**IJME Response Document (Submission: 3076)**

**Comment 1:** Although this claim of the author is understandable when one has read the paper, this phrasing should be reworded – as of now it seems there is no literature at all on fieldwork. This is incorrect and the author herself discusses some of the references in this regard. What should be stated here more clearly is the specific aspect of fieldwork that is missing; i.e., scholarship “on the *experiences* of the fieldworker”

**Response 1:** I thank the reviewer for this comment. I agree with the reviewer and have incorporated the comment and reworded the sentence as well.

**Comment 2:** In the following sections, the author has discussed not just ethical but also institutional challenges. It would be best to either clarify what the author means by ethical challenges (especially since this is the core of the argument) or qualify this by mentioning all the various kinds of challenges faced.

**Response 2:** I thank the review for asking for this clarification. I have removed the word ethical challenges and have added the following sentences to add more clarity: Specifically, this paper analyzes the various factors that need to be considered before conducting interviews in an institutional set up. For instance, this paper discusses how interactions with the authorities, the background of the author and the nature of the research played a role in gaining access to the old age home residents.

**Comment 3:** A brief explanation with regard to what each means would be helpful here.

**Response 3**: I thank the reviewer for asking to explain both insider-outsider perspective and subjective-objective approach. I have incorporated this comment and inserted the following lines: Finally, this paper sheds light on the two main ethical dilemmas of every sociological field researcher in India: the “insider-outsider perspective” and the “subjective-objective” approach. The former (insider-outsider perspective) highlights the extent to which the researcher has been able to absorb the culture of the society/community being studied. On the other hand the latter (subjective-objective approach) indicates the balance the researcher needs to maintain to avoid personal biases and remain neutral towards the participants.

**Comment 4**: Since this paper is about fieldwork itself, one would expect the author to have introduced by now the nature of the research and the kind of interview she conducted – structured, semi-structured as well as the nature of questions asked etc. All of these should have a direct bearing on her discussion of the ethics of doing fieldwork.

**Response 4**: I thank the reviewer for raising this very important point. I have added a para explaining my research and its ethical implications: My research examined the lived experiences of growing old in old age homes in urban India. Additionally I was also interrogating questions around filial obligations and expectations from adult children to understand the shift from the family to an institutional setting. The interview instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire with both open and close ended questions. I intended to conduct in-depth narrative style interviews and the questions focused on adjustment issues, everyday routine and interactions, relationships with adult children, network ties and gender roles in different old age homes in urban India. A closer look at my research, suggests that the respondents would need to share quite an amount of personal information with me. Specifically, the respondents would have to trust me to share their private lives with me. Though I was aware of the complex nature of my research, nonetheless, I planned to remain neutral and not get involved with my respondents.

**Comment 5**: Refrain from using ‘older’ each time – it becomes very repetitive and is unnecessary as a qualifier.

**Response 5**: I have taken note of this comment and removed the word older and used only respondents or participants to avoid repetitions.

**Comment 6**: “As a field researcher, I realized that while we as researchers continue looking for new forms of data in different kinds of fields, however, we always leave a part of ourselves in each particular field.” This is an important point – should be dwelt on more.

**Response 6:** I thank the reviewer for this comment. I have added a few more sentences to elaborate on this point. The sentences are as follows: Though we as researchers enter the field to collect data, it is crucial for us to understand that our respondents view us very differently. From the perspective of respondents, the researcher is a person trying to obtain intimate details from their everyday lives. Specifically, we need to comprehend that our respondents will be sharing their personal narratives with us in a very short span of time. Hence, it is important for researchers to view their respondents more as humans and not merely as sources of information.

**Comment 7**: “Several studies have exposed in detail the insider-outsider perspective while doing fieldwork (Simmel, 1921; Naples, 1996; Sheriff, 2001). In particular, these studies have indicated that being an insider or an outsider is an ever changing identity in the field and thus neither of these positions can be static. Additionally, these studies have also suggested that the fieldworker has the advantage of being a stranger and hence, participants may confide their intimate details to the researcher. However another set of studies have demonstrated that a certain amount of rapport building with the participants is also necessary (Kusow, 2003; Sultana, 2007; Calvey, 2008).” The discussion of the scholarship requires more clarity.

**Response 7**: I thank the reviewer for asking me to expand this scholarship. I have taken note of this comment and added this paragraph: Scholarship on the insider-outsider perspective could be divided into sets. The first set of studies have mostly commented on the abstruseness associated with the method of fieldwork (Simmel, 1921; Naples, 1996; Sheriff, 2001). In particular, these studies have indicated that the being an insider or an outsider is an ever changing identity in the field and thus neither of these positions can be static. For instance, on one hand the fieldworker has the advantage of being a stranger and as a result participants may confide their intimate details to the researcher. On the other hand, it is impossible to prevent the intersections between the researcher’s identity and those being researched. Hence, as suggested by these studies, the process of doing fieldwork is ambiguous and the researcher has to constantly navigate his/her position depending upon the everyday interactions and relationships with the community being studied (Simmel, 1921; Naples, 1996; Sheriff, 2001). Acknowledging the uncertain nature of doing fieldwork another set of studies have emphasized on the need to build rapport with the participants (Kusow, 2003; Sultana, 2007; Calvey, 2008). Specifically, these studies have indicated that the researcher needs to develop a certain amount of rapport with the participants to receive authentic information. Though the researcher will be positioned with regard to his/her class, gender, ethnicity, nonetheless, it is the task of the researcher to cultivate relations in such a manner so as to gain the trust of the community (Kusow, 2003; Sultana, 2007; Calvey, 2008). Summarizing both sets of studies, it may be suggested that the researcher requires to maintain a balance between being an outsider as well as an insider.

**Comment 8**: Rephrase: own background details

**Response 8**: I have changed this phrase to own personal information.

**Comment 9**: Though my participants made me feel like an insider and narrated a substantial amount of their personal issues, nonetheless, as I wrote down my field experience, I still felt like an outsider. Ethically, I might have guarded their interviews and always kept them anonymous even while publishing the data. The connection between these set of sentences is not clear.

**Response 9**: I have added a few more sentences to connect these lines: the sentences are as follows: Though my participants made me feel like an insider and narrated a substantial amount of their personal issues, nonetheless, as I wrote down my field experience, I still felt like an outsider. Most of my respondents had shared details of their strained relations with their adult children and that they were unhappy in these old age homes. After the interviews my respondents believed that sharing their woes with me, might help them transform their situation. However, as a researcher I knew that it was difficult to change their everyday lives. In particular, even if I had shared their concerns with the caretakers, I was not sure if concrete action would be taken. To maintain the ethics of the research, I guarded their interviews and always kept them anonymous even while publishing the data. However, post my fieldwork I never went back to visit them again.

**Comment 10**: “Hence, it is very difficult to practice “passionate detachment” (Haraway, 1988) in this context. Though as researchers we are taught to perceive our respondents only as data, however, ethically, it is difficult to remove the human factor from the process of fieldwork.” This is a crucial part of the argument – would benefit from more elaboration.

**Response 10**: I thank the reviewer for this comment. I have added the following sentences for more elaboration: As students of sociology and anthropology we are trained to restrain our feelings from interfering during fieldwork. Though as researchers we are taught to perceive our respondents only as data, however, ethically, it is difficult to remove the human factor from the process of fieldwork. Despite numerous attempts to remain unattached, during the interviews, I felt I was being unethical by not connecting emotionally with my respondents. Looking back at my own experience, I have to admit that I was moved by each of the narratives and I had also empathized with each of my respondent. Thus, drawing from my own field encounters, I can suggest that the researcher does get enmeshed in the lives of the respondents and the field also becomes a part of the fieldworker’s identity.

**Comment 11**: Although the author mentions Srinivas’s argument about how the researcher’s caste, gender, marital status and age inform the experience of the fieldwork, the author seems to have most explicitly only touched upon the aspect of her age playing a role in her interaction on the field. Can the author include some of these other factors to discuss how these informed her experience too?

**Response 11**: I thank the reviewer for this comment. I had mentioned my experience regarding my caste, gender, marital status and age. However, I have added a few more sentences in different segments of the manuscript and I am highlighting those lines in this document as well:

The old age home had both male and female residents and I got an opportunity to interview both. Similar to the caretaker, the respondents were also intrigued about my background. They were surprised to know that I was married and yet was living apart from my husband even though the reason was that both of us were pursuing our PhDs from different institutions. They were also very keen to know about how I had met my husband and eventually got married, as my husband is a non-Brahmin and also because his family had originally migrated from Bangladesh. They were particularly curious to know if we had faced any family resistance for our marriage. In fact, we spent a considerable amount of time discussing my marital life and my decision to pursue my higher studies post marriage. During the course of the interviews they gave me multiple suggestions to complete my studies quickly and go back to my husband. Most of the female respondents also advised me to have children before I turned thirty. Despite, their suggestions, I felt that since I had revealed intricate details of my private life, it helped me connect easily with my respondents.

Despite my limited time to win the trust of my respondents, I believe, I got access to their private lives because I acted more as a therapist. My role as a therapist took over my role as a researcher and my respondents started looking forward to my visits. In addition to being a patient listener, I also shared several of my own personal information and took their advice. I believe that this also helped in earning the confidence of my respondents. For example, a couple of respondents also gave me suggestions to maintain my health, to avoid becoming weak and dependent like them. Another common suggestion which I received from all my respondents was to relocate with my husband after I finish my higher studies. In fact, most of my respondents mentioned that it is the duty of the wife to live with her husband and look after him. As I did not contest their advice and assured them that I will do as directed, I believe that helped me establish a bond with my respondents.