
The Social And Personal Impacts On Young Adults Raised In Non-traditional Families In Australia

The literature on family structure and relationships has generally focused on the traditional family dynamic whereby the father is the breadwinner and the mother is the full-time caregiver. Within these studies, it is universally found that this can have an advantage on the children. However, over the last century, families around the world and in Australia have been experiencing constant and rapid change. This has led to moral, economic, social and personal implications on the child to be at the forefront of this sociological topic. Families are becoming smaller and more diverse. Consequently, gender roles, social norms and relationships have produced significant changes, whereby the traditional family forms are identified as marginal (Forster-Jones, 2007). For example, sole parent families with children under 15 have increased from 14 per cent in 1986 to 88 to 22 per cent in 2004 to 2006 with the majority of these families formed through relationship family breakdown (Forster-Jones, 2007). Subsequently, research has shown that non-traditional family structures logically impact parenting and child development (Lamb, 1999). This paper explores the social and personal impacts of family dynamics and relationships within non-traditional families on young adults growing up and raised within those families.

Analysis of literature

This research poses the question of what are the social and personal impacts on young adults raised in non-traditional families in Australia? Specifically, this research looks into families of the same-sex couple, blended family, i.e. both with stepchildren and natural children, and single-parent family.

Previous studies which have focused on the family structure and its outcome on the children have found at least one benefit on the child raised by their married parents (Rosenfeld, 2010). However, these findings have been challenged as researchers are afflicted with the question of why which has been left unanswered (Cherlin, 1999). Previous research has found that children within divorce parent families function upon normal limits after divorce (Kelly, 1993). Whereas some have found that parental divorce doubled the odds that the child's marriage would end in divorce and create prolonged sadness, longing, worry and regret (Amato & DeBoer 2001, Kelly 2003). Additionally, Demo and Acock (1996) highlight that adolescents raised and living in single-family families can obtain certain strengths including responsibility.

However, remarriage does not typically benefit or improve the outcomes for the child. Elliot and Richards (1991) found that children with a stepfather resulting in harmful effects on the child's behaviour scores. Furthermore, several studies demonstrated that several family transitions can lead to damaging effects on the children involved. Studies have reported that multiple transitions could impact the child's adjustment problems, prosocial behaviour and increase the likelihood of the child creating an independent family and entering the labour force from an early age (Dunn et al., 1998, Aquilino, 1996).

This research draws upon grounded theory to help conceptualise and understand the role of

family structures in growth and development. According to the family systems theory, the experiences of one family member affects all other family members (Bertalanffy, 1969 cited in Moore & Asay 2008). Thus, this is used as a theoretical framework to help recognise that family dynamics and relationships directly affect all parties involved. Symbolic interactionism theory underpinned the direct impacts of non-traditional family relationships on young adults. This theory argues that interaction between family members involving beliefs, shared values and communication enable family members to develop a sense of self (LaRossa & Reitzes 2009). Lastly, the family ecology theory was used to acknowledge that human evolution and family relations are linked with resources in which exploits problems in which families face in different environments (Haeckel, 1873 cited in Moore & Asay, 2008). Bubolz and Sontag (1993) argue that this theory is especially useful as it is not restricted to a certain group but applies to various families in different backgrounds.

Overall, this current research delves into the social and personal impacts on young adults as previous research has focussed primarily on the effects of family structures on the child during their younger years or adolescent stages in the United States.

Aims and Objectives

This study aims to further our understanding of the social and personal impacts family dynamics and relationships have on young adults who are raised within non-traditional families. It seeks to exhibit why young adults hold certain values and beliefs and why they act the way they do in society. Specifically, it examines the role of the same-sex couple, single-parent and blended families in these decisions and outcomes.

This study will generate the following objectives:

Examine the effects of various forms of family structures including same-sex couples, step and blended families. This is because most studies have analysed the effects of parental divorce.

Examine the relationships within the family and its impact. The relations which involve social relations and care are factors which have shown the impact the child's development (Kalmijn, 2015)

Identify how social decisions and behaviours and personal beliefs are shaped by the various family

Research Design Statement

The purpose of this research: To understand how family structures and relationships shape and influence behaviour, beliefs and values of young adults who are raised within non-traditional families.

The research question: what are the social and personal impacts on young adults raised in non-traditional families in Australia?

The evidence gathered for this research will include information about the experiences of individuals raised within non-traditional families, their relationship and family dynamic including

parenting styles growing up, communication between other family members (do they have good communication?), and extent of the relationship between family members (are they close?). Additionally, this research will gather information on how individuals act in social situations and their beliefs and values. It will also reveal the parenting styles inflicted upon them, how they were involved in family changes, problems faced during and after family changes and within relationships and how the individual dealt with these dynamics.

This evidence will be gathered through in-depth interviews and surveys. The instruments used for this research include semi-structured interviews which are recorded and transcribed.

This study will comprise of purposive sampling. That is, the selection of participants from pre-determined categories to represent the diversity of the demographics and ensure participant relevance:

- Individuals who were raised by same-sex parents in Australia
- Individuals who were raised in a blended family with biological and step-siblings in Australia
- Individuals who were raised by a single-parent in Australia
- Individuals who are willing to participate

Although journals or books can be used to assist in understanding the role of family structures, this information is best collected from this particular group and cannot be found elsewhere as it focuses on specific family structures in Australia. Additionally, an analysis will demonstrate the varying attitudes and beliefs across individual in various family forms.

Methodological Approach

The main methodological approach which underpins this research is the phenomenological approach. In a broad sense, the phenomenological approach is used to describe a specific phenomenon or appearance of things through lived experiences rather than explaining or discovering causes (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Lived experiences include conscious life events without reflection or interpretation and are influenced by internal and external factors. Through these lived experiences, it gives meaning to an individual's understanding of a phenomenon (Speziale et al., 2007). Hence, all interviews will be transcribed and analysed by utilising the tri-partite method of phenomenology developed by Merleau-Ponty (1968). Another aspect of phenomenology which is important for researchers is that of personal bias. Interpretative phenomenology, therefore, recognises the researcher's personal experiences and prejudice and the influence it has on the phenomena (Dowling, 2004). Thus, through phenomenological reduction, the intrinsic biases and dispositions of the researcher are held in abeyance so that it does not affect the aims and objective of the study (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Methods and Strategies

This study will include semi-structured interviews to gain knowledge and insight into how young adults in non-traditional families were raised and the relationships and dynamics in their family. It will also touch base on their beliefs and values, how that corresponds to their upbringing and how they would react to different social situations. These interviews will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. Semi-structured interviews will allow for preparation beforehand which

allows for competency. It will also allow freedom of expression as some questions are open-ended, which then provides further insight into the individual's thoughts, feelings and values. Semi-structured also provide reliable and comparable qualitative data.

Anonymous survey's regarding individuals' beliefs and values will be used to provide an understanding of the various impacts. Individuals will be anonymous, however, their family structure in which they were raised will be recorded. Surveys are inexpensive and are useful in describing the characteristics of a certain group. Additionally, it allows the individual to answer candidly and with valid answers as it is anonymous.

Techniques and Instruments

The interview guide and survey will include questions surrounding the individual's upbringing, what the relationship between family members are like, childhood experiences, beliefs, values and attitudes, and how they would act in different social situations. Most of the data collected are qualitative, open-ended responses. Thus, to analyse and understand the data, a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) will be conducted. Thematic analysis will be used to classify and summarise the data whilst coding and identifying reoccurring themes and patterns. This will provide a description and understanding of the answers collected from participants. Due to the substantial research into family structures, the coding system for this research will be theory-driven.

Sampling Strategy

Young adults who were raised in either family with same-sex parents, single-parent or blended families will be selected for this study. This is because the majority of previous studies have focused primarily on either divorced parents or the traditional family. Based on ethical principles, only participants who are willing to participate in the interview and survey and share personal accounts and beliefs will be part of this research. While some academics in qualitative research refrain from the number of interviews being enough, others argue that anywhere from 5 to 50 participants is adequate (Dworkin 2012). Therefore, this study will interview approximately 50 young adults.

Staging and Timing of the Research

The semi-structured interviews conducted will be in-depth interviews whereby the participants will be asked to answer around 15-20 open-ended questions. This will also include prompts to elicit further responses from the participant. Like most semi-structured interviews, it will typically cover the duration of 30 minutes to an hour. After the interviews are completed, participants will be asked to complete a 10-15-minute paper survey. Once all data is collected for each participant, the interview recording will be transcribed and encoded which will generally take 8 hours for a 45-minute recording. Subsequently, the encoding and analysis process will begin.

Validity, Reliability and Authenticity

Reliability and validity are two aspects of research which arise frequently. For example, cross-paradigmatic communication can result in issues as the same words may have multiple meanings. To deal with issues of validity and reliability in a phenomenological standpoint is

through reduction. This strategy is implemented to ensure reliable and valid research as it reduces the world from presuppositions whereby knowledge is held with judgment (Dowling, 2007). Through this reduction, inherent biases and preconceptions of the researcher are suspended so that they do not influence the study. Subsequently, it reduces the world to that of an entirely phenomenal realm, resulting in the essence of phenomena emerging. Furthermore, to ensure reliability and validity in this research, the search for essence is crucial. As coined by Giorgi (1994, as cited in Rosenfield, 2007), the essences are attained through free imaginative variation whereby all living relationships of experience are acknowledged. Additionally, multiple facets of experiences will be considered without invoking metaphysical and epistemological preconceptions.

To ensure reliability in qualitative research, the examination of trustworthiness is essential. Seale (1999) argues that the trustworthiness of the research reports lies heavily on the issues discussed as reliability and validity. Therefore, this study recognises and acknowledges conventional issues which arise during the research. To ensure authenticity, all accounts and results are collected from the primary source itself rather than second-hand witnesses. Interview recordings rather than note-taking alone will be used to reduce any doubtful sources.

Resources and Budget

This study will need access to libraries and archives to research previous literature and theories which underpin all forms of family structures. For the semi-structured interview, a private setting or location is needed to conduct these interviews without exposure to the public due to participant confidentiality. A voice recorder is needed to record interviews. Interviews and surveys will be conducted in the same location. As this research is specifically conducted in Australia, money for travels and accommodation will be necessary for participants outside of New South Wales.

Ethics

The interaction between the participant and research can be ethically demanding, especially for the participant as they engage with various aspects of the study. Thus, adhering to ethical guidelines is essential. Additionally, this can raise several ethical concerns and dilemmas in which the researcher faces during the study such as respect for privacy, the foundation of honesty and open interactions, and eliminating misrepresentations as much as possible.

This study will seek to minimize the prospect of intrusion into the autonomy of the participants by all means as sensitive issues and topics are involved. By doing this, vulnerable participants will be given the choice to have an advocate present during the interview and survey phases of the study. This will all be recorded and collected throughout the duration of the research.

Informed consent has been identified as a fundamental part of ethics in research studies. Therefore, the researcher has a responsibility to inform participants of the various aspects of the research. In this case, participants will be given information on the nature of the study, participants' role in the study, the identity of the research and financing body, aims and objective of the research, audio recording consent, how the results will be used and published. Participants will be given this information before commencing the study and will be asked to sign for consent once they agree to the terms and agreements. Like most studies, informed

consent requires ongoing negotiation as the research progresses. Therefore, if participants are feeling uncomfortable at any time during the study, they can remove themselves from the study and discontinue.

Secure data storage methods will be used to ensure and protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants in this study from potentially harmful consequences that might impact them as a result of their participation. Furthermore, data collection is ensured to be as overt as possible and recorded.

Significance

Sociological research often focuses on family structures as it is the primary institution for socialising. It also helps us understand how family relationships affect members and the society holistically. It also makes for an illustrative example of the social relationships and dynamics that are formed within society. Family structures and dynamics are also important in understanding the values and attitudes an individual hold (Foster-Jones 2007). Moreover, the role of the family in society is particularly important as functionalists' theorists argue that families are a significant social institution and play a pivotal role in the stabilisation of society (Moore et al., 2008).

There is very little research published on young adults who were raised in non-traditional families. Most studies have focussed on the effects the family dynamics have on children at the time rather than the long-term effects. Thus, this study examines the impacts family dynamics and relationships have on young adults and their attitudes and beliefs.

Current research fails to include various family forms including a same-sex couple, single-parent and blended families etc. It is important to delve into different family structures as society is constantly changing and families undergo rapid change. Thus, this project will provide a different perspective of how family structures impact individuals and the changes which have occurred over the past century.