PARENTING STRATEGIES OF 21ST CENTURY ADULTS

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Abstract: *This study investigates how 21st century parents show openness and flexibility for new parenting strategies. The central theme of the study refers to the positive parenting according to which the active listening of the child, the adaptation of the parent to his needs, the active involvement of the parent in the child's life, and the expression of the parent's attachment to his child become essential for a quality parent-child relationship. Positive parenting does not exclude disciplining the child and setting limits. The results of the study demonstrate the availability of parents for this type of parenting, but also for an improvement in the field.*

Key words: *positive parenting, communication, relationships, listening, discipline*

1. Introduction

Positive parenting is a buffer strategy against harsh discipline (McKee et al., 2007). This aspect is correlated with children's resilience during early adolescence (Nair et al., 2020). Although this type of parenting is becoming an increasingly promoted strategy, 21st century parents still need tools and resources to know how to act appropriately (Balantekin et al., 2020). There are more and more highlights in parenting strategies that involve increased attention given to the child by the parent: active listening, labelling feelings, supporting emotions (Shaffer et al., 2019).

The parent-child relationship and the strategies adopted by the parents are influenced by the interparental disputes that can result in the child's self-guilt. It was found that this can also be supported by the level of autonomy that the parent is willing to give to his child. This autonomy is closely interdependent with the child's academic success. (Hwang & Jung, 2020) The attention given to children by parents as well as the motivation for learning determine the achievement of learning (Lestari, 2020). Parental influence is not one-way. It is recognized that the temperamental differences that determine the child's behavior, determine at the same time the parenting style and parenting strategies (Knerr, Gardener & Cluver, 2013 cit. in Dishion & Patterson, 2006; McMahon et al. 2006).

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A study of the strategies used by parents and children to deal with the tensions in the parent-child relationship (Birditt, Rott & Fingerman, 2009) showed the following: parents and children who have reached adulthood tend to use more often constructive strategies for resolving tensions to the detriment of destructive or avoidant ones; stress relief strategies vary by generation, parent gender, ethnicity, education and age of the child; constructive strategies have been associated with increasing the quality of the parent-child relationship (Selcuk et al., 2020). The quality of the parent-child relationship as well as the time that children spend with both parents are associated with improvements in the cooperative relationship (Saini, 2019).

Relationships between parents, as well as the parent-child relationship, based on positivism, have an essential role in maintaining the child's mental health (Li et al., 2018). Positive parent-child interactions improve children's social competence and ability to learn (Zepeda, Varela & Morales, 2004).

A challenge for parents in the 21st century is the involvement in the child's education (Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2020). Parental attitudes have been shown to play a key role in stimulating children's involvement in various activities (Niermann et al., 2020). In a study on how parents spend time with their children, it was found that the activities in which children are involved vary depending on the sex of the parent. Thus, mothers spend more time with their daughters to prepare meals and in activities related to family care. On the other hand, fathers have an interest in sharing time with their children in activities that involve the maintenance of the house, the yard, the car and pets, as well as in activities that involve the supply of the house (Bryant & Zick, 1996).

2. Objectives

This paper reports a qualitative type research based on the focus group method. The focus group aims to understand the participants' point of view, to issue a variety of opinions on the central theme and to provide information on how the adults involved in the focus group look at parenting.

The central objective of this study is to identify the parenting strategies used by 21st century adults. The assumption behind this study is that parenting strategies used by parents today reflect a paradigm shift in the field of parenting.

3. Material and Methods

The focus group method was used for this research, and the instrument with which the data were collected was represented by the focus group guide.

3.1. Participants

The focus group consisted of six participants. These participants have in common the fact that they are parents of children aged between 6 and 8 years. The age of the participants is between 30 and 45 years, and the level of education of most participants is secondary.

3.2. Focus group guide

Starting from the objective of the study, an interview guide was constructed consisting of ten questions in order to obtain relevant results. The questions were divided into four categories: opening questions, introductory questions, transition questions and key questions. The interrogative approach for the application of the focus group method consisted of the following questions:

1. How would you characterize your relationship with your child? (Opening question)
2. When was the last time you did an activity with your child? (Introductory question)
3. Describe an activity you did with your child and specify when it took place. (Transition question)
4. How do you assure your child that you are listening to him when he has a problem? (Key question)
5. When was the last time you hugged? Did it happen for a specific reason or simply? (Key question)
6. Do you know what would please your child? (Key question)
7. What do you do when your child gets upset? (Key question)
8. Why would you buy a gift for your child? (Key question)
9. What do you think your child needs to do to deserve what you give him? (Key question)
10. Do you feel the need to participate in parenting training courses? (Closing question)

The focus group interview questions were created in accordance with 21st century parenting issues, as follows:

   * Question number 1 wants to highlight the way the parent looks at his child, but also the relationship they have
   * Questions 2 and 3 concern the involvement of the parent in activities with his/her child
   * Question number 4 concerns parents' knowledge of active listening
   * Questions 5 and 6 focus on the child's love language and conditional love
   * Question number 7 wants to highlight the reactions that the parent has in times of upset of the child
   * Questions 8 and 9 highlight how conditionally parents love their children
   * Question number 10 aims to open up parents to parenting training courses.

3.3. Data analysis

The focus of the implemented group was systematic and sequential, which means that it was intentional, planned. Following the start of the entire focus group, it provided the researcher with results that reflected what was said within the group. The analysis model (Krueger & Cassey, 2005) considers the following aspects: words used by participants, the context that determined the answers, the consistency of answers, the magnitude of the topics reflected by the discussion time allocated to a topic, frequency of topics, emotional intensity associated with certain topics, and specificity of answers.

4. Results

The analysis of the data from the interview was based on audio recordings and transcription of those recordings. After transcribing the data followed the formulation of themes, subthemes and categories based on the participants' answers. All these were organized in tabular form.

From the answers provided to the question on the characterization of the parent-child relationship from the parent's perspective, it can be concluded that the parents participating in the study establish a parent-child relationship based on both constructive and destructive elements, which can promote and inhibit the child's development (Table 1). Participating parents demonstrate involvement in activities involving parent-child partnership, behavior that can encourage the child's emotional development.

Analysis of questions 1 and 2 from the focus group   Table 1

Question from the interview guide	Topic	Subtopic	Category
"How would you characterize your relationship with your child?"	The parent-child relationship	Competition, Rivalry	Destructive aspects of the parent-child relationship
		Love, Friendship, Normalcy	Constructive aspects of the parent-child relationship
"When was the last time you did an activity with your child?"	Spending time with the child	Frequency in carrying out parent-child activities	Parents involved in children's lives

Regarding the types of activities that parents practice with their children, the preferred ones are those that involve movement games, practicing some house activities, creative or construction games (Table 2).

Analysis of question 3   Table 2

Item from the interview guide	Topic	Subtopic	Category
"Describe an activity you did with your child and specify when it took place."	Thematic game, Culinary activities, Musical game, Creative activities, Logical and insightful game	Movement game, Preparing sweets, Song, Practical objects, Jenga	Parents involved in children's lives

Eye contact, paraphrasing the child's words and active listening are three of the strategies that respondents use to ensure that children provide support in solving problems. This result indicates that the paradigm shift in parenting is demonstrated in the present study by paying more attention to the child, as opposed to the old paradigm

when parenting strategies were not characterized by expressed and accentuated emotional support (Table 3).

Analysis of question 4   Table 3

Question from the interview guide	Topic	Subtopic	Category
" How to reassure your child that you are listening to him when he has a problem?"	Attention to the child	Eye contact, Repetition, Gestures, Language and Active listening	Parents' strategies for actively listening to their children

The parent's attachment to his child is expressed through nonverbal language, but also the adaptation of the parent to the child's needs (Table 4).

Analysis of question 5 and 6 from the focus group   Table 4

Question from the interview guide	Topic	Subtopic	Category
" When was the last time you hugged? Did it happen for a specific reason or simply?"	Parents' attachment to their children	Physical touches	The language of love
" Do you know what would please your child?"	Parenting, Language of Love, Parental Tolerance of Technology, Child Punishment, Active Listening	Mother's Availability, Computer Games, Gifts, Services, Relationship Difficulties	The language of love

The paradigm shift is demonstrated through the strategies that parents use when children experience feelings of anger. They are followers of empathy, bidirectional communication, and emotional support (Table 5).

Table 5

Analysis of question 7 from the focus group

Question from the interview guide	Topic	Subtopic	Category
" What do you do when the child is upset?"	Active listening, Parent flexibility in the relationship with his child, Stimulating the child's trust by the parent, Parent-child communication	Patience, Empathy, Love language, Two-way communication, Belief and reassurance of the child, Parent's desire to reassure the child	Parent strategies for calming the child

Particularities of conditional parenting are also present in the case of some respondents, who state that doing homework, generosity, kindness, and respect for others are conditions to receive various gifts (Table 6).

Analysis of question 8 and 9 from the focus group   Table 6

Question from the interview guide	Topic	Subtopic	Category
"Why would you buy a gift for your child?"	The language of love, Conditional love, Unconditional love	Gifts, Misconduct, Child Submission, Love, Gifts, Homework	Parents' expectations of their children
"What do you think your child needs to do to deserve what you give them?"	Parents' expectations of their children	School achievement, Respect for others, Learning to be understanding, Kindness and generosity, Respect for others	Parents' conditional love for their children

Training and development in the field of parenting also becomes important from the point of view of the participating parents who state that they want to participate in such activities (Table 7).

Analysis of question 7   Table 7

Question from the interview guide	Topic	Subtopic	Category
"Do you feel the need to participate in parenting training course?"	Training in the field of parenting	Parent awareness of the usefulness of training and parent's willingness to participate in parenting training courses	Improvement in the field of parenting

5. Conclusions

The parents of the 21st century are becoming more and more interested in strategies specific to positive parenting, managing to put some of them into practice. The results obtained after analyzing the answers obtained in the focus group are concordant with the assumption from which the study started. Thus, it was found that the parenting strategies used by parents today reflect a paradigm shift in the field of parenting.

The paradigm shift in the process of raising and educating the child can be interpreted as the formation of an open and flexible mentality regarding parenting. This new paradigm does not give up the idea that disciplining the child is essential for his development but only offers alternatives for managing the discipline in the most efficient way. Strategies such as the permanent conditioning of children's behavior, the expression of negative feelings towards the child and not towards the child's behavior,

as well as the rigid attitude towards the child are replaced by strategies that involve: balance in managing the discipline, warning about the person's behavior and not the person, active listening of the child, unconditional emotional support, assertive communication in the parent-child partnership.

Following the recorded responses, there is an improvement in the strategies that parents use in the process of raising and educating their children, even if they can still feel the valences of the old paradigm in terms of parenting.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study is to discover and subsequently analyze the respondents' point of view regarding the field of parenting. There is an accentuated tendency towards parenting strategies that involve emotional support, managing the discipline in a balanced and efficient way, adapting the parent to the child's needs. This confirms the hypothesis that the parenting strategies adopted by the parents participating in the study reflect a paradigm shift. This new paradigm of parenting reflects the transition from rigid and conditioned parenting to supportive and positive parenting.

The main limitations of the study are the small number of participants in the focus group and the fact that a single group of respondents was formed for this study. Starting from these limits, a new study will be launched whose aim will be to create an overview of parenting with implications for innovating parenting strategies to streamline the parent-child relationship.

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