Parent-Child Relationship: A Qualitative Interview Report of a Dutch Older Adult

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ABSTRACT

The parent-child relationship is a complex social issue. Several factors have much more impact on the issue besides a parent’s perception. The participant was a retired, divorced man with two sons with his ex-wife. He felt satisfied with the relationship between himself and his children. Apart from conflicts and confusion, he successfully made it clear that for a busy person like him, he is doing his best to keep the relationship alive with his children. A relationship is typically subjective between two people and can not only be analysed by comparing it with others’ examples. As the primary purpose of the qualitative research is to represent the essential qualities of one or more complex social phenomena. This qualitative interview successfully achieved qualitative information on the parent-child relationship. However, to understand better, bigger sample size (here N=1) would be required.

KEYWORDS

Anthropology of Ageing, Dutch Parent, Elderly, Elderly Interview, Family, Grounded Theory, Old Age, Older Adult, Living with Family, Parent-Child Relation, Qualitative Research, Social Study

INTRODUCTION

The parent-child relationship consists of a combination of behaviours, feelings, and expectations that are unique to a particular parent and an individual child (“Parent-child relationship,” 2015). Indeed, the relationship between parent and child is a subjective issue in a family. The traditional structure of family in most of the western societies has been altered by demographic changes such as increasing longevity and decreasing the birth rate (“Parent-child relationship,” 2015). However, also because of social developments such as growing individualism and emancipation of women. As a result, the number of living generations has increased, but the size of generations has become smaller (Ferring, Michels, Boll, & Filipp, 2009). Having living parents until late adulthood has become familiar and at the same time this brings about new roles, expectations, potential sources or supports but also sources of conflicts and strain (Askham, Ferring, & Lamura, 2007). Moreover, an intergenerational relationship in families (also in society) have increasingly gained importance (Arber & Attias-Donfut, 2000; Kohli & Küнемund, 2005; Lang & Perrig-Chiello, 2005). Indeed, there is a growing elderly population in the world (“Life Expectancy,” n. d.), so in research, social scientists pay still more attention to care and social support at old age. social scientists have already established that the extent
and the type of support children offer their ageing parents depends not only on the physical distance but also upon the quality of relationship with their parents (Merrill, 1997; “Life Expectancy,” n. d.; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). The quality of parent-child-reations is still a valuable discussion, even now a day. An interesting question is how the increasing physical distance in people’s social network and the quality of relationships influence the extent and type of support between parents and children?

The Grounded Theory is a particular research methodology often used in social science and qualitative research. It is the combination of inductivism and deductivism. In simpler form, inductivism is a personal observation of a researcher and collection of raw data in the field with maximum open and flexible style of data collection. Deductivism is, on the other hand, a systematic verification of the raw data and structure them according to the information gathered and formed a hypothesis or theory (Lindenberg, 2015; “What is Grounded Theory?” 2014). Moreover, qualitative analysis is a process of interpreting raw data to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. Therefore, simply put, Grounded Theory is collections of raw data followed by qualitative analysis of the data and defining hypothesis based on the data received. Indeed, it does not follow the conventional research methods where the assumption is made before collection of data, and the primary research is done to prove or disprove the theory. The Grounded Theory finds qualitative information that provides intricate details of a topic with minimal influence or guidance to the informer. Therefore, working with the Grounded Theory provides freedom for gathering raw data and for analysis in qualitative research.

Qualitative research is designed to reveal a target audience’s range of behaviour and the perceptions that drive that particular kind of conduct. The purpose of qualitative research is to represent precisely some of the essential qualities of complex social phenomena (Baum, 2002). To apply Grounded Theory in qualitative studies, data is collected from qualitative interviews by open-ended questions that give a chance for an explanation of the perspectives. Questions with “How” and “Why” is more appreciated in qualitative research while “What” and “Who” make the questions close-ended and are discouraged. Furthermore, a question that guides the informant to answer in a certain way is not accepted in qualitative research. For example, “Tell me something about your health” is an acceptable query, while “Do you think you are healthy?” -Influences the informer; hence not acceptable. Although maximum care is taken to avoid close-ended questions, the interviewee is, to some extent, still influenced by the place, personal issues, time of the interview, and even by the interviewer. Semi-structured guidelines are used instead of a full list of questions to provide as much as the possible freedom to the informer. The guidance of issues provides space to change or modify the questions on the spot during the interview based on the answers. Moreover, the guidance also provides a chance to add new issues or discuss some topic of interest in depth if necessary.

Social studies analyse not only the current social trends and development but also search for the reasons behind the social behaviour. One of the current debatable social issues is the parent-child relationship, related to social support for parents at an older age.

**METHOD**

To address the issues mentioned above, I conducted a semi-structured interview with a 65yrs old retired man from the Best (a small village) in the Netherlands. During our conversation, I collected data about the participant’s perceptions, experiences and expectations about the parent-child relationship.

A semi-structured interview, a flexible method of qualitative research used in social science, allows new ideas to brought up during the conversation on the basis of information from the interviewee. A structured interview, on the other hand, is performed with a fixed set of specific questions which does not allow the meeting to get diverted (“Semi-structured interview,” n.d.). Thus, at first, I prepared a list of topics for the interview instead of the full questions. The list was a guideline to ask questions to my interviewee. However, I also had a chance to skip, modify or add any query during the conversation. Moreover, the participant had freedom to bring any related topic and elaborate his
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