



The Independent Child vs. The Obedient Child

Evolution of the Way Adults View Children
in Europe over the Last Forty Years (1981-2017)

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Questioning of adult-child social relations



Context

- Developments in the field of Childhood Studies toward **children participation** (Hallett & Prout, 2005; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2016)
- Emerging **youth social movements** : children's rights movement, climate action... (Wall, 2017 ; Sporre, 2021).

Some previous research with EVS data

- Inglehart's theory about **post-modernization** and the cultural shift (Inglehart, 1990, 2018)
- Many publications about **child-rearing values** (Kohn, 1977; Alwin 1988; Voicu, 2012; etc.)
- Study of the links between those values and aspirations for a democratic political system (Jeannot Piétroy, 2021).

Questions

How has the emphasis on child independence and child obedience changed over time?

What dynamics are at work in different European countries regarding the values associated with children's emancipation?

Methods



The European Values Study (EVS)

International statistical survey research program on basic human values.
→ provides insight into the ideas, attitudes, values, opinions of citizens all over Europe.
<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>

Data

- Five waves

1981-1984
1990-1993
1999-2001
2008-2010
2017-2020

- Minimum sample of 1000 people per country (random selections and quotas)
- 36 countries in the last wave
- Age of the respondents : over 18 years old

Approach

Comparative analysis of adults' perception of the importance of child independence and child obedience.



Indicators

Child qualities

Independent variables

- EVS wave
- Country
- Age cohort
- Household income

Q28 Here is a list of qualities which children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which five would you say are the most desirable for a child to have? Please choose up to five!

			mentioned	not mentioned	DK	NA
v85	A	Good manners	1	2	8	9
v86	B	Independence	1	2		
v87	C	Hard work	1	2		
v88	D	Feeling of responsibility	1	2		
v89	E	Imagination	1	2		
v90	F	Tolerance and respect for other people	1	2		
v91	G	Thrift, saving money and things	1	2		
v92	H	Determination, perseverance	1	2		
v93	I	Religious faith	1	2		
v94	J	Unselfishness	1	2		
v95	K	Obedience	1	2		
v96		None (spontaneous)	1	2		
					v96a	v96b

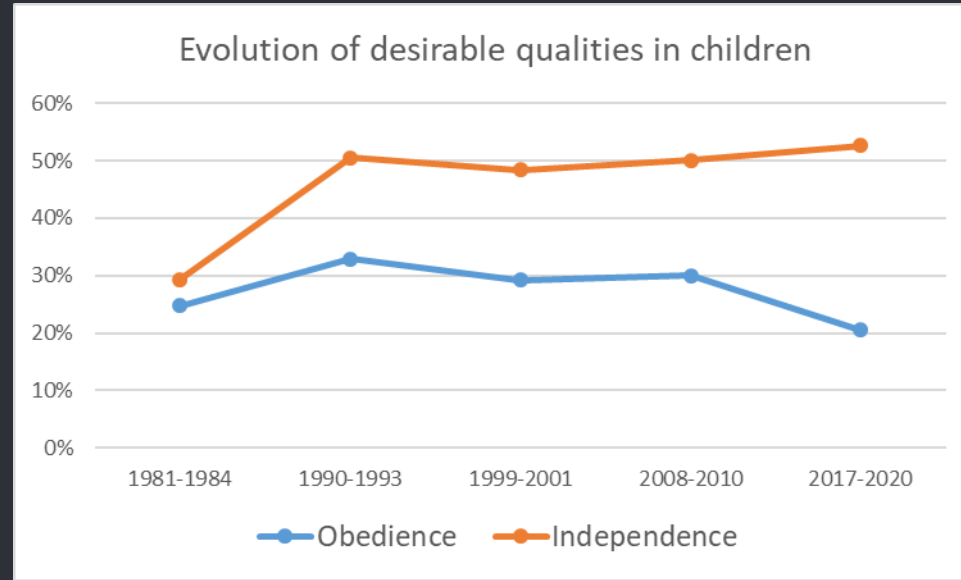


RESULTS

Child independence and child obedience over time



At the European level

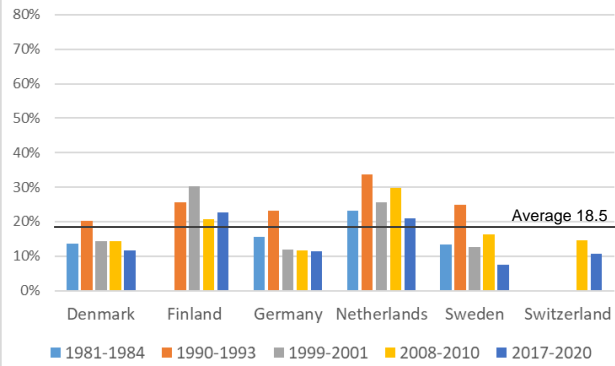


Source: EVS Trend file
1981-2017 (ZA 7503 v 2.0.0)

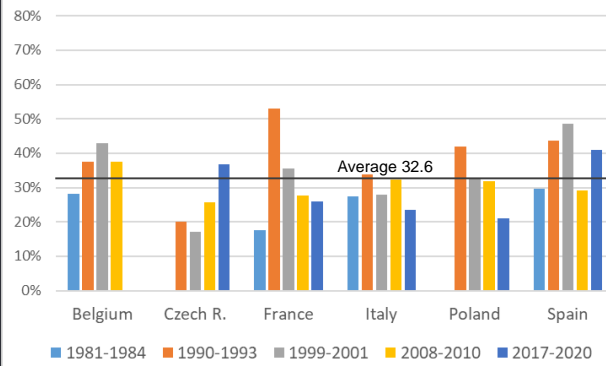
What about the national level ?

→ Grouping of countries by cultural areas (Inglehart-Welzel classification, 2020)

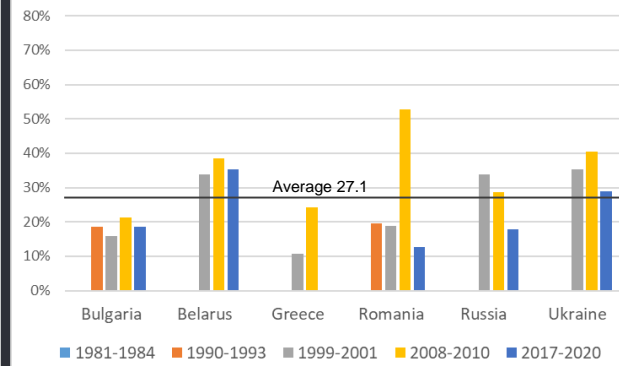
Obedience in Protestant Europe



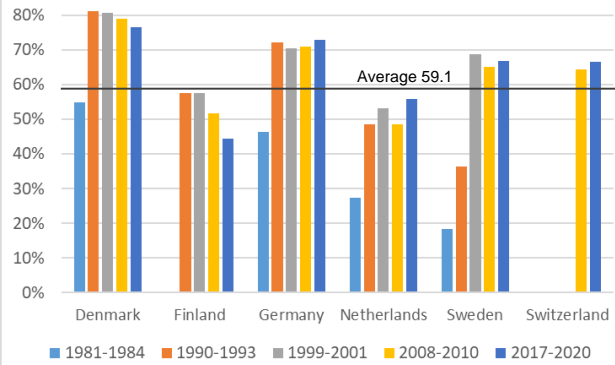
Obedience in Catholic Europe



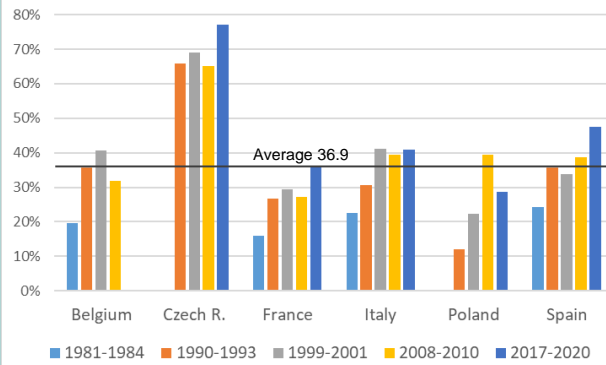
Obedience in Orthodox Europe



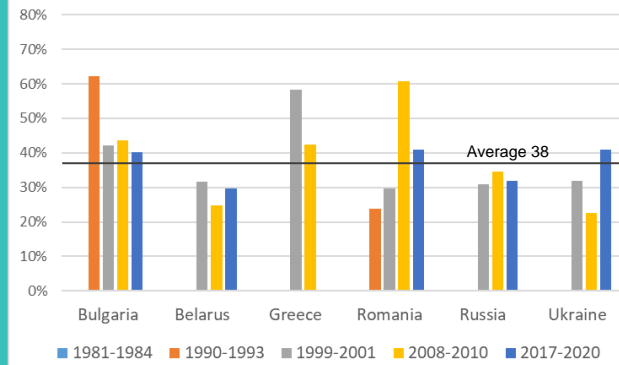
Independence in Protestant Europe



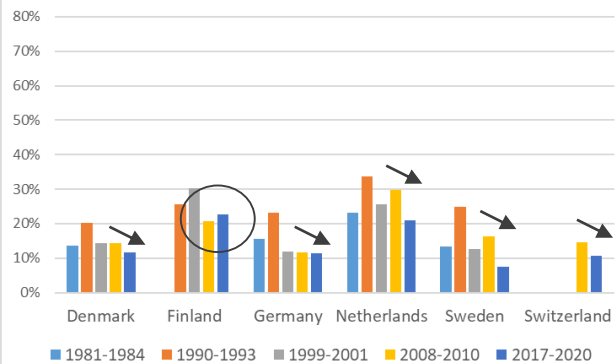
Independence in Catholic Europe



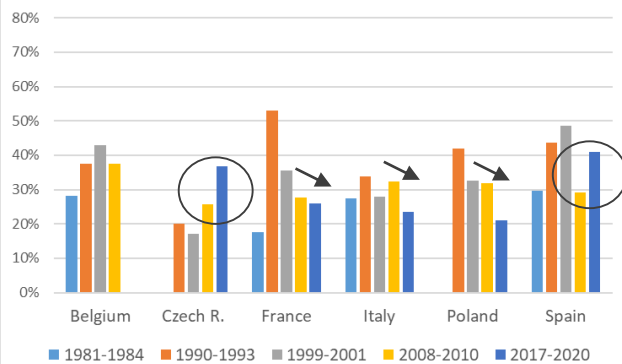
Independence in Orthodox Europe



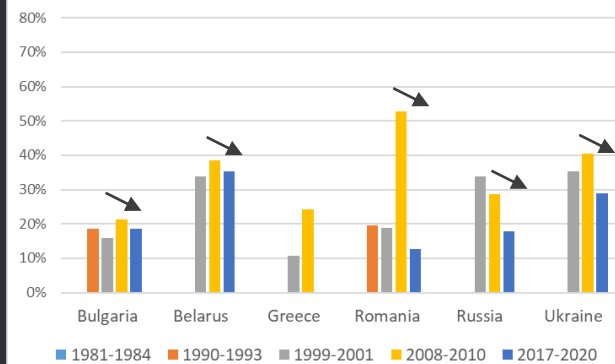
Obedience in Protestant Europe



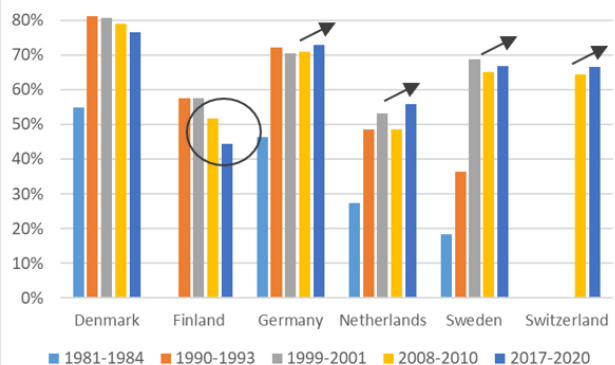
Obedience in Catholic Europe



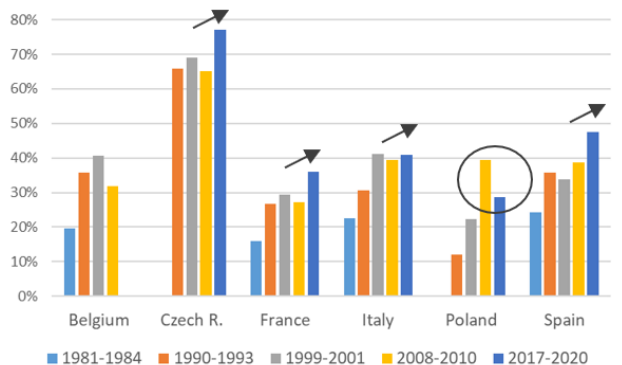
Obedience in Orthodox Europe



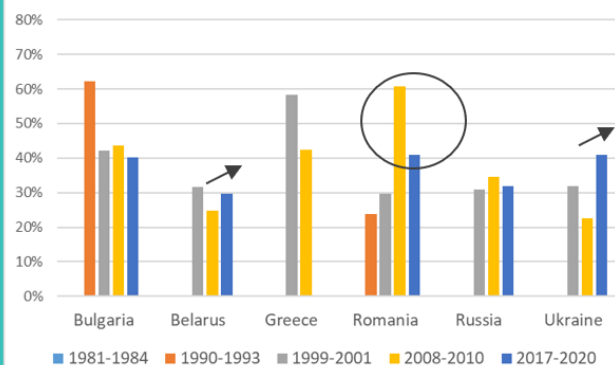
Independence in Protestant Europe



Independence in Catholic Europe



Independence in Orthodox Europe

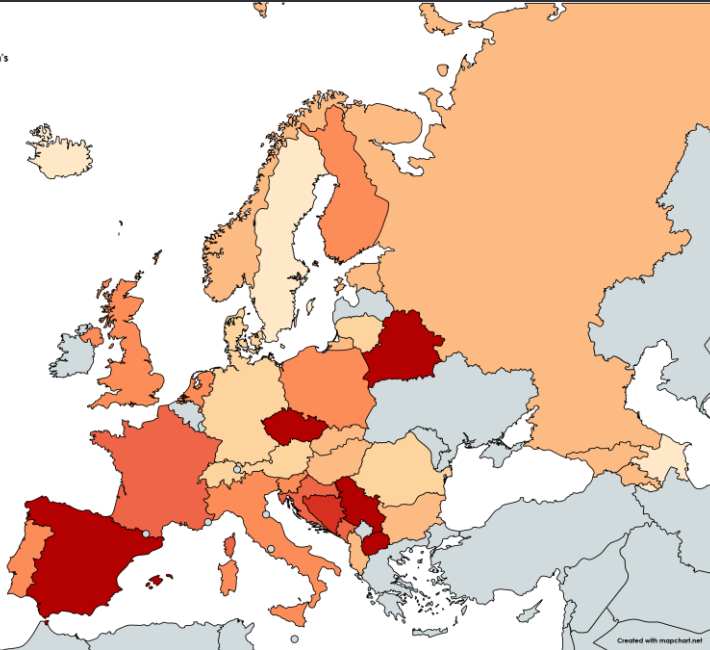


Child-rearing values across Europe (EVS 2017)

Source: EVS 2017 (ZA 7500 v 4.0.0)

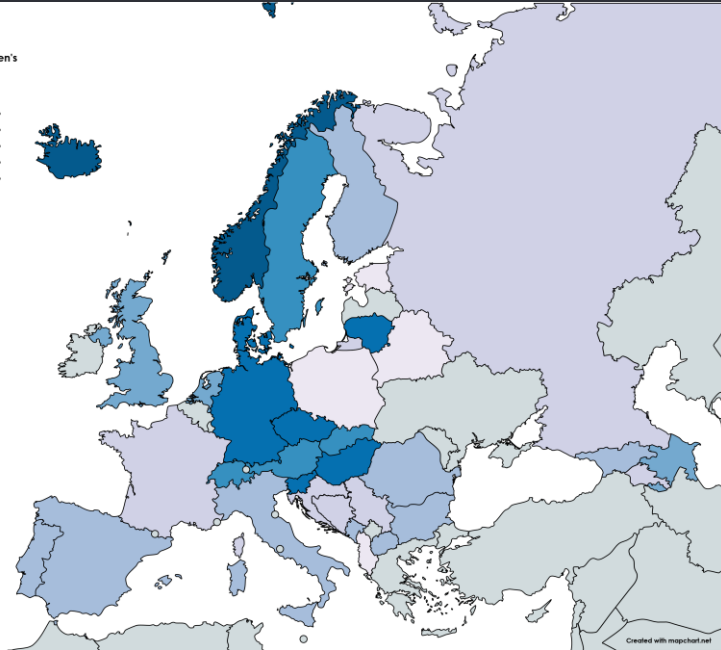
People who value children's obedience

- less than 10%
- between 10% and 15%
- between 15% and 20%
- between 20% and 25%
- between 25% and 30%
- between 30% and 35%
- more than 35%



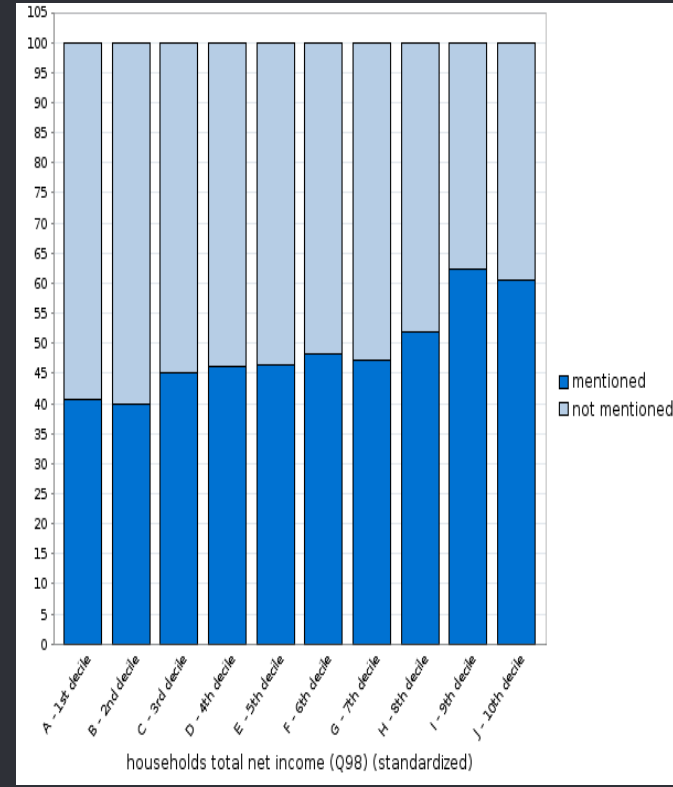
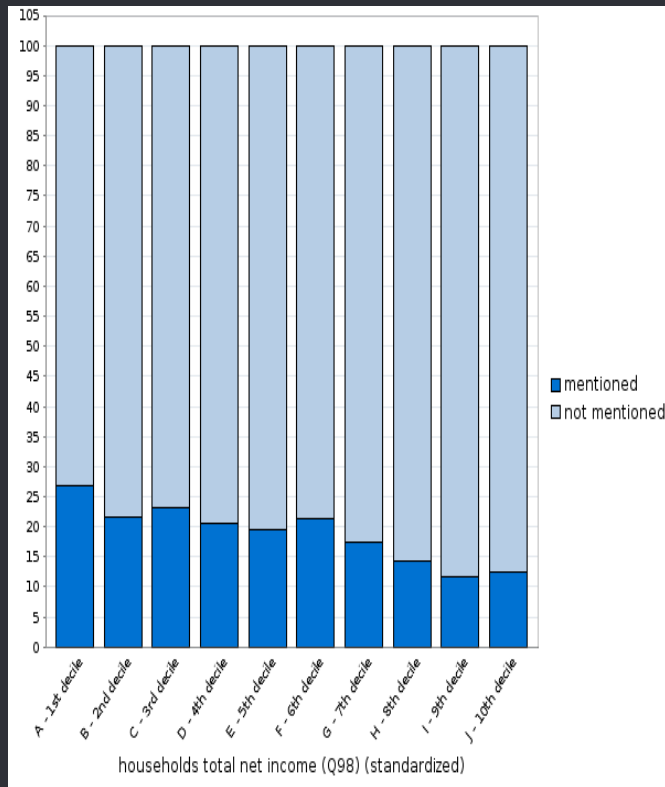
People who value children's independence

- less than 30%
- between 30% and 40%
- between 40% and 50%
- between 50% and 60%
- between 60% and 70%
- between 70% and 80%
- more than 80%



Valuation of **obedience**

Valuation of **independence**



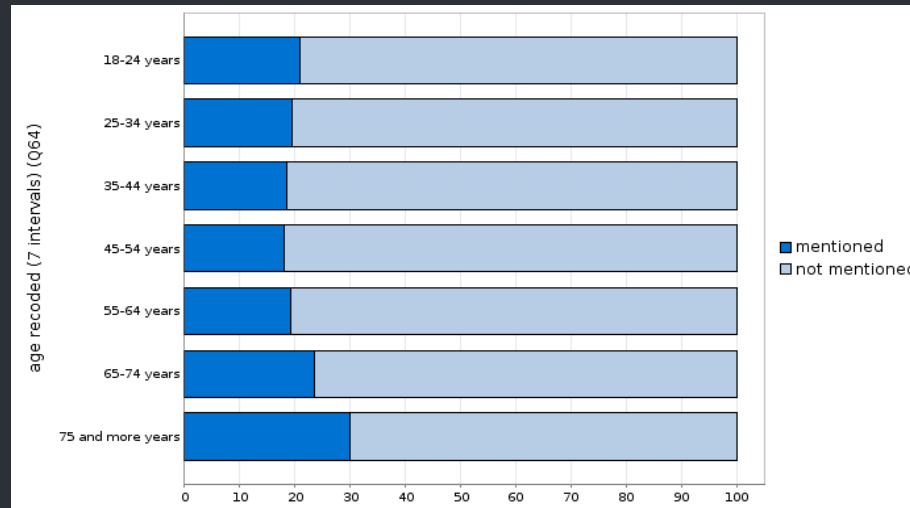
Source: EVS 2017
(ZA 7500 v 4.0.0)

Valuation of
obedience
according to the
household income

Income
(EVS 2017)

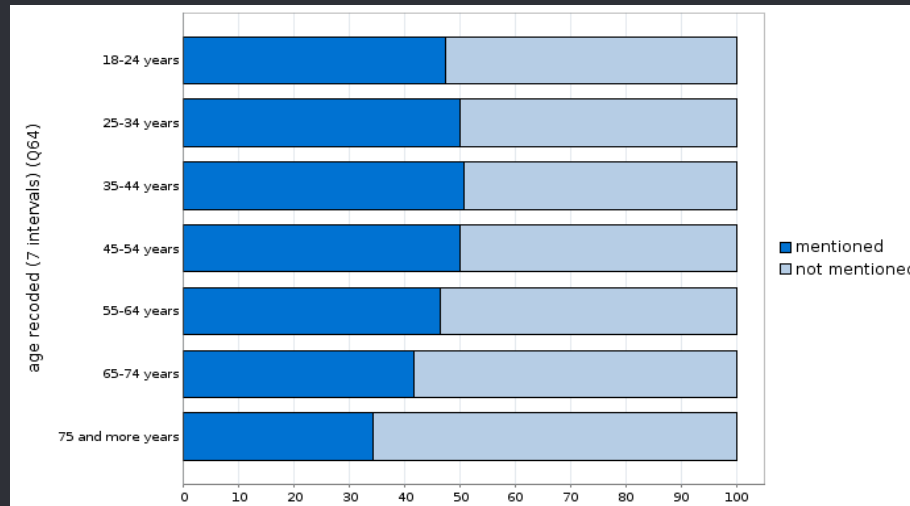
Valuation of
independence
according to the
household income

Valuation of **obedience** according to the respondent's age



Age (EVS 2017)

Valuation of **independence** according to the respondent's age



Source: EVS 2017 (ZA 7500 v 4.0.0)

Discussion

Historical perspective

Need for a broader historical perspective : significant changes during the 20th century (decline of fertility, women's employment, delays in childbearing, divorce)

→ Adaptation of child-rearing values to meet the new demands of social life (Alwin, 1988).

Social perspective

Social stratification of child-rearing values :

- Cohort effect : generations may have distinctive social experiences (Sieben, 2017)
- Influence of socioeconomic variables on autonomy vs. conformity values (Kohn, 1977).

Cross-country comparison

Community-oriented values (collectivism) vs. individual-based values (Protestant work ethic).

→ 2 different types, that are not mutually exclusive (Sieben, 2017; Park, 2016)

Conclusion



The use of EVS surveys :

- + allows us to work on broad quantitative data to examine perceptions of social relationships
- does not allow us to consider the children's perspective.

Importance of better understanding the individual and social factors that explain adults' attitudes toward child-rearing

→ Contribution to the understanding of the **social construction of power relations** between adults and children (see concepts of *adultism* (Flasher, 1978), *adult domination* (Bonnardel, 2015) and *childism* (Wall, 2010)).

Further research

- Looking forward to the next wave of EVS, where the impact of the health and economic crisis can be analyzed
- Conducting qualitative research to investigate how individuals interpret child-rearing values
- Conducting a survey with children on their view on the “most desirable” qualities of parents (see Caplow, Bahr et al., 1982)

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