SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The fast pace of life today, occupies much of the younger generation’s time and energy. Be it in academics, competitive exams or the reality shows on the television, every one is aiming high. The business of being a winner is very serious for the youngsters. Going a step higher, what would the parents of such youngsters be like?

The adult parents are the sandwich generation, as they are in between the younger generation and the older generation. The younger generation is very difficult to keep up with and find the attention of their parents interfering. On the other hand, the older generation craves the attention, but feels guilty on imposing themselves on their already busy offspring. The sandwich generation, in the meanwhile, is busy keeping up with the Joneses, updating themselves to better houses, cars, electronic goods, and holiday trips.

Lost in this rigmarole, are the children and the elderly. Children are busy escorted from school, to tuitions, to hobby classes, so that their schedule is as hectic as that of their parents. And the elderly? The elderly are at home, trying to fit in, help out and adjust to this new pace of life, where their slowness is often a source of irritation to the younger ones, and their wisdom and experience undervalued to the older ones.

The plight of the elderly is yet to set off alarm bells ringing. The
The rights of women and children are sounded everywhere. There are Non-Government Organisations (N.G.O.s) galore for children, women and AIDS/HIV victims, for their conditions are highlighted all the time. Yet the simple passage of time and years, have brought forth an aged generation, whose cry has been stifled and silenced.

The proportion of the ageing population has risen everywhere. India will have, by 2025, the largest hub of senior citizens. Goa will be the second state, after Kerala, in India, to have an aged population. The proportion of the elderly to the rest of the population is estimated to be around 12 percent. That means one in every twelve is an elderly person. Yet this section of the population has become the invisible lot.

The fast eroding values of the present day society have only pushed this invisible population into an isolated and agonizing loneliness. Indeed, lucky are those who have with them the moral, financial and social support of their children. For a vast majority, unfortunately, the support of their children comes with a price tag. The price tag varies in many ways, to willing away property and assets in exchange of support, to making the elderly do their share in the housework, in return to being looked after.

The plight of the older ones has reached proportions where it has achieved enough prominence to become cover stories in recent journals and even the regular magazines. For instance, India Today ran a cover
story entitled ‘Home Alone’ in the recent July 2007 issue, a repeat of a topic that focused on the aged, which was carried out by the same magazine in September 1991. Have things changed from 1991 to 2007?

In the last fifteen years, things have changed, but perhaps not in the right direction. Nowhere in the world, would a Government try to be morally upright for once, and stir its citizens’ conscience to their domestic duties. And seek to punish them if they fail. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Bill, 2007, makes the neglect of parents above age 60 punishable, is waiting to be passed in the country. It now will take a Law to awaken children to their duties, of looking after those, who at one time, looked after them.

Add to this, the plight of being a female, growing under the rules of the father, obliging to the wishes of the husband and lastly submitting to the son. Growing old, often, with no economic independence, no husband, and the traditional friction of a daughter-in-law, the elderly woman is at most times at the receiving end.

Keeping this in mind, the researcher has chosen to focus on this area for the present thesis. The present study aimed to study the effects of marital status, living arrangements and social support on the adjustment and mental efficiency of elderly women.
The sample chosen for the study were elderly Goan women, aged 60 years and above. A total of 173 elderly women were finally chosen as the sample. They were divided into four groups:

1) Elderly women who were married and resided in their own community amongst others.

2) Elderly women who were married but resided with their spouses in old aged homes (OAHs).

3) Elderly women who were widowed, but resided in their own community amongst others.

4) Elderly women who were widowed, and resided alone in old aged homes (OAHs).

The women were selected from all socio-economic backgrounds. The age ranged from 60 years to 98 years. As far as possible even the geographical areas were kept consistent to the sample from OAHs to those living in the community.

Three psychological tests were used as tools for assessing the social support, adjustment and mental efficiency of the elderly women. The tools chosen were those that were build specially to suit the elderly population, so that the items on the tests were appropriate to drawing out the relevant information. The tests were namely, the Social Support Inventory for the Elderly, The Adjustment Inventory for the Aged and the PGI- Battery for
Assessing Mental Efficiency in the Elderly. All the tests were authored by researchers having vast experience in the field of Gerontology.

The data was collected using personal interviews to get personal data. The three tests were given on a one to one basis, in one session. The very old were however, given one test at a time, covering three sessions. The data was then entered into a performa. From the total number of respondents, 173 were selected.

The types of statistical techniques were chosen, keeping in mind, those that would be best able to portray the results that would arise. The ‘t’ test, one way ANOVA, Duncan’s Post Hoc Test for analysis of means and Pearson’s Correlational Method were used.

The ‘t’ test assessed means for three variables, namely, marital status, living arrangements and age group.

Marital status was compared with regard to those who were married and those who were widowed. The married elderly experienced better social support and exhibited better mental status, than the widowed. The adjustment of the married elderly was also better than the widowed.

The elderly women living in their own communities fared significantly better on variables of social support, adjustment, set test (recall), memory and mental efficiency. They were also better than those who lived in the old aged homes on variables of mental status and Nahar-Benson test (perceptual-motor skills).
The elderly were divided into those who were young-old (60-69 years) and those who were old-old (70 years and over). With the exception of the Nahar-Benson test for perceptual-motor skills, there were no significant differences between the two groups on the rest of the variables. The young-old have better perceptual-motor skills.

The one-way ANOVA for social support, show there are differences in the means of sample subgroups. The married/community dwelling got the highest social support, and the widowed/old aged homed elderly got the least social support.

The one-way ANOVA for adjustment showed that the means for the four subgroups differ significantly. The married/community dwelling were best adjusted and those who were widowed/old aged homed were lowest on adjustment.

The one-way ANOVA for Mental Efficiency, show that there are differences among the subgroups of sample. There community dwellers, both married and widowed fared better on the tests, than those who lived in old aged homes.

The one-way ANOVA for Memory, reveal that the means for the sample subgroups differ significantly. The married/community dwellers had the best memory, the married/old age homed elderly showed lowest memory score.

The one-way ANOVA for depression shows that there were no significant differences among the four sample subgroups.
For assessing the significant differences in means Duncan’s Post Hoc Test was used.

All correlations were done using Pearson’s method. The correlations for social support, show significant correlations for social support, adjustment, mental efficiency, depression at 0.01 levels.

The correlations for age show significant correlations between age and mental efficiency, memory at 0.05 levels, and between age and Nahar-Benson test (perceptual and motor skill) at 0.01 levels

The correlations for education and mental efficiency are significant at 0.01 levels.

The researcher has found with regard to the old-old that there were not significant differences, from the young-old group. Most of the hypotheses drawn in this direction were not supported. This finding is important as it indicates that old age need not be accompanied by deterioration and negativity.

Also it was found that the hypotheses with regard to living arrangements were supported by the research findings and that it played a more important role than marital status. So a widowed elderly woman can have a good quality of life without her spouse if her living arrangements are good and it can compensate for her loss of spouse.

The hypotheses that advancement in age will have significant influence on adjustment and depression were not supported. Therefore, the researcher concludes that old age, by itself need not bring on
maladjustment or depression. These results are important as the quality of life for the elderly can be maintained if the factors responsible for them are taken care of.

Based on the results the following conclusions are drawn:

1) The married elderly were significantly better adjusted than the widowed elderly.

2) The married elderly showed significantly better mental status than the widowed elderly.

3) The married elderly perceived significantly better social support than the widowed elderly.

4) There were no difference in mental efficiency between the married and the widowed.

5) The community based elderly were significantly better adjusted than the widowed elderly.

6) The community based elderly displayed better recall, mental status, memory, perceptual-motor skills and overall better mental efficiency than the widowed elderly.

7) The married perceived significantly better social support than the widowed elderly.

8) There are no significant differences in social support, adjustment, depression and overall mental efficiency, where the young-old and old-old are concerned.
9) The young-old have a significant advantage over the old-old where the perceptual-motor skills are concerned.

10) There are significant differences among the four groups of sample where social support, adjustment, mental efficiency and memory, are concerned.

11) Married and community based elderly have displayed significantly better adjustment, memory and their depression levels are significantly lower than the rest of the groups.

12) The widowed/old aged homed elderly displayed significantly lower perception of social support, were significantly least adjustment and were significantly low on memory and mental efficiency than the rest of the groups.

13) Social support has a significant and positive effect on adjustment.

14) Social support has a significant and positive effect on mental efficiency.

15) Social support has a significant and positive effect on memory.

16) There is a significant and negative correlation between social support and depression.

17) There is a significant and negative correlation between age and mental efficiency.

18) There is a significant and negative correlation between age and memory.
19) There is a significant and negative correlation between age and perceptual-motor skills.

20) There was no significant correlation between education and adjustment.

21) There is a significantly positive correlation between education and mental efficiency.

The researcher has sought to be simple and forthright in the language used for this study, so that those reading will not be hampered by technicalities and miss the point of the research. The statistical techniques used are such so that even those with no background of statistics will still understand the results of the study. There was a deliberate avoidance of complex descriptive language and the simple-ness of the research is its strength and should be understood in these terms.