my mistress just gives the orders, but finds everything done." (2)*
- *"All the responsibility of running this house is on me. I make sure no ill comes to the house. I telephone my madam if something goes wrong." (5)*

- (After seeing the family off in the morning) *"Then the whole house remains in my care. I then start cleaning every corner, changing cloths here and there, putting everything in its place."* (20)

One male domestic was confident to the point of arrogance:

- *"I am as good as the houseowner, for everything in this house gets to be asked from me. I am in charge of everything and everybody except my employer. Yes, I am also in charge of him because I have to see to it that he is clean, well-fed, and his keys in their place. I cook, place orders, look into every corner of the house. I see to it that the gardener does his work and that the dogs eat the right food and get their bath and the correct dusting powders are used."* (24)

CHAPTER 3PROGRESS IN WORK

The majority of the respondents felt they had made progress in their work. (Table 3.1.) Progress was measured mainly in terms of the acquisition of job skills, mastery of modern procedures, social skills and language skills. It is interesting that few explicit mentions were made of progress in connection with monetary rewards of work. However, respondents who were disappointed with their progress indicated that their inability to save was one of the major factors contributing to their perceptions of immobility. (Table 3.2.) These findings negate the popular view that workers in lower prestige occupations are only interested in the extrinsic benefits of work.

TABLE 3.1PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRESS IN WORK

*"Do you feel you have made progress in your work?"*

	<u>%</u>
Yes	67
No	27
Mixed feelings	6
	<hr style="width: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"/> 100
	N = 51



TABLE 3.2			
INDICATORS OF PERCEIVED PROGRESS IN WORK			
<u>Progress*</u>		<u>No Progress*</u>	
	<u>%</u>		<u>%</u>
Job skills	65	Wages, savings	47
Modern procedures	27	Job skills	47
Interpersonal relationships	24	Interpersonal relationships	18
Language skills, literacy	15	Modern procedures	12
Instrumental value of work	12	Language skills, literacy	12
Wages, savings	3		
N = 34 = 100%		N = 17 = 100%	
* Multiple responses			

This is not to overlook the importance of extrinsic and instrumental rewards of work as an indication of progress among migrant workers. The respondents who had managed to save larger amounts were more likely to perceive they had progressed than others. Eighty-five percent of the respondents who had saved over R1 000, but only 57 percent of those who had saved smaller amounts indicated progress.

The perception of progress was more pronounced among the Johannesburg (80%) than the Durban (54%) respondents, among non-Zulu speakers (88%) than Zulu speakers (57%), and among married persons than others (78% versus 54%). These differences can be explained in terms of the Johannesburg group's greater opportunities to save. Perceptions of progress were similar among the Durban and Johannesburg respondents who had saved larger amounts. Regarding the marital factor it is noteworthy that among male migrants at least, marriage which involves bridewealth payments, is commonly regarded as an indicator of achievement.

Let us turn to other indicators of progress which emerged in the study.

### 3.1 Job skills and social skills

A large proportion of the respondents felt they had learnt useful skills in town and in their jobs. Skills mentioned ranged from very specific to general capabilities and included knowledge of housekeeping, cookery and baking, gardening, modern procedures such as answering the telephone and the use of household products and utensils, language skills and basic literacy, and in one case nursing. Cookery and baking were reported to be especially popular skills. Some of the respondents had come to their employers with no knowledge of basic cooking and had had to learn from the beginning.

- *"When I came here I didn't have any experience in cooking. Then my employer taught me how they wanted their food to be cooked. So that's where I learnt cooking." (32)*

A Johannesburg cook stated that he had been introduced to winter vegetables at work and he now planned to grow them at home. Two Durban domestics said they were fortunate in that their 'madams' had taught them baking skills. One of these women reported that she now baked cakes in her spare time to supplement her income. The other woman claimed she could even produce a Christmas cake. One male cook boasted that even his wife could not cook as well as he could now:

- *"I have learnt to use many spices, many different vegetables which in all my life I had never seen or heard of." (24)*

A further area of expertise which contributed to perceptions of progress among the respondents was the assimilation of the more superficial and subtle aspects of western culture and technology.

- *"When one works one does learn how the white man lives and does things." (16)*

The chauffeur in the sample amused both the interviewer and himself when he recalled how he had once practised role-playing in front of a mirror.

- *"I had to learn how to carry myself. I walked up and down along the mirror making sure that I improved my gait all the time." (11)*

The chauffeur also referred to newly acquired personal habits in response to the inquiry about progress:

- *"I bath two or three times a day, but twice as a rule. I also change two to three times a day, this also makes me feel good."* (11)

Other Johannesburg respondents similarly reported that they appreciated and made full use of the modern ablution facilities provided by their employers. Another aspect of western culture deemed worthy of emulation by the respondents concerned table manners. Two women in the sample were eager to teach their own children western table manners:

- *"I will also teach them table manners, they must not cough aloud whilst eating. They must ask for things to be passed to them rather than to pull things in front of someone sitting beside them. I have learnt a lot which has added to our culture."* (5)
- *"The whites differ from us in many ways as they eat and I have copied some of their ways for my own children. They don't stretch hands across the table. They laugh, joke and eat looking into one another's eyes. You know what, I love it for my family as well."* (16)

One domestic claimed to be an accomplished table setter and was invited to African weddings specifically so that she could arrange things at the reception according to western etiquette.

Skills which can be used at home as well as in the job are doubly valued. In fact one respondent felt dejected precisely because he had spent all his life learning job skills which had no application in his home community. A small group of respondents felt domestic work was repetitious and there was nothing more to learn in their work. This group included an old nanny who had raised several generations of children in her employer's family. Similarly, the flatcleaner/nightwatchman in the sample regretted that he had not been able to attend night school like many of his workmates. His employers had encouraged him to do so but *"I never got the time"*, he explained.

Skills learned by the respondents reflected the line of work they were in but in some cases were also dependent upon the expertise of the employers and their willingness to provide opportunities for learning new skills. One elderly housekeeper was very sceptical of the capabilities of today's "madams". She herself had been trained in the old school and felt frustrated that her skills were going to waste in her present job. This respondent had grown up on a farm where she was taught by a "Boer mistress" to bake, starch, iron, pot roast, and even to make candles. According to this respondent her "Boer mistress" was huge and could drive six mules and ride a horse. She was also quick-tempered, but a very good teacher. Later, when the respondent had come to her present employer equipped with the skills taught to her on the farm she said she had felt very critical of her new employer's housekeeping. However, she felt she was in no position to suggest improvements and resigned herself to doing things in the inferior ways of the new household.

By contrast, two gardeners in the sample gave glowing accounts of their most rewarding experiences of sharing with others the expertise which they had acquired after years of practical experience. They felt their job skills gave them social recognition which placed them on an equal footing with people in very different walks of life.

The nurseryman:

- *"I am proud whenever there are visitors (to the nursery). I show them around because I know each and every plant in my care. The plants are like my dear friends who have life. I usually go around speaking to them and they seem to hear my voice and they grow as a child grows before its good parents. After I leave this place I hope to show my people how things are done."* (6)

The school gardener:

- *"I have attended classes whenever there were lectures to the staff on gardening. Sometimes the new teachers on the staff consult me on gardening and I feel very important to have a teacher as my student."* (10)

Two respondents who came into contact with large numbers of people in their jobs said they had learnt from their superiors at work how to maintain amicable relationships with other members of the staff and the public. *"I have learnt how to make cross people smile"* said one of these respondents who worked as a cook in a workers' canteen. Other respondents made it clear that they were impressed with the drive and energy with which their employers applied themselves to their jobs. One respondent who remarked on this quality in his employer appeared to be an extremely dedicated worker himself.

### 3.2 Interpersonal relations at work, cultural values and communication skills

When asked if they had made progress in their work, some respondents replied in the affirmative and qualified this by remarking that their employers were sympathetic and understanding. Other respondents stated that they were respected at work or their work was appreciated. In many cases one gained the impression that respondents had grown in their jobs and only in later life had they gained this self-confidence.

As new arrivals on the urban scene the older members of the sample may initially have been overwhelmed by city life and the white people's habits. Under such circumstances, a tactful introduction to one's duties in a new job may have formed the basis of a working relationship which had lasted a lifetime. This is the case of one elderly domestic who told the following story:

- *"Yes I have progressed in many ways. Can I tell you about my experience when I first came here? The madam looked at my papers and she just said: "You are just for me, I have always wished to get someone who has some papers." So I was shown all around and the madam left for work. I walked up and down the big house not knowing what to do. So I started to clean up as this is something anyone can do. But what was I to cook? In the refrigerator was a piece of liver and nothing else. There was also bread, butter, and jam, which I had to share with the young boy for lunch. When the young boy came, he was so nice and said:*

*"Wait, I will be the waitress today." Then he set a tray and made sandwiches with a herb from their garden. Then he got leaves and made them into tea. We both enjoyed it. I especially liked the smell of the herb. As suppertime was nearing, I had nothing prepared. So I made the sandwiches I had just enjoyed. I grilled the liver using no fat. Then I sliced tomatoes, added this herb, and made some baked potatoes with butter. Then the tea the young boy had made for me. The boss just said: "How did she know all this?" It was now their indaba to find out how. But I knew I had been the young boy's student and I became the pet of that family. We used to share with the young boy a lot of good recipes. He was often with me to learn or I from him. This young man is one of my best friends." (12)*

For many respondents contact with the urban industrial world presented a unique opportunity. As one respondent put it: *"How can I not have progressed in a place so different from my home?"* Another respondent commented: *"One thing about work, one earns as one learns"*. One gained the impression from the survey that most respondents were eager to grasp this opportunity to learn the 'white man's ways'. In many cases acquiring job skills in domestic work automatically called for acceptance of western values. Respondents said they had learnt to appreciate many aspects of white culture and technology. However, in later life with the wisdom of hindsight, some of the older respondents had questioned the naive acceptance of novel western ways and had become more selective. Indeed, the interview material suggests that as respondents gained more confidence in the job situation they were also more likely to value their own cultural background and to wish to share it with their white employers.

In another section of the interview respondents intimated that the traditional rural African diet was healthier than a western one. Whilst many respondents conceded that western foods were varied and tasty, some of the older respondents also admitted to being homesick from time to time and yearning for traditionally prepared food. It therefore comes as no surprise that respondents were delighted if their employers also accepted traditional African

as well as western foods in their homes.

- *"I have taught the children as well as my mistress how to preserve morogo and even how to cook it." (14)*

Another respondent was delighted to learn from his employer how to improve on traditional African dishes.

Current thinking among whites may have accelerated this process. For example, one of the older respondents noted:

- *(Their) "Cooking is different from ours, but now they enjoy some of our food these days. For instance putu, morogo, and samp. They add some herbs that make it smell nicer and taste nicer too."*

Thus, whilst respondents may have experienced only the one-way transmission of skills and cultural values as young workers, there appears to be shift towards a two-way exchange of ideas as they grow older on the job. In time domestics discover that they need no longer always be at the receiving end.

This case may be exceptional but it illustrates this point well:

- *"I think I have a very special family although poor. My madam and her children are just more than money to me. We understand one another very well. When I am short of money I can be given a loan and if I have something nice which I brought from home I share it. Why can't all people be like us?" (16)*

The school gardener in the sample described one of the greatest satisfactions he derived from his work as follows:

- *"I have a garden of my own where I plant whatever I like and eat whenever I want to. When there is more than I can handle in my garden, I often pass it on to the children whose parents often send me parcels. I love this exchange." (10)*

In this connection it is interesting to note another area of cultural exchange. A number of respondents reported with pleasure that employers, and in particular their employers' children, were

making an effort to learn their language. The introduction of African languages in white schools has probably contributed to the self-confidence of black domestic workers and to mutual respect among employers and employees. At the time of the survey, some of the respondents had responded positively to this new challenge and were trying to improve the language skills of their employers' children.

- *"One thing I have also progressed in is they have learnt a bit of my language and I know theirs though not so well. We are in fact equal for as they laugh at me when I say something, they do the same in mine. Hey, do you know what! Their two children are studying my language. They can spin it like cotton. I teach them the correct words." (16)*

Another domestic worker reported that she tried to think of stories which featured the new African words the children in the household were learning at school.

### 3.3 Instrumental aspects of work

As might be expected a fair proportion of the sample measured progress at work in terms of monetary gain. Some few respondents stated that they had paid for their children's education or had built a house with their earnings. One respondent felt she stood to gain in her present job because her employer had offered her his used furniture at a bargain price.<sup>1)</sup> Conversely, a number of the Durban respondents felt they had made little or no progress in their jobs because they were earning low wages.

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1) This appears to be a fairly widespread practice. Frequent mention was made in the survey of employers selling used articles of clothing or items of furniture to their employees at reduced or nominal prices.



## CHAPTER 4

PLEASURES, PROBLEMS AND GRIEVANCES AT WORK - WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE  
TO MIDDLE-AGED AND ELDERLY DOMESTIC WORKERS

The sample was divided in its evaluation of work, slightly over half of the respondents were satisfied whilst a quarter claimed to be very dissatisfied with their job. (Table 4.1.)

TABLE 4.1	
JOB SATISFACTION	
	%
Very satisfied	22
Satisfied	33
Ambivalent	8
Dissatisfied	12
Very dissatisfied	25
	100
	N = 51

There are some indications in the survey data that competence in the job situation and opportunities to maintain regular contact with one's family contribute significantly to job satisfaction among elderly migrant workers. Johannesburg respondents who rated themselves as healthy or healthier than others were also more likely to indicate job satisfaction (71%) than others (25%). Similarly, persons who visited their rural homes at least 3 to 4 times annually were tendentially more satisfied with their jobs (68%) than others (37%).

Job satisfaction was generally higher among Durban (69%) than Johannesburg (40%) respondents, and married respondents (74%) than others (33%). These findings suggest that job extrinsic rather than intrinsic factors such as family life may influence satisfaction with one's job.

Job satisfaction did not appear to be significantly related to factors such as sex, age, education, home language, living-in, working hours, overtime, benefits, savings, and years worked in the job. It can also be inferred from the correlation exercise that job satisfaction and perceptions of progress in work are distinctively different dimensions in evaluating the work situation.

#### 4.1 Specific job satisfactions and dissatisfactions

The respondents in the study were asked to tell the interviewer about those aspects of their work which gave them the greatest pleasure, displeasure and presented problems, respectively. A long list of issues was raised as shown in Tables 4.2 and 4.3.

TABLE 4.2

FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TOWARD JOB SATISFACTION

	<u>%*</u>
Social relationships at work	19
Rewarding work	17
Aspects of living-in	15
Opportunity to learn useful or lucrative skills	15
Working independently or without close supervision	11
Opportunities to socialise outside of work	11
Opportunities to learn job skills	11
No transport problems/costs	6
Good quality food	6
Light work	6
Outdoor work	6
Well-equipped workplace	6
Resigned to working until pension age	4

Single mentions include: No "separate pots", good working hours, prestige factors, safety, opportunities to further education, no rentals, gifts from employers.

N = 47

\* multiple responses

TABLE 4.3

## FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TOWARD JOB DISSATISFACTION

	%*
Poor pay	30
Separation from family, anxiety about family	26
Long working hours	22
Strenuous work	16
Safety, security factors	14
No visitors allowed at work	14
Unpleasant work	12
Job security, anxiety about future	12
Transport	10
Unhealthy work	10
Anxiety about ability to perform on the job due to age, health factors	10
No allowance for food	8
No uniform provided	8
Poor social relationships at work	8
Aspects of living-in	6
Required to perform women's/men's work	6
No opportunities to further education	6
Required to eat from a "separate pot"	4
Poor leave conditions	4
Indoor work	4
Sleep disturbed at night	4
Rentals	4
Employer inconsiderate	4
Medical expenses not paid	4
Only working to earn living	4

Single mentions include: Faulty equipment, low prestige work, close supervision, boring work, no useful skills learnt, no opportunities to socialise outside work, irregular pay, desire to retire.

N = 50

\* multiple responses

Generally speaking, the items elicited in response to these questions on work satisfaction meet expectations. The majority of the workers in the sample are domestic workers who typically earn low wages. Therefore one would expect financial concerns to be of paramount importance. Working conditions for domestic workers are not subject to legislation or trade union agreements and therefore vary greatly. Domestic workers who are dissatisfied with their working conditions are also restricted in their job mobility. Once they are registered as domestic workers, migrant workers may experience

great difficulty in obtaining a new work permit which would enable them to apply for work which may suit their needs or work preferences better. Thus, insofar as domestic workers have little or no bargaining power in their work situation, one would expect their grievances to include mainly hygiene factors such as pay, working hours, leave conditions, and benefits at work.

It is heartening to learn that domestic workers do manage to make the best of their situation in some cases and manage to derive some job-intrinsic satisfaction from their work, even if these satisfactions concern peripheral or minor aspects of their work. For example, the rewards of housekeeping are immediate, as in the case of a perfectly laundered item of clothing, or a polished floor.

In more recent times there is increasing evidence that different aspects of work contribute towards satisfaction and dissatisfaction with work and that positive and negative evaluations of one's work situation are not necessarily related. Thus, the otherwise satisfied workers in the survey also had some grievances they wished to air, whilst the less satisfied workers felt they could count one or two blessings at work for which they were thankful.

Several local studies have reviewed the problems experienced in domestic work (Cock 1980, Preston-Whyte 1979, Wood-Bodley 1983). Therefore, it will not be necessary to give a detailed account of the results of the present inquiry into satisfactions and dissatisfactions at work. It may be more useful to highlight those aspects of domestic and related work which are of particular significance for the middle-aged and elderly worker.

One might foresee that as domestics grow older they become more proficient and competent in their work. Indeed, the data suggests that this is the case. On the other hand, elderly domestics may encounter greater difficulties in performing their work adequately, especially under poor working and living conditions. The daily stress of commuting to work, strenuous work or long stretches at

any particular task, and lack of appreciation or support on the part of employers may eventually take their toll. The present inquiry seeks to highlight the particular areas which tend to cause concern for ageing domestics and their employers.

As many issues were discussed during the inquiry, problems are presented under a number of separate headings. This does of course not exclude that many issues are inextricably related to one another. It is also noteworthy that owing to the different interviewing methods adopted in Johannesburg and Durban, the types of issues raised varied slightly between areas. The Durban interviewees tended to concentrate mainly on the types of work they liked or disliked, whilst the Johannesburg respondents gave a more general picture of the positive and negative aspects of their working lives.

#### 4.2 Satisfaction with housekeeping activities

According to the respondents, some tasks in or around the house gave them a sense of accomplishment and pride whilst others were unpleasant or affected their health.

##### 4.2.1 Washing and ironing

One respondent said she derived great satisfaction from seeing her employer's family well turned out in freshly laundered clothes.

- *"My employer and the children look clean and smart after my washing and ironing."* (47)

However, most respondents considered washing and ironing to be heavy work. In Durban ironing was thought to be a particularly unpleasant task during the hot weather. Several respondents reported problems with swollen feet and legs and varicose veins which became painful when they stood for longer periods of time. Some few women in the sample generally disliked working with water and electricity which negatively affected their well-being. One Durban respondent reported she had to carry the washing to a clothesline which was

inconveniently located across the road from the house where she worked.

#### 4.2.2 Cooking and baking

The majority of respondents welcomed the opportunity to learn cooking and baking. One Durban respondent felt she kept herself mentally alert by planning interesting meals. Respondents generally agreed that skills learnt in the employer's kitchen could be usefully applied in one's own home or to earn money in one's spare time or in late life. Cooking skills were also considered a useful reference if one was forced to seek a job with another employer.

On the other hand, respondents were reluctant to have to spend long hours in the kitchen during the hot weather. One respondent complained that the steam in the kitchen affected her eyes. The fry cook who worked in the fish and chips shop was afraid the fat which splattered into her eyes while she worked might eventually harm her eyes.

Some live-in cooks were adamant that they should be allowed to cook for themselves and their employers at the same time.

- *"I do not like to be told to eat my pap en vleis yet it is I who cook the good meals for them. You see if we get employed we are told you buy your own food so as to be given a higher wage." (20)*
- *"I enjoy cooking whatever is given to me by my mistress. I am not made to cook my own separate pot as some of my friends have to. This cooking your own pap is not fair. When the mistress dishes out, she also gives me my plate of the food I have planned and cooked. Some days she cooks and I enjoy her way (of cooking) and we joke about it. This makes me feel a member of the family." (25)*

#### 4.2.3 General housework

Some respondents felt they were extremely competent house-keepers and took pride in a clean and tidy house. A number of workers also remarked that they found pleasure in being allowed to carry out their work independently. This applied mainly to the older Johannesburg

employees as in this example.

- *"I keep the house and work alone with no one to rush me around. I feel I am trusted." (25)*

Some Durban respondents who would have preferred to do different work felt housework was boring and repetitious. Some of the elderly interviewees, and workers employed in large homes, complained that their workload was too great. Climbing the stairs in the double-storey house where she worked presented a problem for one elderly domestic working in the Westville suburb of Durban. Another domestic worker was terrified she might fall and injure herself while cleaning the windows.

- *"I am frightened to climb up the step ladder and sit on the window frame in case I fall down and sprain or fracture one of my limbs. Who will look after me? I don't think there is any benefit I'll get from here." (32)*

#### 4.2.4 Indoor/outdoor work

Some respondents reported they felt shut in while performing tasks in the house. Some few workers reported of respiratory complaints when using a steam iron or scraping down walls. One respondent who had been instructed not to venture outside the house during working hours took pleasure in washing the windows as this gave her an opportunity to see what was going on outside.

#### 4.2.5 Minding children

Some domestics are required to effectively work in two jobs simultaneously. They are child-minders and housekeepers. This represents a double burden which can cause problems for some elderly workers. The survey response suggested that many domestics shouldered these twin responsibilities mainly because children were involved or because they had been loyal servants to the family for many years. However, one respondent confided that her health was suffering from lack of sleep because she picked up the baby every night.

- *"She is not ashamed to call me at nights to come and nurse the baby. I just come up thinking of the old madam (the former employer) who needs all the rest and silence. The (young) madam is not interested in her baby she is always out. She has offered to pay me more. But is money equal to my sacrifices?" (7)*

Another respondent was frequently called in to look after the children on her day off but she did this willingly because the children were nice. The one nanny in the sample resented having to do housework while the children slept.

For an elderly domestic naughty children can be particularly trying and there were a number of complaints. One domestic recounted how the children of the house had "weeded" the vegetable garden she had tended with such care. Nevertheless, she had refrained from scolding the children. Instead she had good-naturedly invited them to help her prepare and sample the dish made from the "weeds".

#### 4.2.6 Gardening

Several men in the sample indicated their preference for gardening over housework. Gardening was a male prerogative according to some respondents. Moreover, working out of doors in beautiful surroundings was pleasant. It could be stimulating as well.

- *"I like working in the garden best because I see many people and things happening outside and I like to talk to women."* (48)

Another respondent remarked that he felt 'at home' in the garden because it reminded him of his fields at home. However, another gardener felt he worked in vain because his efforts were not fully appreciated.

- *"The garden is too big and it is of no use because there are flowers but my madam buys flowers every weekend."* (43)

#### 4.3 Sex roles in domestic work

Some workers resented performing tasks which in their own culture were assigned to members of the other sex. For example, the flatcleaner loathed scrubbing floors. (Some female respondents expressed a strong dislike for this task as well!)

- *"I hate to be kneeling like a woman cleaning these floors."* (4)

One female domestic said she felt awkward when she worked in the garden or washed the car, tasks she disliked intensely.

- *"You feel ashamed when the people passing by see you."* (39)



On the other hand, some male domestics were very pleased to have learnt homemaking skills because this greatly improved the quality of their lives in town. Being able to cook and keep house for oneself was essential for married migrant workers forced to live as bachelors in town.

#### 4.4 Accommodation

Working conditions for live-in and live-out domestics differ greatly, and this emerged as a central issue regarding job satisfaction. Live-in workers dominated in the Johannesburg subsample, whilst a high proportion of Durban workers commuted on a daily or weekly basis.

Live-in domestics may be spared expenditure on savings and transport costs and the hassle of commuting daily. Living conditions can be pleasant as a number of the Johannesburg respondents testified. Live-ins may lead integrated working lives in that they are accepted as members of their employer's family, socialise with neighbouring domestics, and get to know the people in their neighbourhood well.

- *"I used to travel every day but now that I live-in things are better. I hated the change of (employer's) face when I happened to be late. I was living in someone's house and I could not do things as I like. My mistress was a bit unkind whenever I was late but now we are very good to one another." (12)*
- *"I do not have to rush up and down on the buses and trains like other local workers. I am able to enjoy the kindness of my bosses and the children also enjoy visiting me in my room or I them in their sitting-room to watch TV." (16)*
- *"I am happy to work and stay in a suburb. I have no transport worries nor expenses. I have a room in which I sleep comfortably and a bathroom to wash as many times as I wish. I am always sure of hot and cold water. I use a quick iron for clothes. I also serve my friends as well as my employers. I have a little garden under my window. I have grown some morogo, spinach, and beans and my employer loves what I have done." (20)*

However, not all live-in accommodation is altogether satisfactory. For example, an otherwise extremely satisfied worker

felt the cold in his old age:

- *"The room where I live is too small and not so well ventilated. It is damp and has a very unpleasant smell about it during the summer months and in winter it is very cold. I have to rush into bed after leaving my kitchen. There is no heater and the room is very cold." (15)*

Furthermore, living in one's small room can become very lonely at times, a point we shall discuss later. Moreover, live-in domestics are close at hand and can be called upon to carry out extra work in their leisure hours.

- *"People who live away from their work are much better off. Look I am still working, doing my mistress a favour and doing these four chickens and some washing. Why? Because there are some visitors tonight. Unless I complain this happens over and over again." (2)*

The majority of the Durban respondents suffered from what one might refer to as the live-out syndrome: inadequate pay, and few benefits coupled with high travel costs and commuter anxiety. Some respondents worked long hours and were forced to leave children and belongings unattended. According to the respondents, travelling at night in commuter trains and buses was dangerous, particularly for women.

- *"I do not live in, transport can be a problem for someone who still has to cook for himself and sometimes one's home is broken into." (6)*

On the positive side, commuting domestic workers are still able to lead relatively normal family lives.

#### 4.5 Visiting privileges

A major source of dissatisfaction among live-in workers concerned visitors. A number of respondents deplored the fact that they were not allowed to have members of their family stay with them even for short periods of time. Finding accommodation for one's spouse or other members of the family was extremely difficult and expensive and not very satisfactory, the respondents reported. One male domestic was particularly indignant that his wife who worked nearby was

not allowed to spend her leisure hours with him in his living quarters. Given these circumstances this elderly couple was not willing to remain in town longer than absolutely necessary.

- *"I get very cross when my wife who lives not very far from me cannot stay with me or visit me. You see my wife and I are both working to finish putting our children through college. We can only come together on days off. Staying separated makes us feel the sooner we finish this year and go home the better it will be for us." (19)*

#### 4.6 Pay and benefits

In former times, almost all domestic workers lived on their employers' premises and received benefits in lieu of cash wages. Under live-in conditions it is still common practice to remunerate domestic servants in cash and kind. Therefore, live-out domestics tend to fare worse than their live-in counterparts because they forfeit these benefits to a large extent. Complaints concerning benefits were more numerous among the Durban respondents who were mainly commuters. Common grievances were that no allowances were made for uniforms, food, and in some cases medical expenses. A few respondents reported they were not paid if they were ill or were given no sick leave. Some few respondents were satisfied with the opportunities afforded to them to further their education, whilst others were sad that they had neglected their education. Some respondents also resented the fact that they were expected to do extra work without being paid. For example, one caretaker was awakened at all hours of the night, but received no remuneration for being disturbed. A domestic worker who had taken it upon herself to nurse an elderly member of the family felt she was doing skilled work and should be paid accordingly.

#### 4.7 Working hours and holidays

The respondents in the study worked long hours by any standards and a common complaint was the shortage of free time.

- *"My main problem is that my employer has got too many visitors. They come every weekend for lunch and I have got to stand from morning to evening preparing meals for them." (36)*

Respondents felt they neglected family and friends if they worked overtime. Some workers were unable to attend church services because they worked over weekends.

A few respondents, especially those living far from their families, wished to take holidays twice per annum or for a longer period in order to attend to their affairs in the home area. It is a well known fact that long-term migration to the city can lead to loss of contact with the rural-based family. Some of the respondents in the survey were typical cases of stranded workers with no family contacts.

#### 4.8 Social relationships at work

Many worker grievances are offset by pleasant social relationships at work. Whilst many respondents found social support among fellow workers in town, a sizeable proportion of the elderly and live-in workers also commented on their pleasant relationships with the family they were working for. They felt they were trusted members of the family.

- *"Once a year all the children who are now married send me some clothes or whatever they please as a thank you for bringing them up and this is done on their late grandfather's birthday. It is now like my birthday."* (25)

As domestic workers have few means of inducing their employers to respect their working rights some of the elderly domestics in the survey reported that they frequently relied on the influence of the older members of the household whom they had served for many years to induce the younger members to improve working and pay conditions and most importantly their attitude toward their servants. Some of these elderly interviewees said they had served two generations of employers and had shared many of the fortunes and misfortunes of their masters.

- *"I enjoy the company of the family I am used to. The old mistress with whom I have seen life together stays with us and will not be committed to a home."* (7)
- *"I am able to say what I dislike and am given a hearing. Whenever there is something wrong, my employers call me into their sitting-room where we thrash it out. This makes me feel real good and makes us feel we are a real family."* (2)

#### 4.9 Homesickness and anxiety about the family left behind

A satisfactory work situation cannot compensate for the anxiety and loneliness experienced by most migrant workers who must live separately from their families. Problems related to the separation of migrant families was the single most important grievance voiced by the respondents in the survey.

- *"I miss home especially on days when I have been watching what goes on at home on TV." (16)*
- *"I do long to be nearer my family when there is illness at home. It is not just enough to send money. They need on-the-spot help. The very spending of money needs experience. Now the people at home lack this. My heart is half here and half at home." (25)*

In some respects the Durban respondents who were able to commute on a daily or weekly basis to an alternative home in town or on the peri-urban fringe were more fortunate than their Johannesburg counterparts.

It is also likely that elderly migrant workers suffer more intensely from the anxieties caused by family separation than younger contract workers. It is during the later stages of life that workers tend to look forward to spending more time relaxing with their children and their grandchildren. Personal development may be projected onto one's offspring rather than oneself in later life. There is evidence to support this supposition in this study as well as in earlier research. In surveys conducted among a large number of Durban-based migrants some years ago, elderly workers in particular indicated that they were not prepared to work long distances from their home areas because they felt it was their duty to attend to home affairs and also their privilege to enjoy the rewards of family life. (Møller and Schlemmer 1977, 1979, 1981). In the present study two of the elderly Johannesburg respondents expressed their homesickness as

follows:

- *"I would love my grandchildren to come and do light chores for me as I was also taught (to do as a child). I will in turn cook for them all the goodies I have learnt. The lonely hours are in the evenings. I would like my grandchildren to surround me and then to tell them stories and they theirs. We would play quiet games. I will speak English too to show them how clever I am still."* (12)
- *"At times I feel quite isolated from my children and grandchildren who also live far away. I fear this isolation if anything happens to me during the hours when there is nobody around."* (10)

#### 4.10 Anxiety regarding job security and the future

Many respondents in the survey made allusions to job security when discussing their problems at work. For fear of losing their jobs and job-tied accommodation, some domestics were prepared to put up with abuse and strange practices at work.

- *"There is a strange thing happening of late. Some of the people I work for borrow money from me and I never get it back easily. They often give me old things in place of the money. I dare not refuse as I might lose the room I live in."* (8)

A temperamental domestic told the fieldworker that she had in time learnt to control her anger and had remained in the same job all her life:

- *"You may have an issue to raise but because you are saving your job you just stomach it until you feel anger rising like fruit salt in water. In the depth of your heart you are wielding a broom-stick over her head which of course never happens for fear of the law."* (13)

Domestic workers' performance on the job is in large measure dependent on their physical strength and stamina. Apart from willingness to work hard health and fitness are the domestic workers' main qualifications, and obviously they will do well to conserve these assets. If one interprets worker preferences and grievances along these lines it appears perfectly rational for domestic workers to prefer lighter and safe tasks at work which may also make the most of their skills. Similarly, superstitions among domestic workers that

working with water and electricity may eventually harm one's health should not be taken lightly. One might put forward the supposition that under ideal working conditions domestic workers can grow old gracefully in their jobs. There is plenty of evidence supporting this claim in the survey. However, if domestic workers fail in this respect or lose their jobs, the prospects for re-employment or finding alternative means to earn a living may be grim.

Some of the older members of the sample were already in retirement jobs in which they worked reduced hours in the same job and were earning a retainer. Others had switched from better paid, more prestigious jobs to domestic work or gardening. To cite further examples, the messenger in the sample was similarly trapped in a low-prestige job which meant no more to him than a regular source of income until he retired. The fact that almost all members of the staff gave him presents at Christmas time was a consolation, but Christmas comes but once a year.

- *"I do not like anything but my little salary. I have no choice but to stick to it. I am old and I have no one to employ me. I tried some two years ago to look for a new job and all they said was your years do not qualify you for employment. It was then that I changed my mind and decided to stay." (17)*

The chauffeur in the sample by his own admission still managed to cut a splendid figure, despite his years, but he would not be able to keep up appearances indefinitely. Similarly, an elderly domestic attempted to hide the fact from her employers that she could not cope as well as formerly.

- *"My age is starting to show. I sleep because I am tired almost every day, but I pretend all is well. I hate to make them feel I need pity all the time. I am slow to walk to the telephone and at times when I reach it the person has rung off. This has made my mistress quietly cross. This is no longer good." (14)*

For the worker who tended to pedigree dogs, the thought of growing too old to work in the kennels, which represented his life

work, was unbearable.

- *"You know what it is like when you are happy in your work. Nobody pushes you about, you are always at peace. You even feel it is wrong to grow old. (Why?) I would be told to leave my job as is happening to many of late. My cousin is 72 years old, we herded cattle together. He leaves work at the end of this year against his wish." (15)*

The nurseryman who also loved his work had actually been given notice to retire at the end of the year and was at a loss to know how to reorganise his life.

- *"I only do not like the idea of being told to retire long before I give my notice. I only feel sad that I have been asked to take my pension at the end of this year. I am still confused as to what I will do." (6)*

Other elderly workers in the sample who were approaching pension age stated their need for advice on how to apply for a pension to support them when they could no longer work.

- *"We are not sure of our pension funds and often have no one to turn to for advice. We get exploited by some clever people who ask us to pay for every bit of advice they give." (24)*

And finally, it is in late life that one feels particularly vulnerable without one's family and loved ones nearby to turn to for assistance in coping with new procedures and problems.

- *"Being away from my family worries me a lot. I am not certain what could happen to me if my wife dies whilst I am still here." (21)*

The survey also suggested that some employers who assisted elderly but otherwise competent and loyal workers to continue in their jobs as long as possible may have found it paid dividends. Most certainly the domestic workers in the study appreciated the special considerations and concern shown to them by their employers and their families, which in turn appeared to influence their attitude toward work. Examples of employers' special concern toward their older employees ranged from the installation of labour saving devices in the



home to rescheduling of their domestic servant's work programme. For instance, some respondents reported that they were allowed to complete their tasks in their own time and if necessary rest during the day. Other respondents intimated that appliances had turned washday into a field-day. One long-service domestic said she now slept in in the morning while the children in the household assumed some of the early morning chores.

- *"I live as one of the members in this family. The children actually compete in bringing me goodies. They have also chosen to prepare the breakfast every day while I rest a little longer - and their parents love it. I have always admired the way these children were well brought up."* (14)
- *"I have no problems because if I feel like resting, I can at any time during my work."* (28)

4.11 In conclusion, many of the pleasures and problems experienced by the domestic workers in the sample are common to other contract workers and persons employed to do menial work. However, the survey also suggests that middle-aged and elderly workers due to factors of age and long service, may experience more intensely the injustices, inconveniences and the poor physical working and living conditions to which many migrants are subjected. On the other hand, elderly workers may be more motivated than other workers to derive superior types of satisfaction from their simple duties at work. Housework need not be regarded merely as drudgery if it is done with pride and efficiency for people whom one has learnt to love and respect. The survey shows that elderly and middle-aged workers readily appreciate the trust and consideration shown them at work. They appreciate the easing of their workload, labour-saving appliances and pleasant working and living conditions. Most hurtful are the sacrifices which domestics must make by working away from their own families. Homesickness becomes particularly acute in later life when the majority of all migrant workers would wish to stay among their own people. In particular, elderly workers wish to fulfil their duties as grandparents. It is sad to learn that some of the domestics in the survey have become estranged from their own people, precisely because they have served their employers so faithfully for many years.

And lastly, similar to all elderly people, domestic workers in later life will question the value of their life's work and in some cases a migrant career away from the rural home will be found wanting.

- *"I am a bit unfair to my own grandchildren who see me only occasionally." (14)*
- *"We have been told to work on to the end of this year when a social sending-off party will be arranged for us. I will miss these shady trees, you know. My area is very, very hot especially at this time of year. Our animals die just like that. There is no water, no food for them, even our children starve to death for they become so sick and some die.....You know one never knows whether one was being useful or not....I must go at the end of the year. You know it hurts me." (6)*

II

PAST JOB SITUATIONS

CHAPTER 5WALKING DOWN MEMORY LANE

According to some schools of thought among social gerontologists, a person's outlook on life is in large part affected by accumulated life experiences and past satisfaction, aspirations, and expectations. It is frequently assumed that when persons evaluate their present and future life situations, they make comparisons with relevant past experiences.

If we accept this line of reasoning, we shall need to know more about the life course of the respondents in order to better understand their perceptions of the future and in particular their attitude towards retirement. Limiting the inquiry into past experience to events in the working career, some information was obtained on the job histories of the respondents.

5.1 Positive past job experiences

Respondents were first asked to describe the "best" job they had held in their lives. In response, the majority of the respondents referred to a job which they had held early in their working careers. A question concerning age at the time of experiencing optimum job satisfaction confirmed this point. Some 55 percent of the respondents indicated that they had worked in their "best" job before they turned 25. Only 21 respondents or 24 percent considered their present job as their "best" one. It is interesting that a substantially, though not statistically significantly higher proportion of persons in this group (75%) than others (49%) were very satisfied or satisfied with their present job. Domestic workers tend to be relatively stable workers and the respondents, with a median of 3 jobs, were no exception to this rule. Therefore, one might infer that the respondents had few jobs to choose from when stating their preference. In the case of the domestic workers in the sample, the "best" job frequently coincided with the first job held.

However, the figures given in Table 5.1 most certainly exaggerate the youthfulness of the respondents at the time of optimal job satisfaction, because respondents frequently indicated their age when starting rather than finishing work in a particular job. Nevertheless, one can assume that the majority of the respondents experienced greater job satisfaction in the past than in the present.

TABLE 5.1

## AGE AT THE TIME OF WORKING IN ONE'S "BEST" JOB

	%
-19 years	24
20-24 "	31
25-29 "	8
30-34 "	8
35-39 "	10
40-44 "	4
45-49 "	6
50+	4
No information	5
	100
	N = 51

At least two explanations can be offered which account for the finding that job satisfaction among the domestic workers in the study tended to be greater in earlier than later life.

- (a) Working conditions and occupation experienced in the early stages of the respondents' working lives actually satisfied their needs and aspirations at that time.
- (b) General life satisfaction in the early stages of the respondents' working lives was actually greater and in turn positively influenced job satisfaction. In this connection quality of life researchers speak of a "halo effect". In retrospect, life may appear rosier in one's youthful days. Nostalgia for one's youth and the "good old days" may cloud the negative memories of the past and distort images of earlier life situations.

Both explanations appeared to play an important role in defining the quality of "best" jobs held by the respondents.

Regarding the job factors listed under a), respondents characterised their best jobs in terms of the following:

- pleasant working conditions (such as light or interesting work; clearly defined, reasonable working hours; generous leave conditions; good living conditions; convenient and safe journey to work)
- good pay conditions
- extra benefits (working clothes, food for self and even family, tips)

In some but not all cases workers stated they had enjoyed a good working relationship with their employer in their best job.

#### 5.1.1 Social relationships

Regarding the life course or halo-effect factors listed under b), two themes emerge in the data. Positive past job experiences are frequently related to social relationships intrinsic or extrinsic to the work situation. Some "best" jobs were remembered for the spirit of camaraderie and fun which prevailed among co-workers. Other jobs afforded ample opportunity to socialise with fellow migrant workers of similar social standing outside of work. A small number of respondents reported that they had met their first lover or life partner in their "best" job. Although opportunities to socialise may be particularly important during one's courting days, such opportunities are equally valued later in life as mentioned earlier in this report.

#### 5.1.2 Personal competence

The second theme concerns feelings of competence in and control over one's life situation. At the time they were holding down their "best" job respondents reported they felt particularly competent and happy in their work role. Effectiveness in one's job may also have boosted self-esteem and feelings of being able to cope

in other life roles. For example, a number of workers felt they were better breadwinners for their families while they were holding down their "best" job.

The feelings of competence and self-esteem which are associated with one's "best" job may be directly related to the better working and pay conditions offered in the optimal work situations experienced by the respondents. A significant proportion of the sample were in fact carrying out more skilled, demanding and responsible work in their "best" than their present jobs. In the case of the "best" job being the first job held, a respondent may still have been unmarried or have had fewer family commitments than later in life. Under these circumstances the pay packet associated with the first and "best" job would stretch further than wages earned in later jobs when the respondent's financial responsibilities had increased.

### 5.1.3 "Halo" effects

It is also possible that the light-heartedness, confidence and optimism characteristic of a youthful outlook on life may have clouded perceptions of the real value of jobs held in the past. Just under one-half of the sample had started working before the age of 19 years and some 78 percent before the age of 24 years. Therefore, the first job in a working life may have held the promise of long-yearned for financial and social independence, escape from poverty, and hope for a better future. In time, the respondents may have seen their youthful hopes dashed and their optimism drained. Work may have become repetitive, tedious and less financially rewarding than anticipated. Contrary to expectations job mobility, horizontal or vertical, may have been more difficult to achieve. According to this interpretation of the survey responses, interviewees were essentially seizing an opportunity to relive their youthful aspirations before they had been frustrated or disappointed. As one respondent put it: *"The kind of job I miss is one that has some fun in it."* (21)

#### 5.1.4 Prestige factors

The range of "best" jobs held by sample members is relatively narrow and included mainly service work. This is most certainly a reflection of the limited job opportunities for domestic workers. Some respondents who felt trapped in their work situation reported that their prospects of finding another type of job were slim. Apart from domestic work, some of the respondents had occupied other positions which they frequently considered to be more prestigious than their present work. Examples include: working in a bakery, in a hotel, in a factory, in a shop, on a white farm, in a dairy, in a restaurant, in a casino, at a creche, in a nursing home, at a race course, and in a service organisation. Semi-retired part-time or casual domestic workers tended to regard their full-time domestic jobs of the past as more prestigious and financially rewarding. Some of the men in the sample had held supervisory positions in their past jobs which were more interesting and challenging than their present domestic jobs. The respondent who looked after dogs in a kennel, had once held a position as a stable hand or possibly a groom for race horses. This respondent reported he had left his previous job because he had found it difficult to live up to his reputation as a bookmaker. In fact his life had been in danger when disappointed betters who had acted on his tips, had threatened him with assault. Although his work with dogs was despicable in the eyes of some of his former friends, and earned him the nickname of "Sylvia", it was safer. Working with dogs was essentially the same as working with horses and offered the same intrinsic job satisfaction.

#### 5.2 Reasons for leaving "best" jobs

Respondents were not required to indicate reasons for having left their best job, nevertheless some interviewees volunteered this information. In some cases this information was gained from other sections of the interview. It would appear that a large number of the respondents had lost their "best" jobs, sometimes through no fault of their own. For instance, the organisation or firm for



which they had worked had closed down or changed hands and respondents had been dismissed in the process. Similarly, individual employers had moved out of town or abroad and the respondent had been unwilling or unable to move with them. Some of the oldest respondents in the sample stated they had experienced better times in the employ of the parents of their present employers. Some few respondents had left their "best" job because their relationship with their employer or supervisor at work had turned sour. For example, one respondent who had been happy for many, many years in his "best" job was instantly dismissed when he clashed with a new supervisor. Ironically, one Durban respondent related that she had left her "best" job because the pay was poor. In this connection it is noteworthy that some descriptions of "best" jobs, especially those described in objective or instrumental terms rather than in feeling tone, suggested that working life, even under optimal conditions, holds few joys for the average domestic worker. Problems with transport or accommodation had necessitated a change of jobs in some few cases.

### 5.3 Illustrations

To illustrate the respondents' trips down memory lane to the "best" job experienced in their working lives, some excerpts from the interviews are given:

- *"I was very happy I did not feel I was working. I was treated like their daughter." (29)*
- *"My best job was at B factory (a manufacturer of sweets) where I started working. I was doing packing. I was given a packet of sweets, about 2 kg, every Friday. Each Monday my sister (a schoolteacher) used to sell those sweets at school for me." (30)*
- *"I was working in a hotel. I will never forget that job in my life. I was a waitress for four years and I was given food for my children free. There were many tips." (31)*
- *"The best job I have ever had in my life was working in a cafe as a cook. All the left-overs were given to me and I didn't have to buy much food for my children. I worked there for a year in my first job. The cafe had to close down and I had no job after that." (41)*

- "I was teaching. I left teaching because the schools were very far from home. I used to walk about two hours to and fro." (27)
- "The job I liked best was working in the race course. I worked there for 9 years. I was very happy working there and I learnt to ride horses.  
(Why he left?) Our rooms where we lived were demolished and I had no place to stay. It was the first job when I came to town." (42)
- "My best job in my life was looking after children. There was no trouble in the morning, just bathe the child, feed her and then out with the child to the park. At 12.30 come back again, feed her and tuck her into bed. When she is up, bathe her, feed her and take her to bed. Then see her in the morning again. That's all." (44)
- "The second job as domestic worker working very hard: washing by machine, ironing, cooking, baking, cleaning, looking after the dogs. But they (employers) were kindly so that I didn't feel that their job was strenuous because I could relax at any time. There was enough food. There was help if I hadn't enough for my son's school fees or food at home. Unfortunately my husband was transferred." (46)
- "My former job with a very understanding family made me feel very happy. They even paid me a better wage. I never got a scolding and always got praise. My days off were real days off. I left work the previous evening to start the day after at 6 a.m." (2)
- "Cooking in a hotel has always been the best. I loved to set my menus in such a way that all or most of the hotel guests would call for me after eating their food and give me a lot of tips." (3)
- "This family took me as one of them and finally my late husband joined me as their chef. We had our sleeping quarters very cosy in the yard of my employer." (8)
- "I loved my 'plaaswerk'. I loved that koringbrood I used to bake: those mosbolletjies, that homemade konfyf and many such dishes. I was only 12 years and I had to stand on a chair whenever I had to wash dishes or iron." (13)
- "When I was still a round and attractive lady, I never wanted any better work than to look after babies. I really enjoyed this kind of work and still continue to do so. We went for strolls in the parks with the babies. We were able to meet and talk together, about where the concerts would be and of course it meant a lot for us to meet there and have fun, real fun." (14)

- "It was very interesting to be looking after a baby. I enjoyed seeing the baby grow. I enjoyed walks in the park. I also enjoyed the "stay-in" nights for which I was paid extra. Those stay-in nights were almost as good as no work. When the baby slept well there was nothing to do but sit and catch fishes, i.e. nod off." (18)
- "I was happier at the bakery. I started early but at about 3 p.m. all was over. I was also able to buy bread or confectionary at a lower price and I was also able to make lots and lots of rusks for the family and those at school. We worked hard but we were very happy. Our boss and indunas respected us. At lunch time we played mrabaraba (game of draughts) under the trees and I was very clever in this game. Then we waited for our runner for fafee (a numbers game) to tell us the results. Some would jump for joy while others frowned because "Limdlile lomchavina" they had lost. You see my work was interesting unlike here where I rise before the sun and knock off well after the sun has gone." (19)
- "I was working at a dressmaker's shop. I liked this job because I also learned a lot from it. I am a very competent woman now. In fact I can even teach people how to sew buttons on different materials, I can neaten and finish off a garment." (20)
- "My master, father to my present boss, was a farmer and he used to take us to his lands and then move to ours. He would give us the same seed. Also in winter we used to harvest for him and then ours. Once a year he would slaughter a beast for all his workers and we learnt to make biltong and save crops for the next season. He was loved by us all. We called him the "soft-hearted" one." (25)

III

THE FUTURE



CHAPTER 6PLANS FOR RETIREMENT6.1 A typology of retirement

The main topic of the interview was introduced by inquiring whether respondents had ever thought of leaving their present jobs - either to find another job or to retire altogether. Approximately one-third of the respondents had thought of leaving their jobs to retire (33%), a further 22 percent had envisaged leaving their present work to find another job. A further third of the respondents (33%) stated they were in their last job before retirement. In this group two-thirds wished to stay on in their jobs for a while, whilst the remainder wished to retire soon. Ten percent of the sample had not thought of leaving their jobs or retiring. The age of the respondent did not appear to influence the decision to any significant extent. Questions on expectations and preferences regarding timing of retirement were followed by an inquiry into preparations for retirement and future lifestyles. In this section the impressions gained from this investigation are recorded.

Before commencing with reporting one point should be made. Our inquiry into retirement plans were premature in some cases, and seemingly inapplicable in other instances. No doubt some interviewees had never systematically thought through their retirement options and plans for the future. Some few members of the sample were already semi-retired and admitted that they might never carry out their dreams of a lifetime. Nevertheless the response was encouraging, in that respondents reluctantly or delightedly managed to conjure vivid images of retirement.

- *"You are wanting me to count my chickens before they hatch. I must imagine myself very old. Who knows what tomorrow may bring? You know we blacks never worry about that. I think my children should look after me. I will continue doing some gardens as I saw in my good days. Hey, before I went to school I used to lead the span. I used to fall and rise fast or the oxen would be on me. I was staying with my grandfather helping him with his fields. Today I am the grandfather. Can you beat that. Time does really fly." (11)*

It is important, however, to note that the retirement plans outlined in this chapter should be viewed as projections of stereo-types rather than manifestations of intentions to act out such projections. We are gaining a picture of retirement ideals or scenarios here, rather than a motley collection of individual retirement plans. Furthermore, if we focus our interest on ideals rather than reality the limited number of cases in the survey is less of a disadvantage for the task at hand.

### 6.1.1 Retirement strategies

The retirement of domestic workers may be regarded as a special case of retirement among migrant workers. Certainly, the majority (82%) of the respondents spontaneously made reference to some form of rural retirement or return migration. Therefore, we feel justified in the following to speak of return migrants or returnees, as well as retiring workers.

Superficially seen, the respondents in the survey divide into at least four groups of retirees.

- (1) Early retirement - active, innovative lifestyle
- (2) Early retirement - passive, conservative lifestyle
- (3) Late retirement - rest after work
- (4) Non-retirement or urban retirement - the rural dream

A brief description of these types is as follows.

#### 6.1.1.1 Early retirement - adoption of an active, innovative lifestyle:

Workers intend to retire before 'pension age' while they are still physically and mentally active in order to devote more time to their own families and to re-enter and assume an active role in the world they left behind when they went to work in wage labour.

- *"The work I'm doing is very heavy. If I stay too long I think I won't be able to do anything for myself. My arms and legs will be aching because of lifting and my legs will not be able to support my body and I sometimes feel it." (33)*

Some of the retirement activities carried out by members of this group will draw on skills learnt whilst working in town. Returnees will be innovative in the sense that they are prepared to invest in and develop new means of supplementing their income in retirement. This type of innovation will frequently mean that returnees are grasping opportunities for personal development.

6.1.1.2 Early retirement - conservative lifestyle: The distinction between the first and second group of retirees is rather subtle, a matter of emphasis and motivation. Members of this category wish to leave wage labour relatively early in order to resume the life they left earlier. They intend to fit into and adapt to village life as they find it rather than to reshape the pattern of rural living.

6.1.1.3 Late retirement - rest after work: Some domestic workers expect to remain in their jobs almost indefinitely. In some cases workers feel compelled to augment their savings or to purchase a particular consumer item.

The prototype in this category is the domestic worker who has become a permanent fixture in the household in which he or she is employed. Some of these workers have been offered a retirement job for life or the unforeseeable future. The respondents who are referred to as 'amagogos' or grannies at their places of work are a case in point. These workers frequently feel bound by loyalty to remain in their posts until they are well advanced in age.

A variation of the late retiree is the worker who retires from his permanent job and seeks employment in a retirement job until he has reached a certain financial goal. For example, a full-time gardener may seek casual jobs rather than return to his area of origin.

The late retirees in this category expect to retire to live out the remainder of their days in the circle of their families. Retirement is viewed as a well-earned rest after a life of selfless toil. In these last days the retiree will sit back and enjoy the



company, respect, and affection of children and grandchildren.

- *"Yes but my health is against me. I have literally lost my health as a fish frier. I just have to stick to this job until they ask me to retire. I got sick in this job and the doctor told them and they know it. As long as they continue to pay my doctor's bills I will stay on. Perhaps I will get well. I have been told I have rheumatism in my legs and hands. I handle lots of cold and hot things like cold water, cold potatoes, hot fat and frozen fish." (18)*
- *"I am already pensioned and my employers have planned everything for me very well. And they have requested me to work for them till the end of our life. My contract with them is for life. Actually I feel like retiring now but really I dislike to embarrass them, because of all that they have done for me and my family...If it happened I would like to have a little garden for vegetables and look after my brothers' children whose mother died 3 years ago. My employer gave me a certain amount of money and I bought a plot and now we are arranging to build a house with 8 rooms. I would have a little garden and fortunately my employer arranged with the bank that I must have a certain amount every month and government pension." (28)*
- *"If I had all that I think covered, I would be already thinking about my retirement but I just cannot. Last year my only son was stabbed to death coming from work so I have to go on working until...well, you know what I mean, till I die." (12)*
- *"I will not retire. I still need money. I will seek temporary employment rather than to go and idle in the broiling sun. I will continue to keep my room and go out as an unregistered piece-job worker and I know I will be employed." (6)*
- *"What matters to me is that we still work well together and I get very good tips when we have special visitors. I will hate the day I have to leave." (11)*
- *"I am used to this job. In these days it's not easy to find jobs. I haven't got a proper place to live, so I cannot leave this job." (31)*

6.1.1.4 Late retirement - the rural dream: The distinction between the third and fourth categories is sometimes blurred. A small number of workers are prevented from realising their retirement ideals for a number of reasons. Some will never reach their self-imposed financial targets and will continue to work in casual jobs. Other workers in permanent retirement jobs have been caught up in the web

of circumstances and are "trapped" so to speak in town. There was a small number of domestics in the sample who had worked in town so long that they had lost their ties with their families and rural roots. Their employers had made arrangements for them to live out their days in town.

- *"I am already retired, I think with nowhere to go...You see the work I do here does not please me but because I have a home I do the best I can not to lose it. So I must work and work." (8)*

However, these workers, inspite of being "trapped" in town welcomed the opportunity presented by the interview to indulge in what we shall call the "rural dream". This pipe dream consists of nostalgia for the return to one's rural home and people and the pastoral life of pre-migration days. Childhood memories are evoked or tales of the good old days recounted by older relatives or fellow workers. Some respondents in the survey openly admitted that the "rural dream" was an escape from reality, a form of self-deception, others would not wish to admit to themselves or their audience that they were fooling themselves. Whatever the case may be suffice it to say the rural dream is a bitter-sweet pastime of many migrants trapped in town and helps to overcome periods of depression when migrant workers lose sight of their lifegoals.

- *Casual Gardener: "I am now very poor but I still have a little in the bank. I hope to go home one day. As soon as I have some good money to start life again I will go home. I have used much of my money. I have a little in the bank. I lost much by paying fines whenever I was arrested for pass offences. Sometimes the very girls I had stole from me." (3)*

#### 6.1.2 Distribution of retirement types

The small numbers in the sample do not allow us to make an accurate assessment of the distribution of the four types of retirement. However, an informed guess is as follows:

It is proposed that the early conservative retirees will be in the majority in the sample. This group conforms with a well-

established pattern of migrant labour. In particular, early returns are thought to be commonplace among women migrants.

If one makes inferences from past research early innovative returnees will be less numerous than conservative returnees. Ambition and energy may be diluted by the time the migrant retires. There is also research evidence which suggests that the innovative ideas of returnees are not as well received in the home community as anticipated. Therefore many would-be innovative return migrants become conservative in the long run.

It is hypothesised that the late retirees who return to rest will be a minority in the sample. In fact, the late retirement returnee may be a dying breed of migrant worker, a relic from the past. However, domestic workers are exempt from the regulations which govern the working conditions of the majority of black workers in town. As a result domestic workers are subject to exploitation (Cock, 1979) to a greater extent than other urban workers. By the same token somewhat irregular retirement arrangements may be more common among domestic than other types of workers, and a small number of the respondents in the survey have benefitted from such arrangements. Although these informal arrangements may smack of paternalism, domestic workers in retirement jobs may actually enjoy greater financial security than some of their fellow workers in other jobs. As an aside, it can be assumed that the number of white households who employ full-time live-in domestic servants is on the decline. It is estimated that in the foreseeable future the employment circumstances of domestic workers will gradually be assimilated to those of other urban-industrial workers. This trend suggests that informal retirement arrangements will slowly be phased out among urban workers.

It is hypothesised that the would-be late retirees who must make do with dreams of retirement will represent a small minority among the domestic workers in the study. If they are not protected by their former employers their circumstances will be very similar to the countless number of migrant workers who make some kind of living in town in the informal sector.

## 6.2 Preparation for retirement

The majority of the respondents had made some preparations for their retirement. (See Table 6.1.) If they were to retire, say, in the foreseeable future the main steps would be to contact one's family or closest relatives and give notice at work.

- *"I would first tell my wife, then we would look into our money and if she agrees then I'll tell my boss so that he can tell me how I must post my things home and how I can apply for my old age pension."* (23)

MAJOR AREAS IN WHICH PREPARATIONS FOR RETIREMENT HAVE BEEN MADE	
	%
Housing	29
Retirement income	22
Children's welfare	12
Access to land	4
Purchase of farming equipment	4
Applying for a state pension	2
Other people in charge	4
No preparations made as yet	19
No information	4
	100
	N = 51

A number of employees stated they felt obliged to assist in the selection and training of their replacement at work. Preparations included

- (1) fulfilling the financial commitments of a working lifetime and passing on one's responsibilities as main earner in the family;
- (2) securing a retirement income; and
- (3) establishing a retirement home.

6.2.1. Financial commitments

Before retiring the respondents wished to be sure they had settled their accounts and had met their financial commitments to their family. (See Table 6.2.)

<u>TABLE 6.2</u>	
<u>INTENTIONS TO DISCUSS RETIREMENT PLANS WITH FAMILY</u>	
	<u>%</u>
Spouse	33
Children	39
Sibling	14
Grandchildren	2
Friend	2
Fellow worker	2
Child's caretaker	2
No information	6
	<u>100</u>
	N = 51

Some of the respondents reported they were timing their retirement to coincide with the date when their own children or those in their care had finished their education and would be independent or in turn could provide for the family in place of the respondent. Financial commitments also involved investments in consumer goods which would secure an alternative source of income to wage labour. Popular targets for women were knitting and sewing machines, for men means of transport and farming equipment. These survey results suggest that the domestic workers in the study tended to be 'target migrants' in the sense that they were committed to a particular financial goal. Once the fixed goal has been achieved target workers typically feel entitled to take retirement.

- (I hope to retire) *"At the age of 65 when I'll be collecting my government pension and I think I'll be through with all my accounts and educating my children."* (39)
- *"I am only dragging myself to finish another year and buy a car and give my wife a big surprise when I leave this job. You know money on top of other money makes things run better. This is one of the reasons I want to work a little more."* (17)

#### 6.2.2 Retirement income

Another form of target which was common to almost all the respondents is life savings. Many respondents planned to retire once they had saved enough to be able to live comfortably on their savings. The impression is gained from survey evidence that early returnees would rely more heavily on alternative sources of income, whilst late returnees intended to live off their savings.

However, at the time of the survey one-fifth of the respondents reported that they had no savings, just under one-third indicated savings of under R500, and only 38 percent savings of over R1 000. Only one-fifth of the respondents estimated that they could live off their savings for a substantial period of time or for at least 5 years. A further 12 percent said it would depend on how savings were invested. Some 14 percent of respondents with savings stated they would not be able to live for six months on their savings.

Age at the time of the interview was positively associated with the ability to save. Only 36 percent of the younger respondents (59 years and less) had managed to save at least R1 000, whilst 75 percent of the respondents over 60 years of age had done so. Saving capabilities were significantly higher among the Johannesburg than the Durban respondents. This finding is a reflection of the higher earning power and the higher age of the Johannesburg group. It would appear that the sum of R1 000 was considered a fairly substantial sum to retire on at the time of the survey. Some 70 percent of the respondents who had saved at least R1 000 felt they could live for some 5 - 10 years on this amount if it were invested wisely. Table 6.3 shows that savings will mainly be used to supplement other sources of

income in retirement. Alternatively savings will be invested in a retirement business enterprise.

<u>TABLE 6.3</u>	
<u>INVESTMENT OF SAVINGS</u>	
	<u>%</u>
Supplement old age income	15
Business enterprises	12
Agriculture	12
Spouse to (help) make decision	10
Children's welfare	8
Housing, furniture	6
Enjoy, spend on self	6
Other	6
Don't know	4
No information	21
	<hr/> 100 <hr/>
	N = 51

### 6.2.3 A retirement home

The following picture was gained from the survey evidence regarding accommodation in late life.

Retirement among domestic workers, particularly among live-in workers frequently involves moving to a new home. Even married workers may find their homes are cramped if they are to live at home permanently. Some domestics have invested most of their life savings into securing a plot of land in the country and/or establishing a

house of their own at the traditional home. It is not uncommon for domestic workers to circulate between three residences: live-in residence at work, a township address shared with children or other relatives, and a rural home. The majority of retirees will ultimately retire to the rural destination to claim traditional rights to land. Some of the respondents in the study indicated that their families had been resettled since they had left home to work in town. In these cases the return migrants would need to invest more time and effort into re-establishing a home base. Alternatively, resettled migrants might wish to secure land elsewhere.

- *"I wish to go farming. (Do you have land?) No, we were all moved into this new location and we had to sell all our livestock and lost our plough land as well. I intend to buy land in available areas for example in Tongaat district. I have seen that location life is very unrealistic. I believe in raising my own vegetables and of course living the life of our ancestors. I have money and I would be sorry to use it in the location. All this money would be slowly, surely going back to where I earned it..... My father after his return from the war taught us how useful it was to use land. I remember that he used to dig deeper than other people. He produced good crops for that year and I still remember as a boy how my friends mocked us that our potatoes were as big as our heads." (9)*

Respondents who stated a preference for late retirement frequently indicated that they would live with their children and grandchildren and separate accommodation would be provided for them in the form of an additional room or a new structure.

Establishing the retirement home thus requires negotiation with other members of the family, possibly with urban or traditional authorities. It is also a time-consuming affair. Some respondents indicated that they wished to retire when their new home had been established, others stated they had delayed retirement because their retirement home was not ready for use.

Survey evidence suggests that establishing the retirement home is one of the most satisfying pre-retirement occupations of domestic workers. Great thought goes into these preparations on



which ultimately the quality of late life will depend.

#### 6.2.4 Illustrations

Some examples of preparations which the workers in the study intended to undertake for their retirement are as follows:

- *"I shall go to Ntshanga, and ask my grandmother to tell me what I must do in order to get my pension. If she cannot help me, I shall ask my grandfather. I hope that there are many people at Ntshanga who have retired and they will advise me if I experience problems." (50)*
- *"I shall start making my retirement plans in 3 years before I retire. I shall seek advice from my grandmother who retired 10 years ago." (35)*
- *"I have already built my own house on the plot I bought at Inanda district. I still have to pay off my machine and learn how to work it." (32)*
- *"I would tell my family. I would spend less. I would pay most of my heavy accounts so that I do not get any disturbances. I would buy myself tools for the garden. I must have a beautiful garden like the ones I see and drive through here." (11)*
- *"I think my banking account is sound. I paid off my extended house. I have tried to open a savings account for my children who are at school. I hope my wife will agree that we both run a little business of our own as well. I look forward to a time when I can get my children to assist me in keeping the books. My master told me to draw up a will for my family. I have not done this and I don't know how it is done." (11)*
- *"I'll buy new equipment for ploughing. I'll make new fowl runs and renew all that is worn out." (42)*
- *"Four years back I decided to buy a knitting machine and learn how to knit and even now I am knitting jerseys and I sell them. That will be one of the things to help me (when I am too old to work). If it happened that I fail to operate the machine through age I will employ an assistant." (46)*

#### 6.3 The role of the employer

The respondents were asked if they would give their employers advance notice of their intentions to retire and if they would share their plans with their employer or ask for advice or assistance. The results are compiled in Tables 6.4 and 6.5.

TABLE 6.4

INTENTIONS TO DISCUSS RETIREMENT PLANS WITH  
EMPLOYER

	<u>%</u>
Yes	74
Given notice of retirement	10
No	8
No information	8
	<u>100</u>
	N = 51

TABLE 6.5

INTENTIONS TO GIVE ADVANCE NOTICE OF RETIREMENT

	<u>%</u>
1 year in advance	25
6 months in advance	14
3 months in advance	10
1 month in advance	12
Retirement arrangements made	8
No notice	8
No information	23
	<u>100</u>
	N = 51

The majority of the respondents (74%) replied in the affirmative. As mentioned above notifying one's own people and one's employer are commonly considered some of the pre-requisites of retiring from wage labour. Reasons for giving notice in advance varied. A small minority of the long-service workers felt duty-bound to give fair warning to their employers so they could seek a suitable replacement. For some loyal

servants retiring from work would be akin to taking leave from life-time companions. It would require adjustment on the part of both employer and employee. Some respondents intended to give notice well in advance in anticipation of a gratuity or bonus or some token of faithful service.

The majority of the respondents felt confident that their employers would assist them in realising their plans. (See Table 6.6.) The Durban respondents in particular would rely mainly on their employers to apply for a social pension. The standard response to the question concerning retirement procedures was that one would seek to secure a government pension through one's employer.

	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Employer has assisted in the past	15	
Assistance with		
Retirement procedures (application for state pension, investments, etc.)	14	
Transport of household goods etc.	14	
Housing	10	
Advice	14	
Financial assistance	8	75
Will depend on children rather than employer	2	
Don't know	4	
Expect no assistance	8	14
No information	11	11
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
	N = 51	N = 51

According to the respondents many employers had proved to be reliable sources of advice and assistance in the past. Some respondents mentioned that their employers had provided financial assistance,

say for the education of their children. Some 10 percent of the respondents indicated that their present or former employers had started a retirement savings scheme for them and a further 4 percent stated they would receive a pension from work. Respondents also pointed out that the benefits in cash and kind and the gifts they received from their employers effectively helped them to save their earnings. Some 35 percent of the respondents mentioned at some point in the interview that they received benefits in kind at work. These included clothing, foodstuffs, contributions to medical expenses, board and lodging, free uniforms, travel allowances, and school fees. Some of the respondents' employers had assisted in securing accommodation for their employees. In view of the government's new housing policy, this role may assume greater importance in future. In this connection, it is noteworthy that many respondents stated they would turn to their employers for assistance with the transport of their household effects to their retirement home.

Judging from the survey data, some employers are considered role models for retirement. Innovative retirees, in particular, tend to expect that advice and support for their retirement projects will be forthcoming. It would appear that the migrant's employer will remain the most dominant representative of and the major link with the urban-industrial world even after retirement. A substantial number of the respondents felt indebted to their employer for sound advice and practical instruction in modern affairs. These included making financial investments, setting up a will, securing a social pension or making arrangements for a regular income in retirement. The results of the survey tentatively suggest that more affluent employers are more likely than others to act as role-models for their employees. This personal concern for the welfare of their employees may prove to be a hidden benefit for domestic workers.

Many workers will assist their employers in finding suitable successors for their job; even those who will not tell their employers

## of their retirement plans:

- *"Yes, I would inform them quite early, help to check the people he wants to employ if they look mischievous then I can also advise him. I would always remember this 'one good turn deserves another'." (15)*
- *"I am ready anytime as soon as we get someone to take my place. I will teach him and then go. I am now feeling tired and my master has told me I must try and get someone (laughs) like me." (23)*
- *"My employer is like a real brother to me. I live to please him and fortunately he does likewise. I must treat him as a true friend. I have already made suggestions and both of us are looking around for my substitute." (24)*
- *"No, more than my employer I think it should be my family. I'll inform her just to give her enough time to look for another worker." (41)*

## Some employers provide assistance with housing:

- *"They have already planned everything for my retirement. They bought a plot and the house is already built at Umgababa. I am ploughing mealies, I have vegetables and a big garden for potatoes, and cabbages. At the moment my aunt sells vegetables for me." (38)*
- *"He told me when I first started working here that if I want help I must tell him. More especially if I am not satisfied about work or if I want to retire I must tell as to help me in getting accommodation. Knowing that I have got only one son, maybe he (the son) won't be able to assist me in my plans." (47)*

## Assistance with transport:

- *"Only person I can rely on for help. She promised to help me by giving out her truck to take all my furniture home to Inanda." (32)*
- *"To get her opinion about how I'll go about with my plans. To take me with her by car if I have to go somewhere." (33)*
- *"I have even bought some old furniture from her and she said when I go home she will hire a car to take it home for me free." (37)*

## Employers will typically assist with paperwork and applying for a government pension.

- *"I have already told my employer and he is very happy at my long notice. I want him to help me find out how I must get my old age pension." (21)*
- *"Because I can't write, if there is anything to be written, she will be doing it for me." (39)*

Workers seek advice from their employers in matters of retirement. Many employers have proved trustworthy and helpful in the past.

- *"Yes, my employer was the first person to advise me about this. I was advised by him to finish my accounts first (payment for a tractor)." (43)*
- *"I do not think he can refuse to help me if I ask him. He is kind, perhaps we are nearly the same age group, sometimes we laugh at our age and family problems." (17)*
- *"Yes, because he always tells me that if I want help from him I must tell him. He knows all my troubles since I started working for him." (44)*
- *"I will tell him of my present and future plans and I am sure he will advise me and tell me what to do in case my wife dies. I do not want to be a burden to anyone. I would not like my children to take care of me even when they no longer like to do so. When my mother was almost as old as I am I had no way of staying with her. I continued to work and my wife found it hard to please her. I saw this whenever I came home. Now I don't want to be like her when I no longer have someone to care for me. I would sell my house and give my son whatever he pleases and live in an old age home. Or give some of the money to my grandson to go to school with." (23)*
- *Casual Gardener: "I think I will go to my farmer employer and ask him to fix everything for me to go home. He is old now and lives in a flat but is always happy to see me and we sit for hours and talk about our old days." (3)*

Some workers hope their employers will give them a bonus for long service or provide some kind of financial support in old age:

- *"I am now waiting to see what pension the younger lady has kept for me. (Has anyone told you about this pension?) No, but my uncle has built a beautiful home after leaving work and rumours have it that his white boss is building it for him. Well, if this will be it, then it is worth my staying on." (22)*
- *"I was too good to him and he was too good to me too. Maybe he will give me some presents or money." (27)*
- *"I think it would be a good idea so that he will give advice if necessary and so that he can get another domestic worker. I think it will be good to give him 6 months notice in advance. I shall discuss my plans with my employer because I hope that he will give me some form of bonus. He has always been helping me in solving my problems. He has been financing school fees of one of my children." (50)*

Only a small minority of respondents would not wish to confide in their employers for various reasons:

- *"I am worried she may just chase me out because she has not registered me. In fact I am as good as not working if I am not registered so what will it pay me to ask her to help in my plans." (2)*
- *"I would fear to tell my employer because I think he would be very hurt. If I was to leave, I think I would treat him in the best possible manner." (11)*
- *"No, once I let my employer know of my plans, he will give me no help, thinking I have got lots of money." (30)*

#### 6.4 Bridging the gap

The respondents in the sample were aware that retirement would require many adjustments for themselves and their families. Many problems would be solved in discussion with the persons with whom one intended to share late life. Early retirees would have to find a source of income which would support them until they became eligible for a social pension. Cottage industries, handicrafts and hawking are the means by which many women intend to support themselves and their dependents. The retirement of the main breadwinner in the family would require the entire family to reassess their needs and resources, and members of the family might be required to assume new duties and responsibilities. For many workers, the interim period between leaving wage labour and becoming a pensioner would mean a period of belt-tightening.

- *"I have told my wife and children that their lives will have to change and be steadier, poorer in all they do, as I now have to leave work." (6)*
- *"My children must start knowing that they should no longer expect money but must save or learn to make it. I would encourage them to go to the new school of gardening which has shown us that land does not die." (4)*
- *"I would start saving. I would tell my wife to also learn to save. I would encourage my wife to learn ways and means of saving by learning crafts and skills." (9)*
- *"Well, I have heard there is an old age pension from the government. I do hope by the time we both live in that house, we shall be qualifying for that pension." (20)*

- *"I will live happily because as now I am busy planning for the time when I am too old to work e.g. I am paying instalments for my knitting machine I will use during those days to come. I will make jerseys to supply them to schools nearby. Also prepare my vegetable garden, and plant many kinds of vegetables, and then sell to people nearby." (30)*
- *"I have saved and I have invested in this piece of land and I look forward to a time when we as a family can work on something that can benefit us all." (25)*

#### 6.5 Sources of income in retirement

One of the major anxieties shared by all respondents, but particularly by those who would prefer a relatively early retirement, concerned income in retirement. We have already noted that retirement is frequently timed to coincide with the date by which one hopes to have sufficient resources to provide security for oneself and one's dependents.

At the time of the interview some 57 percent of the respondents indicated that they had 1 to 2 adult dependents, and 55 percent stated they had on average 2 children as dependents. In retirement, the expected dependency ratios were similar with some 53 percent adult dependency and 51 percent child dependency. However, the concept of dependency appeared to be relatively fluid. Only approximately half of the currently dependent adults and about 66 percent of the currently dependent children were reportedly substantially or fully dependent on the respondents. Moreover, roughly one-third of the respondents indicated that they received regular remittances from their families, whilst a further 20 percent reported receipt of irregular gifts in cash or kind. Thus, it would appear that cash flows within the kinship network follow a complex pattern and dependency tends to be mutual rather than one-way. Judging from the respondents' expectations concerning retirement income, this pattern of mutual dependency obtains not only during the working life but also in retirement.

The respondents were asked to describe their sources of income in retirement. The responses gained from the Durban subsample tended to be more systematic and exhaustive than those obtained from the Johannesburg respondents and are therefore especially useful for the



purpose at hand. The evidence shows clearly that retirees will seek to spread their risks and rely on multiple sources of income using as many skills, resources and markets as possible (Table 6.7). In reply to a question concerning the main source of income Durban respondents stated they would depend most heavily on government pensions because "it's regular and it's lifetime" as one interviewee put it, whilst their Johannesburg counterparts regarded their savings as their main security in late life.

TABLE 6.7

RETIREMENT INCOME

	<u>%*</u>
State pension	61
Savings	47
Support from children	33
Sale of vegetables	28
Sewing	18
Poultry farming	12
Family income	12
Hawking activities	8
Private pension	8
Odd jobs	8
Disability grant	6
Child-minding services	6
Handcrafts	4
Sale of beer	4
Sale of livestock	2
Rentals	2
Herbalist	2
Life insurance	2
Retirement job	2

N = 51

\* Multiple responses

In most cases retirement income will be shared with those persons with whom one will live in retirement. Therefore, spouses, children and grandchildren are expected to become the major beneficiaries of retirement income. In some very few cases the respondents said they would be the sole supporters of dependents, usually of grandchildren or other related children whose parents had died or abandoned them.

Within the loosely structured retirement household cash dependencies will be mutual. Many respondents expected to receive regular support or gifts from their working children. At the same time many retirees expected to assume a caretaker role for their grandchildren involving cash expenditure.

Whatever cash income is available to retirees will be distributed. Therefore some of the respondents were concerned that their relatives should be thrifty and make their savings last as long as possible. Whilst some respondents stated a strong preference to remain financially independent, others were prepared to let younger members of the family assume their financial responsibilities in future.

- *"I won't support them (grandchildren), I will just give them money because they are my blood relatives." (37)*
- *"(I will have) only my grandchildren (to support), partly just because I will stay with them and their parents." (44)*
- *"I have educated my three children, two are married to prosperous partners, my youngest son can rocket to the sky following the bursary he got. I have worked and saved. I am old but I feel I will not be a burden on my children." (5)*
- Male domestic worker: *"I'll live on my pension and my daughter will be supporting me. I'll be her dependent." (48)*

## 6.6 New roles in retirement

### 6.6.1 Typical retirement activities

A list of typical retirement activities was compiled from respondents' projections of life after finishing work in town (Table 6.8). Women typically expect to attend to domestic chores in and around the house. Many of the activities are income-oriented. In some cases skills learnt whilst working in town will be put into practice in old age.

TABLE 6.8

RETIREMENT ACTIVITIES

	<u>%*</u>
Gardening	47
Growing crops	14
Poultry farming	14
Ploughing for other farmers	6
Animal husbandry	2
Knitting, sewing, crocheting	22
Handcrafts	8
Looking after grandchildren	16
Retailing, hawking	14
Baking	6
Visiting friends	6
Visiting children	4
Church activities	6
Sangoma business	2
Retirement job	2
Resting	6
Playing <u>fafee</u>	2

N = 49

\* Multiple responses

The men in the sample will mainly pursue or supervise agricultural activities. Late retirees will confine their activities to gardening and attending to chores around the house. Most retirees expected to have more time to socialise, to visit with friends and

relatives and to spend more time with their grandchildren. The survey results show that one of the most common activities among retirees and their families is gardening. Most retired persons expect to grow vegetables and fruit for home consumption. If there is a surplus which can be sold, the household is assured of a further source of income.

- *"I'll make use of my sewing machine. I'll sew children's clothes and aprons and sell them. I'll be doing the mending for my neighbours' clothes and get money. Apart from that I will have to collect the disability grant.\* I will buy the fruits and vegetables and sell them at the higher prices in order to get the profit." (The daughter was crippled in a car accident.) (20)*
- *"I will work as a hawker and sell vegetables and clothes. At the age of 54 I do not think I will be able to do physical work." (26)*
- *"I'll go and live in my 4-roomed house. I'll apply for a hawker's licence. When I have it I'll buy clothes for men and women from the wholesalers and go about selling them. I'll also buy sweets and peanuts and sell them to the children around." (33)*
- *"I shall make doormats and sell clothes." (35)*
- *"I hope for the best. My son is a teacher and my daughter-in-law too is a nurse. I will look after their children. Prepare a vegetable garden so that they won't spend money buying vegetables. A bit of crochet such as baby sets and give them to my daughter-in-law to sell them in the hospital. Have some fowls and collect eggs for my grandchildren." (37)*
- *"I will be busy ploughing because I don't want to get sick, as I am working very hard, I'll continue till I haven't enough strength to do it." (38)*
- *"I'll be crocheting some doylies just to make my hands move. Otherwise I'll be having a full rest." (41)*
- *"I will buy peanuts, sweets, oranges and apples and sell them to the children at school because the school is just next to my house. I will spend most of my time cleaning my house and preparing my flower garden." (44)*
- *"When I'm too old to work I will live on government pension. I'll ask parents who want to work but haven't got people to look after their children to bring them to me to look after them, 1-3 years old and they pay me monthly. Five children and charge them R15 per child a month. From 7 a.m. to 5 p.m." (47)*

- *"I'll have my rondavel in my daughter's land. I'll be walking around visiting my friends and neighbours, drinking Zulu beer....I'll be my daughter's dependent." (48)*

### 6.6.2 Innovators

Many of the responses supplied by the interviewees testify to their spirit of enterprise. Many of the women intend to set themselves up as knitters or seamstresses in retirement. Others will obtain licences to hawk goods in their home areas. Some women will prepare foodstuffs for sale. At least two women intend to run a childminding service for working mothers. Some of the women in the study will tap new markets. It is true that many of these undertakings are not novel or innovative in the strictest sense of the word, but it will require courage, skills and determination to carry these ideas to fruition.

Some few authentic innovators are represented in the sample, such as gardeners who wish to pioneer modern agricultural methods in their area.

For the most part, innovative ideas are limited to playing traditional retirement roles with greater insight and resourcefulness gained while working in town. For example, lessons learnt in nutrition or childminding will be passed on to one's own family.

- *"I want to be a small farmer and see my sons and daughters raise the food by using their new way of gardening. My other brother works for a hospital where twice a week they are shown this method. I have been twice to this class to see what was being done and this is really something new and surprising....I hope my children will not let me down but will learn. I will be around to help as to encourage them in their work....I have already sent two of my sons to learn this way of doing things. This is a step forward in my life. At the hospital women are trained to plant seeds in boxes. The men make the boxes and dig the soil. All learn to make manure and so it goes. I look forward to being the supervisor of my project soon after my retirement." (4)*

- "I hope to carry on with gardens although the heat in that area has very little to encourage one with. I feel I have learnt enough to be able to use whatever I have to the best of my ability. I will try to make a greenhouse from which I can also serve my people. (What do you actually hope to do?) I will teach others so as to help me. I will try to meet the chief's councillors to ask them to recognise my skill and perhaps interest the chief. My boss is also keen for me to carry out these ideas. He promised to help me." (6)
- "I would go home more often before I retire to study business prospects and then decide. I think I would like to bake cakes, but not fat cakes. They are too expensive with oil, fuel and other ingredients. Cakes differ from the dearest to the cheapest, yet they can be very tasty." (2)
- "I have to ask my mistress to give my grandchildren some ideas about what they should do to have a sound education. You see my mistress' son had special toys and books that helped him to be faster than other children at school." (12)
- "I do not hope to do any extra business. I will live on my money and on the vegetables we so love to plant with my wife. You see the pots and pans I have been lifting have finished me...My wife is not working very hard. I only encourage her to work on our piece of ground for home vegetables. You see I have learnt a lot about good food while working here. Whenever I go home I buy a lot of seed and we both try it in our garden and we enjoy eating our vegetables." (23)

### 6.6.3 Conservatism and adaptation

Although some of the innovators in the sample will leave their stamp on their retirement community, the majority of retirees expect to pick up the threads of a life they left long ago. This notion was detected in the survey evidence. Some members of the sample reported that they had had little or no experience of living in their chosen retirement home. They expected to feel their way and to adapt to the circumstances they might find there.

Migrancy has also forced the families left behind to assume new roles. Returning migrants may find that other persons are carrying out their traditional roles with great competence. A willingness to assimilate to conditions at one's original home, to learn from others, and to make oneself useful is evident in some of

the survey responses. It is interesting that in some instances traditional sex-roles tend to become somewhat blurred in the process.

- "I don't think it is necessary to make preparations. I shall go to Ntshanga which is my home. I must make sure that I have saved enough to support myself until I die. I must establish my home where I shall stay until I die." (50)
- "My wife knits and sews and she sells to schools and the villagers. People come to her to place orders, fetch them and in this way she has not far to go. Why must she want to go about when I am to come home...I don't want to be involved in her business. I have always done so. I give her the money, I bought the machines for her. I sent her to school to learn. I am a tired person, I want to rest." (21)
- "I will stay home for six months resting. After that I hope to start a kind of business that will keep me as near as possible to my wife so that we work side by side and look at our sons growing and helping us and we recalling some of our hard times. I would become a small businessman perhaps buy and sell goods made at home or secondhand bought or collected. I will travel to all the neighbouring areas selling for money, maize, fowls, call it what you please with my wife alongside me. She as the shopkeeper and I as her driver and of course protector. Hey, I love this business. I saw it with the Machine Madola store. This Madola got so rich, I think I will also do this while the boys (schoolteacher, agriculturalist) carry on wherever they are. I will feel I am a umwumzane." (19)
- "My wife has worked very hard to make us have at least a span of oxen and a cart is drawn by one horse which if all goes well will have a foal soon. I tell her what to do with the money whenever I go home and she has very special money-making ideas. She bought a knitting machine and a sewing machine which she uses and she sells her goods to schools. She does childrens' garments and wedding garments. She also knits for babies and at times for schoolchildren and for adults but she likes to sew for the young. These garments take less material but bring in as much money as clothing for grown-ups. My wife is looking forward to the time when we can go it together. I know she has quite a bit on her hands... I now see people are starting to be jealous and wanting to upset my wife's good efforts. I hope to be my wife's student, I have a lot to learn from her (laughs)." (17)
- "I am old and I think I must go home and rest. I will wait to see what my wife intends to do. She is still very young and full of ideas for business. All I hope to do is to give her my financial support and to do light work while resting. I have no special plans but my wife has indicated that my return home would make things easier for her to be able to move around doing her thing with someone reliable to stay home. I wonder if this will work?" (24)

- *"I do not hope to just go and sit down. I'll go around, see a few old friends and study what they do. If they influence me in a way then I will consult with my grandchildren and wife. It will be something that will not use too much energy like selling of eggs or handmade garments and people come to you and not you to them." (25)*
- *(Plans to live with boyfriend) "I will settle down first and then study what other women do and then decide for my future. But what I think I care for is selling children's clothes, secondhand or new ones, and later on move onto something else. Perhaps by this time my husband will have joined me and perhaps will come with new ideas too." (20)*
- *"I will help my aunt and son with whatever they have in mind about our little site. My aunt already has chickens and it would not be a bad idea to add more chickens and perhaps do some gardening although we are plagued by long spells of drought. I think some of the activities that take place in the area are unknown to me as I am here but I have told myself that I will look on and measure myself and where possible join in." (16)*
- *"I cannot say there is anything special I have arranged because my old man and I still make ends meet. He is at home ploughing, selling, and storing some food for dry months so when I come home we put together what I have also earned and according to our custom all rests on him." (13)*
- *Male gardener: "I think my daughter-in-law needs me more than my sons. Housework for so many men can be a bore so I will interest myself in the kitchen, be a chef, clean and do some ironing whilst I continue with the garden." (10)*
- *"I am going to discuss it with my wife. I think we men can at times listen to our women and by so doing get the better side of things....I will see as soon as I get home." (21)*

#### 6.6.4 Grandparenting

According to the survey response retirees look forward to leading a family life after long years of service in town. Migrancy has deprived them of living with their loved ones. They wish to become full members of the family group and endear themselves to their spouses, children and grandchildren.

- *"I am sure my last days will be full of joy. I will be their gardener, cook, painter and I look forward to helping wherever I can." (10)*

Some retirement projects are planned as family undertakings. Innovators



know that they must gain the confidence of their families if they are to succeed.

Most important of all, retirees look forward to being good grandparents, advising their children and sons- and daughters-in-law in matters of bringing up their descendants. The surveyed women in particular felt very strongly about this role. According to Brindley (1982: 73), the role of the grandmother in educating the younger generation is very pronounced among the Zulu. As Zulus made up the majority (68%) of the sample, it is small wonder that the late retirees in the sample felt particularly deprived of their rightful role in society. Some of the nannies and the older women in the sample were called gogo (granny) at work and yearned to fulfil this role among their own people.

- *"I hope to live with my grandchildren in our little home. I picture myself having a garden of vegetables with my fruit trees. I also imagine myself with the village women learning something. One thing I will not accept is to be ordered around. I want to do things in my own time and pace. I will at times visit my employer and ask her on how to spend some of the money. Ask her to teach me to make some of the things I used to see her do in her home so that I can teach my grandchildren. I will join self-help groups. I do not want to be in a home of old people. My home is where I belong... My grandchildren and my youngest son will keep close to me. I hope for lots of fun and affection. I hope to use my hands. I will keep as close as I can to my girlhood friends. I will try to do my own things as best I can. (Probe: Seen someone do this?) Yes, most white grannies feel free, work, walk and visit one another. I will bake cakes and show my grandchildren ways of making easy money whilst eating. I would also try to play games with them, I will have more fun daily." (5)*
- *"I will enjoy my savings together with my grandchildren who are big and already clever. I have a special granddaughter who is a talented singer. She plays the guitar and sings her own music. I have actually made out my will to her." (7)*
- *"I hope to spend my days at our little stadt where we plough, pay no rent but enjoy to be alive with our chiefs around. I will be glad to spend my last days with my family. I will be so glad to be now called 'gogo' by those born of my own children now." (13)*

- *"For the first six months I want to just rest. I will play with my grandchildren. I will tell them stories and cook the meals I saw improve the health of the babies I once nursed. I will be a sweet granny. I will do as much for my grandchildren as I did for the white ones. I will join the women's club to learn and try to reproduce what they teach me to my family." (14)*
- *"I have my grandchildren. I wish to spend more time with them. I want to tell them stories and they tell me theirs. I want to cook good meals for them. I will look after the home when the mother is at work and they at school. When they come back from school we must do some gardening. I also hope to play a lot with them as my mistress would teach her son. I can also knit so I will make winter jerseys for the children." (12)*

## 6.7 Conclusions

The survey results demonstrate that domestic workers hold clear views of life after retirement which are most probably very similar to those held by migrant workers in general. In most cases retirement from domestic work will coincide with return to one's rural origin. Most workers look forward to being reunited with their families and to fulfilment as grandparents.

Major preparations concern the securing of a retirement home and an income. Some workers delay retirement until they have built or extended their house, have accumulated enough money or have organised an alternative means of earning a living. Tendentially, early retirees intend to pursue retirement activities which will provide an income for themselves and their families until they become eligible for a social pension. By contrast, older retirees are more likely to live off their savings or to rely on support by their children.

The respondents in the survey will rely on a variety of sources of income in retirement, the most important being government pensions, savings, support from children and the sale of handcrafts and home produce.

A number of the respondents will make good use of skills learnt in town and their savings to provide a retirement income. Some returnees

also plan to experiment with modern methods of agricultural production.

Only a minority of the respondents will receive a regular stipend from their former employers. Employer contributions to the welfare of their retired workers varies and ranges from assistance in finding accommodation, financial assistance, transport of household goods, to advice in obtaining social security. Retirement income will benefit the extended family, and retirees will give as well as receive support in cash and kind.

The main reference persons during the transition period between leaving wage labour and reintegration into rural life are the members of the extended family, with whom one will live in retirement, and the employer. The retirement of one member of the family will affect all others and suitable arrangements must be made. The majority of workers will notify their employers in good time about their plans to retire. In turn, employers may be expected to provide some assistance with housing arrangements, transport, and securing a retirement income, usually in the form of a state pension. Most workers have only very vague ideas about the procedures involved in applying for a social pension. This is an area in which outside help is sought, mainly from employers. In some few instances early retirees, who will already have returned to their rural homes before reaching pension age, might also consult with other pensioners, tribal authorities, or domestic worker support organisations. It would also appear that many early retirees do not know at which age they will become eligible for a state pension. In fact, a number of the elderly respondents in the survey could not give a precise definition of their age in any case.

There is survey evidence which suggests that some of the migrant workers in the sample will not return-migrate but will live out their last days in town. Some of the respondents' employers have made arrangements for their servants to remain with them until they die. This is particularly the case with live-in domestic workers who have lost contact with their own families. Other

employees who are retired will continue to seek casual work in town and may never return-migrate in the end. This group of workers tended to respond to inquiries about retirement plans with a pipe-dream of rural retirement. No doubt their idealised pictures of retirement will only materialise in rare instances. Nevertheless, the rural dream provides comfort and dignity to older workers who are struggling to keep body and soul together in late life or who are completely dependent on their employers for their welfare.

Finally, retirement plans are aimed at providing for the well-being of retired workers and their families. It is true there are many anxieties regarding financial security in old age. But essentially, the retirement phase of life is a period of life to look forward to. The respondents in the study stated they wished to enjoy the advantages of old age. Positive aspects of ageing include: freedom from a strict work routine, peace and quiet, personal development in areas of one's choice, close contact with one's family, being a loving grandparent, time to socialise with friends, and being accorded the power and respect due to an elderly person. Survey findings suggest that a substantial number of retirees are determined to remain independent in old age and will wish to contribute to the welfare of their families in retirement. It is their intention to share their life savings or invest them in a retirement project which will benefit the family as a group. In exchange, support from children is considered a token of respect and gratitude for a lifetime of work.

CHAPTER 7ATTITUDES TOWARDS AGEING AND RETIREMENT7.1 The ideal retirement age

Ideally domestic workers should retire between 50 and 69 years of age depending upon individual health, inclination and financial commitments. This is the general view of the respondents in the survey (Table 7.1). Just under one-fifth of the respondents thought domestic workers should retire before the age of 54, and 40 percent favoured retirement before 60 years of age.

TABLE 7.1THE IDEAL RETIREMENT AGE

*"At what age do you think people doing the same type of work as you should retire?"*

	<u>%</u>
50 - 54	19
55 - 59	21
60 - 64	35
65 - 69	21
70 - 74	4

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 100

N = 47

Views on retirement varied among the different sex, age and education categories represented in the sample. The fact that 76 percent of the men but only 50 percent of the women in the survey fixed the ideal retirement age at 60 years or above is most probably a reflection of the view that women should retire at an earlier age than men. Furthermore, 82 percent of the respondents over 60 years of age but only 47 percent of the younger respondents were in favour of retirement at

age 60 years or above. One might make the supposition that age had "caught up" with the older respondents and influenced their views on retirement. Although numbers were small, 79 percent of the respondents with Standard 6 education but only 46 percent of those with a Standard 2 education or less were in favour of retirement at 60 years or above.

Education differentials might be explained in terms of differential attitudes toward work in general. In this connection, it is worth noting, that neither job satisfaction nor perceptions of progress in work was associated with differing views of the ideal retirement age. However, it is perhaps telling, even if small numbers are involved, that a significantly higher proportion of those who were in favour of a 60 years plus retirement age (93%) than early retirement (68%) also felt that older people had an important role to play in educating the young.<sup>1)</sup>

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- 1) A pilot study which focussed on old age and retirement issues was conducted among 98 male Durban workers in 1981/82. The sample consisted of roughly equal numbers of contract and permanent urban workers, and men below and above the age of 40 years.

The question was posed: "*At what age do you think men should stop working in town?*" The median ideal retirement age was fixed at some 57 years, and some 62 percent recommended retirement ages of between 50 and 64 years. The wording of the question was partly responsible for recommendations of early retirement, but the results are by and large consistent with those reported on above. In the pilot study the fixing of the retirement age was based on factors such as frailty (31%), desire to rest from work and enjoy the fruits of labour (22%), convention (11%), personal preference (8%), desire to pursue own interests (7%), and family life (4%). Multiple responses.

Similar to the results emerging from this study of domestic workers, perceptions of the ideal retirement age in the pilot study were associated with age, and education. Moreover, the relationship between views on the ideal retirement age and job satisfaction, and progress in work, respectively, was more pronounced. The data also suggest that contract workers as a group might wish to retire earlier than permanent urban workers whose opportunities for occupational mobility are greater. This view appears to be consistent with those emerging in the study of domestic workers.

The results in full are as follows: The groups in favour of an ideal retirement age of 55 or more years were the older men in the sample (66% of the over-forties vs 46% of the under-forties), the better educated (70% of those with at least standard 7 level of education vs 39% of those with standard 3 or less), the higher earners (76% of those earning R350 or more per month vs 36% of those earning R249 or less in 1981/82), the permanent workers (69% vs 56% among contract workers), those who had made progress in work (64% vs 42% no progress), and those who were satisfied (64%) rather than dissatisfied (49%) with their jobs. All differences but the last are statistically significant at the 0,05 level.

Respondents generally favoured an early retirement age which would allow domestic workers to return to their families while still in good health and motivated to lead active lives in the home community.

The respondents in the sample who were in favour of late retirement were exceptions to the rule. In some cases they were referring to themselves who were sprightly despite their advancing age.

- (Favours retirement at age 75 years) *"So as to have a short time to live after you have retired, then you die."* (48)
- *"I have seen old people go on working like my husband who is now 75 years old but still strong. So I will say 65 years for the weak ones and 70 for those like us."* (13)

Some few respondents thought that retirement age should coincide with the age at which workers become eligible for some kind of pension.

- *"She must get her pension at the age of 50 years if she is unhealthy."* (49)
- (Recommends retirement at age 60 years) *"Most people prepare to get their pension at sixty years."* (34)

#### 7.1.1 Arguments in favour of early retirement

Broadly speaking three major arguments were put forward to support the reasonably early retirement of domestic workers: health, family life, and motivation.

7.1.1.1 Health: Domestic work is physically strenuous and cannot be performed well after a certain age. Alternatively, it was felt that domestic workers should not remain in service after a certain age as it would be detrimental to their health.

- (Ideal retirement age 60 years) *"Most people get tired and unhealthy at this age."* (36)
- (Ideal retirement age 55 years) *"Because it's a tiring job physically and mentally. Water and electricity makes your nerves feel weak."* (39)
- (Ideal retirement age 50 years) *"Because their feet get swollen when they stand for a long time."* (42)

- (Ideal retirement age 54 years) *"Because at this age they cannot do heavy work and it is not wise to work at this age. She must retire since she cannot manage to wake up early every morning."* (26)
- *"This work is very strenuous. When I think of my days as a strong young woman not feeling any strain. Working for hours meant nothing to me. I never groused or understood why one had to have a day off. Yes it takes a long time before one starts understanding. I recommend that people doing this work should be encouraged to retire soon at an age when they can still be useful."* (5)

7.1.1.2 Family life: At a certain age a migrant is more useful to his family if he works at home than in the city. It is recommended that workers return home whilst they can still enjoy family life.

- (Ideal retirement age 65 years) *"It is wise to move out at an age when the children can still have fun with their father and he in turn can be useful to them."* (4)
- (Ideal retirement age 59 years) *"Because I am too old to do any supervised work."* (51)
- *"I think 65 years for work and the rest for the home is just what I think I would accept. You see a man should still be able to plan sensibly too. This gains him the dignity accorded to a deserving father."* (19)
- *"I think 58 or 60 is just right. You see, once a man leaves his home for years and comes home only once a year he is finally as good as a stranger. He has a year or more to readjust himself again, unless he has brilliant sons or helpers."* (9)
- *"I do not think people should wait too long to retire. It is great to go back home and still enjoy life with the people at home. You see some work until they are useless where they work and back home they are a burden."* (28)
- *"I think at 60 or 65 years. You see we leave home to work in cities as soon as we want to pay lobolo for our wives. So at a very early age we leave our homes to work for all the time. And as soon as you are married you discover there are additional needs in the home so you continue to work almost all your life. You are almost a stranger in your own home because you come for a very short time and then back to work. We never enjoy our family lives when our wives come for some special visit. They may not stay with us, they are arrested if found at our workplaces. So one should reserve some of one's energy for one's family."* (23)



7.1.1.3 Motivation: Early retirees are likely to become active members of their rural community after returning to their homes. Late retirement tends to retard personal progress and renders the retiree useless to his family and community. In terms of the conceptual framework introduced in this paper early returnees are more likely to become innovators and inject new life into their home communities, whilst retirement returnees, especially those who return in poor health, tend to become a burden to their next of kin. Furthermore, as one respondent pointed out, an early retiree may still be re-employable in the case of not being able to adjust to rural life.

- (Ideal retirement age 56 years) *"You see at this age, if one is not ill, he often comes back with good ideas of his city experiences which he introduces into his family which finally changes their mode of life. But if he stays too long and comes back sickly no one ever gets any good out of him and he becomes too concerned about himself and annoys those who have to care for him."* (21)
- *"I think they should retire at 50 years when they are still men not coffins. I remember my brother-in-law who retired when he could still move around and do so much with his tractor. He actually drove it, repaired it and is of course still a hard working healthy man. His sons admire him. They are fine boys and are already helping their father."* (16)
- (Ideal retirement age 65 years) *"It's wise to retire at this age. At the age of 70-80 a person won't do a thing at home. Instead she or he will live on an old age pension, that's all, and not think of something else to do such as sewing or preparing a vegetable garden for home use or to sell."* (43)

One last point is of importance. Retirement while still in good health and able to participate actively in family and community life as advocated by the respondents also implies dignity in late life. A migrant must return in time to become a respected and loved member of his or her community.

### 7.1.2 The timing of retirement

A further question was posed: *"How can we tell when people have reached the time when they should stop working and retire?"*

The responses received in answer to this question fell into three broad categories: Frailty (51%), poor performance at work (14%), and poor motivation (6%). These results compare favourably with those obtained in the pilot study.<sup>1)</sup>

Frailty: The majority of the respondents painted a very biased picture of the frail aged who were in no fit state to work. In the opinion of the respondents, movements were slow and deliberate, the hands unsteady, speech slurred, bones brittle, eyesight poor. These elderly people were forgetful, moody and irascible, tired easily and talked to themselves. Such a frail or ailing person needed loving care. It would be shameful to still be in wage employment if one suffered such disabilities.

- *"You know what, I would never like to lean on my stick whilst still being in employment." (16)*

Poor job performance: A less extreme view was that a person could no longer hold down a job if performance was impaired by age.

- (She should retire) *"When she fails to finish her work in a specified time." (39)*

Job dissatisfaction: A minority view referred to motivational aspects of work. When a worker became dissatisfied with working conditions and started to grieve for his or her home, it was time to leave work.

- *"They sort of cease to enjoy life the way they used to. They miss home, have many complaints or just work because they feel they are still employed." (12)*
- *"When they are dissatisfied with their work. When they have to travel far to work. When they are unhappy and get no assistance with preparations for the next day. When they get no love from the family for their efforts." (5)*

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1) In the pilot study multiple responses to the question: "How can one tell when people have reached the time when they should stop work?" fell into the following major categories: Frailty (37%), chronological age (20%), physical appearance (17%), demotivation (9%), long service (6%), ill-health (6%), sufficient savings (4%).

## 7.2 Defining old age

The concept of ageing and old age is relative and difficult to define. Therefore, it seemed appropriate in an exploratory study of ageing and retirement to get respondents to outline their personal conception of old age.

The respondents were asked the question: "*What age do you think of when people talk of older men and women?*" The interviewer was required to write down spontaneous answers and then to repeat the question, this time asking for a separate age definition for each sex. The Durban interviewers were briefed to probe for a response expressed in terms of chronological age.

Definitions of old age in terms of chronological age ranged from 55 to 85 years (N = 33) for men, and from 50 to 85 years (N = 38) for women. On average men were considered elderly at some 70 years, women at some 52 years. This age difference is significant.

Estimates of chronological age as a criterion of old age were systematically obtained from the Durban respondents. According to the fieldworkers' reports the main criterion for judging persons to be old was based on factors such as sexual activity and fertility. Retirement or pension age was an alternative criterion.<sup>1)</sup> By these standards women might be thought to age "faster". In this connection, a number of the Johannesburg respondents volunteered the opinion that women should retire earlier than men, because they worked harder. This argument is consistent with the research findings on ideal retirement age reviewed above.

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1) This may have been the principal criterion adopted by respondents in the pilot study. The average age associated with older men in the pilot study was some 57 to 62 years.

- *"As a matter of fact women have to be considered to retire earlier, because they, according to our customs, work the hardest and carry more responsibilities." (2)*
- *"Older women become so as a result of strains of life. But in reality women are still strong at the age of 50 years. When one takes into account of their having to bear babies, draw water and wood, build houses, plough land, harvest, store food, raise their children, they deserve a very early retirement say from 55 years down." (4)*
- *"Women should be considered to retire earlier. They are mothers, and children really need them next to them. It is a pain that mothers run up and down trying to help the family. I would if I could let them work for a very short while, if I could have it my way." (17)*

The responses obtained among the Johannesburg respondents were less specific about chronological age, but the impression was gained that by and large the Johannesburg respondents would agree with their Durban counterparts. Johannesburg interviewees were also of the opinion that health factors and constitution influenced ageing as well as lifestyle, outlook on life, and feelings of security. A number of the Johannesburg respondents spoke very critically of lifestyle. People who abused their health with drinking, smoking, and fast living aged more rapidly than others. In their opinion loafers also tended to look older than their years.

- *"Men who work and are clean and love good things look stronger, brighter and can go a lot longer." (14)*
- *"Much depends on their state of health, also their security does a lot to bring back that lost smile which makes them look happier and prettier." (16)*
- *"I mean if from boyhood one becomes careless about one's life by drinking, smoking and going about with the wrong company and girls, you are sure to age before your time." (3)*

Soft living in town was a further factor influencing ageing. A number of Johannesburg respondents stated that rural living was much healthier than city living. Hence, rural people and their grandparents' generation who were mostly rural-based, tended to age slower and live longer than migrant workers and urban black people in general. Judging from the responses obtained in other sections of the study this

point would be endorsed by a majority of the respondents in the survey.

- (It used to be that) *"older people were those who had one grandchild or more, but these days it comes off a little too soon. Some can just through worries look like the oldest man in the village or some through the company they keep suffer ill-health untimely."* (13)
- *"My grandmother lived well over a hundred and I am told she never used a stick and she could still thread a jute bag needle and at times a wide sewing needle."* (1)
- *"You see town men are weaker than those in the rural areas. (Why?) I think they just eat what comes to them. They get old food even in summer. We come a long way to sell what we have in plenty to them. They do not plough to get fresh mealies and other things. They have no cows to milk and many other things which the older men can enjoy and look younger in the country."* (2)
- *"People of today are no longer as strong as our ancestors. The way of life has brought us countless illnesses and our life span is even shorter."* (23)

Although women might age faster physically, they might well live longer. This was a view expressed by a number of the Johannesburg respondents. A substantial group of men and women interviewed in Johannesburg were of the opinion that older women were tougher and more competent than their male counterparts. Generally older women exhibited greater stamina and moral strength than men with which to cope with adversities and hardships in life.<sup>1)</sup>

- *"Women are older at the age of 60 yet they appear stronger than men especially in bearing pain and accepting the kicks of life."* (8)
- *"Men and women of late seem to age alike. If there is a difference it is that women seem stronger. Women at my age would still be doing many chores and walking better than us men."* (1)
- *"To me there is no difference between older men and women, except that women are more used to helping themselves than men. Women have always braved life with a certain amount of success. In our language a man is always a junior to a woman irrespective of age, because men look up to a woman for most of their needs."* (2)

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1) Cock's (1979) research among Grahamstown domestic workers suggests that competence is an essential feature of the female domestic worker's self image. In the present survey, the men in the survey advanced this view as well.

- *"The women differ by their endurance, performance, and dedication unlike men who always look up to women for their upkeep." (7)*

### 7.3 Anticipation of old age

In the introduction to this report mention was made of the unsettling effects of modernisation on the position of the elderly in society. It was assumed that black society in South Africa in general, and urban black people in particular, would currently be experiencing a reorientation of traditional thinking concerning the relationship between young and old. At the outset of this inquiry it was assumed that domestic workers, as members of the migrant worker category, might be less exposed to the effects of modernisation. Therefore, if the respondents in the study evoked some negative images of late life, one might expect even stronger negative reactions among black groups who had fully adapted to a modern-industrial lifestyle.<sup>1)</sup>

In response to the question: *"Some people look forward to old age with pleasure, while others dread (fear) the coming of old age. How do you personally feel about the coming of old age?"*, just over half of the respondents (53%) said they looked forward to the coming of old age. Main reasons given for this positive outlook included the opportunity to rest after a working career, to pursue one's own interests at a leisurely pace, and to spend more time with one's grandchildren. Many workers said they also looked forward to the time when they would be relieved of their financial responsibilities towards their families. Some few workers wished to become old as this was considered to be a sign of grace and a privilege afforded to few persons these days. Other respondents assumed a positive attitude toward ageing as it was inevitable in any case. A small number of respondents felt confident about growing old, because they had provided for their future.

- *"I am going to stay at my home and enjoy the fruits of my hard work and sweat. I will relax and do my activities under no obligations."* (26)
- *"Because they look forward to having a rest and having all the time for themselves."* (33)

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1) This assumption may be erroneous in view of the fact that substantial proportions of the domestic workers in the sample had given long service in urban jobs, had lost contact with their rural home areas, and were constantly exposed to modern-industrial values in the white homes in which they worked.

- *"I feel great to be a granny. I want to share my experiences with my grandchildren but not spoil them."* (14)
- *"I will be proud of myself by being old. Nowadays most people die at an early age."* (36)
- *"Yes, some people look forward to old age with pleasure when they were lucky as I am to have been advised to bank by their master."* (16)
- *"I am too tired to work and I am old enough to retire. I want to get money without having done anything."* (49)

A sizeable proportion of the sample (39%) said they dreaded or feared the coming of old age. A further 4 percent were ambivalent. Fears were expressed of physical disability, dependency on others, loneliness and neglect, disrespectful attitudes of younger persons, and poverty and misery.<sup>1)</sup>

- *"Yes, with fear. When all along he has been commanding his own life and suddenly he must depend on others for his livelihood. He is going to be lonely. He wishes to mix with others but his health fails him. His very children become impossible. He has no special room for all his possessions. He does not keep as clean as he should. His advice is not as strong as before. He is made to feel a nuisance and has no company."* (8)
- *"I don't know if I'll live happily or not, as I'll be all by myself in my two-roomed house."* (32)

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1) These results compare favourably with those obtained in the pilot study. In response to an identical question 62 percent of the respondents expressed positive anticipation, 32 percent dread and 4 percent were ambivalent. However, a significantly higher proportion in the under-forties (46%) than the over-forties (29%) category expressed fear or dread of old age. This finding contradicts those obtained in the study of domestic workers. A tentative explanation might be that the youthful members of the pilot sample were responding in general terms of individual modernity and "theoretical" dread of ageing, whilst some of the Johannesburg domestic workers were expressing their personal fears of ageing in circumstances which were beyond their control. A fuller discussion is given in the text. Main reasons indicated for looking forward to old age included inevitability of ageing (37% of total N = 98), old age is a blessing (15%), realisation of life goals (3%), opportunity to rest (3%), and prestige factors (2%). Factors associated with fear of old age were: loss of physical capability and independence (12%), and death (10%).



- *"I personally have great fear about myself and my wife because our only son may make life very difficult for us. We know just what happens to many we see. In my case my son will always think I am very rich because I have been working all these years." (23)*

Whilst the majority of the on average younger Durban respondents (81%) were positively disposed toward becoming old, the majority of the Johannesburg respondents (74%) said they feared old age. Given the different age structures of the subsamples a significantly higher proportion of the over-sixties in the sample (68%) than the under-sixties (30%) expressed fear of old age. This finding contradicted those obtained in the pilot study. However, there are some indications that some of the Johannesburg respondents were airing general views rather than their own personal feelings. The Johannesburg interviewer may not have insisted on obtaining a personal view in all cases. Thus, there was a tendency to moralise and make negative comparisons.

- *"When one has missed a good start in life one ends off miserable and fears getting old because he has nowhere to go and no one to care for him. Some old men of over-mature years still play fufee, dice and horses. They are forever begging for something. It's the man who never saved and stays where he is." (24)*
- *"Old age with pleasure depends on one's family and money. If one has money but has a bad family that person is best away from them and living in an old age home, where he can do everything on time with others and even have them as friends. It is heartbreaking to see how other people are neglected by their people." (22)*

On the other hand the responses of the workers in retirement jobs and casual employment seemed to reflect personal feelings. Their responses were typical of involuntary late returnees who were not fully in control of their own destiny. Emphasis was placed on poverty which prevented return migration. In some instances the impression is gained that these workers had remained in town beyond the conventional retirement age precisely because they feared a life of loneliness,

poverty, and neglect in their areas of origin.

- *"Yes, with fear. One is never too sure of one's future, especially when one has no relatives or family, things get very bad when one is poor. Young people say money speaks. When I have money, I can do as I like. I lost most of my money with girls and I am trying to save from my piece jobs so that I can return to my sister." (3)*
- *"The few who were perhaps educated and have their plans ahead of time are happy, but for those whose days are like ours, old age is a pain. The feeling of being unprotected makes others age even faster. Poverty, poor health, loneliness, feeling rejected makes old age a pain in the heart. Their children or grandchildren rob their grandparents, some even kill them." (2)*

The supposition that dread of old age may be a reflection of overall subjective ill-being and lack of social integration as in the case of the involuntary late returnee is given some support in the findings of the multivariate analysis. Fear of ageing was significantly higher among the non-married (58%) than the married (32%), among persons considering themselves to be in poor (67%) rather than good (27%) health, among those dissatisfied (61%) rather than satisfied (31%) with their jobs, and among persons who stated frailty (64%) rather than other factors (19%) as an indicator that a worker should go on retirement. The statistically significant correlation between higher capability of saving and dread of old age is considered spurious. Alternatively, one might interpret this finding in terms of relative deprivation. An involuntary late returnee who finds himself trapped in town against his wishes for reasons other than financial may feel more frustrated and disillusioned than other migrants who have managed to save for late life.

There is another point which should also be borne in mind. The question concerning anticipation of old age and the ones to follow are assumed to be indicators or correlates of personal modernisation. The Johannesburg respondents appeared in large measure to have assimilated to urban life and western ways. At the same time they were very aware that they were caught up between two cultures. Many of the elderly Johannesburg respondents were grieving for the passing of the old traditional ways. The material comforts of western industrial society were insufficient compensation for the safety and security which

would have accompanied them into old age in traditional society.

This is succinctly expressed in the words of the fry-cook:

- *"You know the way we grew up is completely different from what we see today. You see when a child was born it was given some livestock as a present. As it grew, it grew with a certain responsibility towards its parents and possessions. That is why they became herdboys and tillers of the soil. Our possessions were in the form of substance and not money. Then came laws which made us do away with these possessions and made life very, very disappointing to us to this day. That is why we grow old in the white man's work trying to make up for what we lost." (18)*

#### 7.4 Positive aspects of ageing

Respondents were agreed that there are many positive dimensions of ageing. Some of these dimensions have been referred to earlier in passing and include the following.

Four major positive factors of ageing:

- Sense of fulfilment;
- Sense of continuity of family life;
- Sense of freedom, independence. (Relief from responsibilities, opportunities for pursuing personal interests);
- Wisdom, serenity, and peace of mind.<sup>4)</sup>

Respondents expected to experience a sense of accomplishment and fulfilment in late life when they looked back on a full life, knowing they had carried out their duties as parents and providers for their children. Interviewees thought it would be comforting to see their children and grandchildren in turn become worthwhile members of society. Some respondents said they would be extremely proud to have their grandchildren named after them.

As grandparents, the respondents were looking forward to passing on many of their responsibilities of mid-life. Just as they had cared for their families, so they expected to be loved and nurtured in their last days. In the view of the respondents, old age would be

- 1) In the Durban pilot study a similar question was posed: *"What do you think are some of the good things about growing older?"* Multiple responses fell into the following main categories: Family life and familism (28% of N = 98), life experience and fulfilment (21%), social position (inclusive wealth) (13%), wisdom (4%), old age benefits (4%), prestige (2%). It is noteworthy that 22 percent of the respondents indicated there was "nothing good" about growing old and a further 18 percent fell into the "don't know" category. By contrast only 13 percent stated there was "nothing bad" about growing older. These dimensions are similar to those emergent in the present study. It is, however, interesting to note that the domestic workers in this study stressed freedom and independence whilst the Durban workers in the pilot study emphasised social position.

accompanied by a sense of freedom and independence. One need be responsible only to oneself. One would be relieved of the worries and drudgery of workaday life. One need no longer rise with the cock's crow. Instead, one could lead a more leisurely life and spend more time with one's children and grandchildren. In this connection one might speak of "positive" withdrawal which emphasises personal enrichment rather than inactivity.

Some respondents hoped that in old age they would - for the first time in their lives, have a bit of extra money for personal luxuries, such as sweets for themselves and gifts for their grandchildren. One Durban respondent aspired to have her own television set.

The experience of a lifetime would eventually endow old people with wisdom and foresight and also the serenity and peace of mind which is a sign of a fulfilled life. With the benefit of hindsight, respondents hoped to pass on some of these riches to their descendants.

In addition to these major positive facets of ageing, some few mentions were made of feelings of financial security in old age and the financial benefits accruing to pensioners. One respondent said he felt encouraged to see the great improvements in the field of race relations in South Africa, which had occurred in the course of his lifetime.

Many respondents implied in their responses to the item in question that the respect and love which was granted to the elderly would sustain their dignity and self-esteem to the last.

#### 7.4.1 Illustrations

##### Sense of fulfilment:

- *"You feel happy to have come that far as a fitting reward for obedience."* (16)

- *"I love to think of my boyhood days, and the time I spent at school. We were never thinking this time would catch up with us. Today it is my turn to enjoy seeing my grandchildren grow." (10)*
- *"You have lots to recall, good or bad and you have a story to tell of all the times you have had." (20)*

#### Sense of continuity:

- *"One of the good things about growing old is the pleasure of a good family. Children with good manners, children who have a sound education, who have done well in their own way and also have good families. Once these things come into a man's life, then he is very happy." (25)*
- *"There is not much to worry about as people you have been supporting must do the same as you have been doing for them." (29)*
- *"We watch our children become men and women, have their babies, who grow and they call you granny." (16)*

#### Sense of freedom, relief from the responsibilities of being a provider:

- *"It's good to be old because I won't think for others, I will just think for myself what to do." (44)*
- *"It's good to grow old if there are people responsible. Old people are treated like babies. No problems. They eat nice food, wear warm clothes when it's cold, and tender loving care is given to them." (37)*

#### Wisdom, serenity, peace of mind:

- *"As you grow older you feel satisfied about almost everything." (23)*
- *"There is greatness in growing older whilst still strong. You start looking back on your childhood with joy and with sorrow as well. You see some of the mistakes you made in the children. You never tell them but you smile it from within. You feel sorry for the children if they have no proper guidance and make so many errors." (15)*

### 7.5 Negative aspects of ageing

The list of negative aspects of ageing which emerged from the study is quite substantial. Many of the dimensions in the list given below are interrelated and respondents on average mentioned one to four items. In rough order of frequency of mention, the following negative aspects of ageing were recalled:

- Neglect, lack of care
- No place to live, inadequate or unsuitable accommodation
- Physical disability, health problems
- Dependency on others, feelings of helplessness
- Poverty, few employment opportunities
- Loss of loved ones and friends
- Loneliness and isolation
- Loss of influential power
- Loss of social prestige, respect
- Feelings of insecurity
- Rejection (feelings of being unwanted, being a nuisance)
- Exposure to exploitation
- Sense of unfulfilment, futility
- Children, grandchildren do not live up to role expectations
- Passing of traditional society and culture<sup>1)</sup>

The list reflects many of the problems experienced by the elderly in all times and places. Elderly people all over the world throughout history have suffered loss of status and dignity and in some cases material privilege. It is questionable whether the privileged position of the elderly in traditional societies is not

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1) In reply to a similar question posed in the Durban pilot study: "*What do you think are some of the bad things about growing older?*" the following responses were elicited: Frailty, dependency (33% of N = 98), loneliness, neglect (15%), poverty (9%), lack of purpose in life (9%), lack of fulfilment, unhappiness (9%), proximity to death (8%), senility (3%), personality changes (3%), other (3%), nothing (13%). Multiple responses were accepted. - In part these dimensions cut across those isolated in the study reported on above. However, in broad outline the results are very similar.

more myth than reality (de Beauvoir, 1972). In more recent times studies have been conducted which have disproved the idea that the aged in modern society suffer from isolation and neglect to the extent previously imagined (Shanas *et al.* 1968).

Whatever the case may be, it is important to note that the respondents in the survey belong to the generation of blacks who were brought up with the idea that old age is a rewarding experience and a good time in life and that the elderly should be respected and cared for in the circle of their family. Therefore, the fact that the respondents produced a complete list of negative facets of ageing may in part be a reflection of the anxiety and disillusionment typically experienced by persons living in a society undergoing social change.

Migrancy, and in its wake, the disruption of family life and the rejection of traditional values by many urban-industrial workers lends poignance to many of the items appearing in the list of negative dimensions of ageing. Resettlement, and the increased mobility of the family, means that some elderly will not return to the traditional homestead. The power and respect traditionally accorded to the elderly in black society in the past has been undermined. In a society which is changing from traditional to modern values, the experience of the elderly counts for very little. The elderly will be considered a burden rather than an asset in a society which sets greater store by material than traditional wealth. We have learnt that many of the respondents were indeed uneasy about their old age. Not all respondents, unlike their parents before them, were confident that their children would wish to or would even be in a position to care for them properly.

In this connection it is interesting to note that a number of respondents shared the views of their children, that "money speaks" as they put it. Money would increase their feelings of security in old age, they stated. It could buy them some of the independence, self-respect, physical mobility, and the influence they yearned for. Respondents would be less of a "nuisance" to their children if they



had a reliable source of income in retirement. If this were the case, they would be able to give as well as receive in old age.

### 7.5.1 Illustrations

- *"You are pained when you feel rejected and lonely. You watch others looking happy when you cannot afford even a smile when your relatives and family do not care for you. When you can no longer work for a decent living. When one's grandchildren do not share some joys with you. When one's children who were married get broken homes. When one has no source of joy whatsoever." (5)*
- *"I would hate to know that I have nowhere to go, no one to speak to, and no friends who are honest with me. I would hate to become a beggar and be dirty all the time." (17)*
- *"To be unable to look after yourself. You must always have someone to rely on because you are never too sure of yourself." (29)*
- *"Old people can't go where they like. Because young people just tell them that everything is over now for them. They must just stay indoors, that's all." (37)*
- *"You become an isolated human being because you can't get around enough. When you have no money people call you a nuisance and most of the time you are. You start missing out on life and you hate the day you were born." (9)*
- *"Some laws frustrate us by interfering with our way of raising our children. The children take advantage of this and make a laughing stock of us at this age. You wish to be cared for, be loved, be respected and all these are no longer." (2)*
- *"I would hate to feel my possessions are threatened. I would be very sad to have nowhere to go to. After all this I need a good rest amongst good people. I hate to feel insecure. Staying away from one's home for such long periods makes one a stranger as many things also change. I miss friends and my relatives at times. I hate the laws that divide us from living with them when they are visiting us." (14)*
- *"This is a pain to most of us when we get older to see our children look older than us because of their bad habits. (Like what?) Well, drinking and careless life finishes young people long before they get mature. This makes the whole family poorer than ever." (19)*
- *"Loss of opportunities, your past as a child roaming in the field with the animals all around. This has been silenced. You miss some of the fun if ever it was there." (8)*

## 7.6 Obligations owing to the elderly

The question was posed: *"Thinking about older people: What are the obligations (duties) which young people owe to old people?"*

Without exception, the respondents in the sample supported the traditional view that young folk are under many obligations to their older kinfolk.<sup>1)</sup> The respondents made it abundantly clear that the moral obligations towards one's parents are based on reciprocity. Parents once cared unselfishly for their young. Therefore, in old age, rest and loving care are a well-earned right and privilege. Respect is due for having fulfilled one's duties as a parent and a provider for the duration of a working lifetime. In gratitude children in turn will now provide for their parents. Children who live up to these societal expectations are a source of joy and fulfilment for their parents in old age.

- *"You know we often would say do unto your grandparents whatever was done for you. We used to be told tales to make us think of our grandparents and do the best we could for them." (12)*
- *"Young people should take care of the old people because they are there through them." (36)*
- *"Also they should respect the grandparents after whom they were named by living up to their expectations." (17)*
- *"Young people are ours and we are theirs whether they like it or not. So whatever good has been showered on a child should be so to its grandparents. They should learn how to share with us. Usually they become our heirs if all goes well." (13)*

It is customary for children and grandchildren to fulfil the following duties toward their elderly in rough order of frequency of mention:

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1) An identical result was obtained in the Durban pilot study in response to this question. All respondents named at least one type of obligation. Financial support (50% of N = 98), care (44%), and respect (18%) were the major types of obligations owing to the elderly according to the respondents in the pilot study. Mention was also made of attending to the basic physical needs of the elderly.

Main duties:

- Provide personal care for the elderly
- Extend love, affection, friendship
- Provide (financial) support
- Satisfy basic needs, in particular accommodation needs
- Show respect for the elderly

Further duties:

- Provide protection
- Provide advice and assistance
- Show gratitude and concern
- Ensure that the elderly are happy
- Boost the self-esteem of the elderly

The respondents were unanimously agreed that the elderly deserved only the best of care, and love and affection from their descendants.

- *"To look after them and try to satisfy all their needs so that they live happily." (32)*

The respondents were of the opinion that their children must see to it that their basic needs were met. More specifically, the elderly must be provided with food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention. Their personal needs must be attended to, such as laundry.

- *"You see my son has made me a proud father....Do you know what! My son does my washing and ironing and even my mending. When I am unwell he does the cooking as well. For this reason my boss decided to help him at school. If children could do this and even better, then life would be sweeter and meaningful." (15)*

Special mention was made of the importance of providing suitable accommodation for grandparents. In this connection, it is interesting to note that two respondents implied that the elderly might have to be placed in institutional care rather than accommodated

at home.

- *"Young people should advise their grandparents as best they can through their parents and show why there is a need for them to live in homes. Let them win them over to understand that they are not being driven away but being loved, so they don't suffer unnecessarily."* (20)

However, the responses received to this and other questions concerning domicile in old age suggest that the majority of the interviewees expected to live at home after retirement.

According to survey results, the elderly are vulnerable and depressive and are in need of special attention, protection, companionship, and advice and assistance. Some respondents were adamant that provision must be made not only for the material needs of the elderly but also for their psychological well-being. The young must be prepared to devote some of their time to provide companionship and stimulation for their old folk in order to make them feel cherished and important members of the family. Some respondents emphasised the need of the elderly to be shown recognition in the form of token gifts and treats, such as outings. Younger persons could also serve to extend the restricted world of the elderly by acting as informants and advisors. Excursions for the elderly were an important means of keeping the old in touch with the world around them. Parents should teach their children to respect their grandparents by setting a good example.

- *"We may support them with food but if we fail to respect them it means nothing."* (45)
- *"Caring and loving and sharing, not money nor possessions, but fun is what most elderly parents would wish for."* (8)
- *"Our children make our hearts grow younger if they show their love, care and concern for us...When they have the means, they should give us outings like any young."* (7)
- *"We look to them to show us their gratitude in many ways. We expect them to have time for us and to share some of their experiences or jokes with us. It is so pleasing to enjoy a favour from a younger person. This is the greatest of friendships."* (18)
- *"...They should make our grandchildren learn to admire our age with due respect. They should enjoy our company."* (2)

It is apparent that the respondents in the study were reciting a normative role definition in reply to the question concerning the duties of the younger generation toward their elders. At the same time, it was also clear that the respondents gave their full support to this view. In this respect, the respondents may be classified as extremely conservative in terms of the distinction made in this study.<sup>1)</sup>

A number of respondents pointedly referred to their own childhood experiences of learning to assume their duties toward their grandparents in rural society. The younger generation of today would benefit from similar lessons, they felt. Other respondents were at pains to create new role-models for their grandchildren which were more in keeping with the requirements of life in a modern-industrial setting.

- *"When I was a young person it was my duty to see that grandma and grandpa had their washwater, fire made, food served, house swept. In fact I was trained to care for them and nobody relieved me of these duties until I was sent to initiation school....This is what today's grandchildren should do for their grandparents. They must read or tell them about what happens here and around them. They should give them gifts and share knowledge. For instance, the way of supermarkets is not known so the youth can help with shopping." (16)*
- *"Young people must in return love us, care for us, respect us, make us feel wanted....(How?) I was a chef and I know good food. So why can't my grandchildren ask me about recipes I once did and then do them. You can see how happy one can be to eat what one has taught to one's grandchildren." (3)*

Despite their own strong view regarding duties toward the elderly, some few respondents expressed their doubts that their children or their children's children would similarly honour their grandparents in the traditional way. Judging from the many negative views of one's personal attitude toward growing old, a much larger

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1) As outlined earlier the question of interest here is sometimes used as an indicator of personal modernisation. The modern response is "few duties", the non-modern or traditional response "many duties".

proportion of the sample were aware that they might never become the beneficiaries of the societal ideal in question.

- *"When I think about young people's duties I feel fearful and worried. They are totally failing to do what we have done to them." (28)*
- *"This question makes me laugh because our children have changed very much. You see I was the "sjanbok" child and my child is the "word" child. Now there is a great difference between the two. When I was growing up my parents came first and I did all I could to please them. The word child, that is the one of today, sticks to his word and does what he pleases. So it all depends on what they think today. Yet they should remember that a good turn deserves another. We look after them and now it's their turn." (11)*
- *"Our children have to give us flowers whilst we are still with them not when we are dead. Our children should not make feasts for people in an effort of appeasing us when we are dead, to give them luck or blessing. Who will bless or think well of a son or daughter who made one miserable on earth? I can only say our children should do unto us as we did unto them. Love us, care for us, give us outings and, of course, all the fun, remembering that the soul is young even if the outside looks older." (5)*
- *"They are supposed to support us, but they are failing. Instead they are drinking too much." (46)*
- *"This is a question because it's only few who think of old people, most of them (young people) are educated and become influenced by alcohol. After that they are in need of assistance from old people." (40)*



### 7.7 The learning of wisdom from old people

A further question was posed to the respondents: *"Some people say a child learns the deepest and most profound truth from old people; others say that a child learns most from books and in school. What is your opinion?"*

Akin to the preceding items, this question can be taken as a measure of personal modernisation. With very few exceptions the respondents selected the traditional answer: a child learns the deepest and most profound truth from old people (see Table 7.2).<sup>1)</sup> The few respondents in the sample who opposed the majority view tended to be younger persons.

LEARNING FROM OLD PEOPLE AS AN INDICATOR OF PERSONAL MODERNISATION		
Response type:		%
Traditional:	learns most from <u>old people</u>	84
Transitional:	learns from <u>both old people</u> and books	8
Modern:	learns most from <u>books</u>	6
	don't know	2
		100
		N = 51

It was clear that the majority of the respondents felt very strongly about the role of elderly people as instructors of young people in traditional society. In traditional societies it is the old people who pass on the folklore and the cultural values and norms

1) Although the majority of the respondents endorsed the traditional emphasis, there is more evidence of personal modernisation in the Durban pilot study. Responses elicited to the identical question were: modern ("books") 13 percent, transitional ("both old people and books") 32 percent, and traditional ("old people") response 51 percent (N = 98).



to the younger generations. Thus, the old folk play an important role in the codification, continuity and preservation of a cultural tradition.

The fact that old people should teach their grandchildren about life was self-evident to many respondents. Older people were natural leaders, they were "*born to tell the truth to a child*" (36). It followed the natural order of things that grandparents would come into contact with children long before they discovered books and went to school. Therefore grandparents could instil the "*first and lasting truth*" into their grandchildren in the sense that "*older people are the first and best teachers*". Some few respondents also stressed that as books were written by old people and school was taught by old people, the wisdom of modern educationalists was essentially the wisdom of old people in society.

- "*A child learns truth from old people because they were born by old people not by books and schools.*" (43)
- "*Old people always tell the truth.*" (30)
- "*Grandparents are a storeroom of the culture which we do not find in books. Also writers never give a child a fair chance. They are either too much in a hurry or they are either too cross to help them. You know how some children have even run away from school.*" (12)
- "*Older people are our "books". They are the ones to teach children the truth about their culture long before they can even read. They are the veld school teachers. There are few or no true books about what to dig in the veld for food or medicine, etc. We old ones are still the best book for our grandchildren.*" (5)
- "*A child who grows with older people learns more than a child who depends on a book. Books come too late in a child's life. Older people love telling stories to their grandchildren and this early education of truths is best.*" (25)

A small number of respondents intimated that a qualitative difference existed between the oral tradition and the written word. The knowledge of old people was "pure", in that it was based on personal experience. On the other hand books tended to be misleading and

deceptive.

- "(They learn) most from old people because I think they tell the true stories and most of them really happened and they saw those things with their own eyes." (32)
- "They have more experience in life." (48)
- "Books change from time to time and so do their truths." (19)
- "(They learn) from old people because they tell the true stories, and most stories in the books are not true." (42)

A number of respondents again referred to their past personal experiences of learning at the hand of their grandparents.

- "I think I am what I am today as a result of my granny, then later my parents. I learnt the nobler things from my granny. Hence I think older people contribute a lot to a child's start in life. Books come very late." (14)
- "I am the witness for education. After struggling very hard to educate my son, I am not a fool today because he works very well and his salary is satisfying our needs." (46)

It is interesting that the respondents tended to identify with the old person in the question. This may be taken as an indication that the respondents were keen to preserve and strengthen the one role which appeared most worthwhile to them in late life. It is the role of grandparent-educator which gives the elderly the influence and respect which they are typically afforded in traditional society. In traditional society children are frequently left in the care of the elderly while their parents are tending the fields and pursuing other agricultural and pastoral activities. Migrant parents likewise look to the grandparents to bring up the children while they earn a living in town. Thus, migrancy tends to strengthen the role of the grandparent as the socialising agent.

- "The child who learns truths from his grandparents has the best foundation and is forever capable of thinking of and loving his grandparents." (2)
- "A child who learns truths from its older parents grows up with a greater appreciation of things and people around him. He also becomes cleverer before he reads books." (22)
- "Our sons and daughters must catch up with time and so they have little time for their children. Grandparents come in very handy to the small children by telling them stories and making the best of the time long before they go to school." (11)

On the other hand migrancy may have a disruptive effect on the grandparental role. In the opinion of a number of the respondents this is particularly the case if a worker returns home too late to assume grandparental duties and cannot sow the seeds of respect among the grandchildren. Thus, a late returnee may forfeit the quality of his or her late life at home by seeking to accumulate material wealth in the city. This may explain why late return is considered a misfortune among many migrant workers.

- *"I do not know because many children do not respect their parents, they do what they like." (50)*
- *"The old people tell the children old and untrue stories. Most people don't believe in what old people say. As they are old their brains are stale." (29)*

### 7.8 Ageing in grandmother's and grandfather's time

Towards the end of the interview the respondents were asked if they thought they were as happy as their grandparents at the same time of life. In reply, the respondents painted a vivid picture of an idyllic pastoral scene in which their forefathers lived off the fat of the land and were content.

The factors contributing to grandparents' happiness are given in Table 7.3. With few exceptions emphasis was placed on the value of home produce for health: meat, milk, eggs, poultry, grains, vegetables, fruit, tea and herbs. By contrast to the respondent, their grandparents lived in the family circle and in spacious living circumstances and were not forced to earn a living in the city. Some of the Durban respondents drew invidious comparisons with their grandmothers who, unlike themselves, were not left widowed or alone at an early age and did not have to provide single-handed for the family. In this connection, some few respondents remarked that the rural plenty to which their forefathers were accustomed had also cost them their education. As children, their grandparents had worked as herd-boys or on white farms instead of attending school. Two respondents felt they were earning better wages than their grandparents.

**TABLE 7.3**

**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GRANDPARENTS' HAPPINESS**

	%*
Home produce, healthy food	49
Rural work pattern	22
Lower costs of living	20
Family life	16
Land and livestock	16
Healthy living conditions	13
Financial security	9
Fewer widows and deserted women	9
Health, fitness	7
Respect	4
Care	4

N = 45

\* Multiple responses

Numbers are very small in the minority group who felt they were as happy or happier than their grandparents. Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe that all members of this group considered themselves to be in good health, and with one exception they were satisfied with their jobs.

In broad outline the respondents were agreed that their grandparents' lifestyle was conducive to wholesome, healthy living and ensured self-respect. By contrast, the urban-industrial lifestyle to which the respondents had had to commit themselves as migrant workers was not as conducive to health, wealth, and happiness in old age.

A fair proportion of the respondents admitted that they were reminiscing about their childhood experience of living in the country. They were grieving for the passing of the 'good old days'. Against this background it was heartening to hear how one of the oldest respondents in the sample felt relief when he was able to shed the cares of city living upon returning to the country on leave and actually re-experienced the quality of life his grandfather once knew.

- *"When I was in the township I did not know whether I was coming or going. Every day was a challenge in that very congested yet lovable place. This never made me know whether I was a happy or sad man. Now that I am out here in this homeland, I feel able to breathe, able to joke. In fact, I am as happy or will be as happy as my grandparents....I feel I will be a respected person like my grandfather. We had a song as scouts: "Oupa Stephen had a farm"....and I dream of it now." (11)*

### 7.8.1 Illustrations

Excerpts from the interviews express the typical sentiments of the respondents regarding the quality of late life today as opposed to former times.

## On financial insecurity in modern times:

- *"Money was not so much our (referring to the traditional way of living among his people) worry. Our cattle were our money and so were our children. We did not drink to go mad....We live as you see today, playing fafee (a numbers game) to keep going. Everything is so expensive and we do not know what tomorrow holds for us. I mean, whether we can be thrown in the street from here." (1)*
- *"You know once my father told me this. He said there will be more money and no food. (When asked to explain:) I think, like now, people can earn a cash wage but food is double the cost." (18)*
- *"My grandparents were very happy because they did not have to come to town to work." (42)*

## Two contrary views on the quality of life in grandparents' days:

- *"My grandparents lived happily foodwise but they were never sure of their tomorrow especially in a home where children were lacking. One's living was secured by the labour of the younger generation. This is why some of us never went to school." (9)*
- *"Yes (I am as happy as my grandparents). They were doing the same work and earning only R5 - R10 per month." (45)*

## On the advantages of having access to means of production in grandparents' days:

- *"My grandparents lived in the open more than us. They hunted and drank milk and now all this is gone from us. They ate from their lands." (18)*
- *"How can I really be as happy as my grandparents? Where are the fields we used to plough and harvest and store our food for rainy days? Who has a kraal, a fowl run, let alone horses today? This is what made the heart of any man beat. We can no longer give our children any wealth. We live from hand to mouth on these divided pieces of land." (10)*

## On healthy living in grandparents' days:

- *"My grandparents ate from the veld and not from tins like us and they ate good home food cooked in a very simple way. We drank water from the streams and rainwater. Our huts were covered with grass and cool in summer and warm in winter. Floors were smeared and not cemented. We had room for our food and everyone was happy and healthy." (16)*
- *"We never wore shoes and never suffered from sore feet and swollen knees. I miss the old life." (12)*

- *"My grandparents did not suffer from high blood pressure. They were using traditional food whereas we must buy everything from the shops." (49)*
- *"I saw my grandfather still able to run and inspan a wild filly onto his cart and when he walked he was more of a soldier. His laugh was loud and awe-inspiring. He was quick to laugh and quick to frown. So I remember a bright grandfather. He was indeed strong. He was selective of his foods. He never drank nor smoked. In many ways I inherited many of his qualities but not his health. I no longer get the same food as my grandfather. Our food is in packets." (21)*

On women's changing role in modern times:

- *"Women were not working so they were always happy getting all they wanted from their husbands." (47)*
- *"Most of the men were not dying in middle age as nowadays. Therefore we are supposed to solve every problem for ourselves." (46)*
- *"My grandmother had a husband and I don't have one." (51)*

On the disruption of family life in modern times:

- *"Family life breaks. Our children are instructed not by us but by people who are said to be more educated than us. They are social workers who actually tell you how to cook, how to eat, how to do all things. This is annoying." (9)*
- *"We miss our families until we miss them no more. We must be with our families to feel good like everybody." (4)*

On the impossibility of recapturing the good life of former times:

- *"It is clear that the life of our grandparents will never come back. They had more to do and lived in the family style more than us....We cannot have it any longer, things have changed." (16)*

### 7.9 Home care or institutional care?

A major distinction can be made between care for the elderly in traditional and modern societies. In traditional societies all functions and responsibilities are typically focussed in very few non-specialised institutions. Until recently, the family maintained a key role in rearing the young and caring for the old. However, in modern times many of the family's functions have been supported or even supplanted by institutions outside of the home. As a result the modern family has become more specialised and the structure of extra-kinship reliances has become more complex. Consequentially, patterns of ageing have also become more varied. To people who are living in a rapidly changing society the breakdown of traditional values requires adaptation and resourcefulness which may surpass the capabilities of many. In particular, people who are preparing for retirement in societies in transition will be forced to contemplate alternative solutions to growing old gracefully.

In traditional societies, the normal and ideal solution is that the extended family system provides old age security, and the frail aged are cared for in the home. By contrast, modern societies also make provisions for institutional care for the aged. The need for alternative caretakers for the aged is closely related to the displacement of the extended family unit with the nuclear unit. The nuclear family is typically self-centred and focuses attention on the younger generation to the exclusion of the older generation. Furthermore, geographic mobility in modern societies has loosened family ties outside the nuclear unit. In urban societies housing is typically designed to accommodate small family units rather than larger extended families. Therefore, it is not always feasible or desirable to keep an elderly person in the family home. This does not mean that all elderly persons are living away from their families in modern society. The popular view that the elderly in modern society are isolated from family and friends may well be exaggerated. Recent studies of the housing circumstances of the elderly in three modern industrial societies (Shanas *et al.*, 1968) have shown that the majority of the elderly in the countries in



question were living in their own homes and with family or relatives rather than in institutions for the aged. The authors of this study also note that in most cases reliance on institutional care for the elderly was a last resort rather than the preferred solution. Their findings suggest that an elderly parent or relative is usually placed in institutional care only when the family can no longer cope on its own for the needs of its ageing loved ones. In this connection one might also add that the grim image of the old age home of the past has softened and given way to a variety of housing arrangements for the elderly which cater for a wider range of housing. Housing arrangements vary in degree of independence afforded to the elderly residents and types of care and services provided.

At the outset of the study it was assumed that the respondents in the study were members of traditional society in the sense that they would return to live with their families after retiring from domestic work. Therefore, no items concerning attitudes toward institutional care for the elderly were included in the questionnaire schedule. This proved to be an error of oversight, because the respondents in the survey broached the topic of old age homes spontaneously. A number of the interviewees in the Johannesburg subsample had lost contact with their families and had no home of their own to which they could return to live out their last days. These respondents indicated that one of their most pressing problems was to find a suitable place to live when they would be too old to work.

In the course of the inquiry it became evident that the ideal concept of retirement was the traditional pattern of living with the family. However, practical considerations and the experiences of retired persons in their circle of acquaintances had taught the respondents not to indulge in wishful thinking. African society was modernising to the extent that retired workers could no longer take it for granted that they would live out their days with their children and grandchildren. Alternative solutions such as living in an old age home must be considered in the case of the extended family system breaking down.

One gains the impression that the respondents viewed institutional care for the elderly as a practical rather than an ideal solution. In broad outline, three views of old age homes emerged in the study.

- (1) Positive view: Living in an old age home is a workable solution for elderly persons who would otherwise be isolated from the mainstream of society. Living with one's peers in an old age home is a satisfactory way of life for this category of retired people.
- (2) Neutral view: The old age home is a practical solution and a safety valve to fall back on in case the traditional type of old age security is not forthcoming.
- (3) Negative view: For some persons, living in an old age home is a reflection of the failure of society in general, and their own children in particular, to fulfil their obligations toward the elderly. Worse still, living in an old age home is considered a stigma and a mark of one's own incompetence to raise children to respect and care for their ageing parents.

The following excerpts from the interviews illustrate these shades of opinion concerning institutional care for the elderly.

More positive views:

- *"My grandfather I hear died at the age of 90 years and already he was like a mad man, yet in truth he was not. I still feel grandfather never had a good time to rest and enjoy his last days. If a person stayed with people of his age and was given good care he would have peace and not think that whoever is speaking to him is teasing him. Strange enough, he had his favourite people who could joke with him in any way and he would laugh heartily but even when people were not referring to him, he would begin to make remarks. This was heartbreaking to us. Perhaps he needed his age group to speak to. I think a home where old people live together is the answer...We are all workers these days and all young children are at school or working, so who can sit at home and nurse such cases. I do not think our makoti (young brides) should be asked to nurse our old and infirm." (20)*

- "Old persons should be looked after in homes away from their working families. Their savings must be kept in a more official way and be used with good discretion. They will be free to meet and talk with their age group and share skills and jokes. They would relive their lives if encouraged." (19)
- "People should be taught to change from the idea that old people should just be left to die on their own anywhere, anyhow and be robbed of their savings....The aged should be encouraged to live in a home so as to be near one another and thus be able to share ideas or while away time with their age group. The family can continue to show its interest in the aged in homes by visiting them, sending some goodies or cash. They can let the grandchildren keep in touch." (21)
- "The homeless should be put into some home where they could use their money under special supervision." (17)

#### Practical views:

- "I have heard of some women who live to 100 years or even more, although I have never seen them. How they behaved is a big question. Who looked after them, I fear to think. That is why I choose to live in a home." (23)
- (Suggestions for change?) "Enough old age homes because once our children get married our daughters- or sons-in-law dislike us." (38)
- "We love to live with our families if they have time for us, but if not it is best we live in homes. I would expect a comfortable bed, people to speak to and joke with, and have fun, attend church. Really live with others and have your family, especially one's grandchildren visit one." (22)
- "If there is a home for the destitute let it be comfortable and under capable hands, although we blacks do not like this new set-up, we love to die within the limits of our families. Hai, I hate a home." (14)
- "I mean I can then go (if children change from good to bad - I hear at times that children steal from their parents) to an old age home. First sell all what one has first, bank it and then have it alone. But again I hate this. I'd rather stay with my grandchildren until I die and let them enjoy some of my collections." (15)

## Negative views:

- "Old people should not be forced into homes but should be allowed to live where they please." (8)
- "Old people are ours and we share their suffering as well as their joys. It would be criminal for a grandchild to see its grandparent sent away to some unknown place like a home. Our children are inseparable from their grandparents in our society. (Has this happened?) Thanks to the lack of facilities, grannies (still) live with us." (11)
- "The idea of having old age homes makes me sick. I want to prove how deep or shallow my children think about me. (You don't like the idea, why?) Are there no zoos where animals are kept to be seen? Why must the children we bore be helped in this way. I tell you I will never go there. What happens to my belongings? Where will my relatives sleep? Must they no longer visit me as a family... People should be given a chance to speak for themselves and not be pushed into a home." (5)

### 7.10 Conclusions

In broad outline the respondents' ideas about ageing conformed to the traditional view that old age is an achievement which carries prestige in the community. The majority view among the respondents in the study was that retirement should be taken earlier rather than later in order to reap the benefits of old age.

In response to test questions, the respondents as a group opted for the traditional rather than the modern response. Without exception all respondents agreed that young folk were obliged to support and care for the elderly. Almost all the respondents believed firmly in the role of the elderly as educators and preservers of culture in society.

Despite these traditional views one gains the impression that the respondents in the study were presenting a picture of the ideals of black society in which they desperately wished to believe. There are indications that the respondents did not expect society to live up to these ideals. The respondents voiced their doubts about successful ageing. Only a slight majority stated that they looked forward to old age. Almost 40 percent of the sample admitted that they dreaded or feared old age. Similarly, the respondents gave vivid descriptions of ill-being in old age. They also spontaneously introduced the subject of old age homes, a topic which was not scheduled for discussion and which represents a departure from the traditional pattern of caring for the aged in African society. Thus, we must conclude that the respondents were aware of the unsettled position of the elderly in a society in transition.

In the next chapter we shall probe further into the respondents' images of retirement and seek to distil the aspirations and expectations which the respondents held for late life.

## CHAPTER 8

IMAGES OF RETIREMENT

One of the main aims of the study was to probe into the images of retirement which are prevalent among domestic workers. This inquiry was based on the assumption that the mental picture which workers have of retirement will serve as their frame of reference and shape attitudes toward ageing and behaviour patterns in retirement. Thus, one might expect that workers will organise their lives and make preparations for late life in accordance with their conceptions of retirement.

In order to elicit retirement concepts, the respondents were invited to elaborate on the retirement histories of persons who might act as reference models for their own retirement. There were two points in the interview at which the respondents were called upon to tell of the retirement circumstances of persons in their circle of acquaintances.

- (1) The story of a successful return migrant: After inquiring about the respondent's rural resources, the question was posed: *"Do you know of any persons who retired successfully in this rural area? Who are they? How do they live?"*
- (2) The story of a retiree who had worked in a similar job: Later in the interview, the respondents were asked to recall the story of a retiree: *"Do you know of any person in this area or persons doing the same type of work who retired recently? Please think of one person you know and tell me his/her story."*

In the first instance, the typical response was an enumeration of the characteristics of successful return migrants in the respondent's home area in the country. In most cases the respondents spoke of a particular person in their kinship network.

In the second instance, a retirement story was recorded verbatim after which the interviewer was required to fill in the answers to a number of standard questions pertaining to items such as age at retirement, occupation before retirement, reason for retiring,

retirement activities and income, etcetera. The intention was to use this information as a data base from which to draw up a profile of the retirees who figured in the stories told by the respondents. In the Johannesburg inquiry, the majority of the respondents gave a fairly detailed account of the returnees' retirement circumstances when telling the first story. Therefore, in the majority of cases, the Johannesburg interviewer did not ask for a second retirement story. She simply probed for additional details of the returnee's situation in order to be able to complete the checklist of background information on the principal character in the first story.

In all 47 main stories were collected. Of these main stories, 19 or 40 percent were initially elicited as examples of successful return migration. Although the respondents tended to tell stories about people of their own sex, a significantly higher proportion of women (33%) than men (18%) in the sample selected a member of the opposite sex as the main character in the story they related.

#### 8.1 Profile of the main characters appearing in the retirement stories

Based on the systematic data recorded for all the main characters in the retirement stories, a composite picture of the typical retiree can be described as follows:

The reference person is either a man or a woman. This person was formerly employed as a domestic worker for some 30 years, and retired between 55 and 59 years of age. Most likely retirement was taken for reasons related to health, in order to pursue business or other interests, or to care for grandchildren. In the case of a family crisis, retirement may have been taken prematurely and unexpectedly. The retiree returns to the rural area to live with the family and derives an income from a state pension, from informal or substantial business, support from children, and savings. Major activities are likely to include informal or substantial business, agriculture or gardening. The retiree also enjoys leisure and the company of grandchildren. After some 10 years in retirement the main character in the story is most likely to be reasonably well-off and content.

Women characters are more likely to retire for health reasons, men characters for business reasons. Men characters are also more likely





TABLE 8.1 (continued)

## PROFILE OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS APPEARING IN THE RETIREMENT STORIES

	<u>%*</u>	<u>N</u>
5. <u>Reasons for retiring</u>		
Health	33	
Frailty	20	
Pursue own interests	20	
Care for grandchildren	13	
Family crisis situation	13	
Desire to start business	11	
Tired of working	11	
Children finished education	7	
Accommodation secured	7	
Reached retirement age	7	
Desire to enjoy family life	4	
Care for parents	2	46
6. <u>Number years retired</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>
-4 years	37	
5-9 years	41	
10-14 years	15	
15-27 years	7	
	100	41
7. <u>Life savings</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>
Yes	67	
No	18	
Don't know	15	
	100	45
8. <u>Domicile in retirement</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>
Rural	63	
Urban	26	
Peri-urban	11	
	100	46
9. <u>Living with:</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>
Family, unspecified	43	
Children	26	
Grandchildren	19	
Spouse	2	
Parents	2	
Relatives	2	
Alone	4	
Old age home	2	
	100	47

\* Multiple responses

(continued)

TABLE 8.1 (continued)

## PROFILE OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS APPEARING IN THE RETIREMENT STORIES

10. <u>Sources of retirement income</u>		
	<u>%*</u>	<u>N</u>
State pension	50	
Business	36	
Children	27	
Savings	21	
Handcrafts	14	
Pension from work	.11	
Spouse's wages	2	
Sale of vegetables	2	
Rentals	2	44
11. <u>Retirement activities</u>		
	<u>%*</u>	<u>N</u>
Business	34	
Handcrafts	23	
Rest	14	
Agriculture	11	
Gardening	9	
Care of (grand) children	7	
Housework	5	
Excursions	5	
Part-time domestic work	2	44
12. <u>Well-being</u>		
	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>
Economically well-off	49	
Other positive	19	
Poor health	11	
Other negative	21	
	100	47
	<u>%</u>	
Happy	77	
Not so happy	6	
Miserable	17	
	100	47
* Multiple responses		

## 8.2 Retirement themes

The stories related by the respondents varied in length and emphasis and no two stories were alike. As a general rule, the success stories tended to be cast in a similar mould, whilst the variations within the regular main stories appeared to be greater. Despite this huge variability, the analysis of the story content revealed a smaller number of central themes which were common to a substantial proportion of the stories. The story content was accepted at face value and no attempt was made to quantify the relative frequency of occurrence of these central themes at this stage of the inquiry. Nor were the themes set in relation to attributes of the storyteller. This type of analysis will have to await a larger and more systematic study of retirement concepts.<sup>1)</sup> The intention is that this first investigation should serve as an introduction to this field of study.

An overview of the major themes and subthemes which ran through the retirement stories is given in Table 8.2. Some of the themes will be familiar, as they have been discussed elsewhere in this report. This reoccurrence may be taken as an indication of the validity of the results obtained from the content analysis of the stories. It would appear that the respondents projected their major concerns regarding retirement onto all their responses in the survey including the story material reviewed here. The evaluations given at the end of the storytelling section of the interview also suggested that a large number of the respondents were in fact modelling their own retirement plans along the lines of the lives of the main characters in their stories. Therefore, we can assume that the heroes in their stories served as reference models for retirement. The respondents indicated that they aspired to emulate, at least in small part, the successful returnees in their home areas and wished to avoid the problems encountered by the less fortunate retirees.

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1) Such a study is currently being undertaken by the Centre for Applied Social Sciences.

TABLE 8.2

MAJOR THEMES AND SUBTHEMES IN THE RETIREMENT STORIES TOLD BY THE RESPONDENTS

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Success<sup>+</sup>

Occupational subthemes:

- \*Substantial and small-scale businesses, working proprietorship
- \*Informal sector occupations
- \*Small scale farming/market gardening
- \*Securing a state pension
- \*Family business enterprises
- \*Windfalls and service bonuses
- \*Eventual success following misfortune
- \*Family support and concern

\*Retirement precipitated by a life/family crisis

\*Caring for grandchildren

\*Economic hardship

\*Loneliness

Employer themes:

Employer - benefactor subthemes:

- \*Employer assistance in establishing a retirement home
- \*Employer assistance in securing a state pension
- \*Employer concern for the welfare of the retired employee
- \*Crisis aid

\*Employer - exploiter

<sup>+</sup>Success is a dominant theme

### 8.2.1 Success themes:

8.2.1.1. Material success is the main theme in all the stories elicited in response to the question on successful return migration. The theme appears in many of the other types of main stories as well. There are several variations of the success theme. The prototype of the successful return migrant is the petty entrepreneur. Often the returnee is involved in several business ventures. In some cases the business is run as a family concern, a point we shall return to later. The type and scale of the business venture is largely dependent on the resources which can be developed in the home area and are at the retiree's disposal, and the local market situation. Businesses itemised in the stories include tearooms, butcheries, grocery stores, fish and chips shops, and dry cleaners.

Other formal and informal services include taxis; restaurant; funeral parlour; wood and coal; plumber; shoe repairs; ploughing; corn mill; sale of biscuits, buns, and cakes and vegetables; sangoma; and fortune-telling. Some successful returnees have turned their hand to tenant farming, or have built a rooming house to sublet to lodgers.

The heroines in some of the success stories are more modest. Among the women informal sector work such as sewing, knitting and crocheting, and hawking of soft goods and grasswork are extremely popular. One woman, whose story will be given in full below, makes building blocks which she sells. The sewing machine is a central requisite in a number of businesses. One ex-teacher runs a pre-school for local children. Another retiree looks after foster children as well as her grandchildren to make ends meet. Successful informal sector workers manage to earn a modest income which may be used to support grandchildren as well as themselves.

In a number of the stories the successful returnee or the family is participating in an agricultural scheme, or has benefitted from courses offered by local agricultural extension programmes. Several explicit mentions are made of the progressiveness of the

successful small-scale farmers and gardeners appearing in the stories. For example, in one rural success story, brother-in-law Jacob is said to have attended agricultural school when he was over 60 years of age. As a result of this training, Jacob becomes an expert farmer and produces cabbages the size of a man's head. The storyteller stated that he was so impressed with Jacob's success as a farmer, that he had sent his sons to take the same course which Jacob had attended.

As an aside, it appears that a number of the respondents in the sample who worked as gardeners were particularly receptive to modern concepts of agriculture and horticulture. These respondents had observed the results of modern methods in their home areas or had been exposed to modern methods of gardening whilst working in town.

Manifest signs of success which appear frequently in the stories include a modern or large house with modern furniture, modern farming equipment, and motor cars and vans. It is considered a major achievement to put all one's children through school. The ultimate achievement, especially for the female heads of households in the stories, is to have a child who qualifies as a professional worker.

The successful returnee is typically the person who lives happily with his family. In the success stories the formula for a happy ending is to live in contentment and financial security in the circle of one's family. In one particular story reference is made to a "double pension", consisting of "the fruits from the children and the government pension". Successful returnees are also respected in the home community, especially if they provide a service in the area which is unique and useful, and if they are generous toward the underprivileged in the region.

In their evaluation of success stories, the respondents made it clear that they had the greatest admiration for those retirees who were involved in "slow but steady" business. Role models for one's own retirement were selected from among the characters

who let business come to them rather than running after it. As one respondent put it, the successful retiree "does not go about for his money, rather it comes to him". Although respondents admired the successful business folk in their stories and aspired to live comfortably themselves, they did not wish to rush around or over-exert themselves in the pursuit of a retirement income.

8.2.1.2 The family business: In some of the success stories, the business is run on a family basis. Typically, successful returnees have several business undertakings, say a shop and a transport business. The younger members of the family carry out the work which requires more energy expenditure and physical strength, such as loading and distributing goods and services, whilst the older folk carry out stationary tasks, such as supervision of workers or minding the shop. Elderly returnees who have progressive ideas and some capital may initiate a family project, in which they assume the role of project leaders and supervisors whilst their children carry out the actual work.

Alternatively, a migrant worker in the stories may find that his wife or family have been actively involved in local club activities or community programmes during his absence. In this case the return migrant may fall in with the same line of business.

The women retirees in the stories who sew, knit or crochet for a living may rely on working members of the family to sell their work to the people they come into contact at work. This pattern of co-operation is consistent with the notion that retirees should carry out stationary work as is befitting an elderly person.

8.2.1.3 The service bonus - windfalls: Not all stories reach a climax or some dramatic turning point. However, the most fascinating stories by far are those in which the hero or heroine experiences a sudden change of destiny for the better or worse. A number of stories come to the climax when the retiree lands a windfall or receives a service bonus which provides the capital for investment in a business

enterprise of some sort. Compensation paid out to a worker who is involved in an accident at work is similarly considered a fortune in misfortune. It is perhaps telling that this type of situation was elicited as a rural success story in one instance. The story teller concluded her story by commenting: *"Mr. Mkize's retirement is not enjoyable, but because he has something to live on I describe it as good and successful."*

8.2.1.4 Securing a state pension: One genre of success story focuses on the state pensioner. The stories in this category usually contain a detailed account of the process of securing a state pension. The pension is the end goal which assures the continued welfare of the retired worker for the foreseeable future. It is not uncommon that the workers in this type of story leave their jobs several years before they reach pension age, ostensibly to go through the complicated process of applying for a state pension. The employer and the tribal authorities in the area of origin frequently emerge in subsidiary roles to assist the principal character to attain this goal.

## 8.2.2 Employer roles

Employers appear in the stories from time to time. The employer is seldom cast as one of the principal actors in the plot, he is usually given a subsidiary role to play. The prototype of the employer is the benefactor.

8.2.2.1 The employer-benefactor: The employer who assists the retiree in establishing a home is a motif which occurs in a number of stories. As the plot unwinds, incidental mention is made that it is the retiree's employer who is providing the funds required to build a house. Alternatively it is indicated that the employer has been influential in securing a plot of land, a housing loan, or building materials. Employer characters feature more prominently if they are providing housing for employees who have no children to look after them in old age. Another recurrent subtheme refers to employers who shoulder some of the burden of their employee's family responsibilities, thus enabling the employee to put aside a nest-egg for life after retirement.



Although the employer-benefactors are usually assigned only a shadow role, their existence is nevertheless important to the outcome of the story. Their very presence in the background instills the principal actor with the confidence to carry out the main action. Main characters who are in the employ of benefactors are considered to be luckier than other workers. In times of need or misfortune, they can rely on their former employers to provide advice and assistance. The employers' knowledge of modern procedures, and their power to cut through red tape is particularly useful to retirees. Retiree-entrepreneurs will frequently seek to purchase equipment or secure a loan through their former employers. The most remarkable spontaneous offers of assistance occur in crisis situations. After a disaster strikes the employer may appear instantly on the scene, very much like a *deus-ex-machina*.

To give some examples: In one story an employer rushes to the assistance of a former employee whose house has been struck by lightning and burnt down. This story is given in full below so there is no need to fill in the details here.

In another story told by a Durban respondent, the employer plays quite a dominant role. In this tale, the principal character is a female domestic worker called Sindie. Sindie has a serious accident at work in which she loses one of her legs. Thereupon, Sindie's employer pays the hospital bills, arranges for her to live in a township house, and buys her a sewing machine. The employer also applies for a disability grant for Sindie and makes provisions for home help. From time to time the employer takes Sindie on outings in his car. It is evident that this last point made a strong impression on both the storyteller and her audience. So much so, that when the interviewer filled in the checklist at the end of the narrative, these regular excursions were recorded as the principal activity of the disabled retiree.

Another example of employer assistance in a crisis situation might be cited here. In one particular rural success story the employer

is assigned a relatively important role. As the story goes, this employer is requested to stop sending regular pension cheques to a retired worker whose sons are misusing the money. The employer complies with the request and withholds these cheques for a period of time. Then, one day the retired worker receives a cheque for a relatively large sum of money. Miraculously, the accumulated pension money arrives just in time to save the little business which the retired worker had started after he had left his job. The storyteller ends his tale by saying that the business is still flourishing today.

8.2.2.2 The employer-exploiter: Some employers who appear in the stories act out of character, and not all the retirees in the tales fare as well as the ones in the above examples. The employer-exploiter typically dismisses an elderly or disabled worker without compensation or any other form of recognition for long service. Judging from the respondents' evaluation of the characters which figure in their stories, it is apparent that workers frequently defer retirement in the hope of receiving a service award. If such a gesture of recognition is not forthcoming the workers in the stories feel disappointed and humiliated.

### 8.2.3 Coping with misfortune: eventual success following a life crisis

Success does not come easily to all the persons in the stories. A number of characters struggle to support their families after they have been dealt a blow of fate. Women in particular, are depicted as long-suffering in many of the plots. Women characters are often deserted by their menfolk or widowed in mid-life and must fend for themselves and their children on their own. The story plots in this category tend to be rather more dramatic and fanciful than in others, and some but not all of these stories have happy endings. To cite some examples:

The first story deals with the fate of a domestic worker by the name of Zerich who is continuously unlucky. She is well-educated but only finds work as a domestic. Her handsome husband is, in the story-

teller's own words, a heavy drinker and fast with women. He leaves Zerich to marry another woman. Zerich presses charges against her husband for bigamy but he receives a very lenient sentence. Despite all these problems Zerich manages to educate her children without asking for any support from her husband. The children all become teachers. In view of the fact that Zerich has no savings, her employer assists in applying for a state pension for her. Late in life Zerich's husband begs for forgiveness and pleads Zerich to take him back. However, Zerich refuses to do this.

In a second tale, the heroine is a woman who loses her husband early in life. The young widow decides to leave her young children in the care of her mother and goes to Johannesburg to work. She finds a job and eventually she manages to save sufficient money to start a small business venture in her home area. The business is so successful that she can afford to employ an assistant to run it.

In a last example, the heroine, Eunice, is left to raise two sons on her own after the father, who is described as a playboy, has left her for another woman. Eunice's employer sends Eunice's sons to a boarding school and the sons both become medical doctors. It happens by chance that one day the sons are called upon to treat their father who is admitted as a patient to the hospital where they are practising. The father recognises his sons and repents his wrongdoing. The father is then reunited with his family. Eunice marries the father of her children when she is 65 years old and the family lives happily together.

In all these stories the women emerge as strong characters whose sense of responsibility toward their families is rewarded in the long run. They are extremely competent in coping with stress in life, and their achievements are manifest for all to see.

#### 8.2.4 Family relationships

To be cared for and treated with understanding and respect by one's children is a blessing for the elderly person. The most

unhappy retirees in the stories are those whose relationships with their families have turned sour. In many cases, a change in the retired person's relationships with other members of the family may have a dramatic effect on his or her financial situation or housing circumstances. Retired people who become estranged from their children may suddenly find themselves penniless and without a roof over their heads. Typically, the persons in the stories who are in this type of predicament cannot solve their problems on their own. Therefore a number of the stories in this category have unhappy endings. Alternatively, loving members of the family come to the rescue. In some instances, sons or daughters take their ageing relatives into their own homes. The new surroundings give the old folk a new lease of life.

In their evaluation of the stories in which unhappy family relationships are the dominant theme, some few respondents made it clear that they would not tolerate abuse and neglect at the hands of their children. Under these circumstances they would opt for a non-traditional solution to their problems. Rather than endure maltreatment and run the risk of losing their life savings to undeserving relatives, these respondents would prefer to place themselves in institutional care.

#### 8.2.5 Caring for grandchildren

In some of the stories the principal character is a domestic worker, usually a woman, who feels it is her duty to look after grandchildren who are orphaned, abandoned or neglected by their parents. The worker leaves her job before retirement age and seeks to scrape a living of sorts from informal sector activities until she becomes eligible for a state pension. A variation of this plot is as follows: A recently retired worker has no sooner settled down to enjoy her hard-earned leisure than she is suddenly faced with the new responsibility of educating her grandchildren or possibly even the children of some distant relative or a neighbour. All ends well if the grannies in the stories duly receive love and recognition in return for their sacrifices. However, some of the stories end on an unhappy note. For instance, the

children in the grandparents' care may grow up to be ungrateful. In another example the parents return and reclaim the children they have left to be raised by the grandparents. The grandparents are then left on their own with no one to care for them.

#### 8.2.6 Classical and revised versions of the traditional retirement pattern

The traditional retirement pattern of return migration is recurrent in the stories. However, there are some variations in this pattern which suggest that the stabilisation of the migrant labour force is also influential in shaping new concepts of retirement. Three typical pattern variations are detected in the stories. A brief description of each pattern is given here starting with the 1) traditional pattern and moving to the 2) revised version of the traditional pattern and then to what we shall call the 3) modern pattern.

- (1) Some of the main characters in the rural success stories follow in the footsteps of their forefathers and return to peasant farming in late life. Their children and grandchildren visit them occasionally and remit gifts of cash and kind. The bi-monthly state pension represents a modern and welcome additional source of income. Usually a grandchild is appointed to assist the pensioner with daily chores in and around the house.
- (2) In contrast, a small number of the stories collected among the Durban respondents focus on urban retirement situations. The happiest retirees in this group are those who live with children or grandchildren of their choice or those who have fairly regular contact with their families.
- (3) An unusual story is told about a free-thinking domestic worker who breaks with tradition and seeks to become completely independent of her family when she goes into retirement.

Examples of these patterns are given in the list of stories which follow.

### 8.3 Selected retirement stories

A small number of retirement stories are reprinted in full below. The selection of stories is arbitrary and is made, in part, with a view to illustrating some of the points made above. More important, it is felt that the reader might wish to gain a first-hand impression of the images of retirement projected by the respondents in the sample.

#### Three retirement patterns

The following three stories are examples of general patterns of retirement which range from traditional to modern. It is noteworthy that even in the urban retirement situation, a grandchild is placed in the care of the retired grandparents.

#### Retirement pattern I

##### (1) Sfuba - (traditional rural retirement pattern)

*"I know one man by the name of Sfuba who retired recently. He was working at Iwopo (town in Natal) doing housework, cooking and gardening. He retired at a late age because he was already collecting his pension when he retired. He went back home in the same district and lived with his wife. All the children were married and living in their own homes. They (Sfuba and his wife) lived happily and the wife was also collecting pension. There was one problem they had. That of having no child to fetch water and go to the shop for them. The old man (Sfuba) asked his son to give them one child. One granddaughter came and stayed with them. She was so helpful to them, and the granny educated her. His (Sfuba's) son was so pleased about it. About two years later the old man (Sfuba) died and the old lady (Sfuba's wife) had nobody to stay with her because her son took his daughter." (48)*

#### Retirement pattern II

##### (2) Zodwa - (Modernising urban retirement pattern)

*"There was a lady called Zodwa, who retired at the age of 58 years after she had worked for 45 years. She had only one daughter married to a Coloured man (living) in Wentworth (Coloured Durban suburb). She had three children, one girl and two boys. Zodwa's employer knew that Zodwa had no place to live after retiring and nobody to look after her. So he applied for emancipation and a government pension for her. So Zodwa was given a 2-roomed house in KwaMakhuta Township (KwaZulu township to the south of Durban). Her daughter gave her one of her sons to live with his granny. Zodwa is happy. She is living on government pension, savings and money from the daughter and son-in-law. Zodwa's son-in-law comes and takes her to his home every weekend by car and brings her back on Mondays." (47)*

Retirement pattern III(3) Verah (Modern independent retirement pattern)

"The lady whom I know, she was different from us, because when we were discussing domestic life, her discussion was different from ours. She was working very hard doing the very same job that we do as domestic servants. But instead she was against us. If we were discussing about opening accounts for our children, if we had been told by one of our friends that her employer was selling something, then she advised us never to waste money for anything: "You must try to save money for your future because we (as live-in domestic workers) have a place to sleep and are not paying for transport, we are given free food, and our employers are also contributing with dresses or we are paying little for them." Actually, we thought she (Verah) was bluffing us, but at last the results became clear to us because she tried by all means to save enough money for her retirement. And she is proud of not depending on these children who only think of us when they feel like it. The employer only gave her the amount of R350 and one month's wages for retirement. (How is Verah living?) Brave woman, she retired at the age of 57 years. Instead of struggling she put more effort into her life. She began to sell meat privately. She bought a plot with a beautiful house which has five rooms. And you won't believe it if I told you that her son has got a butcher's licence through her and she is living very well. But she doesn't want to look after her grandchildren. And when I asked her why, she answered that they (her children) must also learn how to look after and struggle for their children as I have done for them." (38)

(4) Gretta ("Granny" retirement theme)

"I know a lady by the name of Gretta who has retired recently. She went back home and brought up her son's children who were left by their mother because of the ill-treatment the mother was getting from the children's father. The father (i.e. Gretta's son) was working in Pietermaritzburg and he was not supporting his family. Granny (Gretta) lived happily with her grandchildren and she supported them satisfactorily with the money she got from selling blocks for building and from what she ploughed in her fields. Her life began to be miserable when her son came back home with his girl friend. He chased his mother away and her (Gretta's) youngest son who stays at Botha's Hill took her in."

(The story teller comments as follows: "Gretta did the right thing by reporting the matter to the chief induna before she left. I would have taken my belongings and given them to the other children and gone to the aged home.") (42)

(5) Gertie (Employer-exploiter theme)

"The lady whom I know worked for 25 years commuting daily from her home to work as a domestic: washing, cleaning, ironing. And as she was working five full days and a half day on Saturday, she was struggling for transport, because it was not available sufficiently. Her employer was kindly, but cruel on the other hand, because she was deducting a certain amount of money from her (Gertie's) pay for rent and electricity. If the charges (for electricity) were less in one month she did not give her the difference. And she was promising to do something for her (Gertie's) retirement but in the end she did nothing for her. The employer retired first and decided to stay with her daughter and still requested her (Gertie) to continue working for her, and her daughter was also having her (Gertie) as servant. Then she (Gertie) worked till her retirement and she (the employer's daughter) did nothing for her; only thank you and her last month's wages." (40)

(6) Edendale success story (Family business enterprise theme)

"My cousin lives in the same area (Edendale, Natal) as me. He worked for years in town and had a very good wife who looked very well after his property and she was a hard worker and a clever woman. She sewed clothes for the children. She saved as much as she could and what was special is that she saw to it that their piece of land was tilled during all the years my cousin was in town. We used to admire her and even help when we were around. My cousin was also a very nice respectable man. Before we all could think he was old, he decided to retire so as to help his wife in all she was doing to keep the home fires burning. This is one family in our area we respect. When my cousin retired he took the deepest interest in their little area. He went to the same school where my children, I hope, are attending school on farming. 1) He now owns a mini market and all is well on this farm. They have their own cattle, chickens and horses. They also own two lorries, the latest car is driven by both man and wife. They have a beautiful home and he says that with his pension money he made additional rooms for his son and daughter. (Anything else?) Well, I also know that my cousin was well brought up. His mother used to help the villagers in a self-help project. They were taught to put their money together and bulk-buy. They were running a cookery school at the local clinic."

Respondent's evaluation: "I think I have a lot to copy from him. I have asked my wife to get as near her (cousin's wife) as possible helping her at times. I admire my cousin and I do not doubt I will

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1) Elsewhere in the interview the respondent mentions that he is "near a progressive area where agricultural methods are being taught not very far from us."



follow his example." (4)

(7) Tongaat success story

"My cousin retired in this area (Tongaat, Natal). My cousin was amongst the first people to buy land here and settle so well. He worked for many years away from everybody. Some of us even mistook him for a home deserter. He was still a boy of fourteen years when he left home. He came back ten years later to marry his childhood girl. In all that, he did so well. He became one of the few youths to do so well. He left his bride with his parents and continued to work. Everyone could see that there was improvement year after year in his home. I spoke to him and he told me that he owes much to his savings and pensions. He says after he was pensioned he decided to use very little or nothing from his savings. So he used his garden, winter and summer. Then his wife joined other women in the extended gardens scheme. That means making gardens on any open space. These groups are very powerful and doing very well. He organised other local men to join him in bulk-buying for their families. He says it is here where he saw the need for home production. Later he built a beautiful house on his new land. Materials were very high in prices and he says for two years he did not see whether he was coming or going. He says one day he decided to write to his past manager who, he says, praised him for his plans and assisted him in cash as well as in kind. He is presently nominated as head of the area. This also makes my plans (the respondent aims to purchase land in the Tongaat district) a practicality. He is progressive and inspires me a lot." (Further details?) "He is progressing and he has a couple of workers on his farm. His wife is an educated person, she keeps records of seed, their yield, what was spent and how much they have gained. (What does he plant?) Amadumbe, beans, sweet potatoes, pineapples, pawpaws, bananas, pumpkins, peanuts, groundnuts, peppers, mealies. (Is there a market for this product?) Yes. (What else?) His family is very happy and they work together like bees. (What else?) He already owns a fleet of four lorries, a number of vans, and three private cars. (9)

The knitting machine as a vehicle for progress

In the following two stories retirement income is derived from knitting. There are other similarities as well. In both of these stories the main characters have cared well for their families during their working lives. In retirement they are rewarded with success and happiness. Both stories feature housing as a subtheme.

(8) Knitting in retirement I

"Yes, I know some housekeepers (who retired) but no seamstresses. Not all of us were wayfarers. They were well suited for their jobs and got on with their employers to the best of their interest. I will tell you of my cousin who has had her son call her back home. He is now a teacher

and is able to support her as a sign of gratitude for the education she gave him. He (the son) has built a nice little home and the mother bought a lot of good things before coming to retire. She bought a knitting machine from her employer and she says she will learn at home. She is very clever, - I would do like her if I got the chance. If I never can use it, I would sell it for bigger money. (If you have the knitting machine what do you hope to do with it?) Well, there are some schools around here, I hope the teachers will accept me if I choose to knit for their school colours. (Laughs) - But you know what! I think I am wanting too much. There are my grandchildren I love above all. But, if I can use the machine as well, it will be joy for us both. (Has your cousin started to use hers?) Yes, she is doing a lot of nice things. (Who taught her?) She says her mistress did before she finished paying for it." (12)

The second story with a knitting theme focuses on the instrumental role of the employer in achieving success. The employer-benefactor theme is quite strongly developed.

(9) Knitting in retirement II (Service bonus, employer-benefactor themes)

"My cousin worked for 25 years. She never got married and stayed on with her parents, and did every good thing for them. I mean, she made additional rooms to the house. Time and again she sent furniture home. She had a knitting machine and used to teach some villagers the use of this machine. She sold some to villagers and she says her boss bought it brand new for her as a final present. She also used to tell me that all the wool she uses is bought for her by her boss. Whenever she needed anything she had to pay a little also. (What else?) She unfortunately died in a car accident and her employer bore the costs and gave some help to her very old mother who also died shortly afterwards." (14)

(10) Cousin Jan (Employer - crisis aid theme; family enterprise)

"My cousin lives not very far from us. They have had a big house for many years which also belonged to their late parents. They were still educating their three children when one unlucky day a storm came over the area and three oxen were struck by lightning and killed, and the best part of the house was burnt. We were all sad and wished to help our relative but all I could do was to give them a couple of rands, as according to our custom we comfort a person in cash or kind. Then the news was spread by the newspapers about my cousin. His former employer (the cousin had worked as a domestic worker-cook for 30 years after being a chef in a hotel for 13 years) was told of this and came to the rescue. He helped him with a couple of hundred rands and new furniture and of course this touched many of us. I have just forgotten, (there were) also the lovely clothes for all members of the family. Also, some of my cousin's master's white friends came over to help comfort our cousin. Their (Jan's) children are true to their parents'

progress, they are helping them in all they do. They (Jan's children) were selling milk and looking after the cows. This was quite something for (boys of) their age but the boys did everything like herding the cows, milking and so on. The old parents did the filling of bottles and the cleaning. There were four cows to milk. They had a cart driven by a horse and everybody knew it in the area. They are still selling their milk and eggs and at times some other useful things like firewood and homemade boerebeskuit. (What is your cousin's name?) He is Jan."<sup>1)</sup>

Storyteller's evaluation: "I think I liked their way of not taking very strenuous work upon themselves. Also their having to drive around selling must have made them meet many friends. I really liked their idea." (18).

### (11) Uncle Isak - a success story

"My uncle lives where we hope to start our new home.<sup>2)</sup> He has a butchery and sells beef, mutton and chicken. He now has four kombis running long distances, and in this area he is one of the prosperous men. He was a domestic worker for many years in the city. His master was forced to return to his homeland during the last world war so my uncle was given a very special thank you and the furniture was all given to him. He continued to work for the new owners (of the house in which he worked) who also loved him and gave him the best of times and good things. He seemed very lucky and we always think my uncle started to get a move on since that time. In this second job he says he worked hardest with a lot of overtime when there were visitors. The main reason (for wishing to retire) was that he had made up his mind to go and start a business of his own in which he was successful. (He did) very well as a shop owner and he became a taxi owner too. He is a prosperous businessman now. His business tells the story. He is by far one of the best butchers in the area and he has a lot of customers. He has three sons driving the kombis to far ends and they often come home with boxes of cleaned frozen chickens which are sold for a very reasonable price, especially to destitute families."<sup>3)</sup> (20)

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- 1) This last section of the narrative was obtained in response to the interviewer's probing. With one exception the probes have been omitted.
  - 2) The respondent plans to marry her boyfriend and to establish their retirement home in Kangwane.
  - 3) This last section of the narrative was obtained in response to the interviewer's probing. The probes have been omitted.

CHAPTER 9SUCCESSFUL RETIREMENT: AN INVENTORY OF PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS9.1 Problems of retirement

In the preceding section the concept of successful retirement was introduced. The inquiry into retirement images revealed that successful retirement was multifaceted and could therefore serve as a reference concept for workers in many different circumstances. However, success in retirement was not inevitable. Many obstacles had to be overcome on the path to success. In this section the focus is on these problems - and their solutions.

Towards the end of the interview, the respondents were asked to name the major problems which retired workers faced. Approximately ten categories of problems were identified (Table 9.1) which can be subsumed under two main headings: accommodation and income.

TABLE 9.1

RETIREMENT PROBLEMS

*"What would you say are the main problems which retired people face?"*

	%*
Accommodation	28
Poor family relationships, generation problems	28
Economic hardship	24
Inadequate care	24
Inactivity, need for recreational facilities	24
Loneliness	16
Assets of the elderly subject to misuse	16
Inadequate rural resources	8
Problems with state pensions	6
Health	4

N = 51

\* Multiple responses

### 9.1.1 Accommodation

A major task for the retiree is to find suitable accommodation and care. If workers cannot live with their children or have lost touch with their kinsfolk, alternative arrangements will have to be made. The respondents acknowledged that times had changed and it was becoming increasingly difficult for several generations to live together according to traditional custom. Retirees who were made to feel unwanted in their children's homes or who were forced to live separately were likely to suffer from neglect, from loneliness and boredom, and loss of self-esteem.

- *"Some retired people have nowhere to go than sit and watch the sun rise and set. They feel lonely and stand at their gates just to say hello to very busy passers-by who have very little or no time to ask how they are in return." (16)*

### 9.1.2 Income

The respondents were of the opinion that pensioners suffered economic hardship in retirement for a number of reasons. These included: lack of savings, inadequate access to rural resources, lack of skills to generate income in retirement, and misappropriation or mismanagement of pensioners' assets (pensions, savings, land, etc.). In some instances, retired persons might find it difficult to live well on their savings if they were required to support their grandchildren whilst their children worked away from the rural home. On the other hand, it was thought that workers who remained in town until their health failed and could not generate a retirement income, would become a real burden on the family at home. It was noted that retired workers who could not command an adequate income in retirement were not highly regarded in the home community. It was also pointed out that financial insecurity would have a negative effect on the physical and mental well-being of the elderly.

- *"They (pensioners) are also expected to support their daughters' children, since they get children before they are married." (50)*
- *"They see their money getting less and lesser, they moan and become more and more helpless. They plan ways and means to stop this flow by thinking of all sorts of markets." (12)*

- "Some wait too long to retire and become problems to their families. Some go back home in a poor state of health and expect other members of the family to help them using their own means and money. Some come back with nothing to give except many useless stories to tell." (14)
- "You see our people have it like this that when people retire they have *unhlalaphansi* (sit-down/pension) money and as they get it they go and sit on a soft armchair and spend this money on many useless things such as clothing and food, especially food, they feast on it, like sweets. As the money runs out it never rolls back except to the clever ones who start little businesses. (Like what?) Well something that makes you meet people and speak to them, move about and at the end of the day count your takings, anything that does not strain one." (15)

### 9.1.3 Typical fears

The list of problems shown in Table 9.1 reflects the typical fears of the respondents who were approaching retirement age. These fears can be outlined as follows: The old system of retirement in which the elderly were certain of their rightful position in society, and of respect and care in their last years is fast disappearing. The younger generation may not wish to honour the old system. In some instances, migrancy and the modern industrial way of life have made it impossible or impractical for the family to care for the elderly. Under these changed circumstances, the elderly feel displaced and extremely vulnerable. Their trust relationships have been betrayed. In some instances, the elderly fear that confidence tricksters and even their own children will rob them of their life savings. They seek modern forms of protection for their old age security: a broker who will manage their affairs, and state-run institutions and clubs which will cater for their needs for congenial company and new interests in life.

- "Even if they have their money they live in fear of being robbed or killed, they seldom can trust anybody." (10)
- "Our children should not be protected by the law if they mistreat us. You see if I still want to live in my house they go and sign papers saying that one is now old and they as younger ones will keep you. As soon as this is done they immediately tuck you in an untidy corner, forget about you, sell or throw out your possessions into the rain. How can one bless such a law and children. The houses should never be written into one's child's name as long as one lives." (6)

## 9.2 Sources of reliance in retirement

Despite these reservations the majority of the respondents felt that retirees should be able to turn to the family for assistance as tradition commands (Table 9.2).

TABLE 9.2	
SOURCES OF RELIANCE IN RETIREMENT	
<i>"To whom can retired persons and persons wishing to retire soon turn for assistance if they have problems?"</i>	
	%*
Family	55
Government agency	53
Employer	16
Church	12
Tribal authorities	6
Rural elite	4
God	4
Self-reliance (savings)	2
	N = 51
* Multiple responses	

- *"The family should be the first on the scene. It was a great pride for a family to have its aged well looked after. A makoti (newly wed bride) had a duty to the elderly of the family too or she was not fit and the lobola (bridewealth) needed to be returned or lessened. Her worth was to make life easy for the infirm as proof of her love for the family. A worthy son in his family would qualify his wife on these merits first." (12)*
- *"Our parents should be kept by their families, we black people believe in having a separate hut for our aged and the makotis must prove their worth by caring for them, doing everything for her (granny) and learning the culture of the family through her. In the evening all younger children took their food to go and sup where granny is and then they tell stories and granny in turn tells her tales. Some would sleep with granny." (7)*

- *"They (retired persons) should continue to augment their savings. They should not start using their savings until they are weak and helpless. Their families should look after them." (9)*

However, a sizeable proportion of the sample indicated it would also look outside the family for guidance and support in old age if the need arose. Other agents on whom one would rely as a retiree included the state, the church, tribal authorities, and the employer. The state was regarded as the single most important source of assistance for retirees.

- *"The country should take this responsibility. Families can no longer stay around and help." (21)*
- *"The chiefs in the area should be in the know; and the employers can be more useful because they know the laws and which doors to knock on, as the doors are theirs." (18)*
- *"If they have families, they then have them to give all the necessary care. But most of the time, the former employers give advice especially in administrative affairs or other official work which affects the pensioner when he wants to build himself a house or the like." (3)*

The order of mention of agents of reliance is important as it suggests a succession. Should one fail to secure help from one agent, one would turn to another one. A typical order of reliance is the family, followed by the church, and then the state. At this point it is worth noting that some 52 percent of the respondents reported membership in a church or similar organisation.

- *"Their families should be the first to come to the rescue. If the person has lost this connection and was a churchgoer then the church takes him over. If this is no remedy then the state must take over." (24)*

### 9.3 Suggestions for change

Lastly, the respondents were asked to make suggestions regarding changes which would improve the quality of life of the elderly. A wide range of responses was obtained which are listed in Table 9.3.



TABLE 9.3

PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

*"What things do you think should be changed to make things easier for people who wish to retire?"*

	%*
Provide a private pension fund for domestic workers	24
Provide old age homes	24
Provide information, advice concerning retirement	20
Provide clubs, meeting places	18
Improve state pensions	16
Promote personal savings	16
Provide assistance with application for state pension	16
Encourage young people to care for the elderly	14
Provide information on savings schemes	10
Pay state pensions directly	10
Provide protection for retirees' assets	10
Recommend retirement age	10
Improve access to state pension pay-out points	8
Promote burial societies	6
Improve access to rural resources	6
Encourage workers to plan for retirement	6
Encourage employers to assist retirees	6
Increase workers' wages	4
Provide adequate care for the elderly	4
Join trade union	2

N = 51

\* Multiple responses

### 9.3.1 Information and guidance

An item which figures prominently in the list of suggestions is the need for information and guidance concerning various aspects of retirement. It was suggested that if persons knew what to expect in retirement, they would be in a better position to prepare for life in retirement. In particular, domestic workers wished to know more about the types of benefits to which they were entitled in old age and how to secure these. It had become abundantly clear throughout the inquiry that the respondents in the survey were poorly informed regarding the official age when workers become eligible for a state pension. Therefore,

it came as no surprise when a substantial number of the respondents suggested that both workers and employers should be informed of the state-prescribed pension age. Furthermore, information regarding the procedures involved in obtaining a state pension should be made readily available to workers and their employers.

- *"Workers should know in advance what to prepare for when they are to stop work." (16)*
- *"They should be educated on this (state) pension scheme and how it works long before they get old." (13)*
- *"They should be told three or four years before the time (pension age) so as to get ready. (11)*
- *"They should be helped before they retire to know where and when to get their pension from the state or be taught how best to keep their pension money." (24)*
- *"The chiefs in the area should be in the know. The employers can become more useful because they know the laws and which doors to open as the laws are theirs." (18)*

Secondly, the respondents reasoned that workers who were well-informed and well-prepared for life in retirement would fare better than others. Well-informed workers would be in a better position to help themselves. In the respondents' view necessary preparations for retirement focussed on two major areas of concern: accommodation and income.

### 9.3.2 Accommodation

Regarding accommodation, it was suggested that prospective retirees maintained good relationships with their kinsfolk throughout their working lives and made the necessary housing arrangements before they retired.

### 9.3.3 Retirement incomes and state pensions

A large number of items in Table 9.3 refer to means of securing income in retirement. A pension scheme for domestic workers was a priority issue for a sizeable proportion of the sample. The respondents were of the opinion that workers should also be encouraged to save for old age during their working lives. Some respondents felt the onus should be on the employer to provide the opportunity structures in this

area. Employers should pay good wages and provide expertise regarding long-term investments.

A number of suggestions concerned the state pension. Physical access to pension pay-out points should be improved. Alternatively, pensions should be posted directly to the pensioner or should be deposited in his or her bank account. Pensions should be paid monthly and the value of pensions should be increased regularly to match the rising cost of living.

- *"Pensions should come through the bank or post office, this queue is making us feel like old beggars exposed to robbers."* (5)
- *"The idea of knowing that you queue for your pension to be paid out or not, brings anger to us. We must be brought in blankets, sleighs, and what not, or we pay to get there only to be told there was no more money that particular day. The very sick should be given special rights to send in some stronger, reliable relative to collect for the aged."* (6)

#### 9.3.4 Retirement activities

A further important issue raised by the respondents, addressed the question of activity in late life. The opinion was expressed that the elderly need a forum where they can meet, socialise, learn hand-crafts or skills which may provide an extra income, or just while away the time in good company. According to the respondents such a forum would stimulate personal growth and foster self-confidence among the elderly. Such centres would counteract feelings of isolation, loneliness and boredom among the elderly and would provide a new interest in life for them.

- *"They should have properly run clubs where they can allow us to show what we also can do."* (18)
- *"They need encouragement from the experts on how to run clubs where they can meet from time to time and do things, socialise, recall some of their past experiences. Learn how to use their hands. Learn how to renew old clothes for themselves or their grandchildren. They must not feel as outcasts, they must feel loved."* (5)
- *"Sitting down and doing nothing is a curse. Older people get to be neglected and forgotten. Old people should be given lots to do as suits their health, (such as gardening and handcrafts)."* (6)

### 9.3.5 Respect for the elderly

Lastly, it should be noted that a number of the changes put forward touch on the question of respect for the elderly. The respondents acknowledged that the social changes which were taking place in black society were eroding the traditional position of the elderly as highly respected members of the community. Therefore, new roles and opportunities would have to be created which were equally fulfilling and status-enhancing. Many suggestions aimed at restoring the dignity of the elderly.

- *"Old age should not be an individual problem but should involve the community so that people learn to care for the elderly as a skill." (3)*

### 9.4 Conclusions

In broad outline then, the survey results reviewed in this section suggest that elderly black workers are becoming increasingly aware of their uncertain and insecure future. They cannot take for granted that their children will provide for their well-being in late life. The respondents in the survey offered a new formula to solve this predicament. Workers who retired in future must learn to be more independent in late life than their forefathers. They must be better informed of the range of alternative options, and they must plan and prepare for their retirement well in advance. By taking these precautions they would protect themselves against misfortune in late life. If necessary, they must "go it alone" in retirement without the assistance and comfort of the family. Nevertheless, a number of respondents criticised the state for taking sides with the younger generation against the older generation. A majority view was that even in modern times children should be encouraged to care for their parents.

The survey results also suggest that self-reliance and reliance on non-family agents in retirement are familiar concepts among elderly black workers. Some respondents intimated that neutral agents such as welfare organisations and the state would in future be called upon to a greater extent to assume the traditional

role of the family in caring for and protecting the elderly. Increasing conflict between the generations would necessitate the intervention of a neutral arbitrator. A number of respondents welcomed the services of an impartial trust which would act on their behalf and administer their assets and manage their affairs. It was also suggested that a state-run home for the elderly could assume this function for persons who had no family left or who had become estranged from their families.

It is also evident from the findings that elderly blacks expect they will in future have to look to their peer groups rather than to the younger generations for the fulfilment of their higher order needs. Therefore, it will be essential to organise clubs and venues where the elderly can meet and rediscover their potential to participate meaningfully in society.

CHAPTER 10CONCLUSIONS

An exploratory study typically raises more questions than it resolves. This inquiry into retirement images among domestic and service workers is no exception to this rule. A number of salient issues emerged from the study which will no doubt require further clarification in future research. Nevertheless, a number of general issues appeared prominently in the study which are reviewed here by way of a summary of research findings.

1. Among the group under study the retirement process typically involved a number of steps: Putting one's financial house in order, taking leave from work, applying for a state pension, finding retirement accommodation and the means of supporting oneself indefinitely or until such time as the state pension would be paid out. The timing of retirement appeared to be closely related to the opportunity to save during a working lifetime. In this respect, the respondents in the study closely resembled what are commonly referred to as target migrants in the relevant literature.
2. Two key figures in the retirement process are the employer and the members of the family with whom the retired worker will live after leaving wage employment.

The employer: Retiring workers are heavily dependent upon their employers to finish business related to the modern procedures of the urban-industrial world. A case in point is the application for state pensions. Assistance is also required in the application for building loans and transport of household goods to the retirement home. Employer assistance is expected as a matter of course.

It is considered the right rather than the privilege of a domestic worker to demand employer assistance after long service. In the opinion of the majority of the respondents in the survey there was little doubt that this type of assistance would be forthcoming.

The family: The principle of reciprocity which is the moral basis of traditional societies all over the world was strongly in evidence in the retirement ideals emergent in the study. In view of the fact that mutual interdependency exists between members of the migrant workers' family, the retirement of one member of the family affects all other members. A retiring worker will therefore consult with the closest member of the family before finalising arrangements for retirement. This key person is most likely to be the caretaker of the family's rural resources - most probably a spouse, or in the absence of a spouse, the children or grandchildren. Preparations and negotiations with respect of accommodation for the retiring worker may take considerable time and may delay retirement for several years.

3. Among domestic workers, whose working conditions are loosely defined by the employer, the timing of retirement is a matter of concern. Early retirement was a general preference among the domestic workers in the study. Judging by the findings emerging from earlier research this preference for early retirement is shared by other migrant workers. However, domestic workers may feel duty-bound to serve their employers until their age forces them to retire. Alternatively, domestic workers may labour on in the hopes of receiving a handsome bonus (a kind of lump-sum pension payment similar to that paid out to non-domestic urban workers) only to be disappointed in the long run.

The survey findings suggest that the personalised contracts between master and servant may benefit the homeless migrant who has no family to return to in the long run. However, for the average domestic worker the uncertainty surrounding the work

contract and the timing of retirement causes considerable anxiety. The regularisation of domestic workers' working and retirement conditions along the lines of those pertaining to regular migrant workers would go a long way toward relieving this anxiety. It is perhaps telling that two of the most pressing needs for reform in the field of retirement expressed in the study concerned a pension scheme for domestic workers and a reliable source of information and advice on retirement questions.

4. Similar to regular migrant workers many domestic workers must leave the family behind when they go to work. However, domestic workers, particularly live-in workers, work long hours and frequently work over weekends so there are few opportunities to visit the family. Anxiety and concern about the family left behind during the working lifetime is not necessarily relieved at the end of a migrant career. Retiring workers are still dependent upon the goodwill of their families for their well-being in retirement. Therefore, good family relationships were considered the passport to successful retirement by the respondents in the survey. This view is consistent with the traditional image of retirement in pre-industrial societies. The essence of this image is that the elderly who have passed through a lifetime of toil in the service of the family will in turn be cared for by their descendants. This image of retirement in which the elderly are surrounded by caring children and grandchildren was prominent in the minds of the respondents. In particular, the respondents were staunch defenders of the traditional role of the elderly in educating the young. This is the societal norm and was also their personal retirement ideal. However, strong doubts were voiced that the traditional image of retirement would in fact become reality for them and a substantial proportion of the respondents indicated that they dreaded the coming of old age.



Maintaining good family relationships which will ensure well-being in late life is difficult at the best of times. There was an awareness among the respondents that the migrant labour system and western-material values have weakened family bonds and the traditional power structure within the family. Therefore, retiring workers cannot necessarily count on their children for support in old age as is customary. It is interesting to note that a number of the respondents indicated that they would shift their views radically if family relationships turned sour and would rely on "modern" support structures for assistance, such as the state or the church, or in some instances former employers. It is also noteworthy that a fairly substantial number of the respondents in the survey viewed old age homes in a positive light. The provision of old age homes would extend the range of choice of lifestyle in old age.

5. Doubts concerning the traditional solution to retirement prompted the respondents to express the need for greater independence and self-reliance in late life. Two main themes emerged in the study: savings and entrepreneurship.

Great emphasis was placed on the life savings which would provide the necessary capital to secure an independent means of livelihood in late life. In some cases savings would have to be used to finance retirement accommodation. It was a common view that "modern" retirement tends to drain retiring workers' savings. An urban retirement, for example, involves regular rentals and outlays for food and other consumer goods. A common complaint was that retired workers were expected to support grandchildren and other children placed in their care whilst the parents pursued their working careers. Traditionally the return migrant's savings would be considered a nest-egg which would be touched only in times of a crisis or dire need. The children would provide regular support so that the retiree's savings would remain intact.

The respondents in the survey who had managed to accumulate savings reported greater well-being and confidence than others. Survey results show that money management is a skill which the majority of domestics wish to master. Expert advice is needed to show domestic workers how to make the most of the little money that they can save from their meagre wages to counteract the effects of inflation. In this area employers of domestic workers and organisations, such as the South African Domestic Workers Association, could play a vital role. In fact, some of the respondents in the survey reported that they were grateful to their employers who had urged them to save and had provided advice and assistance in this connection.

6. Regarding entrepreneurship, there is evidence in the study that the innovator-retiree serves as a role model for successful retirement. The rural entrepreneur who operates a substantial business after retiring from urban work is admired, although the majority of the respondents would shy away from extremely hard work in retirement. The ideal is a business enterprise which more or less runs itself. In order to be able to start such a venture the migrant worker would have to land a windfall or would have to be exceptionally lucky as far as the generosity of his or her employer is concerned.

The majority of domestic workers, and particularly the women workers would aspire to entrepreneurship on a more modest scale. They envisage some kind of retailing, handcrafts or agricultural pursuit which will provide some kind of alternative income to wage-earnings and will bridge the income-gap between leaving work and receiving a state pension. Considerable inventiveness and resourcefulness and a feel for local markets are demonstrated in the choice of a retirement occupation. According to this image of retirement the successful retirees are those people who can leave wage employment to be reunited with the rural family earlier rather than later, because they have managed to carve out a niche for themselves in the informal sector or

in the local market in their area of origin.

7. The concept of success in retirement divides into various aspects: material and less tangible types of success.

Firstly, success generally implies material success which ensures social standing in the community, financial independence and a relatively carefree existence. By implication, success will usually refer to early retirement if pension age is not prescribed as is the case among domestic workers. However, it is considered foolhardy to retire from wage-labour if one has not secured a retirement income.

Consistent with the image of success which focuses on entrepreneurial activities is the strong desire to remain active in late life. However, one might make the supposition that the image of material success which requires retirement activity is a relatively modern concept. There is evidence in the survey that retirement was traditionally equated with rest from work rather than the pursuit of alternative activities. Therefore early retirement which necessitates a bridging-the-gap retirement occupation may be a relatively new concept.

Secondly, success also refers to the less tangible aspects of well-being in late life. This image consists of the retiree who has reached fulfilment after a life of hard work and is happy to live in peace and contentment with the children and grandchildren. Modernisation appears to present a greater threat to this second image of successful retirement than the first.

Thirdly, the successful retiree is typically the recipient of a state pension or a pension from work. The state pension is commonly considered one of the most important sources of income in retirement among domestic workers. However, the difficulties experienced in applying for the state pension and collecting this pension diminish its value to the retired worker. Happiness

for migrant workers would be to receive the state pension with minimal effort and fuss. This would go a long way toward restoring the retired workers' dignity and pride.

8. The expressed need for stimulation and recreation, and a forum for the elderly may be a reaction to the devaluation of the role of elderly people in modern-industrial as opposed to traditional society. The opinions expressed in the study suggest that the black elderly may be seeking peer recognition to replace their former position of authority in the family. Elderly blacks may wish to engage in hobbies and learn skills in order to boost their self-esteem after having been deprived of their traditional role of educating the young. For example, one respondent suggested a revival of the traditional initiation school in "modern dress". This school was described as a club in which retired workers would teach youngsters the industrial skills they had learnt while working in town. Through their teaching activities retired workers would regain the respect and admiration of the youngsters.

9. Insecurity in old age hinges on income and housing. This was one of the main findings emerging from the study. As one respondent put it:

*"I think we should save money and be sure where we live if the worst comes upon one."* (15)

Income opportunities in late life have been discussed above. The housing needs of the elderly are closely related to the family situation. Similar to modernising societies elsewhere the black family in South Africa is experiencing unprecedented geographic mobility, and retired workers are affected by these changed circumstances. There was great awareness among the respondents in the survey that new solutions to the housing of the elderly must be sought. Some respondents appeared to have taken the initiative themselves by securing a plot not far from town and building a house to attract some members of their family to live with them and care for them when they would no longer be able to look after themselves. One respondent intended to rotate

from one domicile to another in order to live with all her children for shorter periods of time. In this way the joys and tensions of living on close quarters would be shared equally among all the children. This solution seemed particularly appropriate in the case of elderly people wishing to live with their urban-based children who are likely to live in less spacious accommodation than their rural-based counterparts.

It would appear that some young folk prepare a retirement home for their elderly parents, especially if these are widowed or single, as a sign of respect and gratitude. This gesture may conform to the traditional ideal relationship between the generations which includes the care of the physical needs of the elderly by the young folk. However, the majority of the respondents seemed to be prepared to house themselves in retirement with some assistance from their children or their employers. The survey evidence is not clear on this point. However, it is abundantly clear that retired workers will increasingly have to assume responsibilities for making their own housing arrangements if all young folk take urban jobs. Under these circumstances the choice of housing options for the black elderly will need to be increased. A variety of solutions to house the frail aged and the elderly persons who have no family able or willing to care for them is required. In this connection, one might mention that according to a minority view in the survey it is only thanks to the current scarcity of institutional facilities for the black aged that the majority of retired workers are still cared for by their children.

9. Despite the anxiety and uncertainty of the future they face, the respondents in the survey still held hopes that they would age successfully and lead useful and interesting lives to the last as suggested in this prescription for retirement:

*"Older people should be those who have worked, saved and then retired to enjoy the fruits of their labour undisturbed and unthreatened. People who have grandchildren can befriend their grandchildren, chat with them and teach them the beauty of ageing."* (18)

The competence, which this and other studies such as the one conducted by Jacklyn Cock (1980 : 104 ff.), have found to be part of the female domestic workers' make-up should stand retired workers in good stead in achieving this ideal.

To grow old graciously is a new experience for everyone and as one respondent put it,

*"be they men or women, they all need care, and some kind of encouragement...."* (10)

It can also be a rewarding and challenging experience. The retirement plans which the respondents in the study intended to put into practice reflect this. There will be many problems to overcome such as the ones discussed in this report. Even if retiring workers show amazing drive and initiative in coping with modern and traditional problems of retirement, as evidenced by some of the would-be petty entrepreneurs among the respondents in this study, they will also need the full understanding and support of the community if they are to succeed. It is hoped that this preliminary research will contribute to such an understanding which will promote successful retirement for black domestic workers and migrant workers in general.

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APPENDIX I



FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS ON SELECTED BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS (N = 51)

1. <u>Sex</u>	<u>Johannesburg</u>	<u>Durban</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>%*</u>	<u>%*</u>	<u>%</u>
Male	56	19	37
Female	44	81	63
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

2. <u>Approximate age</u> (In many cases ages are estimates)	<u>Johannesburg</u>	<u>Durban</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>%*</u>	<u>%*</u>	<u>%</u>
-49 years	-	23	12
50-54 years	8	46	27
55-59 years	28	15	22
60-64 years	16	4	10
65-69 years	24	8	15
70-74 years	20	4	12
90+ years	4	-	2
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

3. <u>Education</u>	<u>%</u>
None	6
Substandards A, B	2
Standard 1 to 2	16
Standard 3 to 5	37
Standard 6 to 7	39
	<u>100</u>

4. <u>Home language</u>	<u>Johannesburg</u>	<u>Durban</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>%*</u>	<u>%*</u>	<u>%</u>
Zulu	52	84	68
Swazi	16	4	10
Xhosa	-	8	4
Tswana	24	-	12
Sotho	-	4	2
Pedi	4	-	2
Shona	4	-	2
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

\* Johannesburg and Durban distributions significantly different.



7. Residential address	Johannesburg	Durban	Total
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Live-in worker	60	58	58
Live-in/township commuter	-	8	4
Live-in/peri-urban commuter	-	11	6
Township commuter	24	19	22
Peri-urban commuter	12	4	8
No fixed address	4	-	2
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
	N = 25	N = 26	N = 51

  

8. Working hours per day	<u>%</u>
No fixed hours	14
5 hours	2
7-8 hours	13
9 hours	12
10 hours	10
11 hours	10
12 hours	12
13 hours	12
14-15 hours	15
	<u>100</u>

  

9. Working days per week	<u>%</u>
3 days	2
5 days	19
5½ days	8
6 days	55
7 days	4
Other	6
No information	6
	<u>100</u>

  

10. Overtime work	<u>%</u>
Paid overtime	28
Unpaid overtime	31
Overtime - no indication of remuneration	4
No overtime	25
No information	12
	<u>100</u>

11. Monthly wages

Absolute frequencies:

	<u>Johannesburg*</u>	<u>Durban*</u>	<u>Total</u>
R20 <sup>0</sup>	1	-	1
R50	1	4	5
R60	2	9	11
R70	-	4	4
R80	-	3	3
R90	1	1	2
R100	2	1	3
R110	-	1	1
R120	1	2	3
R130	1	1	2
R150	2	-	2
R180	2	-	2
R200	2	-	2
R210	1	-	1
R220	1	-	1
R230	1	-	1
R250	1	-	1
R400	1	-	1
R430	1	-	1
R450	1	-	1
R540	1	-	1
No information	2	-	2
	<hr/> 25	<hr/> 26	<hr/> 51
Median	R180	R60	R90

<sup>0</sup>Part-time work12. Savings

	<u>Johannesburg*</u>	<u>Durban*</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
None	-	38	20
- R99	-	8	4
R100-R249	8	19	14
R250-R499	9	19	14
R500-R999	-	8	4
R1 000-R1 999	36	4	19
R2 000+	40	-	19
No indication of amount	8	4	6
	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100

\*Johannesburg and Durban distributions significantly different

13. <u>Years worked in town</u>	<u>%</u>
5 - 9 years	4
15 - 24 years	16
25 - 34 years	27
35 - 44 years	29
45+ years	24
	<hr/> 100

median 35 years

14. <u>Number jobs held</u>	<u>%</u>
1	6
2	22
3	27
4	24
5+	21
	<hr/> 100

15. <u>Land rights in rural area</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	74
No	24
No information	2
	<hr/> 100

16. <u>Access to plough land</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	63
No	35
No information	2
	<hr/> 100

17. Caretaker of rural assets

	<u>%</u>
Spouse	33
Children	19
Sibling	8
Parent	6
Other relative	16
Tenant	4
Childminder	2
No information	12
	<u>100</u>

18. Distance to rural home

Travelling time:	<u>Johannesburg</u>	<u>Durban</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>%*</u>	<u>%*</u>	<u>%</u>
-2 hours	-	46	23
3-4 hours	4	31	18
5-8 hours	8	4	6
One day or more	72	8	39
No information	16	11	14
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
	N = 25	N = 26	N = 51

\* Johannesburg and Durban distributions significantly different

19. Visits to rural home per annum

	<u>Johannesburg</u>	<u>Durban</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>%*</u>	<u>%*</u>	<u>%</u>
More often than fortnightly	8	19	14
Fortnightly	-	8	4
Monthly	-	34	17
4-6 times per annum	-	8	4
2-3 times per annum	20	8	14
Once per annum	52	11	31
Less often	4	4	4
No information	16	8	12
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
	N = 25	N = 26	N = 51

\*Johannesburg and Durban distributions significantly different



20. Club membership

	<u>Men absolute frequency</u> <sup>0</sup>	<u>Women absolute frequency</u> <sup>0</sup>	<u>Total absolute frequency</u> <sup>0</sup>
Church	2	20	22
Savings club	2	8	10
Women's club	-	4	4
Burial society	-	4	4
YWCA	-	3	3
Gambling club	1	-	1
Trade union	-	1	1
Farmers' club	1	-	1
Football club	1	-	1
Church choir	-	1	1
Non-members	7	2	9
	N = 13	N = 29	N = 42

<sup>0</sup>Multiple responses

APPENDIX II

IDENTIFICATION OF THE SOURCE MATERIAL

The numbers in brackets following passages from the interviews quoted in the text of this report refer to the following cases:

- (1) Male domestic worker (gardener), age some 94 years, Johannesburg suburb.
- (2) Female domestic worker, age some 55 years, Johannesburg suburb.
- (3) Male casual gardener, formerly a chef in a hotel; age approximately 68-70 years, works in Johannesburg suburbs.
- (4) Male caretaker/supervisor in a block of flats, age some 59 years, Johannesburg.
- (5) Female domestic worker, age some 59 years, Johannesburg.
- (6) Male gardener in a nursery, age some 67 years, Johannesburg suburb.
- (7) Female domestic worker (nanny), age approximately 60 years, Johannesburg.
- (8) Female domestic worker, age some 73 years, Johannesburg.
- (9) Male caretaker/supervisor in what appears to be a small private firm, age approximately 60 years, Johannesburg.
- (10) Male gardener in a school, age estimated over 70-74 years, Johannesburg.
- (11) Male chauffeur/gardener, age some 57 years, Johannesburg.
- (12) Female domestic worker, refers to herself as a housekeeper and seamstress, age 52 years, Johannesburg.
- (13) Female domestic worker, age over 70 years, Johannesburg.
- (14) Female domestic worker/nanny, age estimated 58 years although the respondent claims she is 68 years old, Johannesburg.
- (15) Male domestic worker - works for a person who runs a kennel, main work consists of caring for dogs. Formerly worked with horses as a stablehand, age some 70 years, Johannesburg.
- (16) Female domestic worker, age some 59 years, Johannesburg.
- (17) Male messenger/teamaker in a firm, formerly a chef in a hotel, age some 65 years, Johannesburg.
- (18) Female fry-cook in a fish and chips shop, age some 66 years, Johannesburg.
- (19) Male domestic worker (refers to himself as a housekeeper), age some 69 years, appears to have returned to work after having gone into retirement, Johannesburg.
- (20) Female domestic worker, age some 53 years, Johannesburg.

- (21) Male nightwatchman/caretaker in a block of flats, age some 56 years, Johannesburg.
- (22) Female domestic worker, age estimated 69 years, Johannesburg.
- (23) Male cook in a works canteen, age some 60 years plus, Johannesburg.
- (24) Male domestic worker (housekeeping duties only), age some 64 years, Johannesburg.
- (25) Male domestic worker (housekeeper and gardener), age some 72 years, Johannesburg.
- (26) Female domestic worker, age some 45 years, Durban.
- (27) Female domestic worker, age some 73 years, Durban.
- (28) Female domestic worker, age some 65 years, Durban.
- (29) Female domestic worker, age some 45 years, Durban.
- (30) Female domestic worker, age some 44 years, Durban.
- (31) Female domestic worker, age some 44 years, Durban.
- (32) Female domestic worker, age some 53 years, Durban.
- (33) Female domestic worker, age some 50 years, Durban.
- (34) Female domestic worker, age some 53 years, Durban.
- (35) Female domestic worker, age some 49 years, Durban.
- (36) Female domestic worker, age some 55 years, Durban.
- (37) Female domestic worker, age some 58 years, Durban.
- (38) Female domestic worker, age some 52 years, Durban.
- (39) Female domestic worker, age estimated 50 years, Durban.
- (40) Male domestic worker/gardener, age some 49 years, Durban.
- (41) Female domestic worker, age some 53 years, Durban.
- (42) Male domestic worker/gardener, age some 50 years, Durban.
- (43) Male domestic worker (housekeeping and gardening), age some 68 years, Durban.
- (44) Female domestic worker, age some 54 years, Durban.
- (45) Male domestic worker (housework and gardening), age some 59 years, Durban.
- (46) Female domestic worker, age some 53 years, Durban.
- (47) Female domestic worker, age some 58 years, Durban.
- (48) Male domestic worker (housework and gardening), age some 60 years, Durban.
- (49) Female domestic worker, age some 53 years, Durban.
- (50) Female domestic worker, age some 52 years, Durban.
- (51) Female domestic worker, age some 53 years, Durban.

APPENDIX III

GUIDELINES FOR WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS  
SPECIFIED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN DOMESTIC WORKERS ASSOCIATION

Extracted from an information pamphlet issued by the South African Domestic Workers Association (SADWA).

- Addresses:
- Room 12-13 Chester House, 132 Jeppe Street, JOHANNESBURG, Tel. (011)837606
  - E.C.T., 20 St. Andrew's Street, DURBAN, Tel. (031)318322/318481
  - 5 Long Street, Mowbray, CAPE TOWN, Tel. (021)692112

SADWA recommended minimum salary 1983:

Full-time living-in domestic worker	R121 p.m. plus meals (8 hr. day)
Full-time living-out domestic worker	R121 p.m. plus transport and 2 meals

Since holding its first general convention in 1981, SADWA has increased its recommended salaries by approximately 10 percent per annum. SADWA views these salaries as realistic and recommends they be adhered to nationally.

OFF DUTY

One full day off a week.  
One half day off a week-end either Saturday or Sunday afternoon.

In the week that the worker is going to have the week-end off he/she forfeits the day off.

DAILY WORKERS

R10,00 per day plus transport expenses and two meals.  
R5,00 per half day plus transport expenses and breakfast.  
An over-time pay of R1,50 an hour.  
Meals should be discussed with individuals on the day of engagement.

LIVING QUARTERS

A room with adequate ventilation, burglar proofing, a lock on the door, heater, a comfortable bed and mattress, wardrobe, chest of drawers, at least two chairs and a table.

ABLUTION

A bath or shower with hot and cold water.  
A toilet that works with toilet paper supplies.

LEAVE

An annual leave of four weeks on full pay. The time for taking of leave should be discussed when the appointment is made.

DISMISSAL

A person employed by the month should be given a month's notice money in lieu of notice if he/she is to be summarily dismissed. Those paid by the week are given a week's notice.

Summary dismissals can only be allowed in cases of gross insubordination, drunkenness or persistent misbehaving whilst on duty.

DEDUCTIONS

It is illegal to deduct money for breakages or articles damaged in the course of duty from the domestic worker's pay.

CONTRACT WORKERS

On dismissal the fare back to the homeland plus payment of salary up to the end of contract is to be made by the employer, unless the employer gives consent that the worker finishes the contract in the employ of someone else.

UNIFORMS

Overalls should be provided as well as soap to keep them clean. Three pairs should be a reasonable minimum.



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