The time factor: does it influence the parent-child relationship?!

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Abstract

The parents of our times are increasingly more and more stressed by the fact that they do not longer have time, neither for themselves, nor for their children. The purpose of this study is to present the importance of the time spent by a parent with his/her child which positively influences the parent-child interaction. The main objective of the research made in this study are the following determination of the importance of the TIME factor in the parent-child interaction. In this study, quantitative research and the survey via structured interview method were used. The research instrument used was the questionnaire.

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1. Introduction

Time has started being more and more precious for each person. Perhaps one of the most frequent sentences heard by Romanians is: “I don’t have time”! We are living in a time of material and financial crisis, but we are also dealing with a time crisis! The more people get caught up in various activities, the less time they have for themselves and their children. Is there a danger in this?! On a short term, parents may not realise how much value their children put into spending time with their own parents and not with their nannies, grandparents, neighbours etc. However, only the children that manage to have a good relationship with their parents and who are supported by them will extend their social and emotional relationships normally with their peers. Every child needs the presence of his/her parents to a certain

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degree. The time spent with parents means a lot more for smaller children that it does to more grown-up children, but, regardless of age, children need the company of their parents.

The precious time, the “quality” time in which a parent efficiently communicates with the child regarding his/her feelings and interests in a secure environment is of utmost importance for the child and can lead to a healthy interaction and to the harmonious development of the child, respectively. But for the small child it is not just the “quality” of the time spent with the parent that is important, but also the “quantity”.

Regardless of the way in which parents interpret the word “time”, they must be aware of the fact that all children feel the need to be near their parents, to see and be with them in simple life situations, to learn from their daily example and to realise that they represent an important of their lives.

Just as each parent wants to relate better to his/her child, every child wants to spend time with his/her parents, in various instances! Various studies (Winnicot, 2006) present the fact the one of the children’s biggest desires is to play with those that gave them life. Despite this aspect, more than one third of parents do not play with their children or do so very seldom. During workdays, only one of two children spends one hour with his/her mother and father and, during weekends, only one out of four children spends more than 5 hours with those that brought him/her to this world. The main reasons for which parents do not have the necessary time and the patience to play with their children are the financial problems, but also career-related issues. Even when they do communicate, discussions between children and parents are limited only to school problems and not extend to the children’s feelings or wishes.

On a long term, this lack of involvement in the children’s lives can lead to a weaker and more superficial parent-child interaction, thus generating complex problems not only for the child’s future but also for the adult’s future.

2. The methods and instruments used in the research

To find the level of self-perception on the time allocated by the parents in the interaction with their children, we undertook an investigation which uses questions with an analytical function that intend to propose an improvement of the relationship between parents and children.

Designed as a direct investigation and made with students - operators from Social Department of the West University of Timisoara, our survey was based on a questionnaire with 16 questions, whose answers allowed the theoretical systematization of the data obtained by transposing the personal impressions of the subjects (parents). The questionnaire explores the time factor and habits and attitudes that parents have in interaction with their own children.

The raw data have been statistically processed with the help of the statistics program SPSS 11.0, 2001.

2.1. Description and operationalization of the concepts useful to the research

The first phase of the operationalization of the psychosocial variables is represented by formulating the definition of the main concept of the research. The concept used is represented by the parent-child interaction as a determinant factor of the child’s feelings, traits, models and actions.

In the research elaboration process and implicitly of the instruments of social investigation, we have started from the process of operationally defining the concepts. The operationalization of the parameters from the main concept of the research is made through the following investigation procedures: detection of the subjects (parents) considered to have a good attitude and behaviour towards their children and their evaluation by using investigation methods based on the following parameters: the time spent by the parent with the child and a good interaction in a family medium. The basic concept of the research was measured through a number of dimensions relevant to this study:
The time spent by the parent with the child includes the moment in which the contact between parents and children is educative, full of warmth and affectionate love. It is the time spent by the parent directly with the child, which implies both a “qualitative” and a “quantitative” aspect;

A healthy interaction in a family represents the good family environment and atmosphere, the affective dimension of a positive nature, the presence of affective support and lack of turmoil, hostility between parents and acts of violence. This interaction positively influences the child’s state and behaviour and takes part in the child’s normal, physical and mental development.

2.2. Presentation of the investigated sample

To achieve the purpose and the objectives, a sample of 150 subjects (male and female) was called upon. Only one category of subjects was used: parents between 25 and 45 years old. The majority of the parents that took part in filling out the questionnaire was female (86%), while the remaining 14% is represented by the male sample. The research has conducted in Romania, in the western part of the country.

Table 1 Tabular presentation of the raw data characteristic of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of subjects</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Education average</th>
<th>Education Upper</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Divorced</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>25-45 years old</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Interpretation of results

We will present the research hypothesis and the results that were obtained: “The less time a parent spends with his/her time, the weaker the interaction between the two becomes.” We present a series of questions and data on which we conducted a statistical processing within the study made on the investigated group:

Question 1- Do I have time to listen to my child when he/she is speaking to me?
This question obtained the following responses: 59% of subjects chose always, while 41% opted for sometimes.

Question 2- Do both parents make free time to spend with the child in our family?
This question obtained the following responses: 35% of subjects chose always, while 65% opted for sometimes.

Question 3- Do I find that I interact better with my child if I make more time for him/her?
This question obtained the following answers: 95% of subjects chose always, while 3% opted for sometimes and 2% have opted for no.

Question 4- How often do you speak to your child, explaining him/her things or answering his/her questions?
This question obtained the following answers: 54% of subjects chose daily, while 40% opted for occasionally and 6% have opted for I do not know.

Question 5- Do I always say what I think when I have a conversation with my child?
This question obtained the following answers: 81% of subjects chose always, while 11% opted for sometimes and 8% have opted for never.
Question 6- When do you have time to teach various things to your child?
This question obtained the following answers: 27% of subjects chose daily, while 61% opted for occasionally and 12% have opted for I do not know.

Question 7- In my family, what is mostly emphasised is communicating with the child?
This question obtained the following answers: 89% of subjects chose always, while 9% opted for sometimes and 2% have opted for never.

Question 8- Do you read stories to your child?
This question obtained the following answers: 70% of subjects chose always, while 26% opted for sometimes and 4% have opted for never.

Question 9- In your family, who has the daily responsibility of taking care of the child?
This question obtained the following answers: 96% of subjects chose mother, 8% opted for father, 11% opted for grandmother, 10% opted for and bona, 2% have opted for another person.

Question 10- Do I find that I spend enough time with the child?
This question obtained the following responses: 12% of subjects chose always, 36% opted for sometimes and 52% opted for no.

4. Conclusions

Without the pretention of having a general availability, our study allows us to at least draw a partial image of the realities regarding the importance of the “time” factor in the parent-child relationship.

- Following the study made, we can notice that emphasis is laid, to a rather significant extent, on the importance of the time spent in the interaction with the child;
- The time spent with the child has an essential and well-defined role in the relationship between parent and child;
- Almost 54% of parents have declared that they have conversations with the child daily, while 40% of them admit that they have time to talk to their child only occasionally; 52% of parents that have answered the questionnaire are not happy with the amount of time they spend with their child.
- The study highlights the fact that the factor TIME SPENT WITH THE CHILD influences in a positive way the parent-child relationship when the parent allocates sufficient time for the child;
- When the child fails to connect with his/her parents, he/she seeks to create significant relationships with other adults, permanently looking forward to connecting to others. If he/she fails in this attempt, discouragement and lack of self-confidence will shortly follow.

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